

Report of Pax Christi USA

HAITI/ HUMAN RIGHTS MISSION

For questions about how to contact members of the delegation contact Bill Quigley: quigley@loyno.edu or 504-861-5590 or fax 504-861-5440 or mail 7214 St. Charles Avenue, Box 902, New Orleans, LA 70118.

Last revision 2004-10-12.

Contents:

1. **Delegation Members**
2. **Summary**
3. **People and Places Visited**
4. **Criteria Used**
5. **Observations**
6. **Conclusions and Suggestions for Action**
7. **Sources for Additional Information**

Delegation Members

This delegation visited Haiti on a human rights mission on behalf of Pax Christi USA, a section of Pax Christi International, the Catholic peace movement. The members of the delegation were:

- Johanna Berrigan, House of Grace Catholic Worker, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Kathleen Boylan, Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington, DC
- Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Detroit Michigan
- Bill Quigley, Loyola University New Orleans School of Law
- Bob DellaValle-Rauth, Pax Christi USA Haiti Task Force, Virginia

Summary

Human rights conditions are worse in Haiti now than they have been in years.

We agree with the Haitian people that the forced exile of President Aristide by the U.S. was effectively a coup that eliminated the elected government of the people and replaced it with an illegally appointed government of the minority with economic and military power, supported by the U.S., France and Canada.

Many of the democratically elected government leaders and their supporters are in prison and thousands have been made into refugees in their own country while former military, gangs and rebels affiliated with those in power are often allowed to do as they please. We are very concerned about the widespread re-emergence of the previously dissolved military, which has historically been a challenge to and oppressive to an independent civil society. The military has also often served as an avenue through which the U.S. has exerted power over Haiti.

The delegation strongly believes that the rule of law is being disregarded in the exile, arrest, beatings, executions, and detention of the people who were democratically chosen by the people of Haiti to govern. People affiliated with the elected government and those concerned about human rights have been beaten and arrested and homes burned and run off to live in hiding. The Haitian constitution and international law are being openly violated. We agree with the people that the rule of law must be reinstated.

The international community must start by restoring the elected representatives of the people. This means explicitly the return of President Aristide and the release of all political prisoners. It must also begin disarming the rebels, terrorists, former military, and anyone else threatening life. The U.S. should also stop selling M-16s to the Dominican Republic and to Haiti.

Human rights in Haiti needs immediate international attention. Current people in power have said publicly that local human rights organizations are stirring up troubles - a threatening warning to stop human rights investigations. International human rights groups must step up monitoring human rights.

We challenge the role of the international community, particularly the US in Haiti. The primary concern of recent US policy in Haiti has not been for democracy, human rights, or fairness to the poor and powerless. It must be. All Americans must insist that our policy help protect democracy, the rule of law, the Constitution of Haiti, human rights and the protection of the poor.

We call for journalists and media to stop the misinformation about what has happened and what is happening in Haiti. Help stop the fear and protect the people, especially the poor and powerless who always suffer the most.

The situation of the poor in Haiti is worsening. The poor are being victimized by economic forces and again by human rights abuses. The basics of life cost two to three times more than before the coup. There are increasing numbers of people who are internal refugees from political violence in their own country. People have lost family members and all their possessions. They have been uprooted from their communities. The plight of workers is deteriorating. Inflation is rising and the minimum wage is declining. The exile of President Aristide has resulted in increased power for business and decreased the bargaining power of individual workers and independent labor unions. Education is at a standstill. The people of the countryside (the majority of the population of Haiti) are under control of the rebels and former military who have created a reign of terror - house burnings, random arrests, brutal killings, and confiscation of property. The military are reorganizing in Petit Goave, Jacmel, Hinche and planning to do so in all departments.

We call for action. Action to restore the elected government of President Aristide. Legislative action to assist the people and institutions of Haiti. Direct action to assist those seeking justice in these very challenging times. Some groups whose support for President Aristide decreased in recent years are now calling for his return. Many poor people told us "We want Aristide back. He is our President. We need him more than ever. We have no one now."

We call for prayers for the people of Haiti. They are our sisters and brothers and they are in crisis. We must remember them in our churches and in our prayers.

