

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**MALIK
GHACHEM:**

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome and thank you for joining us for this online discussion of Haiti at a critical moment in its history. My name is Malik Ghachem and I teach on the history faculty at MIT. We are delighted to have as our guests today, four extraordinary experts on Haitian affairs.

I want to first say a brief word of thanks to Michelle English at MIT Center for International Studies for organizing this event, making it possible. Then I want to say just a little bit about the background to the current political and constitutional crisis in Haiti as a way of laying the ground for our discussion.

In a sense, the central question of this discussion is how far back to date the origins of the current crisis. 2018 seems to have been a turning point of sorts, at least in terms of the scope of popular protest in Haiti, which expanded dramatically in response to reports of a government corruption scandal involving the embezzlement of funds from the Venezuelan oil aid program known as Petrocaribe, as well as chronic fuel shortages linked to the termination of that same program.

Since 2018, Haiti has seen a surge in kidnappings carried out by armed gangs, some linked to the government, who continue to operate with relative impunity into the present. The first half of 2021 has brought massive protests against the de facto administration and its insistence that it has the right to remain in office one year longer than most observers believe the 1987 constitution allows, a deeply unpopular claim in Haiti that the United States, the OAS, and the United Nations have all nonetheless endorsed.

The terms of most members of parliament have expired, the country's judiciary is on strike, and the de facto president has resorted to rule by decree. In short, Haiti's in the midst of a full-fledged constitutional crisis and in the midst of this crisis, the current government is pushing ahead with very controversial plans for a nationwide referendum on constitutional reform set for June and national elections later this year under the authority of a contested, provisional electoral council, which is the body that administers elections in Haiti.

Our purpose in the Starr Forum is to bring to bear the views of four leading experts on two issues. The first, what has been the role of the international community and Haiti's extended political crises since the end of the Duvalier era in 1986 and the adoption of the 1987 Constitution? And the second issue is what steps, if any, can the international community take to help end the current crisis and help create a political climate in which the needs of the vast majority of Haitians are served by their government?

Our speakers, in the order that they will speak and they will each talk for about five or six minutes, then will have a conversation among the group before opening it up to questions from the audience, our speakers in the order they will speak our Robert Fatton, who is the Giulia Cooper professor of Government and Foreign Affairs at UVA.

His books include Haiti's Predatory Republic, which came out in 2007, the Roots of Haitian Despotism, which appeared in I think the first number was 2003, the Roots of Haitian Despotism 2007, and then just published last month a new book called The Guise of Exceptionalism: Unmasking the National Narratives of Haiti and the United States.

Sabine Manigat, a former professor and researcher at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales FLACSO in Mexico City. She's also taught at the University de'Etat d'Haiti at Quisqueya University. She's published a number of important articles on the Haitian political crisis, some of which are noted on your screen there.

George Fauriol is a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a fellow at the Caribbean Policy Consortium. He's also former vice president of the National Endowment for Democracy, published widely on Caribbean affairs and US foreign policy in such journals as Foreign Affairs and others. He has a recent commentary on the Haitian crisis on the website Global Americans.

Lastly, Amy Wilentz who teaches at the University of California Irvine. She is a-- excuse me, Wilentz, I believe, is the correct pronunciation. Apologies Amy. She is a writer and literary journalist and author of two well-known books on Haiti, the Rainy Season, Haiti Since Duvalier, which came out in 1990, and farewell Fred Voodoo: a letter from Haiti, which came out in 2013.

Thank you all to these four wonderful writers and scholars. We will begin with remarks from Robert Fatton of UVA.

ROBERT

Well thank you, Malik. And thank you for inviting me to this Zoom session. This is a pleasure to join all of us.

FATTON:

We're going to talk about the Constitution and its relationship to the crisis at the moment. Well president Jovenel Moise, as well as many other Haitian leaders, have contended that the Constitution of 1987 has caused political instability and compromised the country's development. All of complained that the president is a prisoner of a dysfunctional parliament, triggering deadlocks and permanent crisis.

In this perspective, the solution is to amend or craft a new constitution. It seems to me, however, that the Constitution has never been the cause of Haiti's recurring systemic breakdowns. In fact, government officials, opposition groups, and major foreign powers have consistently violated the Constitution. It is hard to understand why a new constitution would escape this fate.

This is not to say that the Constitution is ideal. For instance, it has burdened the country with a complicated and very costly system of multiple elections scheduled at different times. Elaborated in the aftermath of Duvalier's dictatorship, it was explicitly designed to weaken the presidency and empower Parliament in order to prevent the personal rule of a new despot.

In reality, however, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Renee Preval, Michel Martelly, and Jovenel Moise have, at times, ruled by decree and without a parliament. They have abused their executive authority and undermined constitutional order. What I'm suggesting, therefore, is that while the Constitution is imperfect, it is not the cause of Haiti's crisis. The crisis is rooted on the one hand in the country's massive social inequalities and it's inherited authoritarian traditions, and on the other hand on the neoliberal economic policies adopted by Haitian rulers and their supporters in the international financial institutions.

For the past 40 years, these institutions, with the assistance of NGOs and for-profit contractors, of privatized developmental projects and in the process, eviscerated the Haitian state, which has no capacity to provide basic services to its citizens. Foreign interventionism has not been limited to the economy. It has taken the form of coups, sanctions, embargoes as well as outright military occupation and heavy handed humanitarianism.

It has also orchestrated the funding of elections and their final outcomes. And not surprisingly, Haiti's leaders have come to appeal to, and rely on, major international powers for their continued hold on office. In some instances, these powers determine their ultimate political fate. Changing the Constitution will not erase these realities. What Haiti lacks is a constitutionalism based on the balance of power, compelling key political actors into accepting an institutionalized set of practices, which would have habituate them into acknowledging limits to both electoral defeat and victory.

Can a new Constitution engender that kind of constitutionalism? I seriously doubt it. Elections in Haiti have always been highly problematic before, during, and after they take place. In the aftermath, losing parties have challenged the fairness of their defeat while the victors have always asserted the absolute legitimacy of their triumph. These electoral disputes have undermined governmental authority, invited foreign interference in social conflicts, and increased the role of militarized gangs.

Moreover, political parties in Haiti are organized around a coterie of big men who join and abandon new alliances in a never ending, opportunistic [FRENCH]. Their constant moves are motivated by the acute competition for [INAUDIBLE] gains and the spoils of public office. This is what I have called [FRENCH]-- [INAUDIBLE] politics, which is a politics based on the capture of the state for the illicit enrichment of those who run it. The question then is what is to be done?

In my opinion, neither holding a referendum on June 27 for a new Constitution, nor having general elections later on this year, will bring a resolution to the current crisis. A new Constitution cannot on its own transform political actors into democratic saints. In conditions of extreme social polarization, it can only offer the fragility of written rules which are unlikely to withstand the ferocious zero-sum game of Haitian politics.

