

PRESS RELEASE

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(323) 757-8900

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CONGRESSWOMAN WATERS URGES PRESIDENT BUSH TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER YVON NEPTUNE AND FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER JOCELERME PRIVERT, OBTAIN THEIR RELEASE FROM PRISON IN HAITI AND OFFER THEM POLITICAL ASYLUM IN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, D.C. -- Today, Rep. Maxine Waters (CA-35) sent a letter to President Bush, urging him to take immediate action to protect the lives of Haiti's former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, obtain their release from prison in Haiti and offer them political asylum in the United States. Copies of the letter were sent to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Ambassador James Foley, the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti. The text of the letter follows:

I write to urge you to take immediate action to protect the lives of Haiti's former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, obtain their release from prison in Haiti and offer them political asylum. I am deeply concerned that their lives are in danger, and I am willing to accept personal responsibility for bringing Ministers Neptune and Privert to the United States.

Last Saturday, Prime Minister Neptune and Minister Privert survived a violent revolt at the National Penitentiary. According to reports, the 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 ensuing chaos, one guard was killed and almost 500 prisoners left the prison. It remains unclear how such a massive prison break could have taken place in downtown Port-au-Prince just three blocks from the national palace and police headquarters. However, several witnesses claimed that the attackers appeared to be police officers.

During the revolt, Ministers Neptune and Privert were forcibly removed from the prison at gunpoint. They immediately called on United Nations authorities to guarantee them a safe return to the prison. They were returned to the prison by the United Nations authorities within hours after the end of the revolt.

I fear that Ministers Neptune and Privert will be killed if the United States does not intervene immediately to protect their lives. Saturday's prison revolt was not the first time the lives of these two former Haitian officials have been endangered since they were imprisoned without charge in spring of last year. Last November, according to press

reports, several Haitian police officers were involved in a plot to kill imprisoned Lavalas supporters, including Minister Neptune and Minister Privert. Furthermore, on December 1, there was a massacre in the National Penitentiary. I have recently been informed that Ministers Neptune and Privert have begun a hunger strike following Saturday's prison revolt and vowed not to eat until the injustice and insecurity of their confinement is addressed.

The United States has a unique opportunity to save the lives of former Prime Minister Neptune and former Interior Minister Privert, and I am making a desperate plea for their safety.

I implore you to intervene immediately to protect Prime Minister Neptune and Minister Privert, obtain their release from prison and offer them asylum in the United States. I would appreciate it if you would contact me as soon as possible to discuss the fate of these two individuals, and I look forward to your prompt response.