
The lethal dispersion of a Lavalas demonstration: the PNH spokesperson tries to exonerate the police force

Port-au-Prince, March 2, 2005 (AHP)- Haitian National Police (PNH) spokesperson Gessy Cameau Coicou sought Wednesday to absolve the national police whose patrols shed blood as they violently broke up a peaceful demonstration Monday by supporters of Fanmi Lavalas.

Mme. Coicou, who recently returned from travel outside Haiti and who was reading a report handed to her, tried to explain three days after the carnage that the police had decided to disperse the demonstration with tear gas because there were armed children among the demonstrators.

At least five children were killed including one whose head was smashed. The killings occurred in the presence of observers and foreign journalists.

Visibly embarrassed by the questions of the journalists, Ms. Coicou indicated that the demonstration was broken up through the use of tear gas and that the police did not fire a single shot.

The position of the PNH as read by Ms. Coicou differs from the accounts of local and foreign journalists who were covering the demonstration and also differs from the position of UN officials.

Through these statements, the police can say good bye to its credibility, said a high-ranking police official who said he believes that Ms. Coicou is being exploited in a dishonest fashion by police upper management.

Gessy Coicou is consistently criticized because she always portrays people who are killed by the police in the populist districts as bandits killed in an exchange of gunfire.

These attempts at an explanation by the PNH for Monday's carnage are rejected by MINUSTAH officials.

The deputy commander of the UN Mission, Carlos Chagas, declared that the demonstration was peaceful and that he did not understand why the national police opened fire on the demonstrators.

For his part, General Heleno Ribeiro indicated that the killings perpetrated by the police in the populist districts are poisoning relations between MINUSTAH and the residents of these neighborhoods.

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