The Haitian proverb expresses well this reality. [FRENCH]. In other words, constitution are made up of paper, bayonet of steel. Moreover, a legitimate crafting and adoption of a new constitution requires not only respecting the rule of law, but also the forging of a huge political majority, transcending ideological and class interests. Such a task seems to be well beyond Jovenel Moise's increasingly debilitated statecraft.

Moreover, conducting election in the current climate of generalized insecurity, popular protests, and logistical unpreparedness will only exacerbate the existing crisis. In my view, it is astonishing that the international community is still calling for an electoral process in these conditions, and when major sectors of Haitian civil society oppose it. It is as if past experiences do not matter.

What is needed now is a historic compromise leading to the creation of a government of national unity composed of individuals without immediate political ambitions. This government would serve for a negotiated period of time and would be charged with establishing an environment conducive to fair and legitimate elections. These elections might, in turn, lead to the potential revision or amendment of the Constitution according to existing constitutional norms.

To achieve this objective, there must be a simultaneous process whereby on the one hand, President Moise and his administration relinquish power, and on the other hand, the political parties of the opposition stop their protest and civil disobedience. While such a compromise is unlikely, it is possible because without it, the country faces a descent into chaos and the specter of another foreign occupation the result of which would be a repeat of past failures and the total surrender of Haiti's sovereignty. Thank you.

MALIK
GHACHEM:

Thank you very much, Robert. Our next speaker is Sabine Manigat. Sabine, welcome, and thank you.

SABINE
MANIGAT:

Well thank you very much for the invitation and I will start straightforward. First, acknowledging that the situation in Haiti is object, of course, of growing concern in several parts of the world, but mainly in the United States. It's not necessary to insist on the historical economic and political reasons for this. The outbreak of a new climax since the summer of 1918 has put forward the many failures of a regime set in place and openly supported by external institution.

Mainly the UN, OASU, [? ASAY ?] but also other countries. Many facts could illustrate this. Electoral results at all stages of the 1920 elections to the creation of the US ambassador in Martelly's nationality among others. But most important is the new situation created since July 1918. First, the crisis has turned increasingly political, despite the reality of an economic crisis and its many dramatic fall outs for the population living conditions. Second, after a nine month period of upheaval from the gas crisis of July 18, to the [INAUDIBLE] movement on February March 2019, the dynamics of the confrontation has opposed systematically. A series of mainly Pacific citizen demonstration, like sit-ins, marches-- among them that of October and November 1918-- to the growing brutality of the police, we lead today by a network of criminal gangs.

This approach of the Haitian crisis is to suggest that first, not only the core of the crisis is domestic, but that its main protagonists are also domestic. And two, that the crisis encompasses every aspect of the Haitian society and therefore, falls short of understanding if restricted to a juridic, and more globally, a crisis with international over-spills to quote Sir Ronald Sanders from the CARICOM. What we have is a radical questioning, the result of the exhaustion of an entire system. The leitmotif of all the demonstrations since 1918 have been changed the system. The attitudes of parties and personalities over wide political range, new ex-parliamentarians eager to distance themselves from a regime which some of them were part of. And a number of citizen organizations that have taken some leadership.

Today, what we witnessed is a revival of a strong social movement with deep roots in Haitian history, although regularly battered by repression from an exclusive and elitist state. On the other hand, Haiti's fate and vicissitudes have long been subject to international pressures, intimidation, and in many cases, domination. And although, clearly, the main and most influence is the United States, it is not the only player in this.

The involvement of the OAS, of many Latin American states, of the CARICOM, or the European Union, respond to strategic, economic, or geopolitical interests that the US's policy in Haiti does not comprehend. Generally speaking, a weak Haitian state traditionally, submitted to external powers, has been questioned by many social movements that have reached today's citizen lead maturity. The new step forward has been that both the international dismantlement of the Haitian state since 1991, but particularly since 2004, and the pugnacity of a renewed and mature social movement have led to watch Juan Gabriel Valdez, former special representative and head of the UN mission in Haiti, describes as a Haitian state that has practically disappeared. Its institution, always weak in the past, have collapsed before the autocratic character of an Executive branch that has not hesitate to systematically violate the Constitution.

However, this is only one side of the issue. A broader view suggests that there is much at stake in the Haitian case. Of course, migration issues, economic interests have been put forward. But as Valdez puts it, the well-known Haitian fatigue is apparent in the international community, but in Haiti, there's also enormous fatigue with international intervention.

What can the international community do to help? [? Remald ?] and Valdez, in the dialogue issue that we have read, has taken a stance. Clearly, the balance of power can solve the issue, but the price of an authoritarian or unilateral intervention would be constant and renewed instability, which has not been the history of Haiti all along, but the consequence of the crisis of a dictatorship facing growing social demands. Thank you.

**MALIK
GHACHEM:**

Thank you very much. Thank you very much Sabine. Our next speaker is George Fauriol. George, please.

**GEORGE
FAURIOL:**

Thank you, Malik. I'm delighted to join this panel discussion about Haiti. Last week, I guess I was putting some notes together and I was pessimistic that developments were not only at an impasse, but likely to seriously get more complicated. Today, I guess I'm cautiously pessimistic in the sense that I think there is potentially a way forward, but remains very uncertain as to what that path really is, is what we already have heard from the two previous speakers.

Let me limit my three remarks to primarily the international community's role in all of this. First, the [INAUDIBLE] government's determination to pursue the road towards a constitutional referendum in late June is narrowing by the day. Logistical political issues, clearly, is increasingly making this a figment of their imagination. A signal development, I think in this regard, as yesterday's statement by the acting Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Julie Chung that the United States, in effect, will not support. And that, in practice, means not only politically but financial, will not support the government the Haitian government's push for a referendum. Whether that actually sinks in among Haitian leadership remains to be seen, but I think that's an important clarification.

So it's also, in some ways, hopefully will help clarify the statements on this issue, both the national elections and the referendum, made by other international actors, most notably the Organization of American States, which for the past almost six months now since last December in particular, has voiced confusing, and somewhat evasive support for the national elections, and to some confusing degree also, the referendum. And in the last several weeks has actually now found itself internally with further internal disputes raised by, particularly, several CARICOM countries in the wake of a resolution of the permanent council of the OAS regarding trying to provide some support and assistance in support of the Haitian people and the crisis.

The point of dispute ultimately became, and has become, a public issue, which is whether what the OAS is ultimately talking about is support with elections, or support for the referendum, or both. The fact that even this discussion is emerging publicly is really not a good indication of the international community's role in this particular crisis and reminds, I think, everyone those that follow Haiti fairly closely of the checkered record of the international community in Haiti.

