

**Canadian kidnapped and freed for ransom in Haiti, third foreigner abducted this month**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Armed men kidnapped a Canadian national and released him 24 hours later when his family paid a ransom -- the third foreigner abducted in Haiti this month, police revealed Friday.

The Canadian man, whose identity was not released, was abducted Tuesday in the capital of Port-au-Prince, said police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou. He was freed Wednesday when his family paid an undisclosed ransom, she said.

"The parents refused our help, they wanted to do it all themselves," Coicou said, declining to provide more details.

Canadian Embassy officials did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

A recent surge in kidnappings has compounded difficulties facing an ill-equipped police force and a 7,400-member U.S. peacekeeping force struggling to curb violence ahead of October and November general elections.

The U.S. State Department warned Americans on Thursday against traveling to Haiti and instructed U.S. personnel whose jobs are not essential to leave -- the first such order since the February 2004 rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The State Department warned there was no effective police force in much of Haiti.

The warning came a day after U.S. Embassy vehicle was shot at five times while driving through Cite Militaire, a slum in the capital. The vehicle got away and no one inside was injured, said U.S. Embassy spokeswoman Mara Tekach-Ball.

Tekach-Ball said the State Department's order was not based on the shooting, saying there have been several violent incidents in the past months.

An Indian store owner kidnapped earlier this month is still missing. Abductors released a Russian contractor after U.N. and Russian officials intervened.

Armed men kidnapped Haitian police officer last weekend and killed him when negotiations for his release broke down. Police officers pursuing the abductors in the slum of Bel Air came under heavy gunfire from armed gangs. One officer was killed.

U.N. officials have said at least 130 people were kidnapped in Port-au-Prince in April. Statistics for May were not available.

At least 700 people -- including 40 police officers -- have been killed since September, when Aristide supporters called for intensified protests to demand his return from exile in South Africa.

Critics accuse the Haitian police of brutality, summary executions and persecution of pro-Aristide loyalists. The interim government says the police are outgunned and outnumbered by politically allied gangsters.

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