

## Tensions high in Haiti after police violence

ISN SECURITY WATCH (02/03/05) - Tensions remain high in Haiti after police opened fire on protesters in the capital of Port-Au-Prince on Monday, killing two people and wounding some 20 others.

The police opened fire when a 2'000-strong group of supporters of deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide marched towards the National Palace to observe the one-year anniversary of his ouster.

News agencies said the protestors advanced towards the government building waving portraits of Aristide and shouting slogans against US President George Bush. A police vehicle blocked the road and the policemen fired tear gas shells and then live ammunition into the crowd.

The protestors were accompanied by hundreds of UN peacekeeping troops deployed in Haiti.

"This looked to be peaceful, but for some reason, we are not sure why, the Haitian police arrived and decided to disband the demonstration," the Associated Press quoted Commander Carols Chugs Braga, a spokesman for the 7'400-member UN peacekeeping mission, as saying.

Some 280 people have died in protests in Haiti since September last year.

Last week, 28 people were killed in clashes in the slums of the capital. Some UN Peacekeepers were also wounded when they were fired upon last week.

Haiti has been gripped by political turmoil since last year. Aristide was forced to flee the country after a yearlong popular protest against his corrupt regime. The rebels, mostly former army soldiers who had been removed in 1995, overran most parts of Haiti and advanced towards the capital, forcing the president to leave. Aristide fled Haiti in a US aircraft.

He was replaced with a government that is believed to have the backing of the US administration. The US troops had arrived in Haiti a day after Aristide left the country, and then handed over the peacekeeping mission to the UN force in June last year. Almost immediately after landing in Africa, where he remains in exile, Aristide alleged that he had been kidnapped by US Marines and forced to resign in a US-led "coup d'etat".

A number of Aristide's confidantes are in prison, including former prime minister Yvonne Neptune and former interior minister Jocelerme Privert.