Second, voices in the US Congress are becoming louder, expressing both their concern that the Biden administration has not been perceived as engaged enough, although the statement from Secretary Chung, in some ways, points now in a more positive constructive direction. Also that the situation in Haiti is deteriorating. There have been several statements from members of Congress on this issue for the last two or three months. There is an editorial that appeared earlier this week from Congresswoman Wilson of Florida and colleagues that, in some ways, summarizes the concerns and rings the alarm bell, if you will, from Capitol Hill.

Also, the announcement of the formation of a congressional, at least on the House side, Haiti caucus also points to a more energetic engagement on the part at least of the United States. It's probably ultimately bad news for the US government that had more or less assumed that they had gotten a pass during the Trump administration and somehow hoped that this would ultimately play itself out positively under the new administration. I don't think that's going to happen.

Finally, a third point. All of these developments may not be happening fast enough. What worries me the most is I really don't quite see the emerging consensus that's required politically in Haiti to ultimately bring the pieces together toward a more constructive outcome. There's been for over a year now some discussions, including an active civil society engagement, not to be underestimated. Some models involving the change of a consensus prime minister might be one option. Notions of an interim government gets a little more complicated, as well as some discussions.

In fact, Robert Fatton just mentioned that in passing notions of a bit of a national unity government, presumably without, obviously, Moise being there. All this to me leads me to the final conclusion, which is, unfortunately, rather pessimistic, which is I don't quite see how all of these pieces are going to come together over the next several months, and, therefore, underscores, I think, an emerging consensus, which not only is the referendum, in fact, a complete waste of energy, and a distraction, and ultimately a misleading exercise, but even the notion of holding national elections sometime in this calendar year is itself going to be a remarkably difficult exercise to be charitable if it's to be successful in transitioning to the next government after President Moise. I think I'll stop there with my comments. Thank you very much.

MALIK Thank you very much, George. And our last speaker is Amy Wilentz. Amy.

GHACHEM:

AMY WILENTZ: Thanks so much for having me here. I'm just going to go through the whole situation from, I guess, a very personal point of view. So when the 1987 Constitution was written and became law, it was hailed as a formative document that would bring Haiti from dictatorship into the beautiful light of electoral representative democracy. Haitian constitutions from their origins in 1801 one with the [? Toussaintic ?] constitutions have been political documents more suggestive of the aims and ideology of the world's first black-controlled country than they have been pure legal documents. As one scholar wrote they are about the imagined communities outlined for what the country should look like with many of the legal underpinnings, of course, but not necessarily a step by step blueprint.

Thus I think it's just a little bit, if you will, white, and Western, and arrogant to assert that we can look to the Constitution to help us solve Haiti's current impasse. The organic and enfolding nature of Haitian political crises is the result of various hemispheric and national systems and attitudes. How do you apply the Haitian Constitution of 1987 to the grotesque criminality rampant in the streets of Port Au Prince today? How do you apply it to the hunger, and destitution, and inequality we see throughout the country? It is almost as absurd as applying Toussaint's Constitution of 1801 to the current crisis.

I'd like to say thanks to the State Department's Julie Chung for cutting through this constitutional discussion with a sharp speech yesterday, even though she was singing a different tune not long ago. And her insistence that speedy elections in Haiti are somehow going to be more honest than an interim government is. Well, let's say it's interesting coming from the US government. She says [FRENCH]. With many hands, the work is light. But I say, [FRENCH]. After the [INAUDIBLE] festivities, the drums are heavy.

The name of the new US policy among Haitians is [FRENCH]. That's the Julie Chung analysis and that means directly to elections. It's unclear how this might work because Haitians-- they are the voters after all-- would have to be convinced to believe in whatever elections are held, which will be quite a task if these elections are perceived to be run by Moise's regime, and as usual, by the OAS, the UN, and the US. As electoral authenticators, these entities are no longer trusted.

That's because the perception is that the international community has never been truly interested in the economic, political, and human welfare of the Haitian people. Even after the fall of the Duvalier dynasty, we know in part from their behavior toward president Aristide that their interest in democracy flagged easily when faced with the democracy of the Haitian people wanted. When the highly questionable low turnout Michel Martelly balloting was held in 2011, the OAS certified it in order to put his more palatable, to them, government in place after the difficult Aristide, Preval years.

As earthquake monies in the millions began pouring in from the outside, the international community and members of the core group, as it is known, wanted to ensure that the people they've known and trusted for decades in Haiti, the same ones who pushed for Aristide's ouster, would receive and direct those millions. Much of the money disappeared. The people who wield power now on the ground in Haiti, who tolerate, and even oversee, and arm the street kidnapping gangs are some of these same Haitian counselors who have been advising the US embassy and the core group to be careful about ditching Moise.

These are not model citizens. But the United States, leader of the international community in Haiti, remains the most important actor on the Haitian front as my co-panelists have pointed out. Moise and his opposition both like to pretend that Haiti can act entirely on its own. But sovereignty is not really sovereignty in the global world and in Haiti, things don't change without US greenlighting, for obvious reasons, of aid and other support from the northern superpower. Even recently, we've seen that the Moise forces, faced with a new US administration, were perfectly able to find kidnapped people and take them back from the kidnapers.

The Moise government also suddenly met with various gangs to arrange a sort of cease fire in the streets. The government can convene the gangs. Moise's people seem to know just where the kidnapers were. They simply hadn't rescued victims or arrested perpetrators up until now when they've suddenly realized that they do need US backing in order to stay in power and that the US is no longer run by Trump. A sudden spate of arrests of other gang leaders has now followed. Still, the wrong advisors, the good old advisors, are in place and Haiti still suffers under a core group that is entirely wrong headed and complicit in the [FRENCH] of Haitian democracy. There are reasons for this. Let me present it.

Here are the core group members. I hadn't really thought about them much until I was thinking about writing this talk. The US is at the top of the list. A white country whose slave plantation economy was profoundly threatened by Haiti's revolution and that has been obsessed with controlling Haiti for two centuries. The US also occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, you will remember, and with its harsh racist rule, paved the way for the political turmoil that led to Duvalier. Now that Biden's in the White House, it is a tiny bit possible the US won't be so destructive. Au revoir.

France, white country number two, or perhaps number one, the French were the slaveholders of Haiti in 1825. France exacted reparations from Haiti for the perceived theft by the victorious Haitians of Haiti's own lands and the bodies of its own people. These large payments were still going out up until the days of the Second World War. They undermined the young republic's growth and brought Haiti to its knees economically. There's a reason to look at who these people are. There's a historical depth to the problem in Haiti.

Spain, white country number three, that settled and held slaves on Sant-Domingue, the island Haiti now shares with the Dominican Republic. Germany, white country number four, that vied for control of Haiti during the imperial years and the descendants of whose settlers they are part of the economic elite. Canada, white country number five, although with a less torrid history in Haiti than the others, and a Haitian origin population of more than 100,000.

