

**Rights group says UN Haiti force has failed so far.**

By Andrei Khalip

485 words

22 March 2005

03:01 pm

Reuters News

English

(c) 2005 Reuters Limited

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, March 22 (Reuters) - The Brazilian-led U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti has failed to protect people and bring stability to the country because of a timid and complacent attitude, a leading international human rights group said on Tuesday.

"After eight months under MINUSTAH's watch, Haiti is as insecure as ever," Global Justice said in a report.

The 7,400-strong U.N. peacekeeping force made up of soldiers and police from several nations deployed in June last year after a rebellion that forced elected Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile in February.

Brazil's leading role in the mission is part of a government drive to establish the country as a regional diplomatic power.

In Brazil, critics say the Haiti venture could become President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's first big foreign policy mistake as armed factions are growing more violent, raising the risk people will turn against the foreign troops. On Sunday, two peacekeepers from Sri Lanka and Nepal became the first U.N. troops to be killed by violence in Haiti since the international force went to the country. Brazil has about 2,000 peacekeepers in the force.

Global Justice, which sent delegations to Haiti in October 2004 and January 2005, said the failures resulted largely from the "timid interpretation of its mandate" by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or MINUSTAH.

MINUSTAH officials had no immediate comment.

Global Justice said the peacekeeping force "continues to interpret its mandate complacently and with a narrowness unfit for the situation on the ground."

It said the force had not even started to implement a comprehensive disarmament program, with armed groups, such as former soldiers of Haiti's disbanded army and pro-Aristide gangs, controlling large areas of the country.

The force failed to investigate severe human rights abuses by the Haitian police and even provided protection and equipment for them to wage a campaign of terror in the slums, it said.

"In short, MINUSTAH has effectively provided for the continuation of impunity in Haiti," it said, quoting claims Haitian police carried out arbitrary arrests and summary executions.

It said the promotion of police reform in Haiti was utterly ineffective and MINUSTAH did nothing to improve the situation of returned refugees and displaced persons.

Global Justice added it was not too late to start implementing the mandate earnestly.

"We continue to believe MINUSTAH holds tremendous promise to help Haiti achieve peace, stability and respect

for human rights. With elections slated for the end of 2005, the time is now for MINUSTAH to act."

It called for a strategy to disarm all armed groups and the former military as soon as possible, constantly oversee police operations and investigations and stop giving logistic support to the police during operations that result in violations of human rights.

Document LBA0000020050322e13m00efm

© 2005 Dow Jones Reuters Business Interactive LLC (trading as Factiva). All rights reserved.