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Press Conference: Friday, April 16, 11am, National Lawyers Guild Office, 143 Madison Avenue, 4th Floor (212-679-5100).

DELEGATION OF LAWYERS TO REPORT ON MEETING WITH ARISTIDE

Lawyers Investigate Violations of International Law Surrounding de facto Haitian Government Following February Coup

On Tuesday, April 13, 2004, a delegation of lawyers representing the National Lawyers Guild, American Association of Jurists, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, National Conference of Black Lawyers, and Bureau des Avocats Internationaux met with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti and his wife, Mme. Mildred Aristide in Jamaica, where they were granted temporary asylum. Jamaica and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member countries have resisted intense U.S. pressure by calling for an investigation by the United Nations into the circumstances that led to President Aristide's departure from Haiti. The delegation is also investigating apparent violations of international law and the Haitian constitution surrounding the installation of the *de facto* Haitian government following the coup of 28-29 February.

Representatives of the delegation will hold a press conference on Friday, April 16 at 11am at the National Lawyers Guild, National Office, 143 Madison Avenue, 4th Floor (212-679-5100).

There are facts that are not in dispute. President Aristide was popularly elected and obtained an overwhelming majority of the votes in 2000. He was forced out of office as a result of an illegally staged insurgency; the United States refused to defend the legitimate government despite the provisions of the Inter-American Democratic Charter requiring that legitimately elected governments be protected. Aristide and his wife were then flown, under duress, to the Central African Republic by the U.S. military and were held incommunicado for 20 hours. A so-called "resignation letter" claimed to have been signed by Aristide, was then determined by the U.S. State Department's own Creole interpreter to have contained nothing about resignation.

The long history of U.S. intervention in the Americas and the disinformation campaign that has emanated from the Bush Administration calls for a close scrutiny of the claims made by the Administration regarding President Aristide's departure. The circumstances surrounding his departure raise many questions that have not been adequately answered.

The only defense force available to the Haitian government, which had no military, was its police. A shipment of equipment for the police was sent from South Africa and the transport stopped in Jamaica to refuel on February 28. Before it could arrive in Haiti, the coup had already been executed, as the U.S. refused to assist the legitimate government, except to set into motion the President's departure. Nevertheless, immediately following the coup, U.S. forces were deployed to Haiti, allegedly to restore stability and order.

The coup in Haiti occurred in the context of the growing movement among African descendants for reparations for centuries of slavery and colonialism. Before the coup, Haiti was asserting its own claim for reparations from France and Citibank. Since France and the U.S. were the principal forces supporting the coup, their motivations are highly suspect.

The National Lawyers Guild's delegation to Haiti verified the brutal and indiscriminate repression against the civilian population since the coup. However, the U.S. has closed its borders to Haitian political refugees and the Coast Guard has forced them back, disregarding the imminent danger they face upon forced return to Haiti.

Vanessa Ramos, Secretary-General, American Association of Jurists (AAJ)

Desiree Ferguson, immediate past Co-Chair, National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL)

Marjorie Cohn, Executive Vice President, National Lawyers Guild (NLG)

David Gesspass, International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)

Richard Boswell, Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for International Justice & Human Rights, University of California, Hastings College of Law

Brian Concannon Jr., Bureau des Avocats Internationaux