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**Gunfire erupts as new Haiti ministers take office**

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, June 22 (Reuters) - Heavy gunfire erupted near Haiti's presidential palace on Wednesday as interim president Boniface Alexandre delivered a speech at a ceremony to appoint four new cabinet members.

It was not clear if the gunmen fired directly on the palace, but the gunshots created panic outside the building in Port-au-Prince. The ceremony continued and there was no word of any casualties.

U.N. troops, part of a peacekeeping force who were guarding the palace, did not shoot.

Officials at the ceremony blamed the shooting on armed gangs loyal to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide seeking to disrupt the event, but this could not immediately be verified.

The gunfire underscored the political and criminal unrest that has dogged the impoverished Caribbean nation since Aristide was forced into exile in February 2004, pushed out by an armed revolt and U.S. and French pressure to quit.

At least 780 people have been killed in violence in Haiti since last September and since March the country has been hit by hundreds of kidnappings for ransom.

Wednesday's ceremony was to formally appoint three new ministers and a deputy minister named by interim President Boniface Alexandre and Prime Minister Gerard Latortue in a cabinet shuffle aimed at breathing new life into the government.

Henri Dorlean, an adviser to Alexandre, became Justice Minister, replacing Bernard Gousse, who had resigned. Also appointed were ministers for the departments of the interior and social affairs, and a deputy social affairs minister.

In his remarks, Alexandre urged the new justice minister to be tough on crime and to "take appropriate measures aimed at putting an end to impunity and prolonged preventive custody."

The judicial system is chaotic in Haiti with the majority of people in prisons not yet tried. Additionally, Aristide loyalists say the authorities have imprisoned hundreds of supporters of the former president. The government has denied there has been political persecution.

Haiti is preparing to hold a ballot on Oct. 9 to elect local government officials, while legislative and presidential elections are to be held on Nov. 13. But there is concern that instability could hamper the elections. Voter registration and other preparations are falling behind schedule.

The U.N. Security Council meanwhile voted unanimously on Wednesday to add 1,000 soldiers and police to the U.N. peacekeeping mission ahead of the elections. The mission was sent in to help stabilize the country after Aristide's departure.

The increases would bring Brazilian-led U.N. military personnel to 7,500 from the current 6,700 and raise the number of police to 1,897 from 1,622.

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