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**A New Scourge Afflicts Haiti: Kidnappings**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, June 5 -- She is a bank teller. Her husband delivers air mail packages for DHL.

In a country where about 70 percent of adults have no jobs, that means Gehanne and Jacques-Henri Beaulieu are worth a small fortune.

On Tuesday, it was taken.

As Mrs. Beaulieu arrived for work on Tuesday, in broad daylight, on the busy Rue des Miracles, three men carrying long guns forced their way into her car. Within the hour, they called her husband by cellphone and demanded \$20,000.

"If you do not give us the money," a voice said, at once gentle and cold, "we will execute her."

Emptying his bank accounts, Mr. Beaulieu came up with only \$2,700. He began calling friends and relatives, many in the United States, asking desperately for money.

"I asked everybody I knew, 'Please help me get my wife back,'" he said less than two hours after the kidnapping, still in the heat of panic, after friends of his family helped a reporter contact him. "If I get her back, I am going to send her away from here."

"This country is out of control," he said. "No one is safe."

Indeed, more than a year after the start of yet another conflict-ridden political transition, it is hard to tell who, if anyone, has taken charge in Haiti.

After an armed rebellion, months of violent political clashes here in the capital, and heavy pressure by the United States forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from office in February 2004, the world pledged some \$1.4 billion in aid, and the United Nations sent more than 8,000 peacekeepers to help a shaky interim government bring order to this, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

But chaos still reigns. In just the past two weeks, gunmen fired on a United States Embassy van, and the State Department ordered all nonessential personnel to leave the country. A French honorary counsel, Paul-Henri Mourral, was shot to death on the road between Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien on Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday, gunmen chased police officers into a popular market, and then set the market on fire, killing at least 10 people. And on Saturday, as many as seven people were killed and six houses burned as the police struck back against gangs in Bel-Air, a violent slum. It does not take long on the streets here to see that Haiti's problems go deep and wide. Even supporters of the interim government describe it as far too weak to instill confidence and negotiate peace among the country's disparate political factions. Foreign observers say the international community has failed to undertake the long, hard and dangerous work needed to rebuild Haiti, almost from scratch. Many Haitians openly wonder if there is enough money and manpower in the world to do

that.

By the accounts of diplomats and political observers, human rights activists and business people, this remains a country poised for implosion, with almost all its institutions ravaged from the inside out by corruption. Ruthless mobs have risen in their place, led by drug traffickers, former military officers, corrupt police officers and street thugs. They have set off a devastating wave of murders, carjackings, armed robberies and rapes.

Kidnappings are the latest scourge.

Like most crimes, kidnappings tend to go unreported. But authorities in the interim government and foreign diplomats estimate that 6 to 12 kidnappings occur in this city every day. Among them are high-profile cases, like the recent abductions of an Indian businessman and of a Russian contractor to the United Nations. Some authorities said they had received reports of vegetable vendors being kidnapped for \$30.

An overwhelming majority of the cases seem aimed at the middle and working classes. Afraid to go to the police, most families negotiate with kidnappers on their own. Mrs. Beaulieu's family negotiated for hours by cellphone with a kidnapper who called himself "commandant."

About 4 p.m. on Tuesday, her relatives told him they had \$4,000. The commandant said he would take it, and he told Michel Lapin, 39, Mrs. Beaulieu's brother-in-law, to come alone after nightfall to deliver the ransom at a house in Bel-Air.

When Mr. Lapin got there, he said, four men shone flashlights in his eyes. One shoved a gun into his stomach; another grabbed the bag from his hands and began counting the money.

Then the commandant emerged. Apparently unconcerned about being identifiable, he looked Mr. Lapin in the eye, thanked him for the money and said Mrs. Beaulieu would be released within a few hours.

Sobbing, she was freed about 8:30 p.m. at a street corner near Bel-Air.

"No one is safe anymore," said Kako Bourjolly, a family friend. "This is not a rich family. This is not a political family. They are simple Haitian people, with simple lives. But now danger is outside all our doors."

A report released last week by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group laid the blame for most of Haiti's violence on "spoilers," including drug traffickers, who are well-connected to the political system but have no real allegiances. In a news conference on Friday, Prime Minister Gerard Latortue said many of the leaders of the gangs inciting violence were Haitians who had spent time in American prisons.

"The United States is exporting its crime problems to Haiti," Mr. Latortue said. "Many of the criminals in Haiti learned to be criminals in the United States, and when they are deported here, they bring those skills with them."

