

Police, protesters clash during pro-Aristide protest in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Police opened fire Thursday during a street march in Haiti's capital to demand the return of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Witnesses said at least one person was killed.



Members of the Haitian National Police drop to the ground after hearing gunshots.

By Evens Sanon, AFP

The shooting follows a week of violence that saw two U.N. peacekeepers and two ex-soldiers killed in clashes. The violence has also heightened tensions ahead of fall elections and underscores the shaky security climate in Haiti more than a year after Aristide's ouster in an armed uprising.

Thursday's protest started peacefully in the seaside slum of Cite Soleil with thousands of marchers chanting "Aristide forever!" and waving photos of the deposed leader.

Several gunshots rang out as the demonstrators approached the local police station, sending demonstrators fleeing. Protesters said the shots were fired by an anti-Aristide street gang. The gunfire apparently didn't injure anyone.

But a short while later, police began shooting as a group of protesters reached a main avenue leading to the international airport, killing one man, witnesses said. Associated Press reporters saw police firing into the air and toward protesters.

Charles Christner, a 34-year-old school principal, said he had just stepped off a bus when he was shot in the arm. "All of the sudden I saw the police shooting and I got hit."

Police and U.N. representatives weren't immediately available for comment.

While dozens of police monitored the protest route Thursday, few U.N. peacekeepers were seen — a marked difference from recent demonstrations.

Peacekeepers and interim authorities are struggling to disarm street gangs and ex-soldiers blamed for hundreds of recent killings and many fear the violence could spill over into elections in October and November.

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