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Haiti's Upcoming Elections: Fanmi Lavalas opts out unless Latortue halts State-sponsored Terrorism

- On 1 February 2005, nearly one year after the de-facto coup against Haiti's democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, the AP reported that the Lavalas party will not participate in the local and municipal elections scheduled for October, or the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for November.
- Lavalas' decision to not participate is a direct result of the suppression carried out against party supporters by paramilitary factions and gang leaders who get their marching orders from the Latortue government. New evidence reveals interim Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue's de-facto policy of restoring "Duvalierism without Duvalier."
- Since the first day Washington installed him in power, Latortue has taken a fiercely adversarial position towards Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas political party. By working with the anti-Aristide opposition to extinguish Lavalas, he repudiates his claim that he is for free, fair and open elections.
- Where did Latortue obtain the funds to buy off the ex-military, and how can U.S. and Canadian taxpayers know that the funds their governments donated to the Haitian Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) will not be used as payments for military renegades?
- The ex-military and former death squads are engaging in terrorist tactics similar to those that were used by Iraqi insurgents to keep the majority from the polls. But unlike the situation in Iraq, the anti-democracy forces in Haiti have the tacit backing of the

state.

Haiti's Latortue: Washington's Chief *Chimere* in Port-au-Prince

The Fanmi Lavalas party, which Aristide founded as the Lavalas movement against the U.S. backed Duvalier dictatorship, has decided not to participate in Haiti's upcoming elections. Its grave decision yesterday is understandable since, in contrast to Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue's declaration that in the upcoming elections, "this government will not act in favor of anybody or any political candidate [nor will it] work against any candidate who will run," evidence abounds of state-sponsored terror that has been launched against residents of pro-Aristide slums, such as Cite Soleil and Bel Air, by gangs and possibly the ex-military.

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs repeatedly has called attention to the Latortue government's brutal suppression and illegal imprisonment of Lavalas supporters. We already knew that, according to the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission, there are an estimated 700 political prisoners languishing in Haitian jails, including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Minister of the Interior Jocelerme Privert. The interim government even had the audacity to imprison the country's most revered Catholic priest, Father Jean-Juste, though he was recently released. We also knew that hundreds of Haitians, mostly from Lavalas neighborhoods, have been killed since the coup. For these reasons and many others, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has refused to recognize the Latortue regime. But now, new evidence mounts in support of the claim that Latortue and his rogue justice minister, Bernard Gousse, are engaged in an all-out-war against Haiti's poor, who make up the vast majority of the population and who overwhelmingly support Aristide.

It's worse than we thought

The University of Miami School of Law's Center for the Study of Human Rights has recently published findings from the investigation it carried out in Haiti last November. The inquiry, led by attorney and former law enforcement official, Thomas M. Griffin, included interviews with government leaders, U.S. embassy personnel in Port-au-Prince, U.N. peacekeepers, political prisoners, human rights organizations, and both pro and anti-Aristide groups, among others (for the full report go to <http://www.law.miami.edu/news/368.html>).

In graphic detail, the document presents some of the strongest evidence yet against Latortue's mendacious claims that he is a neutral leader with no political agenda and that most of the violence is the fault of Lavalas-inspired groups and individuals. While it does not present any evidence that Latortue himself has directly ordered the almost systematic execution-style killings of pro-Aristide loyalists across the country, the report does paint a blood soaked picture of the interim prime minister as Washington's ultra right wing servitor and the behind-the-scenes architect of the ongoing suppression of the poor. It documents the Latortue government's complicity in summary executions in urban poor neighborhoods by anti-Lavalas gangs, which often work in conjunction with the Haitian National Police force (HNP) and possibly the ex-military (*Forces Armees d' Haiti*, or "FADH"). To date, we cannot say with certainty that the ex-military is the main culprit in the executions, though we do know that at least 197 ex-soldiers have been incorporated into the HNP. According to the

arms. They need a professional, depoliticized police force to maintain order, not an army that attacks its own people with impunity.”

Washington's Chimeres are back to Work

Unfortunately the UN peacekeeping force, MINUSTAH, seems determined to ignore this advice. It has rarely confronted gang leaders and has even performed the bidding of Latortue by aiding and abetting the HNP and rebel gangs in their raids against pro-Lavalas slums. MINUSTAH's lack of will has been manifest in the words of its commander, Brazilian General Augusto Heleno, who has said, in words that echo the UN's impotence in Rwanda, "I command a peacekeeping force, not an occupation force." Of course, one could retort, since there is no peace to keep, why not force an occupation upon the Haitian ex-military strongholds? But this is, surely, too much to ask, as MINUSTAH has virtually no control in the coastal slums or the countryside, which is run mainly by members of the ex-military and former death squad leaders.

Most of these brigands, such as the convicted FRAPH death squad leader Jodel Chamblain – recently acquitted of murder charges in a kangaroo court last August as a direct result of Justice Minister Gousse's intercession – flooded back into the country from the Dominican Republic and elsewhere following Aristide's ouster, or were broken out of prison during the coup by anti-Aristide partisans. Acting as the frontline of "Washington's *chimeres*," they are now chirpily back to their old business of making life miserable for the Haitian people. While comparisons to the situation in Iraq are irresistibly tempting, one crucial difference should be observed: in Iraq, at least the insurgent uprising against the majority, which really did want to have the election, does not have the support of the state. In Haiti, one could only wish such were the case.

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