
Violence in the commercial center of Port-au-Prince: at least two fatalities result and fire consumes a police substation and the Tèt-Boeuf market

Port-au-Prince, May 31, 2005 (AHP)- Armed individuals set fire Tuesday to the police substation at Portail Saint-Joseph in the commercial center of Port-au-Prince.

The fire then spread and consumed the Tèt Boeuf market and some ten vehicles parked in the vicinity of the market.

The crackling of heavy gunfire was heard at the time the fire was set, creating a situation of generalized panic.

Two people were killed and several others wounded by gunshots, according to witnesses.

Among the injured is Henri Moral, the honorary French Consul serving Cap-Haitien, the country's second city.

As of late Tuesday afternoon he was said to be in critical condition at a hospital in the capital where members of his family and representatives of the French Embassy rushed to his bedside.

Residents in the area where the violence took place described it as being part of an operation targeting the police at the Portail Saint-Joseph station who have been accused of having executed two individuals for reasons that are not known.

The city's center emptied within a short period of time due to the violence: Shopkeepers lowered the iron awnings of their stores, street merchants, passers-by and Tap-Tap drivers were seen running in all directions.

Reports that some small scale vendors died in the fire could not be confirmed by the end of the afternoon.

However enormous losses were suffered, particularly at the Tèt-Boeuf market, because all the merchandise vanished in the flames.

The market vendors, their backs to the wall for some time already due to the precarious socio-economic situation, passionately expressed their desolation, appealing to the interim government to shoulder its responsibilities.

Volleys of gunfire accompanied by scenes of panic were experienced in several other parts of the Haitian capital, notably in Drouillard, La Saline and not far from the Champ-de-Mars, where the National Palace is located.

At the same time, further acts of kidnapping have been committed; two people were abducted on Rue Pétiou in the center of Port-au-Prince. They are employees of a commercial bank, according to witnesses.

The violence has intensified as the October date for the first elections announced for this year draws closer.

A diverse assortment of sectors has spoken out forcefully in recent days to criticize the way the electoral process is transpiring, while other sectors have come out clearly against the proposed elections.

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The EU has frozen 8 million euros that were to be applied toward organizing elections in Haiti; a Canadian consultant offers his critical analysis of how the electoral process is coming along

Port-au-Prince, May 31, 2005 (AHP)- Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) member Patrick Féquière announced Tuesday that the European Union has decided to block the release of 8 million euros earmarked for the electoral institution's work toward the elections announced for later this year.

According to the CEP's director of electoral operations, the European Union (EU) based its decision on what it saw as the dysfunctional state of the CEP.

EU officials reportedly urged the members of the electoral council to instill order into the electoral process, said Patrick Féquière.

He also discussed a devastating report by a Canadian consultant named Ron Gould regarding the status of the electoral process.

In his investigation, a copy of which has been obtained by AHP, Ron Gould singled out a series of problems that could constitute obstacles to the success of elections in Haiti.

He cited problems relating to fragmentation and disorganized approaches to planning and implementation of the electoral process. In his view, this stands in the way of the organization of well-run elections that take place without a hitch and are relatively inexpensive.

Criticizing the process of voter registration that has been set up, the Canadian consultant declared that this step is crucial and fundamental, not only because it establishes the foundation for all electoral activities in the future but also because it will allow Haitians to obtain a national identity card that will enable them to assert their civil rights.

Ron Gould also criticized the absence of an electoral calendar that takes into account all planned activities.

Touching on the question of the budget, he indicated that this is the most fragmented element of all. "None of the positions under this budget have been defined according to their priority and there is no emergency plan in the event of a budget shortfall", he explained.

The budget is nearly \$22 million short, said Ron Gould. This is more than one third of the proposed total of approximately \$62 million, and no international donor he contacted assured him that the \$22 million shortfall might be made available.

"The CEP is not a decision-making body that has been tasked with administrating the elections but is instead just a group of nine people", concluded Ron Gould.

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