



## Earthquake of August 14, 2021 and cascading escapes: RNDDH calls on prison authorities

September 3, 2021

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### I. Introduction

1. On August 14, 2021, the departments of Nippes, Sud and Grand 'Anse were devastated by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale. Human death and material losses and untold numbers of injured people have been recorded.
2. Since this disaster, the National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) monitors, through its regional structures, the situation on the ground, focusing both on the organization of the emergency response, the distribution of humanitarian aid, the responses of the state authorities to the problems faced by the police, the judiciary and the prison in the affected areas.
3. This document focuses on the situation of the civilian prisons of Anse-à-Veau, Les Cayes and Jérémie that were not spared by the earthquake as well as on the various escape attempts and escapes that were recorded.

### II. Events recorded on August 14, 2021 in Southern Prisons

4. First of all, it should be noted that numerous material damages were recorded in the three (3) civilian prisons located in the departments severely hit by the earthquake. In view of the fact that the various buildings that sheltered the detainees of the Great South were already falling into disrepair, the RNDDH was able to observe damaged spaces, partially collapsed walls, packed cells, etc. Moreover, other damage caused by detainees, have also been registered.

#### a) Anse-à-Veau Civil Prison

5. On August 14, 2021, the Civil Prison of Anse-à-Veau had two hundred and twenty-two (222) inmates, including two (2) women.

6. During the earthquake, the door to one (1) of the eight (8) cells opened. The inmates who were there went out and went to the kitchen where they stole utensils. They then used it to open the other seven (7) cells and allow the inmates who were there to occupy the common space of detention. Several cell walls were damaged, and fire was also put in the prison. But, long before its spread, the fire was extinguished by agents of the Directorate of the Penitentiary Administration (DAP) who were on duty that day.

7. Officers of the National Police of Haiti (PNH) called for reinforcements quickly arrived at the scene and helped contain the movement.

8. It was subsequently decided to scatter the two hundred and twenty-two (222) inmates who were incarcerated in the said prison. The various offices and sub-offices of the region were first involved. And, the next day, August 15, 2021, at least one hundred and eighty-five (185) inmates, or 84% of the prison population of this prison, were sent to Petit-Goâve.



#### • Current situation at the Anse-à-Veau Civil Prison

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Anse-à-Veau Civil Prison –

9. Approximately one (1) month after the August 14, 2021 earthquake, the situation at the Anse à Veau Civil Prison remains unchanged. Damaged cells are not yet repaired and only one (1) cell is functional. This is the one that was assigned to the custody of women and girls.

10. Today, the Civil Prison of Anse-à-Veau welcomes thirteen (13) inmates, two (2) women and eleven (11) seniors. The women are kept in the cell that had already been assigned to them. The men are incarcerated in a holding room for the occasion. Twenty-four (24) other detainees are still in the police stations of the department.

11. No action to enhance the security of the already severely damaged building is taken. Officers assigned to the prison in question had to accompany the detainees who were transferred to Petit-Goâve.

#### b) Prison civil des Cayes

12. On August 14, 2021, shortly before the earthquake, the Civil Prison of Les Cayes had eight hundred and thirty-three (833) inmates. The tremors caused by the earthquake damaged the prison walls, which are now cracked.

13. In addition, many inmates rose up. They set fire to seven (7) of the sixteen (16) cells in the building and took advantage of the mess created by the fire to escape. At least twenty-eight (28) have escaped. These include:

	<b>First name</b>	<b>Last name</b>
1.	Issonel	Abichet
2.	Johnny	Charles
3.	Steevenson	Commerçant
4.	Jean Evens	Dagain
5.	Jean Roudy	Défaite
6.	Loving	Delica
7.	Etson	Denis
8.	Emmanuel	Devolière
9.	Marck Donald	Duvers
10.	Kervens	Félix
11.	Lamour	Fortune
12.	Heurison	Gédéon
13.	Oberson	Gerald
14.	Phaniel	Gerlus
15.	Edner	Grodron
16.	Mackendy	Henry
17.	Luckson	Hilaire
18.	Heurijean	Jean
19.	Bob	Mace Jeune
20.	Jeff	Macénat
21.	Jonas	Norzéus
22.	Durel	Orival
23.	Rosa	Pierre Michel
24.	Salomon	Rosier
25.	Mikenson	Valcin
26.	James	Vilsaint
27.	Kendy	Vital
28.	Florantz	Vital

*Table 1*

14. Following this escape, the prison officials partially emptied it of its population. In fact, fifty (50) of the inmates known for their high capacity of nuisance, were transferred to Petit-Goâve. They were accompanied by DAP officers stationed at the prison.

