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Haiti: The Assembly of Progressive National Democrats (Rassemblement des démocrates nationaux progressistes, RDNP), including political agenda, structure, leaders and documents issued to members; relationship with the government; treatment of members by the authorities (2014-June 2018)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to a declaration prepared in 2016 by a representative of the non-profit organization Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) [1], sent to the Research Directorate, the “RDNP is a relatively large party, and has enjoyed some electoral successes” (IJDH 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the non-profit organization Haiti Democracy Project [2] stated that the RDNP is “well known and generally respected in Haiti” (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018). For further information on the RDNP for the period from 2009 to 2013, see Response to Information Request HTI104366 of April 2013.
1. Leaders and Election Candidates


Sources state that the RDNP has no members elected to the Haitian parliament (Loop 11 Dec. 2017; IDJH 4 June 2018). The representative of the Haiti Democracy Project explained that, over the years, the elected members of the RDNP have been “few and far between” (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018). According to the preliminary results published by the Provisional Electoral Council (Conseil électoral provisoire, CEP), the following RDNP candidates ran for the position of senator during the first round of the legislative elections in November 2016:

- Mona Eliacint Leandre in the Nord-Est department, who won 511 votes or 0.71 percent of the vote;
- Michel André in the Ouest department, who won 14,260 votes or 3.97 percent of the vote;
- Robens Marcellus in the Nord department, who won 1,014 votes or 0.75 percent of the vote;
- Jean Willy Jean-Baptiste in the Artibonite department, who won 8,513 votes or 6.49 percent of the vote;
- Janin Leonidas in the Grand’Anse department, who won 526 votes or 0.93 percent of the vote;
- Jean Fritznel Bellefleur in the Nord-Ouest department, who won 7,168 votes or 11.26 percent of the vote (Haiti 4 Dec. 2016).

Information about RDNP candidates for the 2017 elections could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

An article published in 2014 by the Haitian daily Le Nouvelliste states that the RDNP is made up of a [translation] “new structure […] to mobilize the youth of the country,” namely, the National Progressive Youth Office (Bureau national des jeunes
progressistes), led by Alexandre Telfort [3] (Le Nouvelliste 28 May 2014). According to an article published in 2014 by Haiti Press Network (HPN), Présumé Montès is the coordinator of the RDNP's National Youth Council (Conseil national de la jeunesse) and Nerlande Lacossière, Wanick Candé and Sulface Jean Udler are also responsible for youth within the RDNP (HPN 18 Mar. 2014).

2. Political Agenda

According to sources, the RDNP combines the international Christian-Democratic ideology (France 12 Dec. 2016, 4; Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018) “with a strong personalistic style centered on the Manigats [Leslie Manigat, former president, and Mirlande Manigat]” (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018). The IJDH representative explained that the RDNP has always been a centrist party, sometimes self-described as centre-right, and sometimes as centre-left (IJDH 4 June 2018).

In a letter to the Haitian nation, published by Le Nouvelliste, Mirlande Manigat states that, in 2015, she suggested [translation] “the implementation of a transitional government whose essential duty would be to put the country back on the track of the rule of law, competence and honesty, and to pave the way to renewal, cleared of the current miasmas of mismanagement and corruption” (Manigat 8 Jan. 2016). According to the same source, in January 2016, Mirlande Manigat suggested [translation] “again the establishment of a provisional government” that she describes as follows:

[translation]

This provisional government should not remain in office more than two years. It will be formed by citizens from various sectors of national life. Its role will not be to solve, in such a short time, the major problems that plague the country: poverty; endemic unemployment; social inequalities that eat away at the social fabric and render youth from all categories desperate; women who see the gains of their struggles diminish, in particular the implementation of the 30% quota for which they fought and which a simple political will would have made it possible to initiate; rural dwellers whose hope is limited to the prospect of a perilous exodus to Caribbean and now Brazilian horizons; problems related to the inadequacy of health services; dilapidated roads and ports; and the cessation of agricultural and manufacturing production, which
limits local supply and exports and, consequently, increases the fragility of our currency. All of these issues are on the agenda of an elected government whose transition will be tasked with preparing for the future. It will be responsible for laying the foundations of a state concerned with the implementation of realistic and effective public policies, the pursuit of relations with those in the international community who still call themselves our friends, in relationships based on mutual respect, and the search for potential convergence between their interests and ours. (Manigat 8 Jan. 2016)

Sources state that the RDNP proposes an [translation] “overhaul of the Constitution” (Le Nouvelliste 1 Dec. 2015) or [translation] “another Constitution” (Challenges 24 June 2016).

