

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Haiti: International Forces Must Assert Control

More Troops Urgently Needed to Protect Human Rights

(New York, March 3, 2004) – International troops must immediately begin to assert effective control over Port-au-Prince and the rest of Haiti, Human Rights Watch said today. In the power vacuum existing after the fall of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government, armed rebel forces exercise de facto authority over the country and are reportedly engaging in reprisal killings.

The rebel forces entered Port-au-Prince on Monday and immediately took over government buildings, including the former headquarters of the Haitian army. At a press conference held on Tuesday, rebel leader Guy Philippe declared himself "military chief" of the army. "The country is in my hands," he reportedly stated.

"It is irresponsible for the international community to abdicate effective power over Haiti to armed insurgents whose leaders include men responsible for some of Haiti's worst abuses," said Joanne Mariner, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Americas Division. "To do so would be a recipe for continued violence."

Although detailed information was not yet available, Human Rights Watch has already received reports of reprisal killings of Aristide supporters in Port-au-Prince.

U.S. government spokesmen have dismissed the rebels' claimed role in governing Haiti, but U.S. military forces have failed to back up such statements with action. Although U.S., French and Canadian forces are in Port-au-Prince, they have shown little indication of challenging the rebels' control over the city.

Among the leaders of the insurgency are such notorious figures as Louis Jodel Chamblain, a former paramilitary responsible for countless atrocities under the military government that ruled Haiti from 1991 to 1994. The rebels have stated their intention of reestablishing the Haitian military, an institution with a long and shameful history of repressing political movements and propping up authoritarian governments. The army was disbanded by then-President Aristide in the wake of the 1994 U.S. military intervention in Haiti.

Human Rights Watch called on the United States and other countries to send additional troops to Haiti to secure the country in accordance with the U.N. Security Council's February 29 resolution. This resolution authorizes the immediate deployment of a Multinational Interim Force to "contribute to a secure and stable environment in the Haitian capital and elsewhere in the country."

"Haiti remains unstable and insecure," said Mariner. "The international community must take rapid steps to take the country back from armed criminals and thugs who are now in control of the country."

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