

Tab 89

Press Release

Organization of American States



IACHR DEPLORES ESCALATING VIOLENCE IN HAITI June 23, 2005

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) wishes to express its grave concern over the escalating violence in the Republic of Haiti in recent months, which continues to claim lives on a daily basis and has nearly paralyzed the regular activities of Haitians, particularly those living in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The Commission has been informed of numerous serious incidents of violence, many of which have been perpetrated in the context of confrontations between illegal armed gangs and members of the Haitian National Police, (HNP), and which have claimed the lives of numerous civilians caught in the cross-fire. In recent months, the Haitian capital has also been gripped by a wave of violent incidents, and in particular, kidnappings, attacks on members of the transitional government, members of the business community, members of the HNP, and many others. The multiple kidnappings perpetrated in a day, the generalized nature of these incidents, and the new phenomenon of targeting children for abduction are all signs of how this wave of violence has taken on a new degree of severity.

The Commission condemns these acts of violence. While the Commission notes that some efforts are being made to assume greater control over the situation, such as the creation of a special unit within the HNP to investigate kidnappings and the launching of a crime hotline by the UN Stabilization Force's civilian police component, the Commission considers that the current state of insecurity must be confronted more decisively by the government, in collaboration with the international community. As the Commission has previously observed, this ultimately requires the rigorous implementation of a comprehensive security and disarmament plan and urgent measures to enhance the capacity of the Haitian National Police. Without immediate and decisive measures to contain the violence, the Commission is concerned that the fall elections so vital to the country's stability and progress will be jeopardized. In this regard, the Commission is encouraged by the recent decision taken by the U.N. Security Council in its Resolution 1608 (2005) to increase the number of military troops and civilian police.

The Commission also remains concerned about reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions as well as the rate of prolonged pre-trial detention in the country. In this connection, the Commission reiterates its concern over the prolonged delay by the Haitian justice system to conduct a timely investigation into the case of Mr. Yvon Neptune, as well as to determine the legality of his arrest and detention. The Commission emphasizes the prohibition against arbitrary arrests and detentions enshrined in Article 7 of the American Convention, and reiterates the State's obligation to ensure that its efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes are undertaken through demonstrably fair and effective procedures that conform to international standards of due process.

The Commission will continue to closely monitor events in Haiti and to provide assistance within its mandate in overcoming the challenges facing Haiti and its people.

Washington, D.C. June 23, 2005

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