



**Getting Haiti out of the Crisis**, with former Haitian Minister of Social Affairs Victor Benoît (*Batailles électorales et crises politiques en Haïti*) and Chamber of Deputies representative Jerry Tardieu (*L'enfer du Parlement*). Moderator: Dr. Rose Bleus, Sosyete Koukouy of Miami. In Haitian Creole, with English transcript. Sunday, November 21, 2021, available on demand at 12pm on <http://www.sosyetekoukouy.org/koukouy-tv>

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Copyright 2021 Miami Book Fair

### (05:21) Jerry Tardieu:

Good morning, everyone! My name is Jerry Tardieu. First, I would like to thank the Miami Book Fair for inviting me this year to participate as an author. This event, which takes place every year, promotes books and encourages debates. I would also like to thank Sosyete Koukouy for allowing this interview to take place today, and it is with great pleasure that I share my opinion and address the Haitian crisis: what led us to the current situation, and what needs to be done to pull the country out of its chaos.

(06:08) I will start by introducing myself. My name is Jerry Tardieu. Before all else, I am a writer. I am an entrepreneur who has been working for 25 years in Haiti's private sector. I set up many companies, in different sectors, from hospitality to real estate, to the national industry of leather manufacturing. I am a former Congressman for the District of Pétion-Ville: from 2016 to 2020, I served as Congressman for the District of Pétion-Ville in the 50<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

(06:57) I decided to run for congressional office because of a family tradition. This family tradition started with my great-great-grandfather on my mother's side. I am the great-great-grandson of General Philippe Argand, who was Minister of War under Michel Oreste. And, on my father's side, I am the grandson of Pierre Tardieu, who was Congressman for Corail-Pestel. Therefore, I am a son of the Great South and on both sides of my family—my mother's side and my father's side—serving the country, one way or the other, is an essential requirement, a patriotic duty. Therefore, at age 48, I decided to suspend my career as an entrepreneur and opened the second chapter of the book of my life, the chapter of public service.

(07:57) The people of Pétion-Ville did me a great honor when they elected me with a historic majority; we had the most votes nationwide in the 2015 elections. I was very proud but, at the same time, it was a big responsibility because in the 50<sup>th</sup> Legislature I wasn't allowed any mistake. I had to do my best to first honor my term as the people's delegate, and then honor the trust that the people of Pétion-Ville had placed in me. And I believe this is what I did for 4 years. I sponsored several

bills—a National Police bill, a dual citizenship bill, a microcredit bill, a lease financing bill—in addition to many other battles I led, notably for the integration of the diaspora, the fight against corruption, the fight for transparency, the fight for good governance, the fight for economic development, and the fight for justice and social advancement.

**(09:00)** I am a writer, as I mentioned. I wrote several essays about Haiti, at the economic, social, and cultural levels, and in my latest book, *In the Hell of Parliament, Four Years of Struggles and Ideas for Tomorrow*, I discuss my experience as Congressman, what I saw, what I went through. The subtitle is *Four Years of Struggles and Ideas for Tomorrow* because I focus on Haiti's future. It is a set of themes and public policies that I shared with my readers.

**(09:35)** This is me, in a nutshell.

**(09:37)** Now, let's get to the topic that we're going to discuss today. Today, Haiti is experiencing an unprecedented crisis, a multiform crisis. By multiform, I mean multi-faceted. It is a political, electoral, institutional, constitutional, financial, and moral crisis. In fact, Haiti is experiencing a total crisis today. How did we get to that point? There are structural causes that are long-term; there are mid-term causes and short-term causes. Let's go over them quickly.

**(10:27)** Let's not forget that Haiti became independent in 1804 in difficult circumstances. Our ancestors fought to break the chains of slavery and, in 1804, we formed a Sacred Union to kick out the French colonists. But this came with a price because we were in a region where the colonialist and pro-slavery system was dominant. In fact, for a long time, they put us under embargo. The Nation's Father died in 1806 and, between 1806 and 1820, the country was divided in two, with Pétion governing in the West and Christophe in the North. Despite all of Christophe's efforts (he was a great visionary, a builder), Haiti faced many struggles in a difficult international environment.

