

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: APRIL 27 – MAY 15, 2007

Defending Labor Rights in Haiti **By Ben Terrall - HaitiAnalysis.com** **May 9, 2007**

New legislation in Washington D.C., under the acronym H.O.P.E. – short for “ the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act,” has the goal of promoting the garment industry in Haiti. But the legislation falls noticeably short in protecting labor rights or promoting long-term sustainable economic development that will benefit the poor as well as the rich.

The Washington Post editorialized about the bill: “After 15 years of political turmoil, violent unrest and economic mismanagement, this looks like a rare opportunity to consolidate tentative progress in Haiti. Congress shouldn't miss it.” But Tom Ricker, Latin America specialist with the Washington, DC based Quixote Center, disagreed: “Right now Congress has many opportunities to make a sustainable contribution to progress in Haiti, but the HOPE act is not one of them. The bill may create a few low-paying and precarious sweatshop jobs, but it will also reinforce a flawed model of development that has been failing Haitians for two decades.”

As Ricker elaborated, keeping Haiti competitive would mean sacrificing labor rights for jobs that have no guarantee of staying in the country: “A temporary expansion of tariff-free access for third country fabric does not solve the underlying problem. Indeed, by placing so much emphasis on apparel HOPE actually deepens economic insecurity in Haiti, instead of alleviating it.” While the high unemployment in Haiti has led to the destitution of many, Haitian labor organizers told this author that what they really need is a sustained period of peace and stability.

Ricker and others point to the need to revitalize Haiti's rural economy while protecting and ensuring labor rights. According to Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, “HOPE has some worker protection provisions, but they are toothless, and if past is prologue, they will do nothing to address the widespread exploitation of Haitian workers. It may be true that some workers make \$4US per day, but more make closer to the minimum wage of \$2. That minimum wage is far below the minimum wage of the late 1980's and early 1990's, when the country hosted many times more manufacturing jobs. It does not support even two people at the average level of subsistence in Haiti (\$1US or below), which is itself brutal. Even \$4 per day does not, after paying for a family's food, lodging and transportation to work, leave much left over to pay school fees and otherwise break the cycle of poverty.”

Concannon added, “All the HOPE proponents justify the Act by the benefits it provides Haitian workers; but I have yet to hear of any workers who were consulted about the bill, or who are themselves promoting it ... Haiti's only real edge is the exploitability of its work force, which is not a foundation for long-term growth.”

Officials of the Confédération des travailleurs haïtiens (CTH) say that they were not consulted by the Préval government. Prior to the election of the Préval government, the interim government brought about a neoliberal economic framework, the Cadre de Coopération Intérimaire (CCI), in which

workers and popular organizations were also not consulted. Thousands lost their jobs in the IMF backed austerity measures.

Dan Beeton, International Communications Coordinator for the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) in Washington D.C., argues, “HOPE is part of the same old ‘free trade’ model of development. What Haiti needs is a real development strategy that it can pursue unimpeded by the U.S. or anyone else, with a diversification of the economy and mechanisms to help ensure that more revenue stays in the country.”

But in that process, Concannon notes, “one of the most important things international supporters of human rights in Haiti need to stay focused on is supporting workers' rights.”

Haitian Trade Unionists

One Haitian labor group deserving of international solidarity is the CTH. In an earlier form, in 1959, the union was founded during the dictatorship of “Papa Doc” Duvalier and remains one of the most well known unions in Haiti.

While many unions in Haiti have become closely tied with foreign donor agencies, CTH has promoted a sovereign agenda, protesting against neoliberal policies of privatization. It has widely promoted labor rights for jobs across the rural and urban sectors. Organizing on a progressive and collective model its federations range from education, transportation, the ports, garment industry, artisan work and the informal sector. The Confederation is also involved in economic development programs, as well as literacy and health programs. It claims a total membership of 110,000 people.

A recent labor delegation to CTH offices in Port-au-Prince viewed hundreds of young people engaging in language courses. The Confederation, with two offices in Port-au-Prince, is present with offices in all of Haiti’s ten departments. CTH is a member of the regional CLAT (La Central Latinamericana de Trabajadores), CTC (Consejo de Trabajadores del Caribe), and the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation).

In an interview during the interim period, CTH General Secretary Paul "Loulou" Chéry explained, "It is a crisis without precedent. Our population has not known a situation this grave since the founding of the country... The majority of the population has been plunged into misery, and exclusion. At the level of the workers, there is hopelessness, as there are practically no jobs. There is, maybe, 15% of the population who are truly employed [...] At this point; the de facto government is conducting a witch-hunt. They are creating a situation of terror, a situation of fear, of systematic repression. This repression has resulted in the killing of thousands of people since the execution of the coup."

CTH organizers describe how labor conditions deteriorated rapidly following the 2004 coup d'état that overthrew President Aristide. Hundreds of their workers were persecuted, thrown in jail and thousands of public sector workers were fired from state jobs. Many workers within CTH's federations had their vehicles and places of work targeted by arsonists from the ex-military and anti-government opposition. Shortly after the coup, Chéry had a death squad enter his home and threaten him with death.

Prior to the coup they explain the embargo on international aid against the elected government also created economic decline, as it pushed away investors and harmed the ability of the government to carry through on its promises. But the elected Aristide government, they observe, even under these conditions backed a raise in minimum wage and various programs benefiting poor urban laborers. Today they maintain their independence from any political party but describe respect for democracy as a necessity. They describe how they refused to join the Group of 184 campaign, in which foreign donor backed labor groups cooperated in a wide destabilization campaign.

CTH workers want a functioning country, in which they can organize and improve their lives. Dan Beeton summed up why US citizens should support the ongoing organizing efforts of Haitian trade unionists:

"Throughout Haiti's history, the U.S. has usually been a bad neighbor, invading and occupying the country several times, propping up dictators, and at times blocking economic assistance to the country. A number of economically damaging policy prescriptions have originated in Washington as well, including privatization of state industries and the promotion of export processing zones that hamper the development of Haitian industry and generate little revenue...Considering the history of the U.S.' relationship with Haiti, Americans owe it to the Haitian people to support their right to organize independent trade unions and advocate for policies that will foster real and lasting economic development."

