
The killing of Sister Luisa Dell'Orto. Cappellini (AVSI Port-au-Prince): "She was not naive, she devoted herself fully and willingly until the end"

"She devoted herself fully and willingly until the end, to the point of sacrificing her own life; hers was a conscious decision. Sister Luisa was certainly not naïve, she was fully aware of the situation in Haiti." **Fiammetta Cappellini**, AVSI representative in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince, speaks to SIR with deep sorrow and concern. Her words echo those of Pope Francis after the weekly Angelus Prayer (["Sister Luisa made her life a gift for others, to the point of martyrdom"](#)). She was well acquainted with 65-year-old Sister Luisa Dell'Orto, Little Sister of the Gospel of Charles de Foucauld, originally from Lomagna, in Italy's Lecco district. She died in hospital on Saturday as a result of injuries sustained in an armed attack earlier that morning. One of many heinous attacks spreading bloodshed in the country. **Angel of street children**. Everyone knew her in Port-au-Prince. She was the backbone of Kay Chal, Charles' House, which provides a home for street children in an extremely impoverished slum of the Haitian capital. She was their angel, ever since she arrived in the Caribbean country in 2002. Following the devastating earthquake of 2010, the facility had been rebuilt and upgraded, thanks to the support of the Italian Bishops' Conference. Sister Luisa had personally overseen the restoration and, after its reopening, coordinated its activities. She was well integrated into the Haitian Church, and taught Philosophy in the archdiocese's Notre Dame Seminary and at CESADES (Salesian Centre for Higher Education). "We spoke a few months ago" - recalls Fiammetta Cappellini - "and on that occasion we asked ourselves whether it was still worth staying here, in a country torn apart by adversity and violence: Was it still a worthwhile option? She replied that indeed it was worthwhile. 'This country needs us', she told me. She explained we had to continue 'sustaining the people', and that the response of the poorest ones was confirmation of that commitment. She never wavered, yet she was aware that Haiti was becoming increasingly embroiled in a spiral of violence.

That's how she was: full of energy, at times she could appear brisk or abrupt in manner. But in fact she had made a choice in full awareness of the risks it entailed. For us this is a deeply painful moment, and we already miss her very much. It's not easy to move on, it's a tragedy.

"I had the opportunity of getting to know her well, she was among the people who welcomed me and brought me in when I first arrived," says the AVSI representative. She was very well known and highly esteemed. Charles' Home is located in a very poor neighbourhood, burdened by many social problems." **The motivations behind the attack are unknown**. As reported by the media, the nun fell victim to an armed attack when she passed Delmas 19, on the outskirts of the capital Port-au-Prince. She was critically injured and was rushed to Bernard Mevs Hospital, where she died shortly after. It is said to have been an attempted robbery that escalated into violence. "But there are many unknowns. As I understand, it was a very hasty armed attack. It's hard to say whether the intent was robbery or kidnapping. For sure, it happened in broad daylight, in a very busy area. It is definitely a very serious incident." It speaks volumes about the increasingly dramatic situation in Haiti. "Kidnappings occur on a daily basis here, dozens a month in Port-au-Prince alone. These are the official figures. Yet more are probably not even reported. Strictly speaking, this is not a matter of chronic violence but of its escalation, which started in 2018. The situation is worsening with each passing month. The problem of violence in Haiti today is far worse than it was a year ago. And it affects all segments of the population." A slippery slope, a tragic drift amidst an institutional vacuum, where nothing seems to reverse this trend. "The problems affecting Haiti were recently discussed at the UN Security Council", Cappellini concludes, "with a proposal to send an international contingent. But the offer was rejected by the Haitian Government, which requested only for some expert support for its police force.

However, it is widely felt, even on an international level, that the situation has spiralled out of control and that a military contingent is necessary.” **The sorrow of the Church.** As previously mentioned, the death of Sister Luisa Dell'Orto was received with shock by the Church. In a message released by the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, Archbishop **Max Leroy Mésidor** conveyed "the deepest sympathy of our particular Church to the Little Sisters of the Gospel religious community and entrusts the soul of the late Sister Luisa Dell'Orto to the prayer of all the people of God. May the Immaculate Heart of Mary be our sanctuary and grant us comfort in these difficult times, in the hope of a future of peace, for whose achievement all men and women of good will must work with great dedication.”

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