**(11:19)** When Jean-Pierre Boyer came to power, he made a decision that plunged Haiti into problems for a century: he decided to pay an Independence debt. This debt was evaluated at the time at 150 million Francs. To give you an idea of what that means, it represented 15% of France's budget, as confirmed Louis-Phillipe Dalember, a writer who lived during these times. For even more context, think about the United States' Louisiana Purchase from France. How much money did they pay for the French Colonies of Louisiana? They paid 80 million Francs, (in comparison to Haiti's payment of 150 million), and the United States not only bought Louisiana, but many other states, including part of North Dakota, South Dakota, Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota. It was not just Louisiana, but a set of states that were part of this deal between the Americans and the French. Haiti had to pay 150 million, while the 1803 deal only required the United States to pay 80 million for all the acquired states.

**(12:49)** Therefore, during an entire century (because, as a matter of fact, we finished paying the outstanding amount in the middle of the Twentieth Century), during the entire 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Haiti dragged an Independence debt that brought many problems because we had to tax production. There was no money, no liquidity, no capital for development, nothing that would allow the country to properly run. We basically were servants to the Whites because all our revenues, all the taxes we collected were used to pay the Independence debt. And this went on. In addition, in 1915, when the Americans occupied Haiti, they took control of the Central Bank and seized 40% of the national revenue to pay yet another outstanding debt to the United States. So, we practically spent our entire

history as a people, a century and a half, prisoners of a debt that cost us very much and did not give us the means to develop.

**(13:48)** A country born in those conditions has a lot of problems. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we had a decade that was not too bad: Dumarsais Estimé rose to power, and he was one of the greatest presidents Haiti ever had; he made modernization efforts that Magloire continued, but these efforts ended in 1957 with the Duvalier regime (1957 to 1986) that opened the way to the instability that followed between 1986 and 1990, with a series of military coups. Finally, the 1990 elections resulted in the election of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who himself became the target of a coup seven months later.

**(14:31)** So, from 1990 to about 2004, we spent a decade of quarrels and troubles. All this prevented Haiti to gain agency. And in contemporary times, in 2010, we've had to manage the consequences of an earthquake (let's not forget that beyond structural problems, there was the 2010 earthquake) and the earthquake complicated [Haiti's] situation. First, let's say it as it is: while there are, long-term structural causes that led to Haiti's current and unprecedented situation, there are also short-term causes. And, among those short-term causes, there's the fact that, for the five past years, Haiti has been descending in the hell of economic destruction: the country's economy lies on a pallet, with dire unemployment and poverty. Haitians are leaving the country, migrating to other parts of the world, including Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Panama, and Bolivia. They sometimes cross nine countries in Central America to get to the United States and, most of the time, those who relocate are young people who decided to leave Haiti, not only for economic reasons (maybe), but above all because of insecurity. Some of them pay \$15,000 for the journey—\$15,000 they could have used to live [on the land], to open a small business, to thrive. Unfortunately, they couldn't do it. In fact, we can say that the past five years saw the destruction of Haitian institutions: there is no Parliament; the National Police is corrupted, underequipped, and politicized; the judicial system is in shambles, on its knees, facing major problems; Justice, as a power in Haiti, is handicapped.

**(16:50)** The Legislative, the Judicial, and the Executive branches [are in disarray]. As we speak, there is an Executive power with the responsibility to manage the country until the next elections, but it doesn't have the political legitimacy that would ensure the stability and serenity necessary for carrying out its duty. The second part of my presentation will address what we should do to get out of the present situation.

---

**(17:24)** In the first part of my presentation, I introduced myself, and I talked about what we have experienced as a people, a country, since 1804—the factors that brought us to the current situation: a major crisis, a crisis with multiple heads, a crisis that is economic, financial, political, constitutional, institutional and moral. In addition to the structural causes, I discussed what happened during the past five years that led us to where we stand today.

