



# Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

Organization of American States

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## PRESS COMMUNIQUÉ

Nº 22/04

### IACHR EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION IN HAITI DURING ITS 121<sup>ST</sup> REGULAR PERIOD OF SESSIONS

At the conclusion of its 121<sup>st</sup> Regular Period of Sessions, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) wishes to express its grave concern over developments in the Republic of Haiti since the Commission's visit to that country at the beginning of September.

Over the past several months, the Commission has continued to receive information on developments in the Republic of Haiti, including information presented by several Haitian non-governmental organizations during a general hearing convened during the Commission's 121<sup>st</sup> Regular Period of Sessions. In particular, the Commission has been informed of numerous serious incidents of violence that have occurred since the Commission's visit to Haiti at the beginning of September, many of which have been perpetrated in the context of confrontations between illegal armed gangs and police. These atrocities included a brutal incident on September 30, 2004 in which two police officers are said to have been shot to death and beheaded. The Commission deplores these acts of violence and once again urges the government, in collaboration with the international community, to take the urgent steps necessary to guarantee the security of its population by disarming illegally armed groups and to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for killings and other atrocities, regardless of who may be responsible. The Commission wishes to specifically emphasize the urgent need for enhanced international assistance in bringing security to the country and calls upon the international community to strengthen its efforts in this regard.

The Commission is also concerned about reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions that are said to have occurred over the past two months, including the October 2, 2004 arrest at Radio Caraïbe of the President of the Haitian Senate and three other politicians associated with the former government of Haiti, and the October 13, 2004 arrest and detention of Father Gerard Jean-Juste at his parish in Port-au-Prince. In this respect, the Commission emphasizes the prohibition against arbitrary arrests and detentions enshrined in Article 7 of the American Convention, and reiterates the State's obligation to ensure that its efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes are undertaken through demonstrably fair and effective procedures that conform to international standards of due process, including a detainee's right to be promptly notified of the charge or charges against him and to be brought promptly before a judge.

Further, the Commission has been informed of threats and other acts of violence and

intimidation perpetrated against human rights defenders as well as journalists and the media in the country, including the September 13, 2004 murder of Rev. Moleste Lovinsky Bertomieux, host of a daily program on Radio Caraïbe. As the Commission has observed on many occasions in the past, violations and coercion of this nature, if left undeterred, places human rights defenders and journalists in vulnerable positions and effectively prevents them from carrying out their work. The Commission once again urges the government to take all measures necessary to investigate, prosecute and prevent incidents of this nature.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its empathy for the victims of Tropical Storm Jeanne, particularly in the northern city of Gonaïve where over 2,000 people are now said to have been killed or missing. In this connection, the Commission also denounces the actions of armed groups and gangs who are reported to have impeded the delivery of humanitarian aid to victims of the disaster, and urges the international community to continue to provide support to the government and people of Haiti in confronting this catastrophe.

The Commission will continue to closely monitor events in Haiti and to provide assistance within its mandate in overcoming the challenges facing Haiti and its people.

Washington, D.C. October 28, 2004