

14 May 2020

Haiti: Armed attack against the office of human rights organisation Réseau National de Défense des Droits de l'Homme

On 11 May 2020 in the early hours of the morning, unknown individuals fired shots at the offices of the human rights organization *Réseau National de Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (National Network for the defence of human rights – RNDDH) in Port-au-Prince.

Réseau National de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RNDDH) is a human rights organisation based in Port-au-Prince. The organisation works to report on human rights issues with a view to reinforcing the capacity of civil society to defend its rights and, monitor key state institutions with regard to their obligations to protect human rights and defend the rule of law.

In the early hours of 11 May 2020, the office of RNDDH was fired at by unknown individuals. Forensic investigators arrived at the scene of the armed attack to begin an investigation.

Pierre Esperance, human rights defender and executive director of RNDDH believes the organisation is the subject of intimidation acts in reprisal for its participation in the hearing before the US House of Representatives on 10 December 2019, to speak about the situation regarding human rights in Haiti.

The armed attack happened few days after the Anti-Corruption Unit (ULCC) issued a wanted notice on 5 May 2020 for the RNDDH administrator Marie Gesly Damas Jean Pierre. On 23 April, she was summoned to the ULCC office on 5 May 2020 for an ongoing investigation into the organisation and a grant it received in October 2016 from the Development Assistance Monetization Office (BMPAD), which RNDDH believes to be a pretext for a broader investigation into the organization. Despite having already submitted the relevant documents requested by the ULCC on 24 March 2020, the human rights defender was summoned, which RNDDH contested as it believed it was unjustified given that they had fulfilled the request. As a result, the wanted notice was issued against Marie Gesly Damas Jean Pierre, an excessive escalation which may be viewed as judicial harassment.

These incidents are not isolated and are part of a pattern of reprisals against human rights organizations in Haiti and their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights. On 19 February 2020 the office of Samuel Madistin, president of human rights organization Foundation Je Klere (FJKL), was vandalised with extensive damage. Bullet holes were found, and several vehicles parked in the office car park were set on fire. The office was vandalised during a police protest, and Samuel Madistin believes that the attack on the office was due to his position in favour of unionising the Haitian National Police.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the armed attack against the office of RNDDH and the wanted notice issued against human rights defender Marie Gesly Damas Jean Pierre as it believes they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Haiti to:

1. Strongly condemn the armed attack against RNDDH office, as it is believed to be directly motivated by the organisation's peaceful and legitimate human rights work;

2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the armed attack against the office of RNDDH, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Revoke the wanted notice against Marie Gesly Damas Jean Pierre and close the investigation against her, as it is believed to be a judicial harassment motivated by her peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Haiti are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director