

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

22 May 2012

HTI104082.FE

Haiti: Frequency of kidnappings for ransom; groups targeted by kidnappers; measures taken by the authorities to fight kidnappings (2010-2012)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Kidnappings for ransom

In correspondence with the Research Directorate on 27 April 2012, the director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), a human rights organization in Boston that provides legal aid in Haiti (n.d.), explained that almost all kidnappings in Haiti are committed for ransom money. Also, two other sources indicated that most kidnapping cases are resolved by paying a ransom (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012; Canada 1 Mar. 2012). Moreover, several sources indicated that kidnapping victims may be subjected to other forms of violence, including physical (France 16 Feb. 2012; U.S. 11 Mar. 2012) and sexual assault (ibid.), death (ibid.; Canada 1 Mar. 2012) or disappearance (ibid.).

2. Number of kidnappings

According to correspondence from the IJDH director, kidnappings have become less frequent since the 2004-2006 period, but they are still "fairly frequent" (27 Apr. 2012). In its Haiti Crime and Safety Report, published in March 2012, the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security also stated that the number of kidnappings has decreased since 2005 and 2006, but it noted that they are less predictable and more widespread than before (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). The IJDH director noted that kidnappings are rarely reported, explaining that the kidnappers warn families against reporting the abduction to the police (IJDH 27 Apr. 2012). The United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security also stated that the crimes are under-reported (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). Several sources noted that more cases were reported in 2010 than in 2009 (ibid.; *The Miami Herald* 1 Sept. 2010; *Haiti Libre* 2 Sept. 2010). According to the report from the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 121 kidnappings were reported in 2010, 73 in 2009 and 266 in 2008 (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). The same report noted that the number of kidnappings rose in the second half of 2010, after escapees from prisons destroyed in the January 2010 earthquake had time to regroup (ibid.). However, an article published by the Canadian newspaper *La Presse* suggested that the number of kidnappings has not [translation] "exploded" since the earthquake (7 Jan. 2012).

Several media reported kidnappings in 2011 (*Signal FM Haïti* 15 Apr. 2011; *Le Nouvelliste* 26 Aug. 2011; *Haiti Libre* 30 Aug. 2011; *Radio Métropole Haïti* 20 Dec. 2011; *Radio Kiskeya* 26 Dec. 2011). For example, two newspapers indicated that kidnappers had abducted an American of Haitian origin at his home in August 2011 and demanded a ransom of 300,000 dollars (*The Guardian* 31 Aug. 2011; *Haiti Libre* 30 Aug. 2011). The victim was rescued by the Haitian national police without one penny being paid (ibid.; *The Guardian* 31 Aug. 2011). According to the International Crisis Group, there was an increase in kidnapping reports in 2011 (8 Sept. 2011, 1). *Radio Kiskeya*, located in Port-au-Prince (n.d.), also indicated that there was a [translation] "resurgence" of kidnappings in Port-au-Prince in November 2011 (26 Dec. 2011). In March 2012, the National Human Rights Defense Network (Réseau national de défense des droits humains, RNDDH), a human rights organization located in Port-au-Prince that promotes the rule of law in Haiti (n.d.), declared itself [translation] "profoundly concerned with the upsurge of acts of insecurity and violence [namely abductions and kidnappings for ransom] in the country, particularly in the metropolitan area" (15 Mar. 2012, 1).

Sources stated that kidnappings increase in Haiti as the holiday season approaches (*The Guardian* 31 Aug. 2011; U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). According to the report from the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security, that increase, also noted before school sessions begin, are due to the belief that people have more cash at home during those

periods to pay for gifts and school fees (ibid.).