Ginette Apollon, head of the womens commission of CTH, Paul "Loulou" Chéry, General Secretary of the CTH, and Euvonie Georges-Auguste, a Haitian women's rights leader and activist will be touring Canada in May and June of 2007. CTH recently launched a website at <http://www.haitilabor.org>

MINUSTAH Intimidates Journalist on World Press Freedom Day

By: Judith Scherr –

HaitiAnalysis.com

May 8, 2007

On his way to cover a MINUSTAH-police operation in Cité Soleil's Little Haiti neighborhood, freelance reporter Jean Ristil, who was riding his motorcycle, was stopped by a group of Brazilian soldiers who surrounded him and pointed their guns at him.

"Three of them grabbed me and twisted my arm" Ristil said through a translator. They held him by his neck and took him inside a nearby school, which has been transformed by MINUSTAH into a military base inside Cité Soleil.

When they took him inside the school, they saw he was wearing press identification around his neck.

"It was Thursday May 3, the World Day of Press Freedom," Ristil said.

Inside, he saw somebody in handcuffs. MINUSTAH troops asked him if the man were a bandit. "I told them I didn't know him," Ristil said. Then he saw that they started kicking the man.

They made Ristil face the wall and spread his arms apart to search him. "One of the soldiers was going to hit me in the back, but another stopped him saying, 'No he's a journalist.'"

After about 30 minutes they brought in another guy who had been beaten. "I saw them hit him with a gun," Ristil said. The man was wearing a badge that showed he worked as security at the Chapi Clinic. The man asked the soldiers to loosen his handcuffs because they were hurting him and they replied that if he asked again they would beat him.

Meanwhile, people outside were calling for his release. Ristil was able to leave, but by that time the soldiers had damaged parts of his motorcycle, while attempting to search it.

Ristil didn't report the arrest directly to authorities, but went on the radio to let people know what had happened.

Two times in recent weeks before the arrest, he was riding his motorcycle and a UN tank put on its brakes suddenly just behind him in an effort, he thinks, to intimidate him.

"Right now I'm very afraid." If no one were around, he says he could be seriously hurt.

Ristil does freelance work for HIP, the Black Commentator, Radio Lakou in New York, Associated Press, and HaitiAnalysis.com among other news outlets.

Ristil, along with an American journalist, was arrested and briefly thrown in jail by SWAT members of the Haitian police force in September 2005 after they received a tip that police might try to plant weapons at the church of Father Gerald Jean-Juste.

In November of 2005 Ristil was again arrested but by the Central Headquarters of the Judicial Police (DCPJ). He recalls being beaten after he refused to hand over photographs that he had snapped showing the results of violent raids carried out by the Haitian police and UN forces in Cité Soleil.

Freelance journalist Jean Ristil recounted the incident to Bay Area journalist Judith Scherr by telephone through a translator on May 6. Photo by Jean Ristil.

Victims of Violence in Petit Goâve Speak

By: Wadner Pierre –

HaitiAnalysis.com

May 7, 2007

The head of BAI (Office of International Lawyers), attorney Mario Joseph, met with victims of violence in Petit Goâve on Friday April 20, 2007. Joseph in the past represented victims of violence in the infamous Raboteau Massacre trial. Two other lawyers, Aliénor Saint Paul, who recently returned from training in France, and Rouse Celestin, also visited Petit Goâve.

Discussion was held with dozens that were victimized following the coup that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on the 29th of February 2004. The victims are numerous in Haiti. Driving across Haiti and tuning into the local radio stations, one often hears the voices of people in Haitian cities (Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, Gonaïves, etc) who relentlessly call for justice for the crimes perpetrated during and following the 2004 coup d'état.

“We, the partisans of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, we are the main victims. Our brothers and sisters are always illegally imprisoned - to say nothing of those murdered and tortured. We want justice to be served,” said a 43 years old victim speaking with Attorney Saint Paul. There are many people who still live here and carry the after-effects of this hard period according to the many who spoke. The attorneys interviewed five parents of people killed by bullets and stones of the partisans of the Convergence Démocratique (CD).

One young man described how a number of parents were murdered in front of their children and how many houses were burned down. He described a campaign of arson launched by government opponents.

One former political prisoner, Adeline Joseph, stated, “I thank all the people who had helped me to leave the prison, special thanks to: Bureau des Avocats Internatiaux (BAI) directed by Mario Joseph and the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) with the lawyer Brian Concannon Jr”.

The main objective of the meeting was to put together a complaint by the poor citizens of Petit Goâve against the anti-government individuals and groups involved in killings and arson. Many in the crowd spoke of how they, the poor, have no means to seek representation other than with the help of the lawyers of BAI. One victim illustrating their plight, described how the days pass, but God alone knows when justice will be served.

False H.O.P.E. for Haiti?

By: Tom Ricker –

HaitiAnalysis.com

May 5, 2007

[Note from Editor: This is an updated article from a piece previously published on the Quixote Center Blog]

Earlier this month President Bush certified that Haiti was “prepared” to take advantage of trade preferences extended under the HOPE Act – also known as the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act. It has been argued that HOPE will bring desperately needed apparel jobs to Haiti. For example, the free-trade-cheerleading Washington Post editorialized on Monday, November 27, 2006: “After 15 years of political turmoil, violent unrest and economic mismanagement, this looks like a rare opportunity to consolidate tentative progress in Haiti. Congress shouldn't miss it.”

Congress passed the HOPE Act shortly after midnight on the last day of the “lame duck” session in December 2006. It was attached to a much larger tax bill by the Republican leadership in order to make it harder for textile state Republicans to vote against it. But what did Congress actually pass? It is hard to say they captured an opportunity to consolidate any progress other than further enriching Haiti's sweatshop overlords, and professional putchists, e.g. Andy Apaid.

HOPE Background

The HOPE act would provide tariff free access to the United States market for apparel made in Haiti. This is not a completely new program. For years Haiti has been part of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and under these rules has had tariff-free access to the U.S. market for apparel. The caveat is that the fabric had to be made in the United States. Prior to CBI expansion, the U.S. government provided tariff reductions for apparel made with U.S. fabrics under special provisions of customs code. These rules facilitated the expansion of apparel assembly in Haiti, a sector that reach employment levels over 100,000 by the mid-1980s.

