

**Canadian woman kidnapped in Haiti, latest in string of abductions**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - A Canadian woman was kidnapped in Haiti's capital, the latest victim in a string of recent abductions, officials said Monday.

The woman, whose identity was not released, was kidnapped Sunday in the volatile Delmas area of the capital, Port-au-Prince, U.N. Civilian Police spokeswoman Heidi Hoffman said.

The Canadian Broadcasting Company reported the woman is a 65-year-old native of Montreal who was running a telephone calling-card company in Haiti. The woman's husband said her kidnapers have demanded a US\$300,000 ransom, the CBC reported.

Hoffman said U.N. authorities were assisting Haiti's National Police in the case.

Canadian Embassy spokeswoman Caroline Desrochers said officials "are working with the family" of the woman but declined to give further details, saying Canada doesn't publicly discuss kidnappings.

A recent surge in kidnappings has compounded difficulties facing Haiti's ill-equipped police force and a 7,400-member U.N. peacekeeping force struggling to curb violence ahead of key fall elections.

U.N. officials have said at least 130 people were abducted in Port-au-Prince in April. Statistics for May were not available.

The U.S. State Department last month warned Americans against traveling to Haiti and instructed U.S. personnel whose jobs are not essential to leave -- the first such order since the February 2004 rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

At least 700 people -- including 40 police officers -- have been killed since September, when Aristide supporters intensified protests to demand his return from exile in South Africa.

Critics accuse the Haitian police of brutality, summary executions and persecution of pro-Aristide loyalists. The interim government says the police are outgunned and outnumbered by politically allied gangsters.

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