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27 July 2020

HTI200284.FE

Haiti: The Fanmi Lavalas political party, including its leaders, political platform, geographic reach and activities; its relations with the government; whether the party has ties to criminal groups (2017–July 2020)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Leaders, Political Platform and Geographic Reach

For information on the various names of the party, see Response to Information Request HTI105991 of August 2017.

1.1 Leaders

According to *Le Nouvelliste*, a Haitian daily, the Fanmi Lavalas executive council is composed of Maryse Narcisse, Joël Vorbe, Jean Myrto Julien and Anthony Dessources, and the party is led by Maryse Narcisse (*Le Nouvelliste* 4 June 2019). According to the *Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019*, the leaders are "JeanBertrand Aristide (Former President of the Republic, under house arrest as of November 2014), Luis Gérard-Gilles (2006 presidential candidate), Maryse Narcisse (Head of Executive Council and 2015 presidential candidate) [and] Joel Vorbe" (*Political Handbook of the World* 2019, 21–22). According to sources, former Haitian president JeanBertrand Aristide is the [translation] "national representative" within the leadership of Fanmi Lavalas (HPN 30 Mar. 2020; *Le Nouvelliste* 28 June 2019). *Le Nouvelliste* reports that, according to the elected deputies of Fanmi Lavalas, the party is a [translation] "grassroots organization with a pyramid structure" and that "the base is composed of 'ti fanmi', people's organizations, delegates, regional committees, elected officials and cadres" (*Le Nouvelliste* 28 June 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.2 Political Platform

According to a report on a mission to Haiti by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides, OPFRA) with the participation of the National Court of Asylum (Cour nationale du droit d'asile, CNDA), citing an interview with a representative of the Haitian NGO Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), Haitian political parties do not have a [translation] "programmatic or ideological line" and "are generally organized around a personality whose sole objective is to take power" (France 2017, 15). According to the same report, citing a representative of the Civil Society Initiative (Initiative de la société civile, ISC), [translation] "a political analysis think tank," "traditionally," the "Fanmi Lavalas movement" was "considered to have a 'leftist' political coloration" (France 2017, 15, 16). Similarly, Freedom House characterizes Fanmi Lavalas as "leftist" (Freedom House 2018).

On 16 November 2018, *Le Nouvelliste* reported that Fanmi Lavalas had put forward a proposal, in a press release, for a transitional government to replace Haitian President Jovenel Moïse and the government of [Prime Minister Jean-Henry] Céant, calling for the latter's resignation in order to [translation] "put the country back on track" (*Le Nouvelliste* 16 Nov. 2018). The source adds that the organization proposes

[translation]

putting in place an executive and a government of public safety for a 36-month transitional period. The political structure proposes that this government of transition/public safety consist of credible personalities, engaged in the struggle against exclusion and corruption, who share a vision of a new mode of governance and the management of the economic and political space. (*Le Nouvelliste* 16 Nov. 2018)

Similarly, in a press release published in March 2019 by *Le National*, a Haitian newspaper, Fanmi Lavalas reiterated that the party is calling for the resignation of the president and his government (*Le National* 1 to 6 Mar. 2019). The source adds that the party is calling for [translation] "recognition that the Parliament is dysfunctional and has outlived its usefulness," to be followed by the putting in place of an "Executive of public safety" for three years (*Le National* 1 to 6 Mar. 2019).

According to the press release quoted by *Le Nouvelliste*, the transitional government should achieve the following objectives: organize a national dialogue, set up a constituent assembly for a [translation] "new fundamental charter," create the necessary conditions for a trial to be held in the PetroCaribe case [1], revise the electoral law and appoint a new electoral council to organize elections to close out the electoral period (*Le Nouvelliste* 16 Nov. 2018).

Further information on the Fanmi Lavalas political platform since the 2016 presidential elections could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For information on the 2015–2016 elections, see Response to Information Request HTI200290 of July 2019.

1.3 Geographic Reach

Recent information on the Fanmi Lavalas party's geographic reach was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The left-wing American magazine *Jacobin* reports that few Cité Soleil residents, longtime supporters of Fanmi Lavalas, voted in the last presidential elections and "many of them" voted for Jovenel Moïse (*Jacobin* 13 Feb. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Activities of the Party

Information on the activities of Fanmi Lavalas was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Political Handbook of the World 2018-2019 notes that Fanmi Lavalas won one Senate seat and eight Chamber seats in the 2015–2016 elections (*Political Handbook of the World 2019*, 21). According to sources, Maryse Narcisse was its presidential candidate and won 9 percent of the vote (Haiti 3 Jan. 2017; *Political Handbook of the World 2019*, 21).

Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2018* reports that in September and October 2017, Fanmi Lavalas organized protests against the president's budget (Freedom House 2018). Sources report that on 11 September 2017, Fanmi Lavalas held a demonstration against the finance law for 2017–2018 (Loop News 12 Sept. 2017; *Haiti Liberté* 13 Sept. 2017). IHS Global Insight, the economic analysis division of IHS Markit (IHS Markit n.d.), reports that on 13 September 2017, spurred by opposition parties Fanmi Lavalas and Platfom Pitit Desalin, "thousands of Haitians took to the streets" in protest against the 2018 budget (IHS Markit 15 Sept. 2017).

Le Nouvelliste cites Joël Vorbe as stating that Fanmi Lavalas activists are taking part in demonstrations aimed at obtaining the resignation of Jovenel Moïse (*Le Nouvelliste* 26 Nov. 2018). However, the same source reports that Joël Vorbe stated that the political organization was not a participant in any coalition or structure

when questioned about [translation] “the presence of several elected members and party members within the so-called Democratic and Popular Sector” [2] (*Le Nouvelliste* 26 Nov. 2018).