We call for increased solidarity with the people of Haiti. We applaud the good works being done by the many religious, educational and human rights groups in Haiti. But much more needs to be done. We especially encourage schools, churches and human rights groups to visit Haiti and meet the people directly and study and see the social and political conditions of the country for themselves. When they do, we are confident they will be moved to join them in solidarity in their quest for just and basic human dignity.

We believe that if all the people of the world saw what we saw, they would insist that justice be done for Haiti. We ask the world to look at the people of Haiti as our sisters and brothers. Recognizing that our sisters and brothers are in serious trouble, we must all work together to bring about disarmament and elimination of foreign (mostly US) weapons in their country and help them bring justice to their country.

People and Places Visited:

- CTH (Conference of Haitian Workers): women and men union officials
- Haiti National Penitentiary: prisoners and officials
- Independent radio and print journalists
- Institute of Justice and Democracy in Haiti: human rights workers and victims of political violence
- Pax Christi Haiti: volunteer leaders
- Port au Prince Police Station: male prisoners
- SOPUDEP Cooperative Community School, Petion-Ville: teachers, administrators, and students
- St. Clare's Church: children, staff, pastor
- Visitation House: visitors from US Church Twinning Programs, staff
- Women's Prison, Petion-Ville: local pastor and prisoners

Criteria Used

In evaluating what we observed, we use the principles of Catholic social thought and teachings: respect for life and the absolute dignity of every human person; the demand to honor the human rights of all; a preferential option for the poor which insists we look at each situation from the perspective of the poor and most vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers to decent working conditions and fair pay; a profound commitment to solidarity with our sisters and brothers as members of our shared human family; and the right and duty of all persons to participate in society in seeking the common good.

Observations

Haiti is in a political, economic, and human rights crisis of immense proportions. The central political crisis is that the government of President Jean Bertrand Aristide which was overwhelmingly elected by the people of Haiti has been forcibly removed and illegally replaced by unelected powers. People who supported or participated in the elected government are being persecuted by armed gangs, arrested by police without charges, prosecuted by officials of the appointed government, and kept in jail without seeing a judge for long periods of time, some as long as five months. As the poorest country in this hemisphere, the economic crisis of Haiti is well documented. The human rights crisis is made worse by both the economic and political difficulties.

The delegation visited the National Penitentiary in Port au Prince. There were 868 people in the prison, 847 were awaiting trial, only 21 have been convicted. Prison officials advise that most have never seen a judge and do not know when they will see a judge.

The delegation met with several political prisoners in the National Penitentiary including the high officials of the government of President Aristide: Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, Minister of the Interior Jocelerme Privert, and the former Mayor of Port au Prince. The rule of law is being blatantly disregarded in their cases. For example, Minister Privert has been held in the prison for six months and has yet to see a judge for formal charges, which by law should happen within 48 hours of arrest. Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, who was arrested days after giving an interview critical of the government, has been accused by those now in power of prompting police killings in fights with rebel groups, and has

been in prison since June 2004. He says the accusations are totally political and he has no confidence in the current government, but remains strong and passionate about trying with every fiber of his being to reclaim the democracy of Haiti. An elected delegate of Parliament, Jacques Mathier, was reportedly arrested for arson but after going before a judge he was ordered to be released on July 12. Instead the Ministry of Justice ordered him transferred to the National Penitentiary where he has remained in prison ever since. The former mayor of Port au Prince was arrested by Haitian police but was transferred, along with three other members of the Aristide government, into custody of the US military. They were then taken out to sea in a Haitian boat and detained in handcuffs for 20 days, while armed military boats of the US patrolled around the boat where they were imprisoned. For the first three days they were denied water, food and the use of a bathroom. After 20 days, they were transferred to the national penitentiary where Severe now remains.

There have been no reported prosecutions of any invading rebels and opposition gangs who used force and violence to topple the elected government.

