

Haiti: Hundreds Killed Amid Rampant Impunity

Visiting U.N. Security Council Members Should Boost Efforts to End Crisis

(Port-au-Prince, April 14, 2005) — The Haitian government has failed to stop the rampant violence in the capital that has left hundreds of persons killed and wounded in recent months, Human Rights Watch said today.

“Criminal and political violence has killed hundreds of Haitians while the perpetrators enjoy overwhelming impunity. The authorities’ failure to investigate and punish daily acts of violence creates a climate of impunity in which abuses flourish and people feel completely defenseless.”

Joanne Mariner, deputy Americas director at Human Rights Watch

The U.N. Security Council delegation visiting Haiti from April 13-16 should urge the interim government to make security and protection of the

population a major priority and coordinate with the U.N. stabilization mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to stem the violence. With elections in Haiti set for October and November, the Security Council is deciding whether to extend the mission’s mandate beyond June 1, when it is scheduled to expire.

"Criminal and political violence has killed hundreds of Haitians while the perpetrators enjoy overwhelming impunity," said Joanne Mariner, deputy Americas director at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities' failure to investigate and punish daily acts of violence creates a climate of impunity in which abuses flourish and people feel completely defenseless."

Since the beginning of the year, 391 patients were treated for gunshot and other wounds at the Port-au-Prince hospital run by the humanitarian medical organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). MSF estimates that nearly 100 people were killed each month in Port-au-Prince from September to December 2004. In recent months, the number of violent deaths continued to be very high. Statistics gathered by the Haitian National

Justice and Peace Commission show 63 people killed in January and 68 in February. The Commission believes that the actual figures may be much higher, however, as its statistics are incomplete.

Human Rights Watch researchers currently in Haiti found that, in almost all cases they have investigated, the Haitian authorities have taken no action to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. They also have not welcomed the efforts of the U.N. civilian police, who have a mandate to provide assistance to national police in conducting investigations. The victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch all said that the national police never arrived at the scene of the incidents to help the victims or investigate the crimes.

At the same time, victims of violence often face police harassment. Several residents of impoverished Cité Soleil area of Port-au-Prince told Human Rights Watch that the police treat anyone wounded in the area as a gang member. People try not to bring the wounded to state-run hospitals, knowing that the victims may be arbitrarily arrested there.

The situation in Haiti has been volatile in the year since the armed uprising that forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of office in February 2004. Security conditions improved slightly when the Multinational Interim Forces was deployed to Haiti the same month, and in the early months following the deployment of the follow-up U.N. peacekeeping mission in June.

Nonetheless, the interim government's failure to restore stability left a power vacuum allowing armed groups to flourish. Former soldiers, armed Aristide supporters and criminal gangs are contending for control of different parts of the country. The level of violence has skyrocketed since September, challenging MINUSTAH's ability to control the situation.

The Security Council delegation is visiting Haiti this week amid the deepening crisis and growing concerns about the U.N. mission's ability to stabilize the situation. The visit is intended "to emphasize the international community's commitment to long-term stabilization and development" and assess the country's security, humanitarian and development needs.

"The Security Council should insist that the interim government take urgent measures to end the climate of insecurity and lawlessness that prevails in Haiti," said Mariner. "Security Council members must also ensure that the U.N. mission has all the backing it needs to assist the government in this challenging task."

Human Rights Watch called on the Security Council delegation to urge the interim government to take immediate steps, with MINUSTAH's active assistance, to protect the population from rampant violence. These steps should include extending the disarmament and demobilization program to cover all armed groups, and increasing the presence of security forces in the most affected areas. The Council should also urge the Haitian authorities to investigate all acts of violence and actively seek the assistance

of the U.N. civilian police in criminal investigations whenever necessary.



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