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US scales back Haiti embassy staff amid unrest

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PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) - The United States embassy said it was scaling down its operations in Haiti amid ongoing unrest, while local radio said Haitian police had freed a hostage from his kidnappers.

Citing security concerns, the US embassy said in a statement that it was reducing its headcount at the embassy for the second time in a month. A Haitian employee of the embassy was shot dead Sunday in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood.

The embassy said the move would close the visa office to immigrants and non immigrants seeking to travel to the United States. However, the statement said Haitians requiring urgent medical treatment or students would still be served by the office.

Separately, local radio said Haitian police had freed businessman Jean Robert Coles and captured three suspected kidnappers.

Coles told Signal radio he had been held in the basement of a building in the city's Delmas neighborhood by kidnappers who had demanded 200,000 dollars for his release.

The UN Security Council last Wednesday decided to send more than 1,000 extra peacekeepers to Haiti in a bid to improve security ahead of elections later this year in the impoverished, strife-torn Caribbean nation.