The delegation also visited the women's prison in Petionville where 51 women are kept in a poorly lit concrete structure where we met with Annette Auguste, a 69 year old folk singer also called "So Anne" who supported President Aristide and is an activist who has been in prison since May 10, 2004. Ms. Auguste and all of her family of fifteen, including children as young as 12, 10 and 5 years old, were arrested in her home by US Marines. The Marines used grenades to break into the house in the middle of the night, forced black hoods onto the heads of all inside and bound their arms behind their backs with plastic handcuffs. While she was arrested and questioned by the US, she is now being held by the Haitian government and has never confronted her accusers. She told us "The Americans put me here, I am waiting for the Americans to set me free."

Contrast this with the treatment of supporters of the current occupiers of the government. At the time of the coup, the entire prison population was released. Among the released were many human rights abusers, many of whom were, along with other released prisoners, were recruited by the rebels. There was a criminal trial in Haiti in August of Louis Jodel-Chamblain, a very high-profile supporter of the current powers in Haiti, who was found innocent of participation in a political assassination of Antwon Izmerly that occurred in the prior coup of 1994. This trial was an abbreviated overnight event which was called a sham by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. During the coup of 1991-1994, this man was second in command of FRAPH, the organization responsible for the deaths of thousands of supporters of President Aristide.

The delegation also met with many poor people in Port au Prince including some who were forced out of communities outside of Port au Prince (communities like Petite Goave and from the Central Plateau) as a result of the coup in Haiti because they were perceived as supporters of the Aristide government, the Fanmi Lavalas party, or protectors of human rights. Opponents of the elected government came to town and killed the chief of police, burned down the police station and the prison. They then sought out supporters of the elected government, ransacked and burned their houses, placed black bags on their heads, executed them and dumped them in the river. Many from that town have fled to Port au Prince, others to the Dominican Republic. Another young man was beaten and threatened with execution for starting a school - he fled to Port au Prince where he now stays in one room with 15 others. A woman and her family were attacked and had to flee because they were thought to have spoken to human rights visitors and foreign journalists and voiced criticism of the government - they have been sleeping on the roof of a friend's house. Others were beaten and run out of town - walking for a week with children - only because they were neighbors of people thought to be reporting human rights violations. They showed us pictures of their burned homes which were ransacked and destroyed by former militaries and opposition gangs. One person who went back just the week before to take photos of the damaged homes was murdered for doing that. People have lost businesses and property - they are now homeless and living in fear and hiding with anyone who will shelter them. They are refugees in their own country. They stressed to us that there are hundreds more from their small

community in the same situation (i.e. 500 from St. Marc) and thousands more from other small outlying communities.

Women's rights groups in Port au Prince have had their businesses ransacked and destroyed. They are dismayed at the suspensions of the prosecutions of the people responsible for human rights violations, including rape, in previous coups in Haiti. They report that the perpetrators of violence are now in charge and the people are losing hope.

There are widespread reports of the re-emergence of the military which was disbanded several years ago by President Aristide. Ex-military forces are forcibly taking over police stations and other public buildings in many parts of the country.

UN troops were spotted only one time except at the airport where they are headquartered. There were reports that UN troops are cooperating with former military in illegal arrests of Lavalas party members. Haitians cannot understand the UN role in view of the brutal human rights abuses taking place every day throughout the country.

We also heard reports of very recent killings by police in Cite Soleil. There was a report of a police massacre there on September 9, with 17 killed, many more arrested, many disappeared. documentation of this event is ongoing but so far there is credible documentation of 11 people killed or disappeared. Indiscriminate killings and mass arrests are also taking place in other poor neighborhoods. This violence is being done "to break the back of the Lavalas movement before the election of 2005," according to Prime Minister Neptune.

Within days of our visit, a human rights group, the Group to Defend Political Prisoners had their office attacked by armed men in camouflage who destroyed documents and stole equipment.

We visited with independent print and radio journalists who told us of threats of violence and economic pressure being placed on journalists by those in power who are intimidating all voices of dissent, especially outside of the city of Port au Prince. The journalists also report widespread misinformation has been and continues to be distributed by those in power and the media that support them. Other information is suppressed. Human rights violations and military and police abuses are not reported. Demonstrations by the poor are not covered.

