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The United Nations in Haiti
by Erica Caple James

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Haiti was one of the original 26 signatories to the United Nations Charter, the document that brought the United Nations into being when it entered into force on 24 October 1945. Alongside receiving bilateral assistance from the United States and other nations, from the late-1940s until the present Haiti has been the recipient of multiple forms of humanitarian and development aid from UN agencies (i.e., the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNDP).

The scope and character of UN aid to Haiti shifted dramatically when on September 30, 1991, the Armed Forces of Haiti deposed the country’s first democratically elected president, former priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and commenced a three-year period in which detention, torture, disappearances, gang rape, and murder were tools of terror that suppressed the pro-democracy sector. Following an Organization of American States (OAS) resolution calling for international non-recognition of the de facto regime, on October 11, 1991 the UN General Assembly imposed economic sanctions against Haiti to provoke the restoration of constitutional order; however, such efforts were initially unsuccessful.

In February 1993, a joint UN/OAS International Civilian Mission disembarked to document human rights abuses occurring in the nation under the coup apparatus. After failing to implement the July 3, 1993 Governors Island Accord—a measure brokering the departure of military rulers from Haiti in exchange for amnesty, and providing international assistance to restructure and modernize the army, as well as create a new civilian police force under UN supervision (among other provisions)—on July 31, 1994, the UN Security Council authorized Resolution 940, creating a 20,000 member multinational force to restore democracy and rule of law in Haiti.