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NEWS RELEASE

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

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Call for a review of the minimum wage: the RNDDH supports the working class and condemns police brutality

1. For several days now, workers have been waging a struggle to demand a revision of the minimum wage, in view of the ongoing inflation in Haiti. In this sense, they estimate that at least one thousand five hundred (1,500) gourdes should be allocated to them for a day of eight (8) hours of work. And, to get their demands across, they organize demonstrations on the public road.

2. The National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) which follows with particular attention the organization of these demonstrations as well as the behavior of the police authorities vis-à-vis the demonstrators, considers that it has a duty to position itself in relation to the demands of the workers and the police brutalities which have been recorded since then.

I. History and analysis of inflation

3. On the afternoon of December 7, 2021, the de facto government led by Prime Minister Dr. Ariel HENRY revised upward the prices of petroleum products. The prices of diesel and kerosene have more than doubled while those of diesel fuel have increased substantially: diesel has increased from one hundred and sixty-nine (169) to three hundred and fifty-three (353) gourdes and kerosene has increased from one hundred and sixty-three (163) three hundred and fifty-two (352) gourdes. The price of gasoline has gone from two-hundred-one (201) to two-hundred-fifty (250) gourdes. These tariffs came into effect on December 10, 2021.

4. A few days before, that is in November 2021, the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Informatics (IHSI) said that the country has an inflation rate of around 25% since the prices of the products most consumed by Haitian households like rice, oil, drugs, etc., have increased exponentially.

5. At the same time, it should be noted that inflation is the general and continuous rise in the prices of goods and services. The direct consequence of this is the increase in the cost of living and,

in turn, the decrease – or outright loss – in the purchasing power of employees and workers.

6. The factors that can lead to inflation are numerous: For example, for Haiti, the continued devaluation of the gourde against the US dollar as well as the increase in the prices of petroleum products are two (2) important factors on the one hand, because the country is import-oriented and because the price of fuel affects the chain, the prices of all necessities as well as that of public transport.

7. In addition, insecurity, characterized by hegemonic struggles between armed gangs, assassinations, rapes, robberies and kidnappings followed by sequestration for ransom – an insecurity aggravated since the country's arrival at the head in July 2021, Prime Minister de facto Ariel HENRY - is also an important factor of inflation because, agricultural products do not circulate in the country. This leads to a sharp rise in food, vegetable and cereal prices.

II. Peaceful demonstrations and repression of the PNH

8. On January 17 and 21, 2022, workers from the Caracol Industrial Park in the North-East department organized a protest movement to demand an increase in the minimum wage, this disrupts the functioning of the park, which is home to several thousand workers. This movement has had the merit of drawing the attention of public opinion to the fact that the wages received by manual workers are particularly those who work in industrial establishments exclusively geared to re-export and employ their personnel on a piecemeal basis or to the task, represents a pittance that does not allow them to meet their most basic needs.

9. In February 2022, several Haitian workers' unions decided to follow up the movement initiated in the Northeast by peacefully protesting in Port-au-Prince, with a view to demanding a revision of the minimum wage. Thus, after notification to the National Police of Haiti (PNH) on February 9, 10, 16 and 17, 2022, peaceful demonstrations were organized in the streets of the capital.

10. Systematically, the agents of the National Police of Haiti (PNH) made an abusive use of tear gas to the detriment of the demonstrators. In addition, in a first video circulating on social networks, we can see police brutalizing demonstrators. And at least one (1) of them was slapped with a lot of violence when he was not assaulting the police officer or posing any threat to him. Another video that has also gone viral on social media shows armed civilians working with police to disperse demonstrators while threatening to shoot at them.

11. RNDDH has identified at least fifteen (15) victims of police brutality. We spoke with twelve (12) of them, thus confirming the information that had already been communicated to us by the unions organizing peaceful demonstrations.

- Johanne MILCA, twenty-seven (27) years old, works at the Hansae I factory. When she was about to leave the SONAPI Industrial Park to join the demonstration, the police used tear gas. She fell and injured her head. She was admitted to the hospital of the Office d'Assurance Accidents du

Travail Maladie et Maternité (OFATMA). She had to apply to her employer for sick leave for ten (10) days. However, her situation remains critical;

