



### **Judge who recently ordered release of pro-Aristide priest resigns in Haiti**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - A judge who recently ordered the release of a Roman Catholic priest with ties to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide resigned Monday, citing government interference with his duties.

Judge Jean Senat Fleury had ordered the release of Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste in November after the priest -- who was a vocal Aristide supporter -- spent nearly seven weeks in jail. Fleury said there was not enough evidence to accuse Jean-Juste of planning acts of violence, including murder.

Violence has swelled in the slum strongholds of Aristide since Sept. 30, leaving more than 200 people dead, as his partisans stepped up demands for his return from exile in South Africa. Jean-Juste was detained in October.

In addition to accusing prominent Aristide allies of orchestrating the violence, Haiti's U.S.-backed interim government has also blamed Aristide himself for supporting the violence from abroad. Aristide, who left the Caribbean country of 8 million people on Feb. 29, denies the charge.

In a resignation letter addressed to Justice Minister Bernard Gousse and obtained by The Associated Press, Fleury cited an order by Gousse to give all his cases to other judges, saying he was moving too slowly on them.

"Considering that such measures constitute a grave attack on my honor and integrity as a magistrate, a flagrant violation of the Constitution and the laws of the country, particularly in the separation of powers ... I resign as judge of the First Instance Court of Port-au-Prince," he wrote.

Fleury, who did not specifically cite a link between his resignation and the Jean-Juste case, had worked at the court for 18 years. Fleury was not immediately available for comment.

Gousse had ordered the transfer of all Fleury's cases, as well as those of Judge Bredy Fabien, in a Dec. 30 letter to the court clerk, a week after Fabien ordered the immediate release of four prisoners, all once connected with Aristide.

Prison officials disregarded Fabien's release orders and the four men remain in custody.

"Gousse took away their cases just after blocking the release of the political prisoners," said Ronald Saint-Jean, a prisoner rights activist. "It is evident the move was political."

Gousse told private Radio Solidarite his move was simply to speed up the judicial process. He said his office had received reports that some judges were not doing their work, so officials ordered the court clerk "to take the cases from those judges and give them to other judges with the competence, intelligence, to do the work."

Some human rights organizations claim there are more than 100 political prisoners in Haiti's jails, while the government says there are none.

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