

AHP News - June 5, 2005 - English translation (Unofficial)

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**At least 23 people have been killed and more than a dozen homes set on fire during raids by the police in the populist district of Bel-Air**  
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**Port-au-Prince, June 5, 2005 (AHP)-** At least 23 people were killed and more than a dozen homes set on fire during operations conducted Friday and Saturday by patrols from the Haitian National Police (PNH) in the populist district of Bel-Air in Port-au-Prince.

At least 17 residents of this district were killed on Saturday alone.

Various officials of the PNH reached by telephone Saturday refused to comment on the deadly raids. However pro-government sectors claimed that those who were killed were bandits.

Numerous family members and close friends of the victims declared for their part that the victims were members of the civilian population, because the people who are used to exchanging gunfire with the police had time to flee the area, they said.

"The police know full well (who the victims are) but their objective, in targeting the entire population, is to empty the populist districts in anticipation of the elections, whose progress is stalled", said several indignant residents of Bel-Air.

Severely criticized by the interim government and by close supporters of the regime because of the "refusal by the UN Mission (MINUSTAH) to support the raids by the police in the populist districts reputed to be supportive of President Aristide, the MINUSTAH military commander, Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, declared Friday that he would never order a massacre in the populist districts.

The interventions must never be made blindly in the populist districts, he said. The creation of innocent victims must be avoided, he replied to his accusers during a meeting organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Haiti (CCIH).

The spokesperson for the Brazilian UN troops, Colonel Carlos Barcelos, tried Saturday to distance himself from the police raids of the past 48 hours, indicating that "the troops of MINUSTAH did not participate directly" (in these operations).

Violence and insecurity have reached disturbing proportions in recent weeks, marked above all by killings and abductions in which various sectors of the population are said to be involved, including police officers, police spokesperson Gessy Cameau Coicou indicated recently.

However, it is first and foremost the inhabitants of the populist districts, notably the residents of Bel-Air and Cite Soleil who are accused of responsibility for all the violence due to the fact, they said, that they are calling for the return of President Aristide, who was forced to leave Haiti on February 29, 2004 and is currently living in exile in South Africa.

Following the arson attack Wednesday at one of the main public markets in the capital, (the Tête Boeuf market), which left some 10 people dead and caused substantial property damage, the interim Minister of

Justice, Bernard Gousse announced that the authors of the acts of violence as well as the places where they are located, would be struck.

He also announced that the Swat Team specialized unit of the Haitian national police had received the support of members of a foreign Swat Team, however he refused to identify the country of origin of the reinforcements.

The interim Prime Minister, Gérard Latortue for his part said that his government is in the process of preparing a proportional response to the bandits who set fire Tuesday to the Tête Boeuf market.

Latortue had declared however that he would avoid resorting to blind repression in his fight against the bandits.

He announced measures aimed at helping the victims and called on those responsible for the security of the country to assume their responsibilities, and announced at the same time some changes in the team in charge of security for the country.

According to police sources, the interim authorities are aware that former haitian soldiers, as well as individuals who had been forcibly deported from U.S. prisons, and groups of civilians who had taken up arms in February 2004, are still very active.

Indeed, former Haitian soldiers have returned to their base in Pernelles (Central Plateau) along the Haitian-Dominican border, from which they launched attacks in 2004 and held the population hostage under the Aristide government.

**AHP June 5, 2005 12:30 PM**

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