News



People take a wounded man to a hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Aug. 15, 2023, after gangs took over their neighborhood Carrefour-Feuilles. Vatican News reported Jan. 19, 2024, that armed men in Port-au-Prince took over a bus and kidnapped at least six nuns and others who were on the bus. The gunmen, who drove off with them to an unknown destination, were not immediately identified but authorities suspected they were gang members. (OSV News/Reuters/Ralph Tedy Erol)



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Six nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne were kidnapped Jan. 19 while traveling on a bus in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, according to the Haitian Conference of Religious.

Other passengers on the bus also were taken in the abduction, the conference said in a statement.

"These many kidnappings fill the consecrated people of Haiti with sadness and fear," said the statement, signed by conference president P. Morachel Bonhomme.

Pope Francis appealed Jan. 21 for the release of all the hostages, while praying for "social harmony" in the country, Vatican News reported. In remarks after the Angelus, he said he had "learned with sorrow the news of the kidnapping" of the sisters and the others. "I call on everyone to stop the violence, which causes so much suffering to that dear population."

Bonhomme in his statement prayed that "the spirit of strength be given" to the sisters "to find a way out of this terrible situation." "May the solidarity of the consecrated people of Haiti and the world help them overcome this difficult ordeal," he added.

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In a statement published Jan. 19, Bishop Pierre-André Dumas of Anse-à-Veau et Miragoâne prayed "to help us put an end to this bitter nightmare and this tragic ordeal of our people which has lasted too long." He also offered himself in exchange for the hostages.

"We denounce with vigor and firmness this ultimate odious and barbaric act which does not even respect the dignity of these consecrated women who give themselves wholeheartedly to God to educate and train the young, the poorest and the vulnerable in our society," Dumas wrote, according to a translation posted to social media by Fr. Louis Mérosné.

"Let us call for the release of these nuns as well as their driver and the other passengers of the bus," the bishop said. "We also ask that these abject and criminal practices be stopped on the sacred land of Haiti since they degrade the dignity of the human being … by plunging us into the inhuman abyss of nothingness."

The Sisters of St. Anne did not respond to a message left by OSV News at its Canadian office prior to publication of this story.

The religious order, founded in the Canadian province of Quebec in the 1850s, started working in Haiti in 1944. The Sisters of St. Anne focus on educational projects in Haiti and have 40 sisters in the country, according to its website.

Kidnappings have plagued Haiti in recent years — with religious and missionaries falling victim. Five priests, two nuns and two other victims were freed in 2021 after being held for nearly three weeks. They were kidnapped as they traveled east of the capital.

The country is the poorest in the hemisphere and also convulsed with gang violence, which has intensified since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Haiti's Catholic leaders issued a statement after the assassination warning that the country confronted a "descent into hell."

"The public authorities who are doing nothing to resolve this crisis (of kidnapping) are not immune from suspicion. We denounce complacency and complicity wherever it comes from," said a 2021 statement from the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, according to Agence France-Presse.

By some estimates, gangs have taken over about taken over about 80% of the Port-au-Prince area.

"In Port-au-Prince they control major roads and derive revenue from customs, water and electricity distribution systems, and bus services," according to ACAPS, an independent analytical group. "People affected by gang violence often face killings, persecution, confinement, abduction, robbery and forced displacement."