

**Haiti still torn by violence a year after Aristide.**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb 28 (Reuters) - Armed gangs roam the slums, former soldiers control small towns and bystanders die in street gunfights - a year after former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was pushed from power, Haiti remains politically unstable and plagued by violence.

In a sign of what ails the poorest country in the Americas, police opened fire on Monday on thousands of demonstrators who marched through the Port-au-Prince slum of Bel-Air to demand Aristide's return. One person was killed and another wounded, witnesses said.

At least 26 people have been killed in the slums over the past five days, bringing the death toll to 276 since September. Three soldiers from a Brazil-led U.N. peacekeeping force were wounded by gunfire last week.

An increasing number of political and social groups that opposed Aristide are disenchanted with the way the U.S.-backed interim government is running the troubled Caribbean state, which in its history has endured more than 30 coups.

"This government is only repeating the mistakes of the past. We did not fight Aristide's regime to have another one just like it," said Gerard Blot, a leader of one of a dozen political parties that have called on the government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue to resign.

Some Haitians in the slums, where Aristide still has significant support a year after he was pushed out by a bloody rebellion and foreign pressure, believe their economic lot has worsened.

"Last year, I sent all three of my children to school. This year I could only afford to send one," said Marjorie Jovin, 38, a resident of Village de Dieu, a pro-Aristide slum. "I can't even feed them."

**THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...**

Critics of the Latortue government have accused it of incompetence, human rights abuses and corruption, many of the same accusations leveled at Aristide, the former Roman Catholic priest who was seen as a hero of Haitian democracy when he helped unseat the Duvalier dictatorship in the 1980s.

Latortue has denied the accusations, in turn accusing his critics of being unable to adapt to democratic rule.

"They cannot accommodate themselves to the spirit of tolerance, national reconciliation we want in this country, and the fight against corruption we are leading," Latortue said.

Hundreds of Aristide allies, including ex-prime minister Yvon Neptune, have been jailed for months without trial in violation of Haitian law, according to human rights activists.

No one expected the interim government - installed when Aristide fled on Feb. 29 in the face of a rebellion by armed gangs and soldiers who once belonged to Haiti's disbanded army - to solve in one year the grinding

poverty and violence Haiti has faced since independence from France 201 years ago.

But the disappointments stem from the fact that Haiti still suffers many of the ills for which Aristide was blamed.

#### RAMPANT VIOLENCE

Under Aristide, gangs of young toughs called the shots in the streets and authorities condoned political violence. The gangs are still armed and street violence is rampant.

Many of the ex-soldiers who killed police and civilians during the revolt have not been prosecuted. Some have even been named to the new administration.

Former rebel Winter Etienne was appointed port director in Gonaives, where the rebellion started.

Rebels still control parts of the country, with heavily armed soldiers occupying police stations in the southern town of Petit-Goave and in the Central Plateau.

Rebel chief Remissainthe Ravix has demanded Latortue reinstate the army Aristide disbanded in 1995. The government says a new, elected government should decide the matter.

There is a \$30,000 reward for the capture of Ravix, but he is dismissive: "Who could dare arrest a military commander?"

Haiti's electoral council set legislative and presidential elections for Nov. 13. But some political leaders who opposed Aristide are concerned about the credibility of the process.

Micha Gaillard, a spokesman for the Democratic Movements' National Congress, called on the government to disarm groups carrying illegal weapons to stop them from scaring voters.

"Whether they are pro-Aristide gangs or former military, they all have to be disarmed, because they'll try to influence the election in places they control," Gaillard said.

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