

Haitian pastor arrested for role in assassination

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This article appears in the [August 11, 2021](#) issue.



A woman prays during Sunday mass at Sacré-Coeur church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, four days after President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in his home. (AP Photo/Joseph Odelyn)

The head of Haiti's national police announced on July 11 that officers arrested a Haitian man accused of flying into the country on a private jet and working with the alleged assassins and masterminds behind the killing of President Jovenel Moïse.

Police Chief Léon Charles identified the suspect as 62-year-old Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a Haitian physician, pastor, and Florida businessman who has denounced the country's leaders as corrupt.

Charles said the alleged killers were protecting Sanon and that he intended to take over as president of Haiti, adding that officers found several items at his house, including a hat emblazoned with the logo of the US Drug Enforcement Administration, gun parts, 20 boxes of bullets, four automobile license plates from the Dominican Republic, two cars, and correspondence with unidentified people.

“We continue to make strides,” Charles said of police efforts to solve the July 7 attack at Moïse’s private home that killed the president and seriously wounded his wife, Martine Moïse, who was flown to Miami for medical care.

Charles said a total of 26 Colombians are suspected in the killing of the president. Eighteen of them have been arrested, along with three Haitians. He said five of the suspects are still at large and at least three have been killed.

“They are dangerous individuals,” he said. “I’m talking commando, specialized commando.”

Charles said Sanon was in contact with a firm that provides security for politicians and recruited the suspects, adding that Sanon flew into Haiti with them in early June.

Sanon has lived in Florida, both in Broward County and in Hillsborough County on the Gulf Coast. Records show he has also lived in Kansas City, Missouri. He filed for bankruptcy in 2013 and identifies himself as a doctor in a YouTube video titled “Leadership for Haiti.”

In another video, he claims Haiti has uranium, oil, and other resources that have been taken by government officials. “With me in power, you are going to have to tell me: ‘What are you going to do with my uranium? What are you doing with the oil that we have in the country? What are you going to do with the gold?’”

He goes on: “This is the country’s resources. . . . Nine million people cannot be in poverty when we have so much resources in the country. It’s impossible.

The world has to stop doing what they are doing right now. We cannot take it anymore. We need new leadership that will change the way of life.”

The announcement of Sanon’s arrest was made hours after hundreds of Haitians sought solace in prayer at early Sunday church services as a political power struggle threatened to further destabilize the country.

Roman Catholic and Protestant church leaders asked for calm and told people to remain strong as anxiety about the future grew, with authorities providing no answers or theories about who masterminded the assassination.

“Facing this situation, we will not be discouraged. . . . You must stay and fight for peace,” said Edwine Sainte-Louis, a Catholic priest, during a sermon broadcast on TV. The broadcast included a small picture of Moïse with a banner that read, “Haiti will remember you.”

While the streets were calm the day after Sanon’s arrest, government officials worry about what lies ahead and have requested US and UN military assistance.

Laurent Dubois, a Haiti expert and Duke University professor, said questions over Moïse’s assassination could remain unanswered for a long time.

“There are so many potential players who could be behind it,” he said, adding that the political strength of Claude Joseph, the interim prime minister, is an open question. “There is going to be some jockeying for positions of power. That is one big worry.”

In Port-au-Prince, resident Fritz Destin welcomed a priest’s sermon urging people not to be discouraged.

“The country needs a lot of prayers,” he said. “The violence makes life a little uncertain.” —Associated Press. AP writer Evens Sanon and AP video journalist Gerardo Carrillo, both in Port-au-Prince, contributed to this report.