

Mbeki is not a 'scapegoat' for Haiti's troubles

Donwald Pressly | Cape Town, South Africa

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The South African government has taken "strong exception" to reported comments attributed to the interim Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, accusing President Thabo Mbeki of failing to respect international law by allegedly "allowing a person in his territory to organise violence in another country".

In a statement released on Monday by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad, he said: "The comment, if true, has no factual basis."

Both the official opposition Democratic Alliance and the smaller African Christian Democratic Party earlier on Monday called on Mbeki to respond to the allegation.

Pahad said: "The South African government agreed to host [deposed Haitian] president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in South Africa as a visitor of the government pending the resolution of the political situation in Haiti.

"This followed a request by Caricom [the Caribbean Community] through the African Union and in full consultation with both [sic] the United Nations, the United States and France."

He said further: "The South African government has always maintained the view that none but the people of Haiti acting in dialogue among their political representatives and assisted by Caricom can develop a long-lasting solution to their current political and economic problems.

"Accordingly, South Africa and indeed President Mbeki cannot be used as a scapegoat for failure by the interim Haitian authorities to bring about peace and stability to Haiti.

"In this regard, the Haitian interim authorities would do well to create a climate conducive for the restoration of democracy and for the voice of the people of Haiti to be heard," said Pahad.

"The South African government rejects with contempt the attack on the integrity of President Mbeki and dismisses the insinuation that its territory is being used as a springboard by president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to destabilise Haiti through violent means.

"No evidence exists to back up the claim that president Aristide is involved in any activities aimed at the destabilisation of Haiti," said Pahad.

Earlier, Democratic Alliance leader Tony Leon said the president should provide a full account of Aristide's activities since his arrival in South Africa.

"If he can show that there is no substance to Mr Latortue's allegations, then our government should respond to what would amount to a slur against the president.

"If, however, there is evidence that Mr Aristide, who is currently enjoying safe haven at the expense of the South African taxpayer, is indeed inciting violence in Haiti, then the government must revoke Mr Aristide's guest status and President Mbeki should apologise to the UN and to its peacekeeping forces."

The need for Mbeki to dispel the suspicions raised by Latortue is urgent, for the president has made clear where his sympathies lie – he backed the pro-Aristide demonstrators and supported the triumphant return of Aristide to power in Haiti, Leon said.

On July 23, Leon noted that Mbeki devoted his weekly newsletter to Aristide in honour of his birthday. The

president wrote what Leon dubbed a romantic account of demonstrations that "demanded the return of Titid — president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, an honoured guest in our country".

Mbeki added: "The poor of the slums of Bel Air, Cité Soleil and elsewhere in Haiti will achieve their liberation even though their brave and beloved leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is an honoured guest far away in South Africa. Knowledge of that past, and this future, was the best birthday present that Titid received, to celebrate his 51st birthday. *Bonne fête*, President Titid."

Leon said: "The question has now been raised as to whether that moral support for Mr Aristide's restoration has also been translated into material support. The president must answer." — I-Net Bridge