

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.

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Tab 96

US scales back Haiti embassy staff amid unrest

AFP

June 28, 2005

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.

Tab 97

The bodies of a couple arrested by the police are discovered at the morgue of the General Hospital; their families are seeking justice

Port-au-Prince, June 28, 2005 (AHP)- The families of a young couple, Brusso Rubens and Nadia Sanon, spoke out in condemnation Tuesday of what they described as the brutal disappearance of the two whose bodies were discovered at the morgue of the HUEH (Hospital of the State University of Haiti).

Their families insist that the couple was arrested by the police during the evening of June 22 in the vicinity of the PNH Anti-Gang Service headquarters in Port-au-Prince only to be summarily executed afterwards.

Nadia Sanon was four months pregnant, said her family.

One of her brothers said he had racing to all the police stations in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince looking for them without success.

A police official told AHP when reached by telephone that the PNH has no information on this case.

However, according to rumors, the police accused the young couple of being involved in acts of kidnapping.

As for kidnappings, the owner of a garage was abducted last Saturday in Tabarre and two individuals who were kidnapped last week were set free. The Director of the Anti-Corruption Unit, Amos Durosier, was freed Monday after his family paid a large sum of money as ransom, and Jean Robert Coles was released as a result of a police operation in Delmas 2.

However it is said that the owner of the Hotel El Rancho, Gladys Sylvéra, is still in the hands of her abductors.

MINUSTAH troops were hard at work throughout the weekend in several parts of the capital, notably in more well to do residential neighborhoods looking for Mme. Sylvéra.

In other news of suspicious disappearance, a young man named Pouchon Louis has been reported disappeared. He is said to have been arrested by police in Tabarre. His family has had no news of him.

AHP June 28, 2005 11:45 AM

The U.S. Consulate reduces its numbers of personnel in Haiti. Airline executives are dissatisfied with the revenue figures for their flights to Haiti

Port-au-Prince, June 28, 2005 (AHP)- The U.S. Consulate has once again decided to cut the numbers of its personnel in Haiti. The decision follows the lynching of one of its employees in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood. Sources close to the U.S. Embassy insist there is no connection between the lynching and the staff cuts.

However this action taken by the Consulate is having an impact on requests for visas to the U.S. as the time now required for receiving appointments is growing longer.

Other diplomatic missions are in the process of taking similar action.

At the same time, airline companies are complaining that their flights to Haiti are no longer profitable; travelers are choosing to postpone their vacations to Haiti this year or are selecting other destinations.

Airline officials are also complaining of shortfalls of hundreds of millions of dollars. According to some generally reliable sources, they might be compelled to make some difficult decisions if nothing is done to end the insecurity in Haiti.

In addition, many Haitian families have decided to leave the country for good due to the climate of violence and insecurity.


A great number of schools might also find their populations seriously reduced over the next school year for the same reasons.

AHP June 28, 2005 3:00 PM

Tab 98

UN Peacekeeping Chief: Haiti Worse than Darfur

By Peter Heinlein
United Nations
28 June 2005

Heinlein report - Download 447k 

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A Brazilian UN peacekeeper patrols the exterior of the church of Notre Dame du Perpetuel

The head of U.N. peacekeeping operations says conditions in parts of Haiti are worse than in Sudan's devastated Darfur region. The official expressed concern that even a newly strengthened peacekeeping force may be unable to provide security for upcoming elections in Haiti's lawless regions.

Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno says Haiti is at the tipping point. With less than 100 days to go before elections begin, it is an open question whether Haitians can break the long cycle of violence and political failure that has left their country the poorest in the western hemisphere.

The U.N. Security Council recently authorized an additional 1,000 peacekeepers for Haiti through the election season. That brings the total number of U.N. troops to about 8,500. But Mr. Guehenno, who just returned from a five-day tour of the country, predicts that even if the elections can produce a new government, Haiti will need massive foreign assistance, and U.N. peacekeeping troops, for many years.

"One has to recognize it's no quick fix in Haiti. At the moment, the police is broken, they have no resources, no electricity, no phones, no nothing, often no uniforms, cars, the judiciary is weak. So long as you don't have an effective law and order structure that is trusted by people, seen as fair, impartial, has basic means to deliver law and order, you need an international presence there. You don't create a police and rebuild a judiciary in a few months," he said.

Mr. Guehenno added that the plight of Haitians may be even worse than that of the internally displaced people (IDPs) in Sudan's Darfur region, considered the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

"A month ago I was in Darfur, and God knows the situation of the IDPs there is tragic, but at least, thanks to the mobilization of the international community, you see IDPs in camps in al Fasher or cities in Darfur, they have medical facilities, there is drinking water, there are latrines. It's a terrible situation, but some of the basics are being provided by the international community. The Haitians in Cap Haitien, this is a quiet place, they have no drinking water, no latrines, garbage not collected, situation is squalor, its terrible. They are in [a] worse situation than some of the IDPs I saw in Darfur," he noted.

Mr. Guehenno expressed concern that even with 1,000 additional troops, the U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti may not be strong enough to ensure free and fair elections.

