

**Gunmen attack house of Haiti's justice minister, kill policeman**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Gunmen opened fire on the house of Haiti's justice minister, killing a police officer in a brazen attack that underscored the country's shaky security climate ahead of key fall elections, an official said Wednesday.

The Tuesday night shooting in Port-au-Prince came days after U.N. peacekeepers and Haitian police raided two rural towns to remove armed ex-soldiers who helped oust former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide last year. Two peacekeepers and two ex-soldiers died in clashes.

A group of gunmen fired several times at Justice Minister Bernard Gousse's house in the capital, killing a policeman who was guarding the property, said Yollete Mengual, a spokeswoman for the interim government.

Mengual gave no other details, and Gousse wasn't immediately available for comment.

The attack came as peacekeepers and interim authorities struggle to disarm street gangs and ex-soldiers blamed for hundreds of recent killings that many fear could spill over into elections in October and November.

On Tuesday, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld praised peacekeeping efforts in Haiti but raised doubts about the prospects for elections, citing the U.S. government's experience with ensuring the safety of voters in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"It takes a lot of efforts and planning from a security standpoint," Rumsfeld said en route to Brazil as part of a four-day swing through Latin America. "You simply have to be ahead of it or it can get bad fast."

U.N. envoy to Haiti Juan Gabriel Valdes said Tuesday the United Nations is willing to disarm gangs and help them return to civilian life, but is prepared to go after them "with firmness" if they refuse.

"If these offers are not received, if it is not possible to continue to follow a peaceful rendering of these weapons and the disarmament of these groups, we will follow the same line of firmness that we have followed in the last week vis a vis the former military," Valdes said.

His comments followed Sunday's attack by ex-soldiers that killed a Nepalese peacekeeper manning a checkpoint in Haiti's volatile Central Plateau. The fighters managed to escape by using women and children as human shields, the United Nations said.

Earlier Sunday, Sri Lankan peacekeepers raided the southwestern town of Petit-Goave and fought a fierce gunbattle with ex-soldiers holed up inside a police station. The U.N. troops removed the ex-soldiers after a clash that killed one peacekeeper and two ex-soldiers.

The deaths marked the first fatalities among the 7,400-strong U.N. force, which has been seen as being too timid in disarming militants since taking over the peacekeeping mission from U.S. Marines in June 2004.