**(17:59)** In the night of February 6<sup>th</sup> this year, something very serious happened: Haiti's President was assassinated in conditions that we still don't understand. We hope that the authorities will continue their investigation and find the culprits, so that the President's family may get justice, so that the country may get justice. When you know that Haiti gained her Independence by fighting foreign powers, it hurts to learn some preliminary details indicating that foreigners might be involved [in the

murder], with other details remaining unclear. We are waiting for the judicial system to do its job so we can get justice.

**(18:45)** Beyond the pain that every Haitian must feel, beyond the human aspect, [lies the fact that] the Presidency was attacked, the Presidency of a sovereign country. Since the President is the First amongst us, this attack was against all of us. In addition, it happened at a time when President Jovenel's term was characterized by economic regression and insecurity. The country was overrun by gangs, kidnappings, and corruption. Having lost all hope, our youth had started leaving in droves for Chile, Brazil, Argentina, anywhere but Haiti. In fact, during those four years, all the economic signs were in the red: elevated cost of living, unemployment, national currency depreciation, and deficit/debt.

**(19:50)** In fact, during those four years, the country was in an extremely difficult situation. And to make matters worse, we experienced the tragic assassination of the President. On top of it, after this assassination, we found ourselves in a situation where there was no solution, whether institutional or constitutional, that would allow us to fill the presidential void, or at least ensure stability of the State. Because, really, during the four years that preceded this tragedy, there was a systematic and constant degradation/destruction of the Haitian institutions. Therefore, we found ourselves without a Parliament. The judicial system was on its knees and, when it came to the Executive, the Prime Minister was de facto ad interim. While a Prime Minister had been appointed by President Jovenel Moise, this appointment had been made in extremely difficult conditions because the legitimacy and legality of President Jovenel Moise's term was being put into question. We were in total chaos.

**(21:14)** For a time, a national memorandum of understanding was signed by several political parties, which gave Ariel Henry political legitimacy to become Haiti's Prime Minister. This national memorandum of understanding provided for an open government, made up of credible and honest leading figures who would inspire trust in the society. Unfortunately, the memorandum went nowhere, and as we speak, the government envisioned by the memorandum is still not in place. It shall be noted that Prime Minister Ariel Henry proposed a political bill that would provide for a new government in the coming days. We're between a rock and a hard place. What should we do to pull Haiti out of the chaos?

**(22:11)** The En Avant (Forward) movement is a young political party that was created about a year ago—a new political movement that has for ambition to promote the emergence of new leaders, new ideas, new visions. It is made of young men and women in the diaspora who want to get involved in politics, who want to commit; they don't want to stay on the sideline, as they would like to see things change. I am the national coordinator of this movement, which has a vision, an idea, a concept of what should be done to pull Haiti out of the current situation. In fact, for Haiti to get back on the constitutional rail, we must have elections. To have elections, we must overcome three barriers.

**(23:08)** First, there's the issue of insecurity. Today, the main concern of the Haitian people, regardless of social class, is insecurity. There is no peace of mind; all Haitians live in fear. The nurse going to the hospital does not know if she will return home. The mother taking her children to school does it with anxiety. The laborer going to work has no idea whether they will get him. The businessman, the taxi driver, the bus driver, the taxi-moto guy, the rapper, the student, the teacher,

the counselor, the shoeshine boy, the shopkeeper—everyone in Haiti is living in anxiety, because of the widespread criminality: gangs make the rules. Everywhere, kidnappings are rampant; there are areas in the capital that police cannot control. So, the top priority today is to ensure the return of widespread security in Haiti. Insecurity is the first barrier to having elections in a year or a year and a half, within a timeframe that we will define together (we'll come back to that).

**(24:31)** To stop insecurity in Haiti, we must have a strong National Police. We must have a well-equipped army. So, there must be a security plan, that will allow the international community and the national authorities to partner and find the means to equip, supervise and empower the police so they can deal with insecurity, bandits, and crime. They will need drones, equipment, cars, armored vehicles, strategies, instructors, recruitment, and training. This is the priority, to strengthen the National Police so they can bring security back in the country—security not only for the elections but also to allow Haitians to live in peace. This way, our people, our friends and relatives, our brothers and sisters in the diaspora can all return to Haiti every year, to patron saint festivals and to visit family, without having to think of what harm could be done to them. Therefore, security is the first of Haiti's concerns today and the first requirement to carry out elections in a year, as we hope this can be done towards the end of next year.

