

Tab 95

Human Rights Body Concerned Over Escalating Violence in Haiti

Country "nearly paralyzed" by violence, says inter-American commission

By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- A human rights body of the Organization of American States (OAS) has expressed grave concern over the recently escalating violence in Haiti, which the organization says has "nearly paralyzed" the regular activities of Haitians, particularly those living in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

In a June 23 statement, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said it has been informed of numerous serious incidents of violence in Haiti, much of it in clashes between illegal armed gangs and members of the Haitian National Police. The clashes have claimed the lives of numerous civilians caught in the crossfire, said the commission.

In recent months, Port-au-Prince has been gripped by a wave of violent incidents, and in particular, kidnappings and attacks on members of Haiti's transitional government, members of the business community, officers of the Haitian National Police and many others. The multiple kidnappings perpetrated each day -- 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 OAS commission said.

The commission said some efforts are being made to assume greater control over the situation, such as the creation of a special unit within the Haitian National Police to investigate kidnappings and the launching of a crime hotline by the civilian police component of MINUSTAH, the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

Nonetheless, the commission said, the current state of insecurity must be confronted more decisively by Haiti's transitional government in collaboration with the international community. Such action, it said, requires the "rigorous implementation of a comprehensive security and disarmament plan" and urgent measures to enhance the ability of the Haitian National Police to quell the violence.

Without "immediate and decisive measures" to contain the violence, the commission said it is concerned that upcoming elections scheduled for later in 2005, "so vital to the country's stability and progress," will be jeopardized.

In this regard, the commission said it is encouraged by the decision taken by the U.N. Security Council June 22 to increase the number of military troops and civilian police in MINUSTAH.

The Security Council announced it was extending its peacekeeping mission in Haiti until February 15, 2006, with the intention to renew it longer as needed. MINUSTAH will add more than 1,000 troops and civilian police to its force in the Caribbean nation.

With the additional troops and civilian police, MINUSTAH will have almost 9,400 personnel in Haiti, the Security Council said.

The United States, one of a number of countries from the Western Hemisphere in the MINUSTAH contingent, is providing some of the civilian police and military personnel.

The OAS commission also reiterated its concern about reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as the rate of prolonged pre-trial detention in the country.

For its part, the United Nations said in a June 23 statement that the leaders of MINUSTAH were "determined" to end the state of insecurity in Haiti.

The United Nations said MINUSTAH continued to battle attacks and abductions in Port-au-Prince, with a Brazilian soldier being the latest peacekeeper shot and seriously wounded in the city's impoverished district of Cité Soleil.

The Brazilian officer was shot in the chest June 22 during a joint patrol by MINUSTAH military and civilian forces and the Haitian National Police in the Cité Soleil district. The wounded soldier underwent surgery in the Dominican Republic and was reported to be in stable condition.

The exchange of gunfire between U.N. peacekeepers and armed groups has intensified since a successful jailbreak in February. The United Nations said 400 of the escaped prisoners are still at large.

In another Port-au-Prince district called Bel-Air, one of the Brazilian units of MINUSTAH freed a Haitian customs employee, who had been held for two days, and placed her five suspected kidnappers in the custody of Haiti's police.

During the Bel-Air operation, MINUSTAH also seized weapons, valuable objects, and a large amount of illegal drugs.

Created: 24 Jun 2005 Updated: 24 Jun 2005

This page printed from: <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Jun/27-259052.html>