



Fact-finders in Haiti are critical of UN mission

By Marcela Valente

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- [Jean-Bertrand Aristide calls for restoration of constitutional order \(FCN, 04-20-2005\)](#)
- [Haiti: One year later \(FCN, 03-17-2005\)](#)

BUENOS AIRES (IPS/GIN) - Argentine human rights activist and Nobel peace laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, speaking with IPS from Haiti, expressed alarm over the violence and crime besieging this devastated Caribbean nation, in addition to allegations—as yet, unconfirmed—of UN peacekeeping forces involvement in acts of torture and rape.

"The situation in Haiti is critical," Mr. Pérez Esquivel reported from Port-au-Prince. "There has been a serious deterioration of state institutions, the government is more symbolic than real, and there are a wealth of problems like major shootouts between armed gangs of police officers, drug traffickers or common criminals in the streets," he added.

Mr. Pérez Esquivel, founder and director of the Peace and Justice Service, a non-governmental group, is heading up an international fact-finding and solidarity mission to Haiti, made up of representatives of 15 organizations from the continental network Jubilee South/Americas.

They arrived in Haiti on Apr. 3 to gather information and testimony on the living conditions of the population, the human rights situation, and the performance of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which involves a large contingent of Latin American troops.

Mr. Pérez Esquivel reported that the civil society delegation he heads along with the president of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo-Founding Line, Nora Corti—has witnessed "a great many problems in the tax free zone, where workers are subjected to slave-labor conditions," in addition



African Police from the MINUSTAH stand during a press conference April 11, behind arms and munitions that were taken by Haitian Police and MINUSTAH during a recent operation in Port-au-Prince. At least 10 people, including two former soldiers, were killed in skirmishes with police backed up by UN forces, a source close to the Haitian police told AFP. Three people were killed April 9 in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood. The dead included ex-sergeant Ravix Remissainthe, the self-declared leader of former soldiers. At least 18 other people were arrested the same day. No deaths were reported among police. Seven others were killed April 10, near the capital's airport in a shootout with police. The victims included ex-soldier Jean Rene Anthony, who was wanted by authorities for his alleged involvement in the February

to "continual human rights violations" throughout the country. killing of four police officers. Photo: AFP

The activists have met with humanitarian and women's organizations, as well as interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, who denied the existence of the reported crimes and violations. They also visited jails where there are currently "over 1,000 political prisoners being held without trial," he said.

The delegates also took part in a meeting with the UN independent expert on human rights in Haiti, French magistrate Louis Joinet, who painted a bleak picture of the situation in Haiti, where the judicial system is practically powerless and politicians operate with "full impunity."

The critical situation in Haiti raises serious doubts as to the elections scheduled for October and November of this year, said Mr. Pérez Esquivel, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 for his struggle against human rights violations during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship in Argentina.

"The government says they will take place, but so far there have been no discussions with social and political organizations. We do not know what will happen between now and October," he said.

Haiti has been plunged into a state of chaos since Feb. 29, 2004, when constitutional President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was overthrown with U.S. aid. Large areas of the country fell under the control of armed gangs of criminals and former soldiers from the army disbanded by Mr. Aristide.

MINUSTAH, headed by Chilean diplomat Juan Gabriel Valdez, has been responsible for keeping the peace in Haiti since June 2004, when it replaced the Multinational Interim Force (MIF) of U.S., French and Canadian troops sent in after Mr. Aristide's fall. Brazil was placed in command of the mission's peacekeeping troops.

The mission's performance, however, has been the target of growing criticism in recent months, in the face of evidence that armed gangs still control large areas of the country, while violence continues unabated.

The MINUSTAH leadership denies the allegations, while calling on the United States, the European Union and multilateral financial agencies to come through with the funds they have pledged for reconstruction in Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere. This is the only way that peace can be achieved, they maintain.

Mr. Pérez Esquivel acknowledged that "Haiti is not Iraq," but he stressed that the situation is critical and could get even worse if the United States and other donor countries do not send the resources they have promised and if the already dramatic levels of hunger, poverty and social exclusion become more acute.

Over a billion dollars has been pledged by donor countries to fund development projects, but very little of this money has actually reached Haiti.

Mr. Pérez Esquivel said he had received reports of rape, beatings and torture involving Argentine, Brazilian and other members of MINUSTAH, which is made up of 7,400 military troops and civilian police officers from 34 countries, including seven Latin American nations.

However, these accusations have not been confirmed, he noted, adding that the delegation was scheduled to meet with Brazilian General Augusto Heleno Pereira, commander of the UN troops.

Latin American participation in this mission has been a highly controversial issue.

Former priest and two-time president Aristide left the country on a U.S. plane that took him to the Central African Republic, and hours later, Haiti was occupied by a U.S.-led

multinational force.

Mr. Aristide later maintained that he was abducted, after being toppled in a "modern coup d'état" sponsored by the United States and France.

MINUSTAH, which replaced the U.S.-led troops last June, came under heavy fire in a recent report titled "Keeping the Peace In Haiti?", co-authored by the Harvard Law Student Advocates for Human Rights and the Brazilian non-governmental organization Centro de Justiça Global (Global Justice Centre).

The report, released in March, says that the MINUSTAH forces have "effectively provided cover for the Haitian National Police (HNP) to wage a campaign of terror in Port-au-Prince's slums"—where most residents are supporters of the deposed Aristide's party, Lavalas—and have thus failed to fulfill their mandate to protect the civilian population and ensure the respect of human rights.

General Pereira has countered that the report is unfounded.

The activists also plan to prepare a report that they will present to the UN and the countries participating in the mission.

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