



U.N. Security Council concludes Haiti visit after week of violence

By MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN

Associated Press Writer

418 words

16 April 2005

03:22 am

Associated Press Newswires

English

(c) 2005. The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Saturday was the final day of a fact-finding trip to Haiti by the U.N. Security Council, a four-day mission marked by bloody fighting between peacekeepers, police and armed gangs, underscoring the challenge of bringing peace to the hemisphere's poorest country.

U.N. peacekeepers and Haitian police waged an hour-long gunbattle Friday in a maze-like seaside slum. The fighting killed at least five -- and perhaps as many as 10 -- suspects described as members of an armed band loyal to deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, U.N. officials said.

Among the dead, U.N. officials said, was a suspect in the fatal shooting Thursday of a Filipino peacekeeper, the third U.N. casualty in the year-old mission to stabilize Haiti.

Security Council members said it was likely they would increase the number of U.N. civilian police in Haiti when they vote next month to expand the mission's mandate past its June expiration.

Meanwhile, outside observers said aggressive moves by U.N. forces in recent months had not yet stanching the violence.

Dozens of people die monthly from attacks largely by criminal gangs in **Port-au-Prince**, said Anna Neistat, co-author of a new Human Rights Watch report critical of the U.N. and Haiti's interim government.

"In recent months and weeks, violence in the capital has become the No. 1 problem," she said. "It takes lives every single day."

U.N. officials have claimed recent victories against armed gangs and promised more action against gun-toting militants in coming days.

The clashes come as some diplomats and politicians said Haiti has made little progress in preparing for fall elections and needs more funding to lay the groundwork for the vote.

The U.N. Security Council met with leaders of various political groups Friday, and participants said Haitian politicians expressed frustration with U.N. efforts to assure safe and free elections more than a year after Aristide was overthrown.

More than 400 people have died since September in clashes among pro- and anti-Aristide street gangs, police, peacekeepers and ex-soldiers who helped oust Aristide.

Security Council members also toured the northern cities of Gonaives and Cap-Haitien on Friday. U.N. soldiers said the security situation had improved in Gonaives, where peacekeepers were consumed with relief work after September floods that killed nearly 2,000 people.

7

Document APRS000020050416e14g0001a

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