The delegation also visited a local police station in Port au Prince where 36 males were being kept in one concrete cell, 12 foot by 12 foot. None of those in the cell had formal charges, none had a lawyer, none had seen a judge, one had been in the cell since September 4. There is no medical care, and no food is provided. What food there is must be brought by families and then shared with those without family. Mixed in the cell were people with mental problems and epilepsy. Children were in jail with grown men, including a 13 year old boy and two 15 year olds. Some showed open sores on their legs, others showed injuries from physical brutality. Some say no one in their family even knows they are in jail. They sleep standing up and leaning against the wall as there is not enough space for everyone to even sit down together much less lay down. The criminal law system has never worked well and is now being used for massive arrests in the poorest neighborhoods.

Poverty in Haiti is devastating. The delegation constantly observed the search of people for water. People were pulling water up in buckets by lowering ropes into wells. Others were pumping water. Some were dipping water from broken pipes in the street. Everywhere people, including the smallest children, were transporting water. Unemployment is widespread and everywhere sidewalk vendors, who the government is threatening to remove, were trying to sell fruits, chickens, toothpaste, medicine, clothing, or whatever could help feed their families. Much housing is primitive and severely overcrowded. Electricity is severely limited - around three hours a day. Roads in the city are difficult and much worse in the countryside. Reports of the devastation from the flood in Gonaives came from

everywhere with estimates of the dead as high as 3000 and hundreds of thousands homeless. Pax Christi Haiti is one of the groups helping the flood victims.

The minimum wage for those who can find work is declining. In 1984 it was \$3 a day but is now at \$1.75 a day and even that is often violated. Independent labor unions like CTH, which represent a range of workers across the country, are weaker after the exile of the elected government by business interests. National elected independent union leaders reported that the situation of workers has always been difficult with the bosses as adversaries, but now the government is aligned with the bosses and is also an adversary. Workers in businesses affiliated with the new powers in government are intimidated and forced to appear to be supportive of the new government in order to keep their jobs. The situation for workers is much, much worse since the exile of President Aristide.

Within days of our visit, police with black masks attacked the office of a large labor organization, CTH, and arrested 9 people who are being held without charges. Some of those arrested are affiliated with the parish St. John Bosco, the former parish of President Aristide.

We visited a cooperative community school in Petionville, named SOPUDEP, which educates about 700 mostly poor children. Because the school was started by the community during the time of President Aristide, those now in power are threatening to revoke its lease. In early September of 2004, the newly appointed mayor of the town showed up at the school with armed guards. After a demonstration by community people and pressure by US Senator Norm Coleman, the pressure against the school has been reduced for now.

The delegation visited the parish of St. Clare's where church members were feeding over 600 children. The program provides a meal twice a week. When we were there, after prayers, more than 20 children sat at each of 14 tables under a tin roof while the church gave each a tin plate with rice, some beans and a small piece of meat. The children devoured the food in minutes, totally cleaning their plates. They left and older children were let in for their meal. The pastor of St. Clare's, Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste, a supporter of Aristide, spoke plainly of the threats he has received personally. He spoke of the threats of violence and destruction directed against the radio station where he had a 2 hour radio show, threats that forced the station to cancel his show. Another radio station was officially closed by the new government. He told us that President Aristide rejected the use of violence to combat the violence of the rebels who seized control of Gonaives. He said there has been a big migration of people from the countryside into Port au Prince since the coup, as people have fled the violence of the rebels and the ex-militaries. He was certain that the grassroots and the poor still support President Aristide. He said violence has wracked the country - it is time to kneel down, ask forgiveness, and start over.

Over and over we were told by the people of Haiti that there is little or no international human rights presence here. There is no rule of law, the strong do what they want because no one will help the victims bring about fairness or justice.

Most people are very critical of the US, saying that it was responsible, along with France and Canada, for the end of democracy and the exile of the elected government of President Aristide in Haiti. People are also very critical of the US decision to withhold humanitarian aid for the people of Haiti from the government of President Aristide and the apparent funding and training of opposition and rebel groups who deposed Haiti's elected government. Yet the people made a clear distinction between the actions of the government of the US and the people of the US. The people appreciate the work and generosity of church groups in the US. The people repeatedly thanked us for visiting. They asked that we tell their stories. They asked that we counter the lies and misinformation about Haiti and tell the truth. Because they still have hope that the international community and the people in the US will help them recover their democracy, recover their President Aristide, and help them rebuild their country in a just way.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Action

We repeat that human rights conditions are worse in Haiti now than they have been in years. It is clear that the forced exile of President Aristide was a coup that eliminated the elected government of the people and replaced it with an illegally appointed government of the minority who have economic and military power.