#### • Current situation at Les Cayes Civil Prison

15. Today, the Civil Prison of Les Cayes charges a staff of seven hundred and thirty-nine (739) detainees including nineteen (19) women and eighteen (18) minors. Of these, only eighty-eight (88) men are condemned.

16. Due to the fact that cells were damaged by the fire of August 14, 2021, the new distribution of detainees is presented as follows: Women and girls are kept at the police station of Les Cayes, adjoining the prison. The two (2) cells that were assigned to the custody of women and girls are now occupied by the elderly. The remaining detainees shall be kept in the other seven (7) functional cells of the prison.

17. Generally speaking, the Prison civile des Cayes is in a bad state. Having not been scrubbed for some time, it emits a foul odor. Those in charge have difficulty coping with this situation, since they do not have adequate cleaning materials or products

18. From a security point of view, the DAP officers assigned to the prison in question are assisted by specialized units and by the PNH officers stationed at the police station of Les Cayes.



Civil prison of Les Cayes –

1/09/21

#### c) Jérémie Civil Prison

19. On August 14, 2021, shortly before the earthquake, the Civil Prison of Jérémie had four hundred and forty-seven (447) inmates, including twelve (12) women and one (1) minor.

20. The tremors caused by the earthquake opened some cell doors that were already not very solid. The inmates who were there went out and went to the kitchen where they got utensils to demolish the prison. They also broke the windows of the clinic and the prison transplant, before setting fire to some cells. However, the fire was extinguished before it spread throughout the

building.

21. The prison officials quickly appealed to the Departmental Directorate of the Grand 'Anse which, reinforced by agents of the Intervention Corps for the Maintenance of Order (CIMO) and the Departmental Unit for the Maintenance of Order (UDMO), came to their aid.

22. In order to bring peace to the prison, the reinforcements had to use tear gas. The inmates on their side used the locks and other utensils they had in their possession to confront law enforcement officers. Several officers came out injured from these clashes. Among them is the Departmental Director of the Grand 'Anse, the Divisional Commissioner Jean-Louis Paul MENARD who received a bolt in the face and was wounded in the arm by a glass blade. For his part, the head of the prison, the divisional inspector Hyppolite LAURENT is injured on the right foot.

23. In the ensuing boondoggle, the NHRDN learned that at least two (2) inmates had escaped. They were:

- Lucien JEAN MIL
- Gamaël JOSEPH

24. One (1) inmate was shot in the mouth. This is Lovensky SUFFRA. He is thirty-one (31) years old. Several other detainees claimed to have been beaten up by law enforcement officers.

25. In addition, the minor who has been in prison since May 9, 2021, was raped in the process. She is seventeen (17) years old. She claimed to have identified her attacker.

26. The same day, the officials of the Civil Prison of Jérémie had decided to transfer the four (4) main individuals who had been involved in the uprising. They were transported to a police station in the department before being transferred back to prison.

- Current situation at Jérémie Civil Prison

27. Today, the situation in the Civil Prison of Jérémie has not changed too much. The doors of the cells and the kitchen that had been damaged on August 14, 2021, were repaired. However, no measures were taken to increase the security of the prison.

28. Seventy-eight (78) inmates are crammed into a single cell with a maximum capacity of twenty (20) persons.

29. It has also been reported to the RNDDH that no research has yet been undertaken to

resuscitate escaped inmates.

### **III. Situation in Petit-Goâve**

30. At least two hundred and thirty-five (235) detainees from the civil prisons of Anse à Veau and Les Cayes were transferred to Petit-Goâve whose police station converted into prison already had the custody of two hundred and thirteen (213) detainees.

31. To face the arrival of these new detainees, the head of the police station of Petit-Goâve converted into prison, officials of the PNH and the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, have taken the initiative to use the new building of the Civil Prison of Petit Goâve, under construction for several years but not yet handed over to the prison authorities by those who are in charge of its construction.

