

Poverty, elections place Haiti at risk for unrest

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[PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti](#) — Deepening poverty and ineffective governance have left Haiti at risk for renewed violence and political instability, a conflict watchdog warned on Tuesday.

The [Brussels-based International Crisis Group](#) urged international donors scheduled to meet next month in [Washington](#) to provide the struggling [Caribbean](#) country with \$3 billion over the next several years.

"Between now and the summer Haiti faces a series of challenges, and if the population doesn't see progress it could well result in significant instability," ICG senior vice president [Mark Schneider](#) said.

A 16-page report by the conflict watchdog comes ahead of a March 9 visit by [U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) and former [U.S. President Bill Clinton](#) to promote international aid and economic security in the impoverished country. The [U.N. Security Council](#) will visit immediately afterward.

Haiti is enjoying a period of relative stability, but the report says economic and social conditions are even worse than last April, when political riots over high food prices overthrew the prime minister.

Months later the country was socked by four storms that left nearly 800 people dead, caused \$1 billion in damage and halted economic growth.

Tuesday's report says poor cooperation between [President Rene Preval](#), new [Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis](#) and parliament is also deadlocking legislation and preventing passage of a proposed \$256.4 million, mostly donor-financed budget.

That in turn could leave the door open for "spoilers" — drug traffickers, corrupt politicians, gangs and business owners who prefer a weak government — to create new problems.

Illegal flights carrying South American cocaine through Haiti and on to the [United States](#) and [Europe](#) increased over the past year, the [U.S. State Department](#) said in its annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report released this week.

Reminders of how quickly any tension can boil over into violence in Haiti were on display Tuesday in Port-au-Prince when university students threw rocks at [U.N.](#) peacekeepers and Haitian police, who responded by firing tear gas

. The students were protesting a curriculum change.

Observers worry far more violent demonstrations could erupt ahead of a long-delayed April 19 election to fill 12 vacant Senate seats, with concern centering on electoral officials' decision to block all candidates from former [President Jean-Bertrand Aristide](#)'s divided Famni Lavalas party.

The ICG report called for inclusive elections.