"The troops will never enforce peace if the people are not at peace with themselves," he explained. "If in the elections the Haitians demonstrate they are prepared to focus on the real problems of the country, then our presence even in limited numbers can really help provide that political space. If we see a very polarized situation, I'm worried that the troops won't be enough."

Foreign donors last year pledged more than \$1 billion in development aid for Haiti, but Mr. Guehenno says only a tiny fraction of the funds has been disbursed. He blames bureaucratic obstacles for the delays, and urges donors to make good on their pledges.

U.N. troops were sent to Haiti after former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by a popular uprising in February 2004. More than 700 Haitians, including dozens of police officers, have been killed since last September, when Aristide supporters stepped up their campaign for his return from exile in South Africa.

Print

Tab 99

Juan Gabriel Valdès justifies the fact that the PNH was put under the MINUSTHA's control

Port-au-Prince, June 29, 2005 (AHP)- Special Representative of the United Nations' Secretary General in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdès, justified Wednesday the decision taken by the Security Council to give the MINUSTAH the power of control over the Haitian National Police.

According to Juan Gabriel Valdès, this decision is part of the measures taken to make the National Police of Haiti more efficient. This resolution fixes for the first time, clearly and precisely, the MINUSTAH's responsibilities towards the police institution, Mr. Valdès declared. "The MINUSTAH wants the national police to become a professional force", he said.

Different sources at the UN said these last few weeks that the world organization had serious reserves about the way the PNH was running. All operations lead by this institution, notably in populist districts of the capital, turn to a catastrophe, one of those sources pointed out.

The main question is to know the role of the PNH Higher Council or to know if Interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue is still at the presidency.

The Security Council authorized in its last resolution on Haiti the sending of 1000 additional soldiers for the security of the country during the electoral period. That will put the number of United Nations soldiers up to 8500.

AHP 29 juin 2005 10:45 AM

*Former Mayor of Port-au-Prince under the military regime of General Henri Namphy, Franck Romain, said Wednesday that he intended to participate on all levels to the elections announced for this year. In an interview on channel 11, former Colonel of the Army of Haiti declared he was in favor of a dialogue between all sectors.

He had gone into hiding in the Dominican Republic for a first time after Namphy's fall in September 1988 because of the accusations against him for his presumed involvement in the massacre of Saint-Jean Bosco on September 11, 1988. He came back during the period of the September 1991 coup d'état against President Aristide, and went back to the Dominican Republic when Aristide came back from exile in 1994.

Tab 100

An ICRC employee in Haiti has been found dead after he was kidnapped

Port-au-Prince, June 30, 2005 (AHP)- An employee of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Haiti was found dead Thursday after having been kidnapped Wednesday as he was returning home, according to a statement from the international organization.

"The ICRC is extremely moved by the loss of this collaborator who has demonstrated his commitment for the past ten years in support of the organization's humanitarian objectives. The ICRC expresses its deepest sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues", the statement declared.

The International Committee of the Red Cross expressed "its profound concern" at the deterioration of the security situation, which constitutes an additional threat to the Haitian population, the note continued.

The kidnapping took place against the backdrop of a similar incident, as an employee of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations was kidnapped June 28 and released unharmed the following day after an intervention by MINUSTAH forces.

The ICRC delegation in Haiti will continue to fulfill its mission through neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian actions to benefit the populations affected by the violence that is presently gripping the country, the ICRC communiqué concluded.

AHP June 30, 2005 5:15 PM

Mirebalais, June 30, 2005 (AHP)- A resident of Mirebalais (in the Central Plateau) was kidnapped several days ago by individuals who demanded a significant sum of money be paid as ransom in order to obtain her release.

The husband of the victim, who spoke out Wednesday against the kidnapping, said that it is totally impossible for him to obtain access to such a large sum of money.

He appealed to the interim government to provide security for the population and condemned the action of these men who are in the process, he said, of increasing his suffering at a moment when extreme poverty rages in Haiti.

Hundreds of people have been abducted over the past few months in Port-au-Prince.

Provincial cities, which also suffer from insecurity, were until now spared this new form of criminal behavior.

AHP June 30, 2005 11:55 AM

The spokesperson for Lavalas activists in Bel-Air accuses the police and MINUSTAH of conducting blind operations in the populist districts

Port-au-Prince, June 30, 2005 (AHP)- The spokesperson for Lavalas activists in the populist district of Bel-Air, Mr. Samba Boukman, denounced on Thursday what he described as the brutal interventions of MINUSTAH soldiers in this populist district.

The rights of Haitians, he observed, are in no way respected during these operations.

"I have no problem with the police and MINUSTAH fulfilling their missions, but they must avoid creating innocent victims", he declared.

At least seven people were killed Wednesday during a joint operation by the national police and MINUSTAH.

Mr. Boukman, speaking for the Lavalas activists of Bel-Air, indicated that these types of operations will inevitably lead to massacres, because, he said, they are conducted blindly.

He denounced the killing last week of the Sanon couple, Luben and Nadia. She was four months pregnant.

AHP June 30, 2005 12:35 PM