Brazil, a country that offered 36,000 soldiers to the UN's occupation force in Haiti over the years with mixed results and that has taken in many Haitian immigrants post earthquake. The Dominican Republic, Haiti's neighbor on the island, with a record of massacre and legalized racism against its Haitian workers and their descendants. The OAS, an organization composed of countries still influenced by the colonial former slave-holding white nations. The EU, a union of white countries, and the UN, which oversaw a harsh, militaristic peacekeeping force of occupation in Haiti for 13 years until 2017 and still has a formal presence there.

Whose side, then, is the core group on? The answer is simple and unsurprising, their own. They are still operating with an antiquated and neoliberal, unsuitable, anti-socialist, Cold War-style, Trumpian political and economic agenda rather than thinking in new ways about Haitian democracy and what the Haitian people need. They still hope for sweatshops and free zones under the [? appalation ?] of foreign investment, the small presence of which over the past half century has left Haitian workers sick, destitute, uneducated, and hungry for generations and will continue to do so.

Some black lives matter in the US, but not all black lives. The unfortunate global legacy of the Haitian Revolution is that it exposed Haiti early on to various solutions of what I'd call the black power problem for the ruling Western nations. How to control and delegitimize black political power? That was the goal of the white powers and the fight still persists in, for example, the voter suppression attempts in the United States. So my advice, and I imagine that of my cohort here, is this. Let's shut out the current core group and demand its reconstitution. Let's say goodbye to the dominance of the white powers. As Sabine and [INAUDIBLE] have said, change the system.

And say hello to at least a more equitable, thoughtful core advisory group that won't fall back on the same corrupt Haitian opportunists, whisperers, and exploiters who have been counseling the international community for decades. A new group of outside and inside advisors who will not be swayed by the old, shopworn, ineffective solutions, nor unmoved by their tragic human consequences. Because of time constraints, I hope to talk later about a possible new core advisory group. Thank you.

MALIK GHACHEM: Thank you very much, Amy, and everyone. If I could invite all of the speakers to turn on their cameras and unmute, we'll join in the conversation with each other. So as I was listening to the four of you, I heard, really, four issues that I think we should maybe explore a bit more. One is the question of intervention. What intervention does or doesn't mean in the current context. The second is why there is so much argument over the Constitution if it's not the core of the crisis, as Robert and others were suggesting. The third is the election gospel. If that's not the foreign policy of the international community, what should it be? And then, I guess, the fourth question related to that and to Amy's presentation, how exactly to organize the response of the international community?

So let's start with the intervention question because that was a running theme through a number of your comments and particularly Sabine's remarks. So here's this statement, recent statement by Jacky Lumarque, who is the director of Quisqueya University in Port Au Prince. He's [INAUDIBLE] quite unequivocally that Haitian says about Haitian political actors too often turn to Washington for support, either to stay in power to overthrow an established power. Robert made the same point. The best support that the international community can show is to stay out and affirm its neutrality with respect to the solutions envisioned by Haitians themselves.

Is that-- let me just ask each of you. Is that how you understand non-intervention, or what you understand non-intervention to mean? And is that kind of non-intervention in Haitian affairs even possible in the current moment, given that the situation has been so profoundly shaped, as Amy was saying, by the international community? If your starting point is already shaped by the international community, can you simply say non-intervention and expect the train to run, so to speak, in that situation? Anybody want to take that up? Amy?

AMY WILENTZ: I think you can start with the feeling that the United States should not be the major actor and the international community [FRENCH] But there has been there have been repeated problems when this kind of [FRENCH] happens, this meeting of all the forces in civil society and the political class of jealousies that are-- people always say from the outside Haitians can't rule themselves. Of course they can, but so much has been denied for so long so, much has been interfered with and twiddled for so long, that you do risk a big fight among even the best people that we all know in trying to come forward with a solution.

Meanwhile, the best people that we all know who might have some infighting, are going to be surrounded by the remnants of the Moise corruption. I don't know how they're going to actually physically survive, I don't know how they're going to meet, and I don't know how they're going to impose themselves without, at least, the speech of the international community behind them.

MALIK Sabine? And George?

GHACHEM:

SABINE
MANIGAT: Yes, I will continue on with the same idea that Amy was suggesting, but maybe not in the same way. When I say not in the same way. As a matter of fact, it's hard to say that the United States can not be the main player anymore. It would not be, in the short term at least, not be very realistic. However, there is a need. There is a need for the international powers, or international institutions that intervene in Haiti, maybe to adopt another position, a more solid position with less intervention and being more [? attent ?] to what the Civil society is saying, because the crisis has come to a point where we're not talking about making up a new governance in Haiti.

We have to think, really, about a change in system that will have to go through elections that will have to end in the possibility for the Haitian citizen to choose its faith by voting. But right now cannot be considered that way because as Amy was saying, the system was twisted for so long. Not even the voters are really confident in a system where their ballot would be somewhere and then they would tell us this is the person who won.

So maybe we need a more balanced view of the international community, as we call it, maybe with other stakeholders stepping forward, and mainly respecting what the strong social movement that I think is so, so important in today's situation, respect to what this movement is saying. Back off, yes, but we welcome solidarity. This country is too weak and the crisis is too deep to say well, we'll get it on by ourselves. And that that would not be the point either.

MALIK George, do you want to add something?

GHACHEM:

GEORGE
FAURIOL: Let me pick up on what Sabine just said and address this issue of intervention. It's a tough question because in a way, I don't want to suggest that the international community shouldn't care about what happens in Haiti, and therefore that concerns that you may have, the solidarity kind of theme that you may have with Haiti or groups in Haiti, I think that needs to be cultivated and has a potentially positive outcome. The problem with the international community-- I'll make a very general statement-- is that in its experience in Haiti-- particularly but it's [INAUDIBLE] true elsewhere-- it ultimately thinks of intervention in a programmatic sense and ultimately, a very often, the bureaucracies that are behind it are regulated by a mechanism where the success is ultimately achieved by as quickly as possible.

So there's, in some ways, a timeline that is attached to everything the international community ultimately does, and particularly in Haiti. And when it comes to political development issues, that is a particularly difficult theme, ultimately, to try to have. And therefore, my sense in this case is-- I'm sympathetic to the notion that the international community needs to think through a little bit what the nature of its commitment might be to Haiti. The definition of what that problem is, I think I would agree, needs to be defined primarily, if not almost exclusively, by key Haitian actors. That's why, to me, in some ways the potential outcome of the current crisis is not so much what ultimately the US, or France, or the UN, or the OAS ultimately can contribute, but how they can contribute to the definition of a set of issues that have been defined and has ultimately emerged as a consensus among key international key Haitian actors.