**(25:48)** The second obstacle is the issue of governance. There are several groups, both political and civil, that are working to find a formula, a political agreement that will lead us to the elections that I am talking about. The Prime Minister made a proposal that has already been published in *Le Moniteur*. The civil society, through a Commission for the Search of a Solution to the Crisis, has also made a proposal. And there are more initiatives, notably the National Memorandum of Understanding that was signed during the month of July and provided for a dual government, taking into consideration our last piece of legitimacy. Let's not forget that the Senate sits permanently, and we do have a Senate, with Senators. If you want to remain in the spirit of the Constitution, it's extremely important to also take that into consideration.

**(26:52)** These initiatives come in good faith from people who would like to pull the country out of its current condition, but they don't necessarily see the issue the same way. We, in the En Avant movement, we feel that we need a patriotic roundtable so the promoters of these three agreement proposals can sit together, so we can arrive to a single major agreement. Why? When we look at the agreements, we notice that the visions are the same, the assessments are the same, the general considerations are the same. The transition steps are almost identical.

**(27:42)** There are a few irritants and divergences, mostly about the question of whether the government should be monocephalic with a Prime Minister leading us to the elections, or instead be a two-headed government with a President and a Prime Minister leading us to the elections. Also under discussion is the mechanism to use for choosing those authorities. Third (not a problem) is the duration of the transition. Some people say that they want elections right away; we don't think that's possible, as it cannot be done in six months or in three months. Other people say that the elections should be in three or four years; we don't agree with that either. In three or four years, just imagine all the damage that can be done because you will have had a country without a legitimate elected head. We stand somewhere between these two radical positions. Members of the En Avant movement, a balanced, centrist, nationalist, patriotic movement, think that it is possible to hold the

elections within a year. We think that these three agreements can fuse into one. This is our position with respect to governance.

**(28:54)** The current Prime Minister Ariel Henry has taken initiatives with insufficient legitimacy, insufficient consensus, for the country to embark with him on a journey to reinstate peace and security and to organize elections. That is the issue of governance. Don't forget, I said that there were three barriers to getting to elections. The first is the issue of security, and the second the issue of governance; we must find a general agreement that most sectors representing the national life would agree on (the civil society, the political parties, the country's driving forces).

**(29:40)** The third barrier is the issue of the elections themselves. The coming elections must be free, transparent, honest, credible, so that no one can contest them. To avoid contestation, the nine members of the Electoral Council must be nine leading figures with recognized experience and a good reputation within our society, who are known as reliable—men and women who will unite to become an impartial referee. I, as a former soccer player (I forgot to tell in my introduction that I am a former player of the national team, a former member of Violette Athletic Club), know what it means to have a referee out to get you on the field. No matter how well you do, if a referee is against you, you'll get bad whistles, and the result won't be good. So, when it comes to this Electoral Council, the sectors sending representatives must be careful to send representatives who are up to the task and can inspire trust. Amongst those sectors, we think that the diaspora should be present. Why? Because the new electoral law should give the diaspora the opportunity to take part in the elections. Haitians living in Chile, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Mexico, Boston, Paris, Panama, New York, Boston, New Jersey, Elizabeth, East Orange, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Miami, anywhere in the world, Brussels, Switzerland—there are Haitians in the Netherlands, even in Germany, even in Russia—all have the same rights as the Haitians living on the 27,000 square kilometers of Haiti. All should vote in the next elections. So, we must have an electoral law allowing the integration of the diaspora, and we must have a strong electoral law that allows the elections to take place in a way that will allow for the results not to get contested. And the newly elected president, congressmen, senators, mayors, and so on, will have legitimacy to bring the reforms that Haiti needs so we can have economic development, social advancement, democracy, and most of all, security.