The new part of HOPE is the extension of tariff free access to apparel made in Haiti, even if the fabric is not from the United States. There are limits - preferences are primarily extended to fabric from countries that have free trade agreements with the United States. Manufacturers in Haiti would be allowed to use fabric from other sources as well, but there are caps on the volume of this fabric, and the way the bill is written, these caps are reduced over the five year life span of the bill.

Apparel is an important export sector for Haiti, and over the recent past Haiti has become even more dependent on it. Since 1990 the share of Haiti's exports to the United States represented by apparel has increased from 45% to 90%. In value terms, apparel exports have nearly double since 2001. However, employment has lagged in this sector as companies have shifted production contracts elsewhere and political conflict has scared some investors off. A recent increase in apparel exports has been driven by producers from the Dominican Republic. Companies like Grupo M shift production to Haiti to take advantage of the proximity of lower wages, and weaker unions. Yet, despite these recent trends employment in this sector is still below 20,000 today.

False HOPE

As currently constructed the HOPE Act would have a marginal impact on employment in Haiti, and what “success” it would have is ultimately based on more effectively exploiting Haiti’s poverty. The apparel industry is in a global transformation amidst changes in international quota systems, and the explosion of assembly manufacturing in Asia. Keeping Haiti competitive in this environment means keeping wages low and workers un-organized, and even then there are no guarantees. A temporary expansion of tariff-free access for third country fabric does not solve the underlying problem. Indeed, by placing so much emphasis on apparel HOPE deepens economic insecurity in Haiti, it does not alleviate it.

A real HOPE bill would help create jobs beyond Haiti’s sweatshops, especially in the agricultural sector, and would strengthen the Haitian government’s ability to develop the economy and provide basic government services to its citizens.

A Better HOPE

The single greatest generator of unemployment in Haiti over the past twenty years has been the destruction of the rural economy. The loss of economic opportunity in the countryside has translated into a wholly unsustainable urban migration. Urban communities in Port-au-Prince, Gonaives, Port de Paix and elsewhere are straining unsuccessfully to absorb dislocated peasants and their families.

The current HOPE Act does not impact this tragic cycle in any meaningful way. But Congress can take steps that would help. A real HOPE Act would provide Haiti’s government the space to adjust tariff levels to protect its agricultural producers. It is unlikely that the destruction already wrought by years of extremely low tariffs (lowest in the Caribbean) can be reversed. But giving families still trying to scrape out a living in the rural economy a fighting chance would help stabilize employment far more than creating sweatshops.

Another approach a new HOPE could take would be to shift funds for development away from project based grants and loans, delivered primarily through the non-governmental sector, to direct support for government ministries in Haiti.

Haiti has the lowest public sector employment in the region, less than 0.7 percent. Public education programs and government provision of health services suffer as a result. Most education and health care is currently provided by non-governmental organizations, including networks of church based programs. These programs often fill in important gaps, but over time ultimately further undermine the public sector’s capacity. In the long run, rebuilding the existing public infrastructure in health and education has to happen if Haiti has any chance to break the cycle of underdevelopment it is currently trapped in.

Encouraging private sector employment through tariff preferences, as in the current HOPE Act could also be pursued, but not in a vacuum. Worker rights need to be protected, and not with boilerplate labor clauses that go un-enforced. This should not take place through unilateral mandates issued by the U.S. Congress, essentially blackmailing the government to comply or lose benefits. Enforcement

should evolve through dialogue, and direct support for the ministries that would be responsible. Further there must be an absolute insistence on protecting workers rights to organize and collectively bargain. The best guarantor of worker rights is an organized work force.

Finally, an alternative HOPE could flourish if Congress will take what steps it can to insist that Haiti's debts be cancelled immediately and unconditionally. The Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank have already agreed to cancel a large portion of Haiti's debt. But the current program requires that Haiti wait at least two years (more likely three) meet a host of invasive policy conditions, and then face continued indebtedness anyway because the debt "relief" targets will still leave Haiti with a debt burden. Canceling Haiti's debt outright today would free up \$50-70 million a year, and provide the government many opportunities to engage in the public investment mentioned above.

Haitian survivor: 'They just left us out there'

Haitian survivors of a boat capsizing accused Turks and Caicos officials of leaving them for dead at sea.

BY STEVENSON JACOBS

Associated Press

Miami Herald

May 11, 2007

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti -- Survivors of a capsizing that killed at least 61 Haitian migrants said a Turks and Caicos patrol boat rammed them, towed them into deeper water and abandoned their overturned vessel.

"Our boat flipped over and they just left us out there," said Dona Daniel, 23, one of a half-dozen survivors interviewed by The Associated Press on Thursday after they were repatriated to Haiti from the nearby British territory.

The survivors said some migrants tried desperately to pull themselves aboard the patrol boat but were beaten back with wooden batons.

Others were run over by the patrol boat after they were flung into the shark-filled waters as their boat capsized, said Lovderson Nacon, 19.

Many of the migrants did not know how to swim and were screaming "God help me!" in the darkness, Nacon said.

The Turks and Caicos government has said it will not comment until two investigations are completed. Britain's Foreign Office also declined to comment on the capsizing in its island territory. One probe is being conducted by the local government, and three government experts from Britain are carrying out an independent investigation.

MINUTES FROM SHORE

The Haitians said their sailboat, loaded with an estimated 160 people, was minutes away from the shore of Providenciales, one of the Turks and Caicos Islands, on May 4 when the patrol boat rammed them before dawn.

"When they hit us the first time, water rushed into the boat and everybody screamed," Daniel said.

The patrol boat crew ordered the migrants to lower their sails, threw them a line and began towing them into deeper water. The boat then capsized, he said.

"We thought they were bringing us to shore, but they took us further out to sea," said Daniel, whose two brothers drowned.

Minutes after towing began, the migrants' boat jerked violently and tipped over, flinging everyone into the water, several survivors said.

"They were towing us but they pulled too hard and the boat flipped over," said another migrant, Marcelin Charles, 37. "We fell into the water and many people drowned. I was swimming past dead bodies left and right."

News of the alleged ramming and subsequent repatriation angered Haitian activists in South Florida.