According to the IJDH representative, on 5 May 2018, the RDNP organized a national convention during which it modified its political agenda (IJDH 4 June 2018). Corroborating information or information about the changes to the RDNP’s political agenda could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Documents Sent to Members

Information on the documents issued to the members of the RDNP could not be found by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Activities and Relations with the Government

According to the HPN, in March 2014, 500 youths responded to a [translation] “call to Haitian youths to join the [RDNP]” (HPN 18 Mar. 2014). According to Le Nouvelliste, Mirlande Manigat declared, with respect to this [translation] “invitation […] to youths to join the party,” that it was the first time there was such a “massive adherence to the RDNP” (Le Nouvelliste 28 May 2014).

masquerades [in 2015], rife with fraud and manipulation” (Manigat 8 Jan. 2016). In that same letter, Mirlande Manigat [translation] “asks RDNP sympathizers […] not to participate in the impending masquerade […] and to remain mobilized to block the route to these imposters from 11 to 24 January 2016 [second round of the presidential and legislative elections]” (Manigat 8 Jan. 2016).

According to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides, OFPRA), the RDNP joined the Dessalinian Patriotic and Popular Movement (Mouvement patriotique et populaire dessalinien, MOPOD) during the general elections of 2015 (France 12 Dec. 2016, 11). The Political Handbook of the World states that MOPOD, formerly known under the name Patriotic Movement of the Democratic Opposition (Mouvement patriotique de l’opposition démocratique), under the co-leadership of Mirlande Manigat, was formed in mid-2013 by several opposition political parties, including the RDNP (Political Handbook of the World 2017, 629). The same source reports that the group became a political party in early 2014 (Political Handbook of the World 2017, 629). According to the Haiti Democracy Project representative, MOPOD was “an ad-hoc umbrella [group] for all presidential candidates who lost the first round of presidential elections held in October 2015” (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018). The same source explained the following about these elections:

MOPOD falsely charged that the elections had been fraudulent […]. Eventually, through rancorous and sporadically violent street demonstrations, culminating in the burning of schools where ballots were kept, MOPOD did succeed in overthrowing those elections. The RDNP part of MOPOD did not participate in that arson. (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018)

Corroborating information or information indicating whether the RDNP was still part of MOPOD could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to an interview published in 2016 by Challenges, a Haitian news magazine, Mirlande Manigat stated that Jocelerme Privert, former president of Haiti [from February 2016 to February 2017], confided to her that she [Mirlande Manigat] was [translation] “the Prime Minister of his heart [.] [but] that he had constraints and was under pressure in Parliament” (Challenges 24 June 2016). According to the same source, Jocelerme Privert offered the position of minister of Foreign Affairs to Mirlande Manigat, who apparently turned it down (Challenges 24 June 2016).
According to the final results of the first round of the presidential election of November 2016, published by the CEP, the RDNP did not present any candidates for the position of president (Haiti 3 Jan. 2017).

According to the IJDH representative, the RDNP supported anti-government strikes and criticized the current government’s policies, including the financing of political parties and the “controversial 2017 Budget Law” (IJDH 4 June 2018). An article published by Loop, a Caribbean news website, states that the RDNP refused the money that was supposed to be given to it through the [translation] “funding of political parties provided for by the Presidency” (Loop 11 Dec. 2017). According to the same source, Mirlande Manigat stated that, in order to receive that funding, [translation] “political organizations must have at least one elected member in Parliament,” which is not the case of the RDNP, which “questions the funding method employed by the followup committee (made up of seven parties)” (Loop 11 Dec. 2017). An article published by AlterPresse, a [translation] “Haitian alternative information network,” reports that Mirlande Manigat stated that she was [translation] “‘concerned’ about the evolution of the crisis, around the [2017-2018] budget challenged by various sectors, in particular political,” and “[that she] advises the administration of Moïse-Lafontant [President and Prime Minister, respectively] to take the necessary measures to avoid the multiplication and intensification of strikes and demonstrations in Haiti” (AlterPresse 20 Sept. 2017).

5. Treatment of Members by the Authorities

A 2014 report on Haiti prepared by the UN Human Rights Committee reports [UN English version] “allegations of threats, harassment and intimidation by the police, security forces and political authorities against […] members of the opposition and the lack of protection provided by the State party in this connection” (UN 21 Nov. 2014, para. 19). The 2016 declaration prepared by the IJDH representative states that the RDNP and its supporters “have been regularly subjected to political persecution over the past twenty years” (IJDH 2016).