The democratically elected government leaders and their supporters are in prison or have been made into refugees in their own country while former militaries and gangs affiliated with those in power are allowed to do as they please.

There is a clear re-emergence of the previously dissolved military, which has historically been a challenge to independent civil society and oppressive to the poor.

The rule of law is being disregarded in the exile, arrest, beatings, executions, and detention of the people who were democratically chosen by the people of Haiti to govern. People affiliated with the elected government and those concerned about human rights have been beaten and arrested and homes burned and run off to live in hiding.

The Haitian constitution and international law are being openly violated. The rule of law must be reinstated.

The international community must help restore the elected representatives of the people. This means explicitly the return of President Aristide and the release of all political prisoners.

Human rights in Haiti needs immediate international attention. Current people in power have said publicly that local human rights organizations are stirring up troubles - a threatening warning to stop human rights investigations. International human rights groups must step up monitoring human rights and protect those on the ground who are trying to do so.

We challenge the role of the international community, particularly the US in Haiti. The primary concern of US policy in Haiti has been not democracy, human rights, or fairness to the poor and powerless. It should be and all Americans should insist that our policy-help protect democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of the poor.

We call for journalists and media to stop the lies about what has happened and what is happening in Haiti. Help stop the fear and protect the people, especially the poor and powerless. It is the millions of the poor who always suffer the most.

The situation of the poor in Haiti is worsening. The poor are being victimized by economic and political forces and again by human rights abuses of the illegal government, the rebels and the ex-military. The basics of life two to three times more than before the coup. There are increasing numbers of people who are internal refugees from political violence in their own country. People have lost family members and all their possessions. They have been uprooted from their communities. The plight of workers is deteriorating. Inflation is rising and the minimum wage is declining. The forced exile of President Aristide has resulted in increased power for business and decreased the bargaining power of individual workers and independent labor unions.

We suggest people in the US and the international community learn more about Haiti, its current situation and its history of how it got to the point where it is today.

We call for action. Action to restore the elected government of President Aristide. Legislative action to assist the people and institutions of Haiti. Direct action is needed to assist those seeking justice in these very challenging times.

We call for prayers for the people of Haiti. They are our sisters and brothers and they are in crisis. We must remember them in our churches and in our prayers.

We call for increased solidarity with the people of Haiti. We salute the good works being done by the many religious, educational and human rights groups in Haiti. But much more needs to be done. We especially encourage schools, churches and human rights groups to visit Haiti and meet the people directly and see the conditions of the country for themselves. When they do, we are confident they will be moved to join them in solidarity in their quest for just and basic human dignity.

We believe that if all the people of the world saw what we saw, they would insist that justice be done for Haiti. We ask the world to look at the people of Haiti as our sisters and brothers. Recognizing that our sisters and brothers are in serious trouble, we must all work together to help them bring justice to their country. Haiti is a short distance from the US shoreline. Let us become a human bridge that connects us to Haiti.

Sources for Additional Information

We suggest people read anything they can about Haiti by Paul Farmer. He has written a great history of Haiti called *THE USES OF HAITI* (Common Courage Press, 2003). Paul has also written more recently on the problems of Haiti. E.g. see his April 15, 2004 essay in the London Review of Books, www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n08/farm01_.html

Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, a non-profit human rights organization with board members like physician Paul Farmer and human rights advocate Brian Concannon. www.ijdh.org/

HIDDEN FROM THE HEADLINES, by Haiti Action. Available online at: www.haitiaction.net/News/Hidden.html

Haiti Action is an independent source of news about Haiti.
<http://www.haitiaction.net/index.html>

The Human Rights Report on Haiti compiled by the National Lawyers Guild from their visits to Haiti in April 2004. Available on the website of www.nlg.org

The Haiti Reborn movement of the Quixote Center: www.quixote.org/hr/