AlterPresse, an [translation] “alternative Haitian news network,” reports that on 18 November 2019, members of Fanmi Lavalas participated in a day of reflection with the theme [translation] “18 November 2019, a last push for the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse” in Papaye, near Hinche, northeast of Port-au-Prince (AlterPresse 19 Nov. 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Relations with the Government

Sources report that the party rejected the president’s call for dialogue during the political crisis in Haiti after the budget vote in August 2017 (*Le Nouvelliste* 25 Oct. 2017; AFP 26 Oct. 2017).

Sources report that on Tuesday, 9 October 2018, at the Port-au-Prince Public Prosecutor’s Office, Schiller Loudor, a senior Fanmi Lavalas member, was interrogated by the government commissioner at the Court of first instance for statements deemed inflammatory (Radio Métropole Haïti 10 Oct. 2018; AlterPresse 15 Oct. 2018). According to the same sources, Schiller Loudor had called on the population to participate in the anti-corruption demonstrations announced for a number of cities in the country (Radio Métropole Haïti 10 Oct. 2018; AlterPresse 15 Oct. 2018).

In an interview with World Politics Review (WPR) [3] in September 2017, François Pierre-Louis, a former Haitian government official who is now a professor of political science at Queens College, City University of New York, explained that President Jovenel Moïse chose a former advisor to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Jean-Henry Céant, as prime minister (WPR 1 Oct. 2018). The same source reports that Céant broke with Aristide in 2004, but that he relied on members of Fanmi Lavalas in the 2016 presidential election, in which he ran (WPR 1 Oct. 2018). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that Prime Minister Jean-Henry Céant resigned on 21 March 2019, after he lost a no-confidence motion, and Jean-Michel Lapin was appointed as acting prime minister (Loop News 21 Mar. 2019; *Le Nouvelliste* 21 Mar. 2019). According to *Le Nouvelliste*, Fanmi Lavalas rejected President Jovenel Moïse's March 2019 invitation to a meeting on the formation of a new government (*Le Nouvelliste* 1 Apr. 2019).

According to sources, the party condemned the alleged involvement of the government's audit office (Cour des comptes) [including President Moïse (HaïtiLibre 5 June 2019)] in the PetroCaribe misappropriation of funds case and called for him and his government to step down (*Le Nouvelliste* 4 June 2019; HaïtiLibre 5 June 2019). According to other sources, the party is calling for Jovenel Moïse's mandate to end in February 2021 (VBI 6 June 2020; Juno7 5 June 2020), instead of February 2022 (Juno7 5 June 2020).

Sources note that Fanmi Lavalas did not sign the agreement reached in November 2019 between various opposition parties paving the way for a transition after the end of Jovenel Moïse's mandate (AFP 9 Nov. 2019; AlterPresse 11 Nov. 2019). Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that [translation] "all twenty or so political and citizens' groups represented signed the agreement, except for the Fanmi Lavalas party" (AFP 9 Nov. 2019). Sources report that the agreement provides for the appointment of a supreme court judge to replace President Jovenel Moïse during a transition period (AlterPresse 11 Nov. 2019; VBI 10 Nov. 2019).

3.1 Treatment by Law Enforcement

In its 2018 report, Freedom House reports that the September and October 2017 protests organized by Fanmi Lavalas were "violently broken up by the police" who "fired tear gas" into crowds (Freedom House 2018). Similarly, sources report that during the demonstration on 11 September 2017, police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters (Loop News 12 Sept. 2017; *Haïti Liberté* 13 Sept. 2017).

According to a press release from an American delegation of human rights activists, residents of the Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods of Tokyo, La Saline [Lasalin] and Site Vinsant suffered "deadly attacks" in April 2019 perpetrated by

police and criminal gangs associated with Haiti's government to punish them for their role in the demonstrations opposing government corruption, mismanagement and brutality, as well as for their support of the Fanmi Lavalas party (Delegation 8 May 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Relations with Criminal Groups

Information on ties between Fanmi Lavalas and criminal groups could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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 PetroCaribe program is an agreement signed in 2006 between the governments of Haiti and Venezuela that allowed Haiti to buy oil from Venezuela, deferring 40 percent of the payment for that oil for up to 25 years (*Time* 24 June 2019; *The New Yorker* 19 Oct. 2018). The government was supposed to use the proceeds from the sale of this oil for social and development projects (*Time* 24 June 2019; *The New Yorker* 19 Oct. 2018). However, *Time* reports that \$2 billion of the program's funding went missing and a Senate commission found evidence of corruption in the use of the funds (*Time* 24 June 2019). Similarly, the *New Yorker* states that a report from the Haitian Senate explains how funds that had been accumulated through participation in the PetroCaribe program were misappropriated by government officials and their "cronies in the private sector" (*The New Yorker* 19 Oct. 2018).

[2] Vant Bèf Info (VBI), a Haitian news website, reports that the [translation] "so-called Democratic and Popular Sector (Secteur dit démocratique et populaire)" is a "political structure" and identifies Joël Costumé, a former deputy from the Artibonite

department, as one of the organization's spokespersons (VBI 29 Mar. 2019). Other sources refer to André Michel [Michel André] as the spokesperson for the so-called Democratic and Popular Sector (AlterPresse 9 Oct. 2019; Loop News 10 Dec. 2019).

[3] World Politics Review (WPR) is an independent news website based in New York that analyzes global trends in international affairs (WPR n.d.).

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