"I believe if that's the case, it's a crime," Miami activist Lucie Tondreau said. "I want to know if they were able to file for political asylum in the case of political persecution. And we still maintain that we need a full investigation on behalf of those who died."

Haitians have been organizing a delegation to visit Turks and Caicos to try to prevent migrants from being deported before it's determined whether they qualify for asylum.

The Turks and Caicos government has criticized Haiti for not doing enough to stem illegal migration. About 400 Haitians arrive monthly in the British territory of 20,000, many having been duped by migrant smugglers into thinking they were being taken to the United States, officials say.

After being flown back to Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city, the surviving migrants, wearing maroon T-shirts and athletic pants, were driven on a school bus to a gymnasium where about 100 relatives, many weeping, greeted them.

The relatives called out their loved ones' names, not sure if they had survived the worst disaster to hit Haitian migrants in years. More than a dozen are still missing and presumed dead.

WAITING IN THE WATER

Nacon said he was in the water for more than 15 minutes before a smaller Turks and Caicos patrol boat came out to pull survivors from the water. Other migrants said they were in the water for more than 40 minutes as they waited for the rescue boat to make a return trip.

"They heard us screaming so much, they finally came and helped us," Nacon said. "The people who knew how to swim lived. The people who didn't drowned."

Jeanne Bernard Pierre, director general of Haiti's National Migration Office, said Tuesday that the Haitian government would consider the ramming of a migrant boat to be a "criminal" act.

South Florida Haitians who say they had relatives aboard the boat worried about their fate.

"I haven't eaten since Saturday. I can't drink anything. I've been calling all over," said Myrtil Baptiste, 40, a chef in Fort Lauderdale.

Baptiste said family members in Haiti told him on Saturday that his 31-year-old brother, Jacquelin Pierre, boarded the boat. Baptiste's brother hasn't been heard from since.

Miami Herald staff writer Trenton Daniel in Fort Lauderdale contributed to this report.

Haitians in Miami angered by alleged ramming
BY TRENTON DANIEL
Miami Herald
May 10, 2007

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Haitian activists had been meeting to prepare a delegation to visit Turks and Caicos in an effort to prevent the migrants from being deported without seeing if they qualified for asylum.

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Commentary: Defending labour rights in Haiti

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

By Ben Terrall

Caribbean Net News

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As Ricker elaborated, keeping Haiti competitive would mean sacrificing labor rights for jobs that have no guarantee of staying in the country: "A temporary expansion of tariff-free access for third country fabric does not solve the underlying problem. Indeed, by placing so much emphasis on apparel HOPE actually deepens economic insecurity in Haiti, instead of alleviating it." While the high unemployment in Haiti has led to the destitution of many, Haitian labor organizers told this author that what they really need is a sustained period of peace and stability.

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Ginette Apollon, head of the women's commission of the Confédération des travailleurs haitiens (CTH), Paul "Loulou" Chéry, General Secretary of the CTH, and Euvonie Georges-Auguste, a Haitian women's rights leader and activist will be touring Canada in May and June of 2007. For more information see www.HaitiAnalysis.com

**PROVIDING MEDICAL SERVICES PART OF UN POLICE ROLE IN HAITI:
COMMANDER**

Press Release - UN News Center

May 14 2007

Along with its security and law-enforcement role, the Senegalese specialized United Nations police unit in Haiti continues to help civilian doctors provide medical services in some of the poorest areas of the capital, Port-au-Prince, its commander highlighted recently before ending his mission to the impoverished country.

Officers from the Formed Police Unit (FPU) provide free consultations, medicine and hot meals to people from Cite Militairé and Village Solidarité, the UN Mission in Haiti said in a press release, adding that most of those receiving treatment are women and children.

"Since our arrival in Haiti, we initiated a policy of taking charge of medical services. officers must carry out development actions outside of their security activities. Thus they provide reinforcement to civilian doctors in offering consultations to the population," said the contingent commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Hassan Diouf.

The most common cases treated are children or adults suffering viral infections and those who have been involved in road accidents. Shooting victims also receive help. In addition, Senegalese officers working with charity organizations, distribute food to the poor three times a day, including inside orphanages.

Working closely with the Haitian National Police, FPU officers are also helping restore law and order in the violence-ridden country, through regular patrols and crowd control, efforts that along with the work of other UN and national units has improved security, said Lieutenant-Colonel Diouf.

"When I arrived in Haiti the security situation was bad but it is now very different," he said, voicing satisfaction with the work of the men under his command.

In particular, in recent months the mission has stepped up efforts to crack down on criminal gangs. Since the start of the year, more than 400 gang members have been arrested.

MINUSTAH is currently staffed with almost 9,000 uniformed personnel, including over 7,000 troops and 1,800 police, along with 444 international civilian personnel, 727 local civilian staff and 165 UN Volunteers.

Haiti's President, Dominican Foreign Minister meet in Belize City
The Dominican Today
May 14, 2007

SANTO DOMINGO.- Dominican Foreign Relations minister Carlos Morales met with Haiti's president René Preval in Belize City Saturday, where he reiterated Dominican Republic's interest to support the neighboring country's efforts to get the international community to keep its promises of financing and cooperation, and to promote Haiti's economic and social development.

This meeting was part of the Second SICA-CARICOM Heads of State and of Government Summit held in that Central American country.

Discussed during the last meeting of the Rio Group ministers, held in Santo Domingo, was Haiti's crisis and the need to get the participant countries to contribute to materialize the billions of dollars offered by the European Union to alleviate its social pressures.

Accompanying Morales in the Belize gathering were Luis Manuel Piantini, Eduardo Lama and Campos de Moya.

Ingraham Vows To Eliminate “Offensive” Immigration Practices
The Bahamas Journal
By Vanessa C. Rolle

Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham has promised that his government will get rid of "offensive" immigration practices, although he said recently that it will not go the route of another referendum. Mr. Ingraham said that his government will respond in a timely manner to the applications of persons who were born in The Bahamas and who are entitled to citizenship.

Such individuals, he said, " are frustrated because they cannot get it. We've got the problem of spouses of Bahamians who were given spousal permits for five years and whose spousal permits expired, and who are unable to receive their permanent residence, which the law also allows them to have."

