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Haiti: Last chance to end cycle of violence

The deployment of a new United Nations mission to Haiti this month represents a major opportunity, and perhaps a last chance, to break the cycle of violence and impunity that has plagued the Caribbean republic for so many years, Amnesty International said.

In a report published today, *Haiti: Breaking the Cycle of Violence - A last Chance?*, Amnesty International reveals the profound insecurity and fear still gripping the country almost four months after the latest political crisis plunged Haiti into near-total anarchy.

The report is critical of the 3-month presence of the UN-mandated Multinational Interim Force (MIF). "The MIF did little to assist the Haitian National Police to secure the country and maintain public order and practically nothing to develop a comprehensive disarmament plan", the organization said.

It is now up to the new UN Stabilisation Mission, MINUSTAH, to assist the Haitian police in disarming all armed groups, to protect the civilian population and to help rebuild the administration of justice.

"The international community must be ready to provide personnel, training, expertise and funds for this new mission. In order to achieve success the commitment must be long-term and certainly extend beyond the Mission's current 6-month mandate. However, this support needs to be matched by an equal commitment on the part of the Haitian authorities who must demonstrate to the people of their country that they are entitled to justice and that no one is above the law," Amnesty International said.

Based on the findings of the first Amnesty International delegation to visit Haiti since the departure of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February, the report sets out key challenges facing Haiti's interim government and the new UN Stabilisation Mission, MINUSTAH.

- With an estimated 25,000 Haitians in possession of guns and armed groups still in de facto control of the much of the country, Amnesty International is calling for a comprehensive, nation-wide programme of disarmament as a priority.
- The cycle of impunity must be broken. Successive Haitian governments have allowed the perpetrators of human rights abuses to escape justice. Human rights crimes are seldom properly investigated, let alone brought to trial, and the situation in Haiti demonstrates all too clearly that what is done without punishment, can be repeated without fear.
- In order to end impunity, the rule of law must be impartially applied and enforced. The interim government has swiftly moved to arrest members of former President Aristide's Lavalas Family party suspected of acts of political violence or corruption. However, the government has failed to act against a number of convicted perpetrators of grave human rights violations who were freed from prison before or during the recent insurgency, some of whom have emerged as commanders of rebel groups. None of them has been re-arrested, and a few are reportedly terrorizing their victims and others involved in their prosecution.
- Given the army's past record of human rights abuse, there is strong concern at the decision by Haiti's interim government to integrate former army officers into the Haitian National Police.
- Insecurity, impunity and partiality have encouraged attacks on freedom of the press and threats against human rights defenders. A number of journalists in former rebel areas of Haiti have been arrested and beaten after reporting abuses by the rebels, while pro-Aristide media such as Radio and Tele Timoun have been closed.

"Unless Haiti can demonstrate that no one is above the law, and that the law is applied impartially to both government supporters and opponents, impunity will continue to be rife and there will be no end to the violence and instability that has plagued Haiti for so long," Amnesty International said.

Further information on the crisis in Haiti:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/hti-index-eng>

Public Document

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