That may not be easy to do and they, therefore, may be a supportive role very specific that can be played by some international actors, but not the large bureaucracy that we all often imagine.

MALIK Thanks George. Robber?

GHACHEM:

ROBERT FATTON: Yes. I wish we could hope for more solidarity. I must confess that I'm extremely pessimistic about fundamental change in the international community and how they approach Haiti. Whether it be a Republican, or even a Trump [INAUDIBLE], or Obama's administration, the policies have been very much the same. Very much the same interferences.

I think one of the major problems, and maybe we are reaching the end of that period, is the economy programs that were unleashed since the 1980s and that have contributed to the development of some nations, but really devastated countries like Haiti. If we change, that maybe there is hope. In terms of the politics of it, you have a major contradiction. And this is the reality, that Haitian politicians, Haitian leaders, have always consistently said that they don't want foreign interference, but at the same time, they are calling for it. And this is a contradiction that has not been resolved.

You also have the problem that what we might call the opposition is deeply divided. There is a civil society, which is different from the traditional opposition, but in terms of the organization of the opposition, they always manage, in one way or another, to co-opt some key sectors of that civil society and undermine the autonomy of those movements. So there are many problems confronting the internal resolution of the crisis and the international community, I don't think we are going to see fundamental changes there.

One should remember, for instance, that a few weeks ago, President Biden put a picture of himself and he said to Haitians, essentially, don't come here. It was in Creole. That was a statement that was completely Trumpian, so I don't see fundamental changes. What I would hope, the best that I can hope, is that the international community doesn't do harm, but that is a complicated thing because of the programs of the international financial institutions, the opportunism of many Haitian [INAUDIBLE] and in the government. So my pessimism is very profound, unfortunately.

MALIK GHACHEM: All right, well maybe-- let's continue on this theme and talk about the fourth issue I mentioned, which is Amy's suggestion for reformulating how the international community is organized vis a vis Haiti. And I want to ask you all two dimensions of this. One is a US specific one. Is about USAID, which is on the ground, and is not going away from Haiti, and is a key part of US foreign policy in the country. So do you have any thoughts about what USAID [INAUDIBLE] relationship to this crisis should be and then secondly, if it's not the core group, what should replace the core group? So in other words, can we just flesh out a bit more what Amy was talking about when she reimagines a new kind of international community? What would that look like exactly and who are we talking about? Sabine and then Amy.

SABINE

MANIGAT:

Well actually I'm sure one comment back, I want to react shortly to what Robert said. Actually, the problem when we think about solidarity or another stance of the international community, it means that we're not thinking primarily about the United States. We're not talking about the American policy has changed or hasn't changed, is Trump different from Biden? I was rather thinking in the audacity that Amy put forward when she was reshaping the core group. I was thinking of a much broader participation, a world participation, or at least hemispheric participation. Solidarity encompasses many kinds of contribution to alleviate some of Haiti's problem, but certainly not reshape, or even rethink, or reorganize Haiti's situation, even with compassion. Even with goodwill.

What Robert said in his first intervention remains, to me, fundamental. Only the Haitian actors can actually solve this and the extent to which the international community is convened to do will depend on the capacity and the proposition that the Haitian actors have. Will they succeed? Well, there's no guarantee for anybody on any social movement in any country that this will succeed. We've seen many failures lately around the world.

MALIK

Amy. Thank you, Sabine.

GHACHEM:

AMY WILENTZ:

Yeah so I was thinking more, of course, I've watched USAID for many, many, years, which was the first part of your question, Malik, and I've been confounded by them for so long. I talked in my little opening remarks about the Haitians who have been advising the international community. And I think they've been so destructive and so-- not all obviously-- but so me, me, me. I want this. I want to get this program. I want in on the ground floor of this. And that's something that has happened at USAID for so long. They need different Haitian interlocutors.

But I would like to propose, as a beginning for this, a new core advisory group that would be advising the US, the OAS, and the UN, basically, and would include them to a degree. And this is how I would constitute it. And I'm just going to tell you my weird pipe dream, and of course, Haitians would have totally different opinions about this. But I would, from the US on the new core advisory group, I'd include a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and someone delegated by Samantha Powers, the new head of the Biden administration's USAID. Those would be two members of the new group as well as a young, outspoken black American or Haitian thinker, someone like Ta-Nehisi Coates or Valena [? Elisa ?] [? Shalia. ?]

I'd include a Cuban health official and/or a representative from Venezuela, someone who's not part of the long, [? etiliated, ?] outmoded US OAS mindset in Haiti. From France and Canada, I'd want a human rights official and an economic advisor. I'd want a respected constitutional lawyer from a core nation. Five further Haitian or Haitian-American members, a business person, and a professional from the diaspora, a Haitian educator, a leader of one of Haiti's women's groups, and a rotating member from the Haitian political class just to say goodbye, again, to the dominance of white powers and the thinking, the old thinking of this core group and the United States.

And what Robert, Robert, was talking about how it doesn't matter who's in power in the US. They still are thinking the same way. But I think if they had an advisory group that didn't think the way they thought, they might actually be conscious of some things that they haven't been conscious of, at least.

MALIK That's a striking proposal Amy. Thank you very much for sharing that thought. I hope somebody is listening.

GHACHEM: We're going to have to turn at some point soon to questions from the audience. So I want to just move on to another issue before we do that, though, which is elections, and particularly the election gospel that the United States preaches in Haiti. I mean not just in Haiti, but certainly in Haiti. And those of us who heard, or read, the Julie Chung statement from Haitian Flag Day yesterday, you can't help but be struck by the paradigm, the world view, just unable to perceive options outside of the fundamental recourse to elections as the basic solution to the crisis.

She did say it's not a panacea, but it is the first and fundamental step for US policy. So maybe some of you could just respond directly to that and what, if that's not right, what exactly is wrong with it? And what is your position on elections in Haiti? Who would like to? George, do you want to?

GEORGE
FAURIOL: Let me start with that. I would give Julie some credit for at least making the statement. The problem, I think in part, is that she's working from, in some ways, a rather deep deficit and credibility in that sense that for what three or four months, the new administration here in Washington was rather evasive, to be charitable, about Haiti, about the elections, about the referendum. And in some ways, ultimately at the end of the story, at least today, the issue became a referendum versus national elections and ultimately, in a very practical sense, I think they want to ditch the whole notion of referendum and put all the efforts now in elections.

Having said that, I have some difficulty, I must admit, trying to visualize how, under present circumstances, both the politics of the country. Secondly, the electoral logistics that ultimately are either incomplete or nonexistent in some cases, starting with voter ID card issue. And thirdly a security, or insecurity, how, somehow, there is a conception in her mind, or the administration's mind, of how elections can actually be held in a credible manner in Haiti during calendar 2021. That's also overlooking the fact that to have Democratic elections, you need participation, need candidates, you need debates.