- Miralda PIERRE, six (6) months pregnant works at the 51 BMF factory. The place where she was bombed by tear gas. She went into syncope. She was rushed to the OFATMA hospital. Today, she fears for the life of her baby who no longer moves as before;
- Dieula SIMEUS works at 2D20-45. She was injured in her right hand;
- Newvile CHARLES, works at MGA Building 11. While trying to get to safety when the police were shooting at the crowd, tubes and canisters of tear gas, he was struck by a motorcycle. He is injured in the right foot;
- Ruth Leon works at Building 52. She has asthma and had to be rushed to hospital after inhaling tear gas;
- Lucie LAGUERRE, forty-seven (47) years old, works at the Centry Group 13 factory. She fell during a police intervention. Injured in her knees, she was treated at the OFATMA hospital;
- Carline JEAN SIMON, thirty-nine (39) years old, works at the factory building 55 Hansae. Asthmatic, she had respiratory problems after inhaling tear gas. She was rushed to the OFATMA hospital;
- Gina HENRY was struck in her right thigh by a tear gas canister;
- Marie Lourdy PIERRE fell when the police intervened to suppress the demonstration that had just begun outside the premises of the Industrial Park of SONAPI. She is fractured on the right flank;
- Stéphanie FRANCISQUE, Josiane LAGUERRE, Stéphanie CORNER, Yolande NOËLSAINT and Cherlande BELIZAIRE work at MGA Building 17, Building I and Building 34. They were subjected to police brutality. They were treated at the OFATMA hospital and sent home.

III. Proposal of the Superior Council of Wages (CSS)

12. In July 2019, the Superior Council of Wages (CSS) submitted its latest report setting the minimum wage by sector of activity, referred to as the segment. At the time, it was decided to grant five hundred (500) gourdes of minimum wage to workers working in re-export-oriented industries, and more or less than five hundred (500) gourdes to other segments. This amount had been denounced at the time because it did not allow the workers, who demanded a thousand (1,000) gourdes of minimum wage, to adequately meet their needs.

13. At this stage, it should be stressed on the one hand that according to the Law of October 6, 2009, the CSS consists of three (3) groups of three (3) representatives each from the Ministry of Social

Affairs and Labor, the Employers' Sector and the Workers' Sector. On the other hand, the Law of October 6, 2009, as well as the Haitian Labor Code require the CSS to review the minimum wage whenever necessary, each year, three (3) months before the end of the fiscal year and forward its report to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

14. However, since 2019, despite all the promises that had been made and despite the deterioration of the country's socio-economic situation, no revision has been recorded. As always, the workers had to decide to protest the high cost of living and demand better working conditions in order to get the CSS to provide its report on February 18, 2022.

15. In this report, the CSS proposed to add one hundred and fifty (150) gourdes or less on the minimum wage, depending on the segment concerned. On the same day, a meeting was held between trade unionists and de facto Prime Minister Ariel HENRY during which it was agreed to add five hundred (500) to the current minimum wage, to grant social benefits to manual workers, for example by taking charge of transport and making their health insurance cover effective. A few hours later, another meeting was held with the employer sector following which, the minimum wage adjustment was revised to two hundred (200) gourdes.

16. Finally, on February 20, 2022, in the Council of Ministers, it was decided to add one hundred and eighty-five (185) gourdes to the current salary, bringing to six hundred and eighty-five (685) gourdes the minimum wage for workers in re-export-oriented industries. It was also decided to award them benefits and conduct a new salary review in September 2022.

IV. Comments and Recommendations

17. The RNDDH stresses to the attention of all that the Law of October 6, 2009 requires the CSS to analyze the socio-economic situation of the country each year for the submission of a reasoned report on the basis of the cost of living and inflation, whether or not to propose a revision of the minimum wage. This work is never carried out by the CSS, since it is the working class that takes to the streets every time to demand an improvement in its working conditions.

18. The RNDDH believes that the CSS must work to take into account the interests of the working class rather than to protect the bosses as it seems to want to do, contrary to the provisions of Article 3 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention # 131 on the setting of minimum wages which provides that The factors to be taken into account in determining the level of minimum wages must, as far as possible and appropriate, taking into account national practice and conditions, include the needs of workers and their families, having regard to the general level of wages in the country, the cost of living, social security benefits and the comparative living standards of other social groups...".

19. It should also be recalled that when, in December 2021, the State authorities decided to increase the prices of petroleum products, they also committed to adopt a set of accompanying measures. Those promises were never kept.

20. Based on these considerations, the RNDDH considers that the demands of the working class that demands one thousand five hundred (1,500) gourdes of minimum wage are just.

21. At the same time, the RNDDH points out to everyone that freedom of expression is a fundamental freedom. It suffers from no prohibition, whenever it is peacefully manifested, as stipulated in the Haitian Constitution in force and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Haiti.

22. The RNDDH therefore considers it inconceivable that police officers have sided with the bosses to oppress a population plagued by extreme poverty, demanding a fair and equitable wage for work with the demanding hours it provides daily. The organization believes that the police institution would prefer to tackle the major problems of insecurity that ravage the country such as assassinations, kidnappings followed by sequestration for ransom and the loss of control of Haitian territory to armed gangs.

23. Based on all the above, the RNDDH recommends to the appropriate authorities:

- Increase workers' wages substantially, considering the cost of living, instead of making decisions that risk worsening the already chaotic situation in the country;
- To pass the instructions in order to bring the agents of the PNH to put an immediate end to the repressions of peaceful demonstrations of workers;
- To pass the instructions so that the General Inspection of the PNH is seized of the police brutalities recorded during the last demonstrations and that sanctions are taken against the police officers at fault.

Port-au-Prince, February 21, 2022