**(32:26)** Our purpose in this country should be to substitute order for chaos. Substitute order for chaos when it comes to security, so that Haitians can freely go about their activities, go back and forth with no fear. Today it is difficult for someone to leave the West Department and travel to Nippes, to Grand'Anse, to the South, to the Southeast, because it is difficult to cross right here, in Carrefour. This cannot go on.

**(32:55)** We must substitute order for chaos when it comes to our economy. In a country with such potential, there should be more companies—small, medium and big companies—creating jobs. A country with so many problems should, like the Dominican Republic, open both arms to direct foreign investment because the government by itself will not be able to solve the country's economic problems. We need massive foreign investment to create millions of jobs so the youth no longer have to go suffer in Central America, so the youth don't have to go risk getting eaten in the Bolivian jungle, so the youth can live with dignity and pride, because they only ask for one thing: jobs. "We have strength, we have energy, we can work." By the way, very often, these young people are

prepared: they learned a trade, they have training; if they are not lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, they are joiners, cabinetmakers, dressmakers; they went to hospitality school, they were in a training center, they are good bricklayers, good carpenters. All these young people would like to stay in the country. If they leave in the conditions that they do, it is because the country has nothing to offer them. If they turn their back to Haiti, it is because Haiti turned her back to these young people.

**(34:19)** So, elections will allow for legitimate elected officials, who in turn will have the ability, the legitimacy, the legality to manage the country in the coming years. We will also substitute order for chaos so the big companies making money in the country can pay their taxes. Because the government needs money to build hospitals, schools, roads, to pay teachers, nurses, police officers who will help us spread security in the country. This is extremely important. We must substitute order for chaos at the border. Because contraband is being done freely. We are overwhelmed with goods, national production is in danger, and it is the Dominicans who are overwhelming the national market. We must look at all this.

**(35:15)** We must also substitute order for chaos to put money into education. Until a certain age, education should be free for all children in Haiti, so we can have a common citizenship. So, the children taught in Port-au-Prince, Pétion-Ville, Delmas, Tabarre, Grand-Goâve, Petit-Goâve, Carrefour, in the Third District of Port-au-Prince, in the Second District, in the First District, may have the same education as the children in Roche-à-Bateau, Torbeck, Coteaux, Port-Salut, Cayes, Les Anglais, Port-Margot, Mare Rouge, Fort-Liberté, Cap-Haïtien, in the Northeast, in the Northwest, everywhere in the country, on the Island of Tortuga, La Gonâve. All children in Haiti must have an opportunity to receive the same education. The government must do its best. It must be a strong government able to offer free education and healthcare, even if we believe that the private sector, private investment, must be the economic engine. In terms of job creation, the government will never be able to provide employment to everyone.

**(36:26)** Substitute order for chaos: from infancy, we should teach children a set of values that have been lost. Nowadays when kids see an elder, they don't get up to greet them. Nowadays when the National Anthem is being played, the young people stay seated. I went to the Sylvio Cator stadium the other day; they were playing the National Anthem and half the stadium remained seated. This is because we have lost the patriotic spirit. When I was a kid, when we were going to school, either by car or on foot, when they raised the flag at eight o'clock, everyone stopped: cars, pedestrians, everyone—to show respect for the flag. These values must return. And it's at school that we must teach children about democracy. Because in Haiti, we have an issue. We cannot achieve democracy because of our mentality. If someone does not agree with you, they must die; that's not normal. We believe there must be civic education, education on democracy. We must ensure that from infancy, the youth understand that there can be differences in vision, in ideas. Intolerance is almost palpable in Haiti. This intolerance, which starts while we are still kids, is reflected in the economic, social, and political areas. This is why in Haiti today the dialectic weapon—speech—is not important. It is the weapon dialectic that matters. You will not have elections based on your ideas, vision, philosophy, programs, but based on gunfire. This is not normal. It is at school that we must explain to the kids that this kind of behavior is not normal. They must have a moral and civic education. We must rework the children's education from the bottom.