How this is going to happen under present circumstances, let alone a worldwide pandemic, I'm not quite sure that this has been thought through terribly carefully. So to me, I'm happy that the statement has been made. I'm not convinced, however, that it's been thought through very carefully as to so what now is basically the question I would ask, Elections, how does that work? And we're not quite sure that the administration has a clear answer to that question.

I would add, very quickly however, that part of that answer has to come from Haitian actors themselves. Unless there is quickly a response from the Moise government or other key actors in Haiti, this is going to drag on and not get any better any time soon.

MALIK
GHACHEM: Thanks a lot George. I don't know if anyone else wants to opine on the election issue or not? Sabine, it looks like maybe, Robert briefly, and then maybe at that point, we'll turn to some audience Q&A. Go ahead Sabine and then Robert.

SABINE
MANIGAT: Very, very quickly, I second what George just said about the technical conditions. I just would like to underline that in Haiti we have a problem that goes beyond that. To put it shortly, the meaning of the vote is problematic in a system that has been confiscated from the start, or at least after 1990. And not only confiscated, but twisted to the point that elections appear as an imposition to the majority of the voters. And I'll stay here just to add to the technical things that the political aspect of holding elections in Haiti today.

**ROBERT
FATTON:**

Yes. Just to say that elections are a good thing but not under any conditions. And clearly, the conditions are not inviting for any type of legitimate elections. And the problem is that we have the same problem the last election, and the election was forced. Most Haitians didn't want the damn election. And the problem is that when you have such bad elections, it gives a very bad name to the democratic process and the elections themselves. So people don't vote. People look at the electoral process and they say "What the heck is going on? It doesn't change anything. We don't want those people. We are not going to vote."

15% of the population supposedly voted in very bizarre conditions. And this time is going to be as bad, if not worse. So to have elections in a moment like that is to invite to the exacerbation of the current crisis. The government has no longer any real legitimacy. Part of the opposition has no legitimacy. This is why I was suggesting that we need some kind of transition whereby some of the civil society organizations, people who are not immediately concerned about getting into office, set up the conditions that are more or less legitimate for some sort of fair election. That's my view on that.

**MALIK
GHACHEM:**

Yeah. So that's linked to, Robert, that's linked to one of the comments from the audience here. Maybe I can put this question before the group and see who wants to respond. This is from Vicky [? Asevera ?] who asks have any of us, have any of the experts on the group here, ever done an assessment of the opposition, quote unquote? Or all the political parties forcing an articulation of actual substantive platforms? And she goes on to say the US should support democratic practice and not elections, which are one small facet of how people organize themselves to govern their collective public goods.

What is the state of the opposition? Who are the who are the alternative political parties that I think she's suggesting? What would be in a position to support democratic practices as opposed to their own particular interests? Maybe the issue is what are some of the groups? Maybe you could tell us, Sabine, a been a bit more about the social movement. I mean who are some of the groups that you think the international community should partner with? Should express solidarity with? What is their-- what role would these groups have in the transition to a new and different government?

**SABINE
MANIGAT:**

To put it very short, we have had a strong social network in Haiti, not only since 1986 but long before. The question has always been how do they organize besides local democratic practices that are being invoked right now? It's interesting. Presently, the civil society, the so-called civil society, the society many of its sectors and it's more organized sections is working on a national international proposition to the nation and to be able to declare it and oppose it to foreign or to authoritarian interventions.

But the problem is we never had a governance system with institution backed by political institutions and political parties genuinely representing the population. It's always been a superposition of personalities, or groups, or so-called parties, but were never rooted in the social movement that is presently expressing itself. So the political parties are working with civil society, but civil society today is not reflected by the political parties. It's not going to be easy for representation like democracy calls for.

The parties have to reorganize, and maybe there should be new institutions shape from civil society, but it's going to take some time. This is why they're calling for a transition, a genuine transition, not just a transition to postpone elections. Just to make them genuinely possible.

**MALIK
GHACHEM:**

Amy and George?

AMY WILENTZ: I just want to say briefly that the minute that the international community expresses solidarity with a faction, or a person, or a party in civil society, or a group that's doing something, first that group will become suspect to a degree. And second of all, everybody might flock to that group thinking that, therefore, funding and support is coming. So it's a very hard place for the international community right now, and I think that's why they're so reluctant to see an interim civil society unity government because they don't know what it will be. They don't know how to support it. And it might blow up in their face. Always they're worried about Haiti blowing up in their face.

MALIK Yeah, George?

GHACHEM:

GEORGE FAURIOL: Conceptually, my sense is that civil society, which I think has, actually, in Haiti, demonstrated a fair amount of organization and strength. We saw that in the 2017, 2018, 2019, massive demonstrations and particularly in connection with Petrocaribe. Corruption in general basically almost shut down the country in some ways. The problem with civil society is that they're different than political parties. You need to translate political action into political action and political groups. And Haiti's political party community, certainly over time, certainly since the end of the Duvalier era, are-- some of it originally had a philosophical and to some degree ideological base. Now we find it, in some ways, it's a collection, like many other countries, of personalistic vehicles that obviously have no real grasp in terms of the electorate beyond just their own personality.

And I think that's the challenge here, and that is that translating what clearly is active interest within civil society groups, to ultimately address the political crisis, but then translate that into political movements, let alone political parties. That's the challenge. That's why I'm a little-- it's not that I'm uncomfortable, I am a little unclear as to how you ultimately end up with a near-term solution with a government of national unity made up of exactly what?

If it's just civil society, to me, that misses the element of governance. Civil society is, in fact, what it is, but it's missing the actual instruments, if you will, of political action that ultimately make a difference.

MALIK GHACHEM: Thank you very much. Let's turn to another question from the audience. This one from Michelle [? Degraff, ?] who is an MIT colleague of mine and expert on linguistics. And Michelle is asking is there a linguistic dimension to the mishandling of the international community's policy towards Haiti? He asked, in particular, how can the international community support Haitians when it does not even speak, or even care to speak, the language of the sovereign people that is Creole? Except for insulting Haitians like Biden, President Biden recently did.

So he says, I think we need first to break down these fundamental linguistic and cultural barriers between local and international elites and Haiti's sovereign people. That's a necessary initial step. And we have a follow up comment on that from another audience member. Any thoughts about this? Is there a cultural linguistic dimension to the situation here? Amy?

AMY WILENTZ: Don't we all agree? Isn't-- I'm only raising my hand because no one else is. But of course, years before, everybody should speak Creole. The USAID people should speak Creole. People can't know Haiti profoundly unless they speak Creole. I don't even speak very good Creole, but it makes a huge difference. And if you don't, you're locked into speaking to people who speak French and English. That's a certain part of the society.

