

ON HAITI VISIT, OAS DELEGATION COMMENDS PROGRESS IN SECURITY CLIMATE

February 17, 2008

An [Organization of American States \(OAS\)](#) delegation completed its second full day of high-level meetings and onsite visits to projects in Haiti, expressing optimism about the country's improved security climate and emphasizing the need for economic development to be now in greater focus.

Ambassador Cornelius A. Smith, the OAS Permanent Council Chairman and Permanent Representative of the Bahamas to the OAS, who heads up the mission, said that after meetings with President René Préval, Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis, the Senate President and senior members of the government, the OAS delegation sensed “a real commitment on the part of government to move Haiti along the path of democracy through the holding of fair and transparent elections and then to ensure that Haiti attack the problem of poverty through job-creation and through foreign direct investment.” He stressed, however, the tough challenges ahead.

OAS Assistant Secretary General Ambassador [Albert R. Ramdin](#) is co-leader of the hemispheric delegation, which includes Ambassadors: Rodolfo Gil, of Argentina; Osmar Chohfi, of Brazil; Graeme Clark, of Canada; María Zavala Valladares, of Peru; J. Robert Manzanares, of the United States; and María del Lujan Flores, of Uruguay; as well as Alternate Representatives Christian Rehren of Chile and Luis Javier Campuzano Piña of Mexico.

The mission arrived in Port-au-Prince Thursday, and has met with leaders from various political parties, civil society groups and the international community. The Permanent Council Chairman said those meetings underscored how, across the society, “they really believe this is Haiti’s time—that this is their moment to take advantage of what appears to be a real opportunity to move Haiti forward.”

Saturday’s itinerary included touring Cap Haïtien on the country’s north coast to meet with the private sector leaders and the mayor, and to visit L’Arsenal Prison where the OAS-affiliated (PADF) [Pan American Development Foundation](#) runs a rehab project. At Belladères on the border with the Dominican Republic, the tour included a PADF facility to help undocumented Haitians who are repatriated.

Referring to expressions of fear in the past, the Bahamian Ambassador—who is also representing the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) delegations—noted that the OAS delegation sees “real signs that it is becoming a little more stable.” Smith said this improved security climate stems from, among other things, institutional assistance in training police officers; the increase in the ranks of the police force; and “an overall sense of security being established through the international agencies.” The optimism was reaffirmed after Friday’s visit to Cité Soleil, where the OAS team observed positive developments despite poverty challenges. The Permanent Council Chairman said he would impress upon his colleagues back in Washington, particularly the donor nations, that economic development must be emphasized alongside political stability.

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Ambassador Ramdin, for his part, commented on the sense that the society supports the President's strategy to move Haiti forward, including a poverty-reduction strategy that is being implemented. "I believe that this will provide the policy framework for the international community to know how best to support the country," said Ramdin, commending the "open, constructive atmosphere" noted in discussing the country's challenges as well as the opportunities for further development.

Elaborating on the "acceptable level" of security in the country, Ramdin was emphatic that "we absolutely do not agree with the assessment of a major magazine in the United States which puts Haiti as the fourth most dangerous country in the world." He said that is "not a statement which we can support on the basis of our experience."

Ramdin also reiterated the OAS' call for partial senatorial elections to be held as soon as possible, and underscored the need for reform of the country's penal system and for a strengthened Haitian National Police that can play its full role in addressing law and order. He praised the [United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti \(MINUSTAH\)hyperlink](#), and acknowledged the tremendous effort of the Haitian police amidst great challenges.

Haiti's Minister of Tourism, Patrick Delatour, accompanied the OAS officials on Saturday's visits to Cap Haïtien and Belladères by helicopter. The OAS mission will meet with civil society organizations on Sunday and then hold a press conference at the airport, before returning to Washington.

"This mission came to Haiti not with a preset agenda," Ramdin stated. Rather, he explained, it was really meant to inform member states about what is happening in Haiti; to better understand the Haitian environment; and to listen to Haitians and understand their priorities and the way they look at development efforts and their future.

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