



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE DEMOCRACY IN HAITI

CONTACT INFO

**Institute for Justice
and
Democracy in Haiti**

P.O. Box 745
Joseph, OR 97846
Telephone:
541-432-0597

Fax:
541-432-0264

www.ijdh.org

info@ijdh.org

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Haiti's Most Famous Political Prisoners Announce Hunger Strike

By Bill Quigley, Professor of Law, Loyola University
New Orleans. Bill is in Haiti as a volunteer attorney
with the Institute for
Justice and Democracy in Haiti, www.ijdh.org Contact
duprestars@yahoo.com Phone in Haiti 509.401.4822

Political prisoners Yvon Neptune, Haiti's former
Prime Minister, and Jocelerme Privert, former Minister
of the Interior, survived the
massive prison revolt at the National Penitentiary of
Haiti on February 19, 2005. The Saturday afternoon
revolt began with the firing of heavy automatic
weapons at the main gate of the prison and
the sudden disappearance of all the guards. In the
chaos one guard was killed and 490 of the 1250
prisoners left.

Ministers Neptune and Privert were forcibly taken out
of the prison by former military people concerned for
their safety. Once secure, they immediately called on
international authorities to guarantee them
a safe return to the prison. They were returned to
the penitentiary by the UN authorities within hours
of the end of the revolt.

Speaking from a cement cell with no running water, no
bathroom, and no electricity, Yvon Neptune and
Minister Privert vowed not to eat until the
injustice and insecurity of their confinement is
addressed. Privert has been in prison since April 2004
and Neptune since June 2004 and neither has a trial
date set.

Yvon Neptune said, "My life has been in real danger
since the elected President of our country was removed
in February of 2004. This is the third time my life
has been put in danger in prison. There was an
assassination plot against me in the fall confirmed by
the National Police. Then there was the prison
massacre on December 1, 2004, in which unknown numbers
of prisoners were killed. When the prison was
attacked this weekend, my life was again clearly and
seriously in danger. I could easily have been killed
by people inside or outside of the prison. Who is it
that keeps putting me in situations where I
might be killed?"

After Neptune and Privert returned to the prison by the UN, Haitian authorities wrongfully reported that the two men had been captured by national police, a charge Neptune said is a total lie and a story repudiated by the UN.

Neptune concluded by asking, "We have been patient for over eight months. We have given time for the government and the international community to act. Enough is enough."

Brian Concannon Jr.
Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti

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