

For the first several days of our trip to Haiti, University of San Francisco law students have been investigating the role of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) during illegal evictions of residents of Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps. These extrajudicial evictions are often performed by agents of the Mayor's Office or the Haitian National Police (HNP) at the behest (and bankroll) of the owners of the properties occupied by the camps. After hearing alarming rumors that MINUSTAH was playing an active role in the illegal eviction of residents in Camp Django (which would violate its mandate), we interviewed residents and journalists who were at the camp. These revealed a wide variety of experiences and opinions about MINUSTAH, as well as a glimpse into the personal hardships of the residents who are faced with forced eviction.

First, we interviewed a journalist who had been at the camp soon after MINUSTAH arrived at 11:00 PM on Thursday, July 28th. According to the journalist, fifteen MINUSTAH soldiers from Cote D'Ivoire, Niger and Bangladesh entered the camp, which was a departure from the earlier policy to remain outside the gate. MINUSTAH leadership and supporters have articulated its role as to provide security to the camp. However, others believe that this amounts to little more than providing an additional show of force to preemptively intimidate residents that may resist the eviction.

MINUSTAH arrived less than 24 hours after the HNP repeatedly beat many residents of Camp Django. These beatings occurred as police responded to coordinated peaceful protests about the inadequate compensation for the impending evictions. For a detailed account of these beatings and the ineffective compensation process, see <http://brikourinouvelgaye.com/2011/07/28/threats-and-violence-against-idps-at-camp-django>. Under this tense and oppressive atmosphere, MINUSTAH forces entered the camp. Shortly afterwards, four police officers arrived along with "agents of the mayor" (who, according to a journalist we interviewed, are ex-convicts who participate in beatings during the evictions). This apparently raised some uneasy concerns inside the camp that MINUSTAH was acting in concert with the HNP and the Mayor's Office to perform these evictions.

The on-going conflict between residents of the camp who fled to open fields after the earthquake and the owners of the property who have had an IDP camp on their land for eighteen months has been further aggravated by intimidation tactics of the Haitian National Police and agents of the Mayor of Delmas. If perceived as partial during these evictions, the level of animosity towards MINUSTAH—who have been blamed for the recent cholera outbreak as well as for many human rights violations—could reach a critical level for some residents.

Many of them brandishing assault rifles, most of these soldiers do not speak any Creole and could easily be intimidating to residents of the camp. The journalist we interviewed hypothesized that if he was a child he would not have felt free to leave the camp if they were there and that MINUSTAH's mandate of "stabilization" is viewed by locals as to "repress those who stand up for their rights", as well as to be just another mechanism to "protect those that have wealth." Questions as to MINUSTAH's role in evictions were further darkened when MINUSTAH soldiers confiscated the journalist's camera and deleted his photos. As the journalist told us, "they said they were here to protect people. My photos protect people. If they were here to protect people, why would they take my photos?"

On Monday, we visited Camp Django during protests that had attracted members of other camps from all over the city and surrounding suburbs. We encountered diverse opinions of MINUSTAH. Many people felt that MINUSTAH's presence had kept the police from beating them. There were rumors that it was camp leadership who called them after the alleged brutality on Wednesday and Thursday. However, we encountered just as vehement sentiments in line with that of the journalist who lost his photos. Some

people said they felt intimidated and oppressed, but reports of further beatings were minimal. However, during the afternoon, either agents of the Mayor, HNP officers, or property owners (depending on who we talked to), walked through the camps and threatened people with violence if they did not leave. There were also conflicting reports of agents throwing rocks from outside the camp.

Regardless of the veracity of these reports, the evictions occurred that Monday night. We returned to the camp the next day to find a few tents, a small protest and scavengers who were carrying out scrap wood. We interviewed the on-sight MINUSTAH commander, who denied knowledge of any attacks, stone-throwing, or intimidation in the past few days. He also said that his mandate only allowed him to temporarily arrest criminals and prohibited any sort of interference with the HNP (although he could submit a report about it to a government entity). Skeptics wonder if these excuses are creating opportunities for security forces to shirk responsibilities or turn blind eyes to brutality.

Ascertaining the roles of MINUSTAH in this particular instance, as well as the public's experiences and opinions of them, has been mercurial goal. Everyone we interviewed during this tense politically charged eviction period had some sort of agenda. We were consistently directed to speak to certain people, whether it was particular camp members (generally members of the camp leadership committee) or commanders of MINUSTAH. The next step in our pursuit to obtain a full picture of MINUSTAH's involvement in Haiti is administering a survey to residents living inside and outside of the camps, which will hopefully give more complete and reliable statistics about the public's opinion of MINUSTAH.