

HAITI

REUTERS 

U.N. Lacks Troops in Haiti to Stop Rebels -Brazil Army

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► Cesar Bianconi

SAO PAULO (Reuters) - The Brazilian-led United Nations peacekeeping force in Haiti does not have enough troops to stop renewed conflict at a time when armed groups have taken over two towns, a Brazilian Army colonel said on Thursday.

"The U.N. should, at this moment, have more than 6,000 men for the full restoration of security. Only about 2,500 have arrived. This gap needs to be filled by somebody," said Col. Luiz Felipe Carbonell, spokesman for the Brazilian contingent.

In the past few days, former soldiers, who helped overthrow President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in an armed revolt in February, have taken the southern towns of Jacmel and Petit-Goave.

They demand the reestablishment of the Haitian army, which Aristide disbanded in the mid-1990s when he became president after years of brutal military rule.

The ex-soldiers moved on towns where there were no U.N. troops and not enough police, Carbonell told Reuters in Sao Paulo by telephone from Haiti.

Rebel leaders have threatened action if their demands are not met.

Asked about the possibility of a new wave of violence, Carbonell said :
"The risk always exists."

"Any movement by the rebel groups could cause friction. But our force is here to bring peace. We cannot take an initiative for action. We can only act in self-defense."

Carbonell said the provisional government was trying to open a channel of communications to the rebels. One problem was that it did not have the power to set up a new army as this could only be done after elections planned for 2005, he said.

A U.S.-led multinational force deployed in Haiti in the days after Aristide's overthrow, and Brazil assumed command of the U.N. force in June. It has 1,200 troops there at present.

The U.N. has authorized a force of 6,700 troops. A total of 5,000 soldiers from several nations should be in place by the end of October, Brazil's U.N. ambassador, Ronaldo Sardenberg, said in New York last week.

Some Brazilian politicians have criticized their country's involvement, saying it endorses the overthrow of a democratically elected leader and plays into the hands of the United States, which helped engineer Aristide's departure.

But President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva says it is Brazil's responsibility as a regional power to help restore peace to Haiti. Last month, he visited the country with the Brazilian soccer team for a special "peace game" against the Haitian national side.

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