

# The Dominion

DAILY WEBLOG

August 25, 2004

## Congressman Conyers: Remarks for Haiti's Bicentennial

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Today, this Bicentennial "Cruise Into History" is a hopeful rededication to Haiti's future.

It caps several years of effort, under Ron Daniels inspiring leadership, to reintroduce the United States to the physical and cultural beauty of Haiti and its people. I salute Ron and everyone else who joined his cruise. Sadly, this cruise also comes at a time of terror and tragedy for most Haitians. It sails with a heavy cargo of history..

posted by [anthony\\_fenton](#)

Two hundred years ago, the newborn Nation of Haiti burst upon the World. Haitians won independence unexpectedly because their determination to reject tyranny was stronger than the mighty armies of France. That victory, like our own Revolution, has been a beacon of hope to freedom-loving people everywhere. Haiti's hard-won prospects for a brighter future, however, were short-lived.

Over the past two centuries this beautiful and bountiful land, once widely known as the "Pearl of the Antilles," was devastated by internal strife, natural disasters and by repeated invasion by foreign powers. Haiti was unable to develop deeply rooted economic and democratic institutions necessary for political stability and prosperity. Instead, Haiti has remained a land gripped by the wealthy, powerful few. They have forcefully resisted efforts to overcome the abject poverty and bleak existence of the great majority of their countrymen.

Still, the Haitian spirit could not be crushed. Periodically, down through the years, brave Haitians sought to remove the yoke of repression, whether domestic or foreign. Their spirit also shone through remarkable outbursts of creativity by Haitian artists, artisans, writers and performers, unparalleled in the region..The Haitian people have not lost their thirst for freedom. Just twenty four-years ago, after years of determined struggle, Haitians held their first truly democratic election to elect a President. Since then, after an intervening brutal coup regime was overcome, two additional democratic presidential elections were held, and power was peacefully transferred. Friends of Haiti looked forward to a national renaissance.

Those dreams have been cruelly dashed.. The international community, shamefully

led by the Government of the United States, strangled Haiti's economy by withholding crucial aid and allowed an unnecessary political deadlock to fester. The tragic finale occurred early this year when the Constitutional Government was overthrown by a band of murderous thugs and the elected President of Haiti was virtually kidnaped by foreign soldiers acting in support of the latest coup d'etat.

Haitian authorities and Embassies in Port-au-Prince claim that the situation is now largely calm, order is restored and plans can proceed for the next election. Their claims do not match the facts. Most of Haiti remains under the lawless control of the same thugs who attacked the constitutional government last February. The efforts to prepare elections are proceeding with the largest political party excluded. The police force is rapidly incorporating criminals and human rights abusers. The U.N. force remains largely passive; the U.S. largely silent. So it falls to United States' friends of Haiti to help the Haitian people reverse the downward spiral of politics there. The illegal removal of the constitutional President must be resolved. Any new election process thereafter must be inclusive enough to be accepted as legitimate. Civil and criminal law must be enforced. Foreign aid must come quickly, both to avert starvation and to begin redevelopment. Those are among the goals we strive for in the months ahead. This "Cruise Into History" can be the starting point for that crusade.

Right now, however, in Haiti as in Iraq, security must come first. It is essential for social stability, credible elections and encouraging investment. The immediate priority is to halt the murder and mayhem currently directed primarily against supporters of the lawful Lavalas political movement. Neither the Haitian "government" installed by foreign countries, nor the U.N. peacekeeping forces seem able, or disposed to do so. Soccer matches provide a day's respite, but no more.

Even worse, two self-styled "human rights" organizations, supported with United States Government funds, as well as Haitian radio stations, are facilitating the violence. Despite repeated warnings by international human rights groups, they continue to identify Lavalas members as criminals, without meaningful investigation or evidence, forcing those accused to flee for their life or face vigilante violence. This pattern of violent repression is disturbingly similar to the systematic killing of Lavalas members by the vigilantes called "FRAPH" during the prior coup regime in the early 1990's. Perhaps this is not so surprising, since the leader of the FRAPH death squads, Jodel Chamblain, was also the leader of the main criminal band that precipitated the overthrow of President Aristide. Only this week, Chamblain was acquitted in a hasty retrial of an earlier murder conviction; that sham trial was widely recognized as a travesty of justice.

I recognize there are other humanitarian emergencies around the World, such as the Sudan and the Congo. Nevertheless, we must loudly call on the Bush Administration to end its silent acquiescence to this Haitian slaughter. Then we must return, once again, to the slow, hard road of rebuilding a peaceful, stable Haiti, one with real prospects for reducing poverty, administering justice and realizing the great promise of this magnificent land and its wonderful citizens.