Prime Minister Ingraham also alluded to the issue of children of Bahamian women who are married to foreigners, who had their children in the United States and need permission from the Department of Immigration for those children to reside with them in The Bahamas.

"These are offensive and unacceptable things and we shall tackle them early," Prime Minister Ingraham said.

The newly appointed Immigration Minister Tommy Turnquest

also weighed in on this situation recently, noting that all children born in The Bahamas, regardless of the gender of their parents will be given "quick and speedy consideration."

Minister Turnquest said, "There are large numbers of applications at the Department of Immigration, some that are quite obviously 'no' answers that are just sitting there. When we're going to tell people 'no', they will know why it's a 'no'."

Meanwhile, The Bahamas Human Rights Network is calling for the new government to establish a better system that would naturalize persons born in The Bahamas to Haitian parents in a more timely fashion.

The organization's President Elsworth Johnson told The Bahama Journal that it should not take such persons 10 years to be given status.

He said that only time will tell if the new government will move at the pace the former government did with regard to granting citizenship to these individuals.

"I know that individuals who find themselves in The Bahamas are entitled to certain basic fundamental rights. I know that young Haitians who would have been born in this country and who have the right to apply to citizenship, hundreds of them are hoping that this government would give them what is their entitlement," Mr. Johnson said.

The group hopes that the Opposition and the present government would see the need to properly address this issue because these individuals are disenfranchised.

"They can't get into schools, and if they do get into the schools, they have to pay twice as much and they are Bahamians. Everything about them says that they are Bahamians," Mr. Johnson said.

"They play on your basketball teams, they are on your track teams and Junkanoo groups because they were born here and they are entitled to that right, but when they go to the airport, they don't have a passport. They don't have the documentation."

Mr. Johnson said the group expects from the new government what it expected from the former government.

"I would not go on the limb to say that the FNM would be any different than the PLP, or that the PLP was bad. If you apply and the proper procedures are followed and you find that the person is entitled, then within a reasonable time, it should be granted," Mr. Johnson said.

He said persons who have made contributions to the Bahamian community for many years have not received citizenship or residency. Yet, they have had to watch persons get their citizenship after only a few months in the country because they might have been popular or wealthy.

"I think our value system has to be changed. How can we judge what is the value of that person's contribution to the person who has money. Those are some of the issues that we hope the government would deal with," Mr. Johnson said.

"A lot of these young people who find themselves in The Bahamas and are entitled to citizenship, after a reasonable time, the system should be fair and respond reasonably. That is all we are asking for," he said.

In earlier reports, the BHRN called for the Bahamas government to use its international influence to encourage lenders to eradicate Haiti's debt.

The International Monetary Fund gave debt relief to Haiti in 2006 by approving it for participation in its Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) that would apply to its World Bank debt. The HIPC is a process contingent upon Haiti's compliance with specific conditions that would take until 2009 to come to fruition.

Just last month, the Board of Governors of the IDB approved 100\$ debt relief for Haiti, which hangs upon Haiti's compliance with the HIPC.

Former Minister of State for Finance, James Smith responded that The Bahamas fully supported the IDB's decision. He said that the burden of illegal immigrants, which has existed from over fifty years, has been too much for The Bahamas to bear alone.

To this Mr. Johnson responded, "when we made our call it was both nationally and internationally for countries to lend assistance to The Bahamas. We fully appreciate that The Bahamas has been doing what it can but always think that there is room for improvement."

Haiti's President Rene Preval Meets with Pelosi, Others to Urge Protective Status for Refugees Monday, May 14, 2007

By: Jackie Jones

BlackAmericaWeb.com

Haitian President Rene Preval met with congressional leaders late last week to discuss economic and trade incentives for his country and to encourage the U.S. to grant temporary protective status to Haitian refugees already in this country.

“Today, given our situation, we need people to understand the state at which we are,” Preval told reporters through a translator at a news conference in Rep. Kendrick Meek’s Capitol Hill office. “Sometimes our partners have the will and the desire to help, but we are the ones who have to explain the situation and explain how they can help us.”

Meek, a member of the Ways and Means Committee, and Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), chairman of the committee, have lobbied the leaders of the Organization of American States, the World Bank, the U.S. Treasury, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation seeking the implementation of the Haiti Hemispheric Opportunity Through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act.

Preval met with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to discuss a pending immigration bill and other economic measures that he hoped would bring investment and jobs to Haiti and discourage illegal migration.

Pelosi’s office had no comment on the talks.

In the past, Preval said, Haiti has not had strong enough relationships with key players on Capitol Hill and the executive branch to influence U.S. policy toward the island nation in a positive way.

“What is lacking are linkages so that we can explain things to our partners. We must establish channels between Haiti and the American executive,” said Preval, referring to the Bush administration. “If we establish these links, we will find ways for those who want to help us, either through funds, humanitarian aid, education, training police, in justice, etc.”

Meek (D-Fla.) said Haiti is primarily seeking three things:

Help from the Drug Enforcement Administration in intercepting drug traffic from South America before it can use Haiti as a conduit for drugs heading to the United States.

Better incentives in the HOPE Act, which provides certain Haitian textiles and other commodities with duty free status to help spur investment and create jobs in Haiti.

Debt relief and help building its democracy.

Meek pointed out that President Bush recently signed an executive order providing debt relief for Liberia.

“I think that it’s important that we do that for Haiti so that it can stand up and allow the kind of support for business the country needs,” he said.

Meek told reporters Preval also had asked the Haitian parliament to revise the nation's constitution so that Haitians in the Diaspora may hold dual citizenship, to encourage investment and job development and to revise the electoral code to allow Haitians abroad to vote in national elections.

Preval is not interested in shifting problems to the U.S. and does not encourage illegal migration, and in fact, Meek said, the Haitian president hopes economic incentives will stem the flow of Haitians out of their homeland to the U.S. to seek employment.

“If we’re ever going to get our arms around this issue of illegal immigration, we need to allow economic incentives that will discourage people from taking to the sea,” Meek said, noting the great physical peril Haitians face getting on small boats that are not especially seaworthy in an effort to get the U.S. in hopes of finding work.

