

## Haitians accuse police of killing radio journalist

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Jan 19 (Reuters) - Haitian police executed several youngsters and a radio journalist during a raid in a slum stronghold of support for the country's ousted president, witnesses and a human rights group said on Wednesday.

On Friday, dozens of heavily armed policemen raided Village de Dieu, a Port-au-Prince shantytown believed to be a bastion of gangs loyal to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was driven into exile during an armed revolt last year.

Police acknowledged killing several people during the raid, and described them as bandits killed in an exchange of gunfire.

Ronald St-Jean, an activist with the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Haitian People, and several residents said at least a dozen people were killed by police during the raid. They said several of them were executed, including a journalist, Abdias Jean, who may have seen police shoot and kill three youngsters.

"The police called three young men that were coming out of a corridor. The police were pressing the youngsters to tell them where armed bandits were hiding," said Maxon Beauduy, who said he saw the incident from inside his house. "When they (the youngsters) said they did not know, the police killed them after blaming them for hiding criminals."

Another witness, Magalie Jean, said that as she took cover, she heard Jean screaming, "Don't kill me, I am a journalist. Why should I be killed like that?"

"Then I heard a series of gunshots and it was over for him," she told Reuters.

Maxon Beauduy, who also said he witnessed the incident, said police severely beat Jean and then, "After beating him, they took him a little farther and shot him dead."

A police spokeswoman, Jessie Coicou, refused on Wednesday to confirm or deny the allegations and urged families to "file complaints before relevant courts of justice if they think they have a case."

The police don't have to defend themselves before the media. Since I heard there are several witnesses, I hope they will accept to testify before a judge," Coicou said.

"I can tell you that the police high command has never instructed policemen to perform such behavior," Coicou said.

Police said the raid was part of a broader effort to crack down on armed gangs. Some 200 people have been killed since early September in gang wars and clashes between Aristide supporters and foes.

U.N. troops were sent to stabilize the chaotic country after Aristide's departure. The U.N. secretary-general's special representative in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, said last week that he was concerned about reports that Haitian police have been responsible for repeated human rights abuses.