

# HAITI

**The Miami Herald**

## **Human rights organization reports Haiti situation deteriorating, blasts violence, justice system in Haiti**

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**A human rights panel has called for 'urgent measures' to suppress the widespread violence that jeopardize elections scheduled for fall in Haiti.**

MIAMI - (KRT) - A human rights delegation from the Organization of American States painted a dire picture of the situation in Haiti in a report Monday, slamming a broken-down justice system, decrying violence that has killed at least 600 people since September and raising concerns about the viability of upcoming elections.

"A secure environment for political debate, campaigning and voting is essential for free and fair elections," wrote the six-person team from organization's Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. "Urgent measures must be taken to suppress the violence."

The organization is responsible for registering voters for the elections scheduled in October and November.

The commission last visited Haiti in September 2004, six months after the revolt that ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. On this visit, April 18 to 22, it found the situation had "deteriorated markedly."

The delegation urged donor nations to fulfill their promises to help the desperately impoverished nation, noting that only 10 percent of the \$1.4 billion pledged to Haiti has been disbursed. It also urged U.N. peacekeepers to implement a disarmament program they have been promising for months.

"The commission found that no systematic or comprehensive disarmament initiative has yet been undertaken and encourages the rapid implementation," the delegation wrote.

Guns are everywhere in Haiti.

In the slums, heavily armed gangs are exchanging fire with peacekeepers almost every day. The armed rebels who pushed out Aristide have killed police and peacekeepers in the countryside. Police open fire on peaceful demonstrators. And criminals of every sort kidnap, carjack, rape and wreak havoc in the streets.

"While cooperative efforts between the U.N. and the police have had some success against armed groups in recent months, it remains apparent that these efforts are insufficient and must be expedited and expanded," the commission wrote.

But efforts to clean out the criminal elements that control much of Haiti run into the obstacle of the dysfunctional justice system.

According to the report, "Judges lack the protection necessary to perform their duties without fear of threats to their physical integrity, and court facilities in some precarious areas have been forced to close."

This exacerbates a long-standing problem in Haiti - "the prolonged detention of individuals without charge or trial."

The OAS delegation visited the National Penitentiary and discovered that only 9 of 1,054 inmates had been convicted of a crime.

The OAS group plans to release a more detailed report of its findings soon.

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