In addition to putting life and limb on the line, many Haitians are often intercepted at sea and returned home, and those who make it to land are oftenly deported without due process.

Haitian officials said dozens of Haitians died in shark-infested waters on May 4 after a Turks and Caicos police vessel rammed a crowded boat carrying about 160 migrants about one half-mile from one of the islands, 125 miles north of Haiti.

“They’re very angry and revolted by what happened because this is a problem that we still can’t clarify up until now,” Jeanne Bernard Pierre, director-general of Haiti’s National Migration Office, told the Associated Press.

More than 60 people died and more than a dozen migrants remained missing and were presumed dead last week, officials said.

On March 28, 102 Haitians reached the shore of Hallandale Beach in Florida after a grueling 22 days at sea in a dilapidated wooden sailboat. The refugees, who arrived starving and dehydrated, were taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security and taken to the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol in Pembroke Pines for processing. Nearly a dozen minors were among the group.

Since their arrival, the adults have been held at the Broward Transitional Center in Pompano Beach, and 14 children are being held at the Boystown shelter in Miami-Dade while they await the outcome of hearings on their status.

Two of the migrants died, one of them after reaching the U.S.

On April 9, 78 Haitians were intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard before they could reach the Miami shore. The Coast Guard crew provided food and medical aid to the emigres before returning them to Haiti. Under federal law, if refugees are caught before they reach land, they can be sent back immediately.

Rep. Alcee Hastings, in a May 3 letter to President Bush, noted that 704 Haitians were rescued from vessels in April and returned to Haiti, an exponential increase over the 43 Haitians rescued in April 2006. The total number of Haitians rescued in 2006 was 769.

“Due to Haiti’s unstable condition, foreign investment is discouraged, creating vast unemployment throughout the country,” Hastings wrote. “This has forced countless Haitians to risk their lives in the treacherous seas in a quest to provide not only for themselves, but for their family and community members back home. Repatriation of the very people who can help Haiti through remittances only makes this sizable problem even larger and out of control.”

In January, Hastings introduced a bill that would grant temporary protective service for Haitians. The legislation has been referred to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security and International Law. Hastings has written Bush several times seeking relief for Haitians.

Temporary protected status (TPS) provides a 12- to 18-month halt on deportation proceedings based on a number of criteria, including environmental disasters, such as hurricanes and tropical storms. Haiti, which has been beset for years by a number of natural disasters and political turmoil, has never been granted TPS.

Hastings’ most recent letter urged the president, who recently extended protective status to Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, to extend TPS to Haitians currently in the United States.

“Mr. President, Nicaraguans and Hondurans have continued to receive Temporary Protective Status designation renewal for almost ten years now. As you know, the original designation for Nicaragua and Honduras was granted in response to the devastations from Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and for El Salvador, which is approaching their seventh year of protection, after two deadly earthquakes in 2001. In the case of all three countries, the U.S. federal government has acknowledged and rightfully supported their struggle to return to a sense of normalcy by granting TPS. However, at the same time, and under similar dire situations, Haitian migrants have not received similar treatment. I ask why?”

“What we’re asking for Haiti is that Haitians are given a fair hearing, that they receive legal representation, that they receive due process,” Meek said. “It’s been ‘You’re Haitian? Forget about your rights. We’re just sending you back.’”

The tragedy of being Haitian at home and at sea
Caymen Net News
Commentary
Anthony L. Hall
Tuesday, May 15, 2007

I sympathize with the efforts of Coast Guard agents throughout the Caribbean who patrol night and day trying to stem the tides of Haitian refugees washing up on our shores.

But my sympathy does not extend to enforcement methods in this respect that are more suited for interdicting and incarcerating drug traffickers than for rescuing and repatriating these desperate souls; which brings me to the tragedy that unfolded off the coast of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) a week ago today.

According to an AFP report, TCI police claim that they interdicted a boat jam packed with about 150 Haitians (some of whom reportedly paid as much as \$6000 to board) on a voyage to a better life in the United States. And that as they were towing it to safe harbour from stormy seas – no doubt “rescuing” the Haitians only to repatriate them – the boat capsized...accidentally.

Although in other reports, TCI police claim that they responded to calls of distress only after the boat had already capsized (61 bodies have been recovered so far, but more than a dozen remain missing).

Whereas, according to an AP report, many of the survivors claim that their boat capsized only after it was “rammed , towed into deeper water and then abandoned” by a TCI police patrol boat. And, that they were all “in the water for 15 minutes before another patrol boat arrived and began pulling people out of the shark-infested waters.” (This patrol boat responding, perhaps, to those distress calls mentioned above...?)

Regardless of which report is correct, however, the TCI government must accept strict liability for this tragedy. Because even these disputed facts are sufficient to indict our police on a charge of either criminal negligence or intentional murder – neither of which can be condoned nor defended. (The BBC reports that three maritime experts have been dispatched from London to this British overseas territory to conduct an independent investigation.)

But I am acutely mindful that no accident or death at sea will ever deter Haitians from fleeing the nightmare of their daily lives at home. Likewise, however, no Caribbean nation should be expected to cope with the chronic menace posed by these Haitian refugees.

Indeed, just imagine the clear and present danger they present — with millions of Haitians just lying in wait to flee — to the national sovereignty of a country like the TCI – with a population of only 22,000...

Meanwhile, I have written numerous articles over the years in which I condemned Haitian leaders for doing so little to improve Haiti’s plight as a dark, destitute, diseased, desperate, disenfranchised, dishonest, disorganized, disassociated, dysfunctional and, ultimately, dangerous blight in our

Caribbean Sea. But, in those articles, I also condemned regional leaders for doing so little to either repatriate Haitian refugees properly or assimilate them comprehensively.

Even as Haiti wallows in chaos and violence, almost every nation in the Caribbean is busy rounding up Haitian refugees, on a daily basis, to return them to their rightful place. [from “Haiti’s living nightmare continues... unabated” - The iPINIONS Journal March 2005]

Yet I am equally mindful that Haitian and regional leaders have woefully limited resources to deal with the root causes and collateral effects of Haitian migration.

And, this is why I have invariably reserved the lion’s share of my condemnation for American leaders — who bear almost as much responsibility as Haitian leaders do for this menace, and who have the resources, though not the will, to redress it.