According to Freedom House, André Michel, an “outspoken leader” of the RDNP, filed corruption charges against President Martelly’s wife and son (Freedom House 2015). The 2016 declaration prepared by the IJDH representative also states that in 2012, Enold Florestal, an RDNP activist, had filed a lawsuit against President
Michel Martelly’s wife and son for corruption, and that André Michel, an RDNP ally, was one of the lawyers involved in the case (IJDH 2016). The same source added that brothers Josué and Enold Florestal had been arrested in July and August 2013, respectively, in a case dating back to 2010 concerning the killing of Frantzy Duverseau, the brother of Josué Florestal’s wife (IJDH 2016). An article published by South Florida Caribbean News (SFCN) also reports that Josué and Enold Florestal, RDNP activists, were jailed in 2013 after they filed a complaint against Michel Martelly’s wife and son for corruption (SFCN 17 May 2018). According to the 2016 declaration prepared by the IJDH representative, in August 2014, Josué and Enold Florestal, as well as André Michel, were charged with the murder of Frantzy Duverseau by Judge Lamarre Bélizaire, who was named to the bench by the Michel Martelly administration (IJDH 2016). Similarly, Freedom House reports that Judge Bélizaire indicted André Michel and his two clients for murder, without any “formal investigation” (Freedom House 2015). The National Human Rights Defense Network (Réseau national de défense des droits humains, RNDDH), a Haitian NGO, reports that this case

[translation]

merely reinforces the hypothesis that justice was used for political persecution against the FLORESTAL brothers for having endorsed the complaint against the presidential family for acts of corruption and against the lawyer and politician André MICHEL, a fierce opponent of the ruling political power. (RNDDH 2 Sept. 2014, 9)

According to sources, Josué and Enold Florestal were released in December 2014, within the context of the release of political prisoners (IJDH 2016; SFCN 17 May 2018) by an appeals court (IJDH 2016). Freedom House states that André Michel and his two clients were exonerated in December 2014 by an appeals court (Freedom House 2015).

Furthermore, according to sources, bullets were fired at the RDNP headquarters on 20 February 2016 (IJDH 2016; Haiti Observer 20 Feb. 2016); no one was hurt and no one was arrested (IJDH 2016).

The IJDH representative states that they found no evidence of “mistreatment” of RDNP members under the administration of President Jovenel Moïse, that is, from 2017 to present (IJDH 4 June 2018). Similarly, according to the Haiti Democracy
Project representative, although the RDNP did form part of the coalition opposing President Jovenel Moïse, "no significant retribution has been taken" against its members (Haiti Democracy Project 31 May 2018).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The IJDH, located in Boston, is a partner of the Office of International Lawyers (Bureau des avocats internationaux, BAI) located in Haiti; the IJDH works with human rights defence organizations in Haiti, documents and disseminates information on human rights violations and helps victims of such violations pursue cases in national and international courts (IJDH n.d.).


[3] According to an article published by Haiti Press Network (HPN) in 2015, Alexandre Telfort and Charlot Jacklin are former members of the young progressives of the RDNP; since the RDNP was not registered with the CEP, they decided to register under the title of other political groups (HPN 30 June 2015).

References


Haiti Democracy Project. 31 May 2018. Correspondence with the Research Directorate by a representative.


Loop. 11 December 2017. Rosny Ladouceur. “RDNP 'refuse' l’argent de financement des partis politiques.” [Accessed 1 June 2018]


Le Nouvelliste. 28 May 2014. Carlin Michel and Michelson Césaire. “Le RDNP recrute de nouveaux membres et s'offre une structure de jeunesse.” [Accessed 4 June 2018]


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** Assistant professor of political science and former political columnist in Haiti; assistant professor whose research concerns Haitian politics; associate professor whose fields of research include Haitian policy; National Democratic Institute; Plateforme des organisations haïtiennes des droits humains; professor whose fields of interest include Haitian studies; professor whose research concerns Haitian policy; Rassemblement des démocrates nationaux progressistes – youth wing; Réseau national de défense des droits humains.
Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Factiva; Haiti – Parlement, Primature; Haïti en marche; Haiti Sentinel; Human Rights Watch; United Nations – Refworld; United States – Department of State.

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