

Haiti: Deaths and injuries amid gang violence

Reports from Haiti this week have underscored the extreme brutality of violence being inflicted on the population and the impact it is having on their human rights.

On the night of 14-15 August, a local municipal representative, his wife and child were shot and killed in their house in the Decayette neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince by alleged gang members. The man was apparently targeted in retaliation for his reported support for a local self-defence group set up to confront the gangs. Hours earlier, on 14 August, five men and two women from the same family were burned alive when their home in the Carrefour-Feuilles neighbourhood was set on fire by the Grand Ravine gang. They were also reportedly targeted because of their support for a self-defence group.

These neighbourhoods, as well as the Savanne Pistache neighbourhood, had been targeted by the Grand Ravine gang since 25 July. The violence intensified between 11 and 15 August, with gang members killing or injuring some 28 people, and looting or setting on fire at least 50 homes. Two police officers associated with the self-defence groups were also killed.

Specialised police units were eventually deployed on 15 August and forced the gang out of the immediate area. However, the situation remains extremely insecure as the police subsequently withdrew and gang members are still operating in surrounding areas.

Some 5,000 people have fled these neighbourhoods since last weekend and are either sheltering in improvised sites or with host communities, often in dire circumstances and still vulnerable to attack.

Other neighbourhoods in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, such as Tabarre and Croix des Bouquets, have also seen spikes of violence in

recent weeks, as gangs vie to move into new areas while also consolidating their control over areas already in their grip.

Between 1 January and 15 August this year, at least 2,439 people have been killed and a further 902 injured. In addition, 951 people have been kidnapped.

In response to the ongoing gang violence and pervasive insecurity, there has been a rise in “popular justice” movements or self-defence groups, also leading to violence. Since 24 April up to mid-August, more than 350 people have been lynched by local people and vigilante groups. Those killed have included 310 alleged gang members, 46 members of the public and a police officer.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, who visited Haiti in February this year, calls for urgent action to be taken on the UN Secretary-General’s appeal for a non-United Nations multinational force to support the Haitian police in addressing the grave security situation and restoring the rule of law, in strict compliance with international human rights norms and standards. The human rights of the Haitian people must be protected and their suffering alleviated.

ENDS

