

Working to stop weapons exports to Haiti

Angie Howard-McParland; Institute Justice Team

In our work on the Critical Concern of nonviolence, the Mercy Justice Team engages a broad spectrum of advocacy and education on everything from nuclear weapons and the Pentagon budget to personal peacemaking and nonviolence language. We are also deeply involved in [gun violence prevention](#), both on a domestic level – as the [U.S. surgeon general recently declared firearm violence a public health crisis](#) – and on an international scale, as this emergency is [exported throughout Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Our recent work on U.S. exports of small arms and ammunition to Haiti highlights the importance of this work and offers opportunities to get involved.

Our working group – consisting of the Mercy Justice Team, [Nuns Against Gun Violence](#), the [Quixote Center](#), the [Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth](#), and the [Justice Coalition of Religious](#) – began visioning a project in early spring, as each of these groups has a history or current work in Haiti. The bloodshed and destabilization were rapidly increasing, with armed gangs controlling much of the country's infrastructure, and food insecurity and extreme poverty reaching record levels. Guns and ammunition are not manufactured in Haiti, but flow into the country primarily from the United States due to a combination of weak gun laws in several states and insufficient oversight of weapons smuggling through the port of Miami. Our hope was to mobilize faith-based organizations and partner groups to participate in a joint action to first learn more about the crisis and then to call on Congress and the Department of Homeland Security to take the necessary actions to stop this flow of arms from the U.S to Haiti and the rest of the region.

The first step consisted of organizing and creating awareness. We were able to secure 35 co-sponsoring organizations – including congregations of women religious, faith-based organizations, and Haitian diaspora partners – to come together as part of this project, hosting a call with these groups at the end of June as we planned our next steps of education and advocacy.

In July, we hosted a webinar with United Nations Haiti expert William O'Neill and staff from the office of Haiti Caucus co-chair Congresswoman Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick. With over 500 people registered and more than 300 attending live, it was clear there was interest and enthusiasm to respond to the trafficking of illegal arms from the U.S. to Haiti and to call on the U.S. government to take action. You can watch the recording in [English](#), [Spanish](#), or [Haitian Creole](#).

And now we are moving on to convert this education into action. We are creating the opportunity for participants to contact key members of Congress and the Biden administration on September 25th and 26th, either in person with us in Washington, D.C. or with letters, phone calls, and virtual meetings. These dates were chosen to dovetail with [the Gun Violence Prevention Summit](#), taking place September 23–24, to continue creating partnerships between faith-based groups and the larger gun violence prevention movement, as well as to encourage attendance at both events for those able to travel.

For those interested in participating virtually or in-person in Washington D.C., [please register here](#) and share with others, encouraging them to support this vital life-saving work. You can also use our [recent Mercy action alert](#) asking the White House and Congress to support legislation that can stop the illegal flow of weapons, and read more about the priority bills we are supporting in this coalition [here](#).