

Maxine Waters says Noriega is undermining Democracy in Haiti	News HaitiAction.net
June 10, 2005	
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Congresswoman
Maxine Waters

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Washington, D.C. - Today, on Capitol Hill, Rep. Maxine Waters (CA-35) released a statement on Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega's visit to Haiti. The Congresswoman's statement follows:

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega's recent trip to Haiti filled with contradictions - if not outright hypocrisy. Mr. Noriega urged the United Nations to respond to the escalating violence in Haiti and provide security for the elections that have been scheduled for the fall. What Mr. Noriega failed to acknowledge is that he is largely responsible for Haiti's chaos.

Roger Noriega, as the State Department's top diplomat for the Western Hemisphere, presided over a coup d'etat in Haiti last year. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected President of Haiti, was forced to leave Haiti on February 29, 2004, in a regime supported by the United States. The tragic results of that regime change are abundantly clear. The interim government, which was put in power by the United States and has received unprecedented support from our government, is a complete failure. Kidnappings, murder and other forms of violence are widespread. Dead bodies can be found lying in the streets.

Human rights violations have been occurring with impunity since the coup d'etat. Amnesty International has expressed serious concerns about arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment in detention centers, and summary executions attributed to members of the Haitian National Police. It has been estimated that there are over 700 political prisoners in Haiti, and most of these prisoners have been detained illegally for months without formal charges. Several former government officials and prominent supporters of President Aristide's political party, including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, and Haitian singer Anne Auguste, are among those detained illegally.

If Mr. Noriega really cared about the people of Haiti, he might have visited some of the political prisoners in Haiti's prisons. One prisoner he certainly should have visited is former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. Prime Minister Neptune has been held in prison for about a year without being formally charged in violation of the Haitian constitution. He is now in the second month of a hunger strike to protest his illegal imprisonment. He is reported to be so weak that he cannot walk, and he slips in and out of consciousness. His life is in grave danger and he will probably die if the interim government does not release him immediately.

If Mr. Noriega had met with Prime Minister Neptune while he was in Haiti, he would have sent a strong signal to the interim government that the United States does not support the illegal detention of political opponents. He might have also embarrassed the interim government.

releasing Prime Minister Neptune and thereby saved his life.

If Mr. Noriega really cared about democracy in Haiti, he might have condemned the recent decision of the Haitian Supreme Court to annul the convictions of over a dozen former soldiers and death squad members who were involved in a brutal massacre in 1994. The soldiers and death squad members were convicted in November of 2000 for their participation in a massacre in Raboteau, a low-income neighborhood in Haiti, in which at least eight people were murdered. The Supreme Court's decision, which was based on a technicality, probably opens the door to the release of one of Haiti's most notorious criminals, Louis-Jodel Chamblain, the second-in-command of the brutal death squad known as FRAPH.

If Mr. Noriega had condemned the Haitian Supreme Court's decision to overturn the convictions of those responsible for the Raboteau massacre, he would have sent a strong signal to the interim government that the United States believes that people who commit human rights violations should be prosecuted.

Instead of demanding an end to political imprisonment and human rights violations, Mr. Noriega has resorted to blaming the United Nations for the lack of security in Haiti. Ironically, Mr. Noriega embarked on his visit to Haiti while the Organization of American States (OAS) was concluding its meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. At the OAS meeting, the Bush Administration tried to urge the OAS to create a committee to monitor the exercise of democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

It is hypocritical for the Bush Administration to advocate democracy at the OAS, when the Administration was responsible for dismantling democracy in Haiti and while Roger Noriega continues to undermine democracy in Haiti. It is time for the hypocrisy to end.