And I get the feeling very strongly that the Americans really like to speak to people who speak English, and that's who's advising them and encouraging them in certain directions. I think it's a really huge problem. I think Michelle is right about that. But how are you going to get them to all be speaking it suddenly? How is that going to happen in the next before elections are imposed? I don't know.

How are they going to find out that patients don't want that election? They have to listen to what people like Sabine are telling them. They have to have reasonable, intelligent, sensitive interlocutors on the ground in Haiti who care about the country. That is the essential thing that the Americans, and the rest of the international community, need to develop.

MALIK Any other thoughts of Sabine on this issue? Please.

GHACHEM:

SABINE Very quickly, I totally agree with what Amy said. But I wanted to point out, though, that many institutions, some development institutions, some administrative institutions in the United States, and in several mission churches have adopted, more or less, systematic practices of, I mean habit, of learning Creole before coming to Haiti or when they come to Haiti. It is it does not have a lot to do with the empathy that we're talking about. Because I suppose that Michelle is referring, [CREOLE], is referring to the quality of communication that it entails when you speak the language of the person you're pretending to communicate with or to work with.

MANIGAT:

And it's not necessarily the purpose of these initiatives of learning Creole before you go into Haiti. But it is a fact that we should take into account. Robert, sorry.

ROBERT

FATTON:

I agree to some extent. In other words, knowledge of the language allows you to communicate much better. On the other hand, if you look at the situation in Haiti, all Haitians speak Creole. And to put it crudely, that has not stopped people at the top from screwing the Haitian people. So language is one thing, but the material differences, the inequalities-- and clearly language is a very important thing to say about it because while the top was and still speaks Creole, speaks English, it speaks Spanish, speaks French and have used those languages to build the networks that are facilitating its power. But internally, Creole has not really facilitated any type of fundamental transformation of the Haitian social system.

If you look at Duvalier, Duvalier was a brilliant in how he how to communicate with the peasants, but it was a very vicious type of use of the language. So language is important, but it has to be also analyzed in terms of the potential differences between those who run the show and those who are literally being run by the show.

MALIK

GHACHEM:

Thank you all. Let's get a couple more questions into the mix. I'll put two on the table and you can take or leave as you like. So one question is about economic pressure. Please describe the kind of economic pressure the US uses to shape Haitian politics. There was a reference in Julie Chung's speech yesterday to use of the Magnitsky Act, which is a statute that permits the application of sanctions against people involved in human rights abuses. So what do you guys think about that as a tool of US policy here?

And another question is about the Haitian American diaspora. Maybe we should say the Haitian North American diaspora, or the Haitian diaspora more broadly. What can the Haitian diaspora do to bring attention to these issues and place pressure on the Biden administration to stop supporting Moïse? Any comments on either of these two questions? George?

GEORGE FAURIOL:

I'll start with the economic pressures and sanctions question. As a general policy issue, I'm somewhat skeptical of the utility of sanctions, particularly in the cases of countries that ultimately it's not going to change the behavior of the leadership if that's the intent. It may address, to some degree, of populations aspect to which it draws the attention to the activities of certain individuals, and it, to some degree that may be satisfactory for us policymakers, it also underscores the concern regarding that behavior.

I think in the case of Haiti, I'm not quite sure that's much of a particularly effective policy instrument that's going to change very much on the ground in the near future. I'm also not quite sure, however, that the United States only doesn't need to be a bit more creative when it comes to not so much economic sanctions or economic pressure, but I'm really trying to determine in some ways a better model than simply saying well, we don't like this particular exercise, so we will not support it. We will not fund it. But we like this one and we'll fund that. It becomes a bit more formulaic and simplistic.

And particularly in the context of elections, it can be ultimately very counterproductive. The United States, the international community in general, has spent enormous amounts of funding, directly, and through contractors, and NGOs, in revising, recreating, reinventing the Haitian electoral machinery. And as of today, you probably need an entirely new effort to reconstruct it. I think part of the issue there is simply an inability to translate what are probably valuable efforts into ultimately institutionalizing actual Haitian institutions, Haitian capabilities, to actually maintain and ultimately run the process rather than simply depending every election cycle on international assistance.

MALIK GHACHEM:

Any other comments on either of those issues? Robert and Amy?

ROBERT FATTON:

Sanctions are instruments that do not necessarily work. We can remember, for instance, during the Cedras administration, the de facto government, that there were massive sanctions imposed to the Haitian elite and on the government. But the government was not going to move, and it started moving only when Carter and Powell and Sam Nunn went to Haiti and told the Cedras regime the planes are in the air. Get out of here. That's why they moved. They were always able to maneuver around the sanctions.

And when you have sanctions, there is a crisis which is even more acute. In crisis, not everyone suffers. There are people who use the crisis for their own benefit, especially those who are in the state, because they have the levers to manipulate those sanctions. So while sanctions may be an instrument, I'm not sure that at the moment, given that the vast majority of Haitians are really suffering already, that it would have a positive effect.

In terms of the diaspora, I was talking to some people of the diaspora and they said what we should do? Because the diaspora is remittances represent actually the most important amount of money that Haiti receives from the external arena, something like over \$3 billion. That the diaspora should stop and say we should stop giving that money and the government would respond. Now there's a problem with that, obviously, because a lot of the money that the diaspora sends to Haitians is very much linked to the very survival of very poor people. So it's a very complicated business and it's not an easy equation, as it were, to resolve.

MALIK GHACHEM:

Amy and then Sabine.

AMY WILENTZ: Another of my loopy, crazy ideas is that the governments of the US, Canada, and France, perhaps some other countries, should give tax deductions, charitable tax deductions, to the Haitian diaspora for time spent-- so no actual money exchanges-- for time spent in Haiti working and training Haitians in whatever is their expertise. Because now they go out of the goodness of their heart when they go to do that kind of work and it doesn't happen that often. But I think with a little incentive, it might happen more. And it just struck me oh, that might be good. Of course, hard to do, hard to convince people.

MALIK Sabine?

GHACHEM:

SABINE Yes, I wanted to say something very short about the sanctions. Like Robert put it, the sanctions do not always work. But not only that, usually the sanctions fall on the most vulnerable part of the population. We've seen that in 1991, from 1991 to 1993, and in my view, this what has been a step downwards with the earthquake. But since the sanctions that were imposed in 1991, from 1991 to 1993 or 1994, the country has never really recovered from the sanctions.

It's not easy to target the persons or the groups who are going to be the object of the sanctions. But, of course, there's always the issue of taking our visas, and calling to justice, or putting them wanted by the DA. The problem may be not so much to sanction a country, but to combine non-intervention with some technical assistance. That could take the form that Amy was saying or maybe some other, as long as respect for the choices and the possibilities of the population is being put forward. This is what I would tell you.