32. The building in question is not yet illuminated despite the presence on the site of several solar panels, batteries and a generator. Security's not set up yet.

33. The detainees from the civil prisons of Anse-à-Veau and Les Cayes, as well as those who were at the police station of Petit-Goâve, a total of four hundred and forty-eight (448) individuals, were all taken to the building under construction. They are grouped according to their origin and fourteen (14) officers of the Directorate of the Penitentiary Administration (DAP) who were posted to Anse-à-Veau and Les Cayes, ensure their custody.

34. An escape attempt was recorded on the evening of August 17, 2021 where detainees from Les Cayes attempted to use a scaffold found at the scene to escape. The officers at the scene were able to control them. However, these inmates were returned to the same cell from which they attempted to escape.

35. A few days later, on the night of September 1-2, 2021, an escape was recorded at the unfinished Petit Goâve Prison. Indeed, it was two (2) hours in the morning when the fifty (50) detainees from the Prison civile des Cayes, making use of the blankets that had been made available to them and their clothes, were able to make a rope to slide along the wall, through a hole they made in a grid at the level of the roof of the cell.

36. At least eleven (11) inmates were involved in the preparation and commission of the coup. Four (4) were killed. They answer to the names of:

- Junior SAINT CYR
- Anthony FRANCIQUE
- Kerizareth RICOL

- Abraham ETIENNE

37. Three (3) inmates were able to escape. These are:

- Ronald LUXAMAR
- Meilled PROSPER
- Johnny ETIENNE

38. Four (4) inmates have been re-admitted. They respond to the names of:

- Peterson BAZILE
- Stanley PIERRE-LOUIS
- Soner GÉNÉUS
- Sonson BENJAMIN

39. At the call made by the prison authorities after the escape, forty-three (43) of the fifty (50) detainees from Les Cayes, are present in Petit-Goâve.

#### **IV. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

40. The events that occurred in the civil prisons of Anse-à-Veau, Les Cayes and Jérémie on August 14, 2021, and then the attempted escape followed a few days later by the escape recorded at the unfinished prison of Petit-Goâve should attract attention for several reasons:

- Thirty-three (33) inmates have escaped yet re-appearing them does not appear to be a priority for state officials.
- The prison movement that was carried out by the prison authorities in the civilian prisons of Anse-à-Veau and Les Cayes in the aftermath of the earthquake is likely to cause enormous harm to all those who are still in preventive detention. They were taken outside their jurisdiction of prosecution and are now far away from their family members who generally support them.
- The situation is also very precarious for those who are still in police stations because the detention centers are not equipped for the reception, custody and management of

people awaiting trial or sentenced.

- The civilian prisons of Anse-à-Veau, Les Cayes and Jérémie were partially ransacked on the day of the earthquake, their officials decided to decommission the damaged cells. As a result, the capacity of these prisons has diminished. However, no redevelopment work has been recorded. Today, inmates who find themselves there are kept in confined spaces and, by extension, in unacceptable conditions. This is the case for example of the seventy-eight (78) inmates kept in a cell that can accommodate twenty (20), at the Civil Prison of Jérémie or that of the seven hundred and thirty-nine (739) inmates incarcerated in nine (9) cells of the Civil Prison of Les Cayes.

41. Moreover, the RNDDH believes that the similarity in the mode of operation of the prisoners of the civil prisons of Anse-à-Veau, Les Cayes and Jérémie must challenge the prison authorities. They all went to the kitchen and set fire to parts of the prisons. It is clear that all inmates know they will find sharp equipment in the kitchens. And this ease with which they set the fire is very worrying because it suggests that dangerous materials such as lighters, matches, alcohol, gases, etc., are often – if not always – accessible to them.

42. Based on all of the above, the RNDDH recommends that prison authorities:

- Redevelop prisons damaged by inmates to make them functional;
- Strengthen the security of the country's various prisons;
- Retransfer the detainees currently imprisoned in the police stations and in the unfinished prison of Petit-Goâve;
- Avoid transferring detainees to the cramped cells of the police station of Petit-Goâve;
- Finalize the construction of the unfinished Petit-Goâve prison to make it functional;
- Initiate research to re-apply the thirty-three (33) inmates who have escaped from prisons since August 14, 2021.