Danielle Magloire, a spokeswoman for Haiti's temporary governing group, the so-called Council of the Wise, agreed. "There's no real ideological fighting in Haiti," she said in an interview. "The criminals here are not political activists. They are mercenaries."

Still, other observers said, the violence in Haiti has its roots in politics. Human Rights Watch said in a letter to the United Nations last month that former members of the military, including many led by those who helped oust Mr. Aristide, were responsible for rampant abuses in the provinces, including illegal detentions and extortion.

Here in the capital, poor slums like Bel-Air and Cite Soleil, dominated by pro-Aristide gangs called chimeres, remain almost impenetrable to the police.

John Currelly, a Canadian who represents the Washington-based Pan American Development Foundation, was kidnapped on May 24 by five men carrying cheap pistols, some of them held together by duct tape. He was released 16 hours later. Most of the men who held him had images of Mr. Aristide taped to the butts of their rifles.

In all, human rights groups report, more than 700 people, including seven peacekeepers, have been killed in the last eight months. The Haitian National Police -- an estimated 3,000 officers assigned to cover a population approximately equal to that of New York City, over a geographical area 35 times the size -- have said they do not have the kinds of weapons and training they need. The United Nations peacekeeping force has more than 6,000 soldiers, but they have been criticized here and in Washington for failing to dismantle and disarm the gangs.

The United States ambassador to Haiti, James B. Foley, said in an interview that the Brazilian-led United Nations peacekeepers seemed crippled by understandable concerns about casualties among their own as well as among the people they have been sent to protect.

Mr. Foley said Haiti -- where most people live on \$1 a day, more than 40 percent of children are malnourished, and childbirth is the second leading cause of death among women -- faced myriad challenges as it struggled for stability. But, he said, unless the government took control of the streets, it would make no real progress on any other front.

He said that police reforms were crucial to fighting crime, and that the United States was considering a one-time waiver of its ban on the sale of weapons to Haiti in order to approve a request by the Haitian government to buy \$1.7 million in equipment for law enforcement.

"Haiti is close to a failed state," Mr. Foley said. "Many people have looked at the current mission as Haiti's last chance to have a huge international effort to help it become self-sustaining."

When asked why the United States had not committed troops, he said that it had sent troops last year and would spend some \$200 million helping Haiti this year alone. But he pointed out that the United States was also occupied with its international campaign against terrorism.

The growing insecurity in the capital has raised new fears. Authorities warn they may not be able to protect their people from the coming hurricane season, much less organize them for national elections scheduled to begin in October. The main roads from the capital to the international airport and seaport are considered unsafe. The United States and several other countries, including Britain, Australia and Canada, have issued warnings in recent weeks about an increase in attacks against foreigners and cautioned their citizens not to travel here.

Schools and businesses in the center of the city have closed. Well-to-do Haitians with relatives abroad have begun to leave the country. Those who stay say they are increasingly afraid to leave their homes.

Jean-Gerard Gilbert, the director of a private high school in the city's center, was abducted at 6:30 a.m. Wednesday at the school's front gate. His wife, Maryse Gilbert, said he called her half an hour later.

"I've been kidnapped," he told her. "They shot me two times in my feet."

Then Mrs. Gilbert said the kidnappers snatched the phone and demanded \$200,000. "Where am I supposed to get that kind of money?" she asked them.

After hours of negotiations, Mrs. Gilbert said, she and the kidnappers reached an agreement on the ransom. She would not reveal the amount, but said that relatives had delivered the money, and that the kidnappers promised to release her husband.

At 8 p.m. Wednesday, they called to say that her husband was in a coma.

On Thursday morning, Mr. Gilbert was still missing. His students held a demonstration outside their school to demand his safe return.

A gunman drove by and opened fire on them. Two students were wounded and taken to the hospital.

Mrs. Gilbert remained alone at the school on Thursday afternoon, waiting for her cellphone to ring.

"I don't know where to go," she said. "I don't know what to do."

Photos: Taisa Naar, 14 months old, with her mother, Manoushca Douyon Naar, in Port-au-Prince last week. Taisa was kidnapped several weeks ago by armed men who released her after her family paid an unspecified ransom. (Photo by Michael Kamber for The New York Times)(pg. A6); Gehanne Beaulieu, center, a Haitian bank teller, was comforted by a relative after being released by kidnappers on Tuesday in Port-au-Prince. (Photo by Michael Kamber for The New York Times)(pg. A1)

Map of Haiti highlighting Port-au-Prince: In Port-au-Prince, many areas are too dangerous for police to enter. (pg. A6)

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