

## **Catholic Priest arrested in Haiti**

by Haiti Information Project (HIP) *Thursday, Oct. 14, 2004 at 3:21 PM*

Port au Prince, Haiti(HIP)- Heavily armed units of the Haitian National Police (PNH) arrested Catholic priest Gerard Jean-Juste today at his parish of St. Claire in the poor neighborhood of Petite Place Cazeau. The U.S.-backed government of Gerard Latortue accused Father Jean-Juste of importing arms and harboring gunmen in his parish. Jean-Juste spoke by telephone minutes prior to his arrest and denied any involvement in the violence that has rocked Haiti since September 30th when police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration. "Everyone who knows me knows that I do not support violence. This is a desperate move on the government's part to frighten people into silence who they believe do not support them. This is a sad day for democracy in Haiti because without freedom of speech there can be no democracy. I will pray for them from my prison cell" Jean-Juste said before being taken by police to an undisclosed location. Residents reacted with anger and began throwing rocks and bottles at the police as they left with the priest in custody.

Jean-Juste's arrest came hours after armed members of the former military entered the capital of Port au Prince in force. According to spokesmen for the former military they have an undisclosed number of units already in place in the capital and are planning actions against "Lavalas bandits." The United Nations allowed the former military to enter the capital without a challenge leading to charges by members of Lavalas that "the United Nations is complicit in a defacto political coup returning the former military."

The arrest of Father Jean-Juste and the arrival of the former military in the capital comes one day before the 10th anniversary of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's return to Haiti in 1994 after spending three years in exile. Former President Bill Clinton dispatched 20,000 U.S. troops in "Operation Restore Democracy" in 1994 and Aristide disbanded the military that overthrew him in a coup on September 30, 1991 after his return to office.

Violence erupted in Haiti on September 30th after police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators demanding the return of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and condemning political persecution of his Lavalas political party. Aristide was ousted last February 29th amid charges he was kidnapped by U.S. Marines and is living as guest in the Republic of South Africa.

On September 30th the police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators provoking an attack against a unit of the Unite de Securite Presidentielle (U.S.P), a special security detail assigned to Interim President Boniface Alexandre. Witnesses say members of the special police unit were seen firing on demonstrators and collecting bodies before masked gunmen returned fire killing three and wounding a fourth who later died in the hospital. Representatives of Aristide's Family Lavalas party have reiterated it was the police who provoked the violence by firing on the unarmed demonstrators.

The U.S.-backed government claims that the headless bodies of three policemen were recovered and that Aristide backers have launched a campaign imitating Iraqis called "Operation Baghdad." Representatives of Aristide's Family Lavalas party have denied the allegations and the U.S.-backed government only released the identities of the headless policemen at a funeral held for them earlier this week. The bodies of the headless men were reportedly cremated before journalists and human rights groups were given an opportunity to perform an independent examination of the corpses to confirm the government's claims.

Earlier this week UN soldiers and Haitian police conducted numerous joint raids in several poor neighborhoods in the capital known for their support of Aristide. Hundreds have been arrested yet few weapons have been confiscated as the violence continues for a second straight week.

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