Therefore, I shall conclude my commentary on this latest tragedy to befall the God-forsaken people of Haiti by reiterating what may be the only hope we have of managing the danger they represent:

The American government must honour its unfulfilled obligations to impose law and order, and help build a sustainable economic infrastructure in Haiti. And if Haitians remain compelled to brave the Caribbean Sea to escape horrific conditions at home, then Caribbean countries should consider doing as Fidel Castro did with his undesirables in Cuba 25 years ago: Put all Haitians who reach their shores into sea-worthy dingys and ship them off to the United States [which, invariably, is their destination anyway] and let the Americans to deal with them.

But to all Haitians who continue to drown at sea: RIP

NOTE: I have also written many articles in which I decried the hypocrisy of the U.S. “wet foot, dry foot” policy. And this inherently-unfair (if not patently-racist) policy is especially noteworthy because it was initiated by the purported best friend Caribbean natives have ever had in the White House, namely, Former President Bill Clinton.

The wet foot, dry foot policy calls for seafaring-Cuban refugees who make it to U.S. shores to be welcomed unconditionally; but for seafaring-Haitian refugees (fleeing even greater persecution and privations) who make it to be repatriated summarily. Alas, U.S. and Caribbean Coast Guard agents are so zealous in their efforts to interdict Haitians these days that relatively few of them who take to the sea ever get the opportunity to be discriminated against so profoundly....

(Reproduced from Caribbean Net News – www.caribbeannetnews.com)

Anthony L. Hall is a descendant of the Turks & Caicos Islands, international lawyer and political consultant - headquartered in Washington DC - who publishes his own weblog, The iPINIONS Journal, at <http://ipjn.com> offering commentaries on current events from a Caribbean perspective.

Haiti Immigrants Angry With Boat Sinking

By STEVENSON JACOBS

Associated Press

The Lexington Dispatch, NC

May 11, 2007

Haitian immigrants were simmering with anger Friday over allegations that a Turks and Caicos patrol boat may have caused a packed vessel to capsize last week, killing at least 61 of their countrymen.

The Turks and Caicos Islands government has opened an investigation into the May 4 disaster, the worst to hit Haitian migrants in years. Survivors said the coast guard crew rammed their rickety sailboat as it approached the shore, then towed it into shark-filled waters, causing it to capsize, and abandoned them.

"This is our blood. We will demand justice if what the migrants say is true," said Line Francois, pastor of All Saints Evangelical Assembly, a Haitian Protestant church on the territory's main island. "But when you're a foreigner living in another country, your voice is not that strong."

The Turks and Caicos government said in a statement Friday that a police boat was towing the migrants toward shore and immediately offered help when their boat overturned, disputing migrants' accounts that they were being led away from land and that police initially refused to rescue them.

Haitian immigrants form an essential low-income work force here, laboring to build luxurious beachfront homes, collect trash and carry suitcases for tourists. Many say allegations in the capsizing underscored their belief that they get treated like second-class citizens compared to locals, known in the Turks and Caicos as "belongers."

Many Haitians arrive here illegally by boat, paying about US\$400 (euro300) for the two-day journey across 125 miles (200 kilometers) of ocean. Several interviewed by The Associated Press recounted stories of illegal Haitian immigrants being robbed, beaten and deported by immigration agents before they could lodge a complaint.

"Dogs get treated better than Haitians here," spat a 33-year-old Haitian hotel worker, who declined to give his name for fear of retribution. He called what happened to the migrants last week a "crime" but doubted it would ever be resolved.

"Haitians don't get justice in this place," he said.

But some said their home country, not the Turks and Caicos, is to blame.

"The Haitian government didn't do its work and create jobs," said Rudy Delancy, a taxi driver who has lived here for more than 10 years. "That's why people risk their lives and get on the boats."

Haiti's government ordered flags lowered to half-staff for an official period of mourning for the lost migrants, and the Interior Ministry promised to crack down on human traffickers even though the country's coast guard has only a handful of working boats.

In 1998, Turks and Caicos Islands police allegedly opened fire on a boat packed with more than 100 Haitian migrants, touching off a capsizing that led to the drowning of dozens. Officials said the police fired warning shots and none hit the migrants or the boat.

Haitians have been coming to the Turks and Caicos for years, fleeing the violence and social turmoil of the Western Hemisphere's poorest country for jobs as construction workers, janitors, landscapers and bellhops in the wealthy territory of 33,000.

Haitians mostly live in ramshackle communities, but the conditions are far superior to life back home.

Many are proud of having helped convert the Turks and Caicos from a mosquito-infested backwater to a popular resort.

"Haitians built this place," said Ronald Gardiner, a Haitian-born businessman who used to host a Creole-language radio program in the Turks and Caicos. "When I came here 22 years ago, there was no fresh water, no electricity and mosquitoes were the king of the island. Now look at it."

Haiti immigrants protest boat tragedy
Press TV, Iran
Sat, 12 May 2007

Haitian immigrants are protesting over allegations that a Turks and Caicos patrol boat may have caused a packed vessel to capsize last week.

The Turks and Caicos Islands government has opened an investigation into the May 4 disaster, the worst to hit Haitian migrants in years, according to the Associated Press.

Survivors are reported to have claimed that the coast guard crew rammed their rickety sailboat as it approached the shore, then towed it into shark-filled waters, causing it to capsize, and abandoned them.

"This is our blood. We will demand justice if what the migrants say is true," said Line Francois, pastor of All Saints Evangelical Assembly, a Haitian Protestant church on the territory's main island.

"But when you're a foreigner living in another country, your voice is not that strong." He added.

In a statement Friday the Turks and Caicos government said that a police boat was towing the migrants toward shore and immediately offered help when their boat overturned, disputing migrants' accounts that they were being led away from land and that police initially refused to rescue them.

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Haitians mostly live in ramshackle communities, but the conditions are far superior to life back home.

Roughly 160 Haitian migrants were packed aboard a 25-foot boat when it ran into stormy weather before dawn Friday off the coast of this British territory. At least 61 were killed in the incident and the remaining passengers have been rescued.

Haiti president pitches trade, foreign investment to U.S.

