

**French Diplomat Shot Dead in Haiti Capital**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Gunmen killed a French diplomat who was driving in Haiti's capital and stole his car, the latest example of rising violence in the hemisphere's poorest country, the French Embassy said Wednesday.

The killing of Paul-Henri Mourral, France's honorary consul to the northern city of Cap-Haitien, came less than a week after both the U.S. and French governments issued travel warnings for Haiti, citing a deteriorating security situation and an upsurge in carjackings and kidnappings.

Mourral was traveling on Haiti's main north-south highway, starting his trip back to Cap-Haitien from Port-au-Prince, when a group of men shot him, pulled him out of his vehicle and then stole it, said Eric Bosc, a French Embassy spokesman.

"We are still not sure how many bullets hit him," Bosc said. "There were many."

Mourral, 53, represented the commercial interests of the French community in Cap-Haitien, Bosc said. Mourral was born in Paris but had lived many years in Haiti. He is survived by his Haitian wife and two children, who are university students in France.

France asked the Haitian government to "put everything in place to identify and judge the authors of this assassination," Foreign Ministry spokesman Jean-Baptiste Mattei said Wednesday.

Bosc said embassy officials did not have a motive for the attack. Haiti national police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou said officers were investigating.

Haitian police and a 7,400-member U.N. peacekeeping force have struggled to control violence since the February 2004 rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Human rights group estimate that more than 700 people -- including 40 police officers -- have been killed in Port-au-Prince since September, when Aristide loyalists called for increased protests to demand his return from exile in South Africa.

The violence has increased as authorities prepare for municipal elections in October and the presidential election in November, which are intended to replace an interim government installed after Aristide's ouster.

Last week, the U.S. government issued a travel warning to American citizens and ordered the departure of nonessential embassy employees and their relatives.

"Visitors and residents must remain vigilant due to the absence of an effective police force ... and the possibility of random violent crime including kidnapping, carjacking and assault," the warning says.

The French government issued a travel warning Monday to tourists and businessmen, said Bosc, but it did not order families from the French diplomatic corps to leave the country.

On Tuesday, a fire ripped through a popular market in downtown Port-au-Prince a few minutes after armed men opened fire. At least seven people died from gunshot wounds or smoke inhalation, and three policemen were wounded during the attack, Coicou said. She said gangs were responsible for the attack.

When asked about the fire, U.S. Ambassador James Foley told reporters the security situation in Haiti was "serious and grave."

Foley said he believed Haitian police and U.N. peacekeepers were capable of confronting the violence but needed to develop a strategy.

"This situation is difficult, but it can change" for the better, Foley said.

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