News



Gena Heraty, a longtime Irish missionary in Haiti pictured with a child in a 2012 photo, has been freed after nearly a month of captivity, the news agency Agenzia Fides confirmed Sept. 1, 2025. Heraty was among several people — including a 3-year-old child — taken in the early hours of Aug. 3 after gunmen breached the Saint-Hélène orphanage in Kenscoff, near Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince. (OSV News/Courtesy of NPH International)



by OSV News

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Port-au-Prince, Haiti — September 3, 2025

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A longtime Irish missionary in Haiti has been freed after nearly a month of captivity. Gena Heraty, who has been working in Haiti for 30 years, was freed along with the other hostages captured Aug. 3 after gunmen breached the Saint-Hélène orphanage in Kenscoff, near Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince.

The nongovernmental organization for which the missionary works, Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, reported the news with "deep gratitude and a relief that cannot be described in words."

Agenzia Fides, a news branch of the Dicastery for Evangelization, confirmed Sept. 1 that the freed hostages "are all safe, receiving medical and psychological care, and are with their families." Among those freed is the 3-year-old child with a disability, Fides said.

Heraty's family also confirmed her release, thanking everyone who "contributed to her release. We are deeply grateful to everyone in Haiti and internationally who worked tirelessly during these terrible weeks to ensure her safe return."

The facility, which Heraty headed up, serves 240 children and is operated by Nos Petits Frères et Sœurs, established in 1995 as the expansion of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, an international outreach founded by Fr. William Wasson to serve vulnerable children. The network of charities spans 22 countries and supports 3,200 children in Bolivia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

Heraty, an acclaimed humanitarian and Viatores Christi missionary volunteer, moved from her native Ireland to Haiti in 1993.

Tánaiste Simon Harris, Ireland's deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs and trade, said in an Aug. 4 statement that Heraty has for over 30 years "dedicated her life to supporting the most vulnerable people in Haiti and it is imperative that she is released immediately."

"The worldwide outpouring of sympathy, love, prayers, and solidarity shown to Gena and us by friends, neighbors, communities, colleagues, and even people with no

connection to us have been a tremendous source of comfort and support," said the family's statement, which asked the media to prioritize the missionary's "health and privacy," Fides reported.

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"We ask the media to respect her need for privacy while everyone involved recovers from this traumatic experience. We continue to hold Haiti in our hearts and hope for peace and safety for all those affected by the ongoing armed violence and insecurity in the country."

Gangs, which control 85% of the capital, according to the United Nations, are said to be responsible for the attack.

In his April 2 statement to the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need, Archbishop Max Leroy Mésidor of Port-au-Prince said the nation's entrenched violence is constraining the church's ability to serve.

"Twenty-eight parishes in the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince are closed, while around 40 are operating at minimum levels because the neighborhoods are controlled by gangs," the archbishop said. "The priests have been forced to flee, finding refuge with their families or with other clerics. They need help. The archdiocese is also in difficulty."

Some 5.4 million Haitians face "high levels of acute food insecurity" due to the armed gang violence, with 6,000 residents experiencing "catastrophic levels of hunger and a collapse of their livelihoods," according to a report released in August 2024 by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

Between the beginning of April and the end of June, armed violence in Haiti has killed 1,520 people and injured 609 more, according to a new report on human rights in Haiti which was released on Aug. 1 by the U.N.