3. Targeted groups

According to the United States Bureau of Consular Affairs, kidnapping victims are not targeted according to their profession, nationality, race, gender or age (U.S. 8 Aug. 2011). The report from the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security stated that the breakdown of victims in recent years are spread fairly evenly between men, women and children (11 Mar. 2012). According to the report from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada, Haitian citizens, regardless of their social class, run the risk of being kidnapped (1 Mar. 2012). However, other sources stated that Haitians from the middle or upper class, or those who are perceived to have money, are at greater risk (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012; IJDH 27 Apr. 2012; *Haiti Libre* 2 Sept. 2010). Nevertheless, the IJDH director noted that the majority of crime victims, including kidnapping victims, are poor; wealthy people have security to protect them (27 Apr. 2012).

Several sources noted the kidnapping of foreigners (France 16 Feb. 2012; Canada 1 Mar. 2012; U.S. 8 Aug. 2011; *The Miami Herald* 1 Sept. 2010; *Haiti Libre* 30 Aug. 2011; Reuters 9 Mar. 2012). A report from France's Department of Foreign and European Affairs (ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes) indicated that approximately 10 percent of victims are foreign nationals (16 Feb. 2012). The spokesperson for the United Nations police in Haiti was cited in two newspapers as saying that 83 percent of kidnapping victims between January and August 2010 were Haitians, while 17 percent were foreigners (*The Miami Herald* 1 Sept. 2010; *Haiti Libre* 2 Sept. 2010).

According to the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security, home invasions for the purpose of kidnapping and robbery have increased since 2010 (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). Sources indicated that the kidnapers target the most affluent neighbourhoods, namely Pèlerin and Thomassin, in south Pétionville (ibid.; *The Miami Herald* 1 Sept. 2010).

The Bureau of Diplomatic Security also noted the "serious problem" of vehicle thefts commonly committed in conjunction with kidnappings (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). Haitian sources indicated that seven people travelling by car were kidnapped by armed bandits in 2010 (*Haiti Libre* 2 Sept. 2010; Radio Kiskeya 1 Sept. 2010). According to the newspaper *Haiti Libre*, the kidnapers demanded a ransom of 150,000 dollars for the release of one of the victims (2 Sept. 2010). In March 2012, Dominican truckers blocked a border crossing point between Haiti and the Dominican Republic to protest against the recent kidnappings of three Dominican truck drivers in Haiti and the general lack of security for drivers (Reuters 9 Mar. 2012; *Puerto Rico Daily Sun* 12 Mar. 2012).

3.1 Political kidnappings

According to the United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security, most kidnappings are motivated by criminal rather than political reasons (U.S. 11 Mar. 2012). However, the International Crisis Group stated that many unsolved cases of kidnapping and murder between 2009 and 2011 are "frequently labelled political killings" (8 Sept. 2011, 3). In September 2010, the *Miami Herald* wrote that some sources, including the UN, suspected that politicians of hiring gangs to commit kidnappings for ransom in order to collect money to hire protesters during the election (1 Sept. 2010). Additional information on this topic could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

4. Measures taken by the authorities

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, published by the United States Department of State, police reform has made "significant improvements" in the Anti-Kidnapping Unit of the Haitian national police in 2010 (8 Apr. 2011, 7). Sources indicated that the police sometimes manage to arrest kidnapers and rescue hostages (Radio Métropole Haïti 13 Dec. 2011; ibid. 20 Dec. 2011; Radio Kiskeya 26 Dec. 2011; IJDH 27 Apr. 2012). However, sources also stated that some police officers have been complicit in kidnappings (ibid.; U.S. 8 Apr. 2011, 3). Moreover, the RNDDH stated that [translation] "it appears the Haitian authorities have not assessed the scope of the situation to enable an appropriate response to the acts of insecurity and organized violence" (15 Mar. 2012, 1).

For more information on crime in Haiti, see the response for information request HTI104083.

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts made to contact a representative of the Réseau national de défense de droits humains were unsuccessful. A Haitian journalist was unable to provide any information within the time constraints for this Response.

Internet sites, including: Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement; Canadian Foundation for the Americas; defend.ht; ecoi.net; Haitian national police; Human Rights Watch; Interpol; *Miami New Times*; Organization of American States; United Nations – UN News Centre, Integrated Regional Information Networks, United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, Refworld, Security Council; *The Wall Street Journal*.

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