

# HAÏTI

AFP

## **US allows some diplomats to leave Haiti amid new surge in violence**

**14th October 2004**

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States said it would allow its non-essential diplomats and the families of all personnel at the US embassy in Haiti to leave the crisis-wracked country amid worsening violence.

At the same time, the State Department upgraded its travel warning for Haiti, telling US citizens not to visit the country and urging those already there to consider leaving until the deteriorating security situation improves.

"US citizens (should) avoid travel to Haiti at this time due to the volatile security situation," the department said in a statement. "US citizens in Haiti are urged to consider departing until the situation is stabilized as travel in Haiti still involves serious risks."

Non-essential US diplomats and embassy spouses and dependents will now be allowed to leave Haiti at Washington's expense under a so-called "authorized

departure" scheme, the department said.

The warning, which replaced an existing October 8 alert, said the situation in Haiti was growing dire due to the absence of an effective police force, the potential for looting by armed gangs and an increase in random violent crime, including kidnappings, car-jackings and assaults.

It said there had been "a noticeable escalation in criminal and gang activity" since September 30. Much of the violence has been blamed on supporters of ousted president Jean Bertrand Aristide who fled the country in February amid an armed uprising under heavy international pressure.

On Wednesday, two people were reported to have been shot to death in downtown Port-au-Prince in the latest spate of attacks which shut down the capital's commercial center for 48 hours after three people were killed in street violence on Monday. Over the past two weeks, nine Haitian police officers were killed, including three who were decapitated.

Minutes after the new US warning was released, the Haitian embassy in Washington issued a statement maintaining that calm had returned to the country despite the best efforts of "thugs" loyal to Aristide.

"Through a campaign of rumors, the enemies of democracy have tried to sow fear and create confusion," the embassy said. "The government has moved quickly to deal with the situation (and) calm is again the norm."

On Tuesday, the United States accused supporters of Aristide, who is now in exile in South Africa, of mounting a "systematic campaign" to destabilize Haiti's interim government and urged the former president to speak out against violence.

The United States, which turned against Aristide in February amid spiraling unrest in the impoverished country and which assisted in his departure, said the former leader had "played a negative role" since he left the country.

The State Department said the United States fully backed Haiti's interim government and would continue to work with

**President Boniface Alexandre and Prime Minister Gerard Latortue as well as UN peacekeepers to help restore security and democracy.**

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