MALIK No, that makes complete sense, I think, as far as regards country sanctions, that's certainly true. I think the **GHACHEM:** Magnitsky Act sanctions are targeted to particular individuals in the government, so that would be a somewhat different approach. George, briefly, you want to add a footnote to that?

GEORGE Actually just to comment on the diaspora issue, which was the second part of your question. I tend to think that **FAURIOL:** the Haitian-North American diaspora in the United States and Canada is increasingly organized and motivated. Ironically in the last two or three months, the Moise government was trying to reach out to them in connection with the referendum, trying to somehow demonstrate to them and convince that community that the new constitution would be good for them. I think to some degree, highlights the potentially influential role that the diaspora can have on shaping particularly United States policy.

And in some ways, it's the degree to which the members of Congress listen and hear from their constituents, which is only going to make a real difference, potentially in terms of how activated and how engaged members of Congress are on the Haiti issue.

MALIK Interesting. There's a suggestion from the audience, one of the audience members, Maricena, that the diaspora **GHACHEM:** needs to have dual citizenship in Haiti and the United States. Presumably that would entail voting rights in both countries. Let's see. We've got, well-- Robert, we've got a rebuttal from Michelle. But I'll let you guys argue over-- for Michelle Degraff, I'll let you guys carry forward that dialogue, perhaps offline.

There is a comment about local elections from [? Don ?] [? Jean. ?] In this talk of elections, we often forget the local elections and governance. How can we think about reinforcing political stability through local elections instead of waiting every four years for the presidential one? Sabine, any thoughts about the local electoral scene in Haiti?

SABINE
MANIGAT: Well actually, the local electoral scene has been one of the biggest issues that the social [INAUDIBLE] is putting forward, thinking about participation in political participation. But of course, it's always also been seen as the main danger for the central power for the central government. And to what extent also from external institutions, I don't know, but certainly from the central government.

The fact that the grass root participative traditions that we have could foster strong local governments that would control and would shape better the central power, and maybe provide for more stable institutions, political institutions for instance, that will generally come from the local governments and shape a new political scene. I think it has always been seen as a bit dangerous and this is why it has never been organized by any governments, be it more progressive or more authoritarian. It's a big issue.

MALIK
GHACHEM: Any other thoughts on this question of local elections? Otherwise, I have one maybe wrap up question that I'll give everyone a chance to share some final thoughts. OK, here's my here's my wrap up question. And you can use this opportunity to say anything you feel still needs to be said. The question comes from Ryan [? Ely ?] who asks what does the future hold if elections are not held this year? And I'll add, given some of George's comments, if there is no constitutional referendum and if there are no elections held this year, how does the country escape from the current crisis if that turns out to be the case?

AMY WILENTZ: Isn't this, if I may? Isn't this what we've been talking about the whole time?

MALIK
GHACHEM: In a way.

AMY WILENTZ: Or has it escaped from it? I think one of the things that was contained in Julie Chung's talk when she mentioned the Magnitsky Act was a threat against precisely Moise and the people around him of the US bringing down that act on them. So I think that there is an attempt to convince this government to go, perhaps. And then what we do if there aren't elections is just what Sabine has been talking about this whole time. It's the organization of civil society in an attempt to come together to make something work that can go to elections, but not to just rush off [FRENCH]. Not to just go headlong into that scene again.

MALIK
GHACHEM: Sabine and George.

SABINE
MANIGAT: Maybe should I take from what Amy just said and just add that for somehow, as the situation is today, there's no perspective of anything consistent coming out of so-called referendum of [INAUDIBLE] if ever there will take place. So we're talking about a transition anyway. What we don't know, what is difficult to foresee because the Haitian actors have to be the one to decide-- and if they fail, well they will fail-- is what kind of transition we will get.

Of course, the supporters of the present regime can choose to back off and that would precipitate some kind of outcome, which would not necessarily be orderly. But there is sufficient, I think, there's sufficient conscious of a more mature social movement today. It is sufficient conscience that we have to get out of this without going to chaos, It's a choice, in any case, more than an option. It's a choice to set, to stay, to stand by the proposition of an orderly transition of the civil society.

MALIK
GHACHEM: George.

GEORGE FAURIOL:

Let me pick up on Sabine's last thought, which is the issue, the notion of orderly transition. I'm willing to still think that the objective of having a national election is an important objective, around which there needs to be some emerging consensus among key Haitian political actors. To me, the key issue is dropping the referendum. As long as that issue is on the table or floating around in the background, in effect, the question is not only we don't know what we're going to look at what this is going to look like on June the 27th, we don't even know what the rest of the year is going to look like.

And the timing is getting shorter and shorter to try to address that. And my sense, therefore, that the real issue is not so much simply having national elections in the hope that miracles will come out of that, but rather that the process by which one drives toward that actually does engage an emerging civil society consensus, some acceptance, clearly, political acceptance on the part of the Moise government that the game is over. And, therefore what he has supposedly promised, which is that he's out by next February the 7th actually does occur. But also between now and then, it was actually a more constructive, evolving, emerging process that is only not just to have elections, but actually to have a richer process that comes out of that electoral process, some time hopefully by the end of the year, early next year.

MALIK GHACHEM:

Thank you. Robert, you will have the last word.

ROBERT FATTON:

OK. Well if history is a guide, we have a few possibilities. One is that Moise manages to finish his term. And then you have a crisis at the very end because we need a transition to something, an election, but that's a possibility. Or he finish like Martelly. Very debilitated years to exit and then you have very non-productive answer. In other words, you put another politician out there for two months and you have an election, which would lead to the same type of crisis.

The other possibilities are one that is even worse, which would be a descent into chaos and foreign intervention. And then you have the possibility that people are afraid of that very possibility, and that they manage to force the powers that be into accepting the transition. And the transition would have to be negotiated between the government, the political parties, and the civil society. That's a possibility. But if you are going to form the government of national unity with the same characters, you fall into the same trap. So you would need, for a while, a government of people who are not interested in the immediate conquest of political power.

I think there are enough Haitians capable of doing that if they are given a chance, but there is no guarantee at all that this will happen. So we are in uncertain terms but with particular scenarios that look very similar to the past because we had similar crisis.

MALIK GHACHEM:

And that will indeed have to be the last word. I want to thank Sabine Manigat, George Fauriol, Amy Wilentz, and Robert Fatton for bringing their expertise to bear on a difficult set of issues. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to our audience for listening in. This session has been recorded. It will be posted to the MIT CIS YouTube site where it can be accessed there. Please share with people who you think would be interested in the discussion. Thank you again for joining us, and once again, thank you to our participants for being part of this conversation. Appreciate it very much.

[MUSIC PLAYING]