**(38:35)** If we are talking about getting out of the crisis, we are not talking about getting out of the crisis in one or two years, we are talking about getting out of the crisis to prepare Haiti for the next fifty or hundred years. To get out of the crisis, decisions must be made that are timely, immediate, political, economic, organizational, democratic (elections, security). There is also a need to think about things that are more fundamental, notably the issue of education. And I invite everyone who is listening to reflect about it. Substituting order for chaos is also about ensuring that we put enough money into the children's education. It must reflect in the budget. We, in Haiti, spend fifty dollars per child per year, to educate our youth. In the Dominican Republic, right next door to us, they spend a thousand dollars per child per year. There is no secret formula. This is why today you see them well ahead of us.

**(39:45)** So, elections are important, formation of the Council is important, and there are these three barriers that we must overcome to get out of the crisis destroying Haiti today: insecurity, governance, elections.

---

**(40:08)** There you have it: My brothers and sisters, I believe that in the twenty to twenty-five minutes we just spent together, I allowed you to better understand what brought us into the crisis that we are experiencing today, starting in 1804 (structural causes), and considering the factors within the five years that brought us to the point where we currently are. But the most important question is what we will do to get out of the present situation, and we agreed that we must hold elections to elect legitimate officials with the responsibility of managing the country. We discussed three obstacles we must face: first, there is the issue of insecurity, which currently impede the elections; there's an issue of governance, as we need a political agreement that grants the government wider legitimacy, includes leading figures from civil society, and considers the position of the different sectors representing national life, the lifeblood of the country. We also discussed that we must move towards the formation of a new Electoral Council that will be an impartial referee, that will inspire trust in the political actors and candidates running in the elections.

**(41:30)** In conclusion, we will say that beyond the work that we must do at home, we must make sure to negotiate a new deal with the international community, notably the United States of America. Our neighbor, the United States, is a preferred partner, a friend, and I wish to keep this friendship with them in the economic, political, cultural, social areas. However, we believe that we need a new deal with the American administration. I gave a speech after the scandal of Del Rio, Texas, where our migrants were humiliated. This humiliation stemmed from the way they were treated and mostly from the fact that they were not given access to lawyers to defend their cause. We denounced it. But as we were denouncing it, we addressed the Biden administration, and the administration representatives, the two envoys from the National Security Council, Juan Gonzalez, and from the State Department, Brian Nicholls. I personally told them that Haiti needs a new deal with the United States, based on two things. First, from a political point of view, a new deal that respects the principle of a people's self-determination. A people must be autonomous and able to choose their leaders. A foreign leader or country cannot decide who will lead Haiti, without the people voting for this person. This is extremely important.



(43:39) There is also an economic aspect in this proposed new deal. The United States must do their best to support trade pacts, economic agreements, that would allow massive investment from the American companies in Haiti, similarly to the way it is done in the Dominican Republic. Why? Because Haiti has an issue that is firstly economic due to the lack of opportunity for the youth. If the economic issue is not solved, if we don't organize ourselves to give the young men and women the opportunity to find work, they will either pick up a gun and choose the easiest way, which is entering gang criminality; alternatively, they will cross to the Dominican Republic or take a boat to Panama and leave the country. Therefore, this new deal must have an economic component, so the United States won't see Haiti simply as a country that needs humanitarian help. No. Our country has great potential; it is a large market, with production capacity, and we are not far from the United States. We can seal an economic deal with the United States, if the country is pacified, and security is re-established. I believe that, just like the Dominican Republic, we can get billions and billions of foreign investment dollars in Haiti. Even considering all the deposits in American dollars into the system, we can never have enough money for development in Haiti, so dire are the needs. So, this new deal will be very important for Haiti.

(45:33) Once again, I thank the Miami Book Fair for inviting me this year to participate as an author in their annual Book Fair. I thank Sosyete Koukouy for allowing this interview to be conducted today. I thank them for this opportunity to speak to all who are connected and wanted to know what is going on in Haiti, and what can be done tomorrow. Thank you very much. God bless you.

## READCARIBBEAN ONLINE! IS SPONSORED BY



Media Partners



MIAMI BOOK FAIR  
*online*  
 Miami Dade College