By William E. Gibson

Washington Bureau Chief

South Florida Sun Sentinel

May 11 2007

WASHINGTON · Despite a recent wave of desperate Haitians fleeing toward South Florida, President René Préval tried to assure U.S. leaders this week that conditions in Haiti are improving enough to encourage aid, trade and foreign investment.

Préval was warmly received during three days of meetings at the White House and Capitol, though officials made no commitments to bolster the poorest nation in the hemisphere. At the least, Préval raised his own profile and American consciousness of Haiti's concerns while meeting with President Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress.

"This trip was very important to establish ways for us to advance and ways for our American partners to help us," Préval said through a translator after meeting with Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Miami.

Meek cited a Haitian proposal to create dual-citizenship for Haitian-Americans as one way to encourage South Floridians to invest more money in Haiti. Creating jobs in Haiti is the best way to prevent another tragic mass exodus to Florida, Meek said.

But many Haitian-Americans have become impatient with the pace of progress in their homeland and with Préval's promises. "Talk is cheap. I want to see action," said Daniella Henry, a Haitian-American community activist in Delray Beach, who owns a travel-services business in Haiti. "Préval has been visiting everywhere and making promises. But I want to see something concrete."

"People can't invest in a country that doesn't have infrastructure -- things like roads and security. For three years, I've applied for a phone line; for three years, I've tried to get electricity. How can you invest in a country like that? We are sick of the way Haiti is."

Despite continuing problems, Préval told President Bush on Tuesday: "Peace has been restored, and the conditions for investment are here. Haiti is awaiting American investors."

Préval, elected in 2006 about two years after the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, had vowed to unify and stabilize the nation after waves of violence.

His main mission in Washington was to encourage expansion of trade incentives approved by Congress last year, which provided duty-free access to the American marketplace for clothing assembled in Haiti. He also sought relief from Haiti's debt payments and stepped up enforcement to block a Caribbean drug trade that fosters gang violence and creates political instability.

None of these proposals appears likely to prompt swift action in Washington, though Bush saluted his call for tough drug enforcement.

After their meeting Bush said Haiti had made progress. "The economy is improving," he said. "Inflation is down, exports are up."

Préval pressed Bush to provide "temporary protected status" for recent arrivals to prevent deportations of Haitians.

Bush made no promises but said he hoped a comprehensive immigration bill under consideration in Congress would help resolve Haitians' immigration status.

William E. Gibson can be reached at wgibson@sun-sentinel.com or 202-824-8256.

Six mayors from Haiti will visit Rockland

By SUZAN CLARKE

THE JOURNAL NEWS

The Lower Hudson Online

May 11, 2007

SPRING VALLEY - Six Haitian mayors will come to Rockland next week to study municipal management in Spring Valley and Ramapo.

Joseph Desmaret, a Spring Valley village trustee who was born in Haiti, said he invited the mayors so they could learn how American municipalities are run by watching and being taught by government officials and employees.

"It is an important issue because what happened in the country has been mismanaged for a long time and with this type of training, that will help the new elected mayors to ... see how we do it over here," Desmaret said yesterday. "They can go back to Haiti and apply it."

This is the first such delegation from Haiti to Rockland, Desmaret said, adding that the community was excited and already asking for more.

"What people in Spring Valley (are) asking me, after we provide the training with this group, to invite another group to come because they would like to see other mayors benefit from this type of training," he said. "Everybody is coming from a little part of Haiti and they're saying, 'Oh, what about my mayor?'"

The mayors will arrive Wednesday and will return to Haiti on May 21. They are Yvon Jerome of Carrefour, Claire Lydie Parent of Petionville, Jean-Yves Jason Muscadin of Port-au-Prince, Louis Wilson of Cite Soleil, Jean-Frantz Theodat of Tabarre and Jeudi Wilson of Delmas.

They will spend their time here in observation and training in Spring Valley and Ramapo, as well as in meetings with the community and elected officials.

Also during their stay, the mayors will tour Spook Rock Golf Course and attend a celebratory fundraising dinner May 19 at the Hilton Garden Inn.

On May 20, they will join the community at Konbit Neg Lakay to enjoy "soup joumou," a squash soup eaten by Haitians to celebrate the nation's independence, after which they will march in the annual Parade of Unity.

Renold Julien, executive director of Konbit Neg Lakay, a nonprofit agency in the village, said he was honored to host the mayors.

"I think it is a good thing for both the Haitian community here in Rockland and in Haiti in general," he said.

Haiti has been beset by political instability, rampant crime and severe economic decline.

According to the 2000 U.S. census, about 11,000 Haitians were counted in Rockland, although community advocates call that estimate low.

Local Haitians will benefit from the chance to speak with the mayors about how things are at home, Julien said.

The delegation will also give non-Haitians, particularly business people, a good chance to find out about investment opportunities in Haiti, which has a ready and willing labor force, Julien added.

The mayors' air travel is being paid by the Haitian government; their lodging and meals are to be covered in part from local private fundraising, Desmaret said.

The funds raised at the dinner will cover the remaining cost of the trip.

Bush Pledges Continued Economic, Security Aid for Haiti
Media-NewsWire.com
May 10, 2007

Washington -- President Bush pledges continued U.S. support for Haiti as the Caribbean nation works to emerge from years of political and economic turmoil. ♦ While there is still a lot of work to be done, there's progress being made on a variety of fronts, ♦ Bush told journalists following a meeting with Haiti's president, Rene Preval, May 8.

(Media-NewsWire.com) - Washington -- President Bush pledges continued U.S. support for Haiti as the Caribbean nation works to emerge from years of political and economic turmoil.

♦ While there is still a lot of work to be done, there's progress being made on a variety of fronts, ♦ Bush told journalists following a meeting with Haiti's president, Rene Preval, May 8.

Since 1973, the United States has been the world's largest foreign aid donor to Haiti, which ranks among the world's poorest countries. U.S. aid from 1995 to 2006 totaled over \$1.4 billion and focused on delivering food and health care; education; support for Haitian farmers and businesses to alleviate poverty through new economic opportunities; and professional training for government officials, judges, journalists and entrepreneurs. (See related article.)

In its most recent foreign aid budget request to Congress, the Bush administration asked for an additional \$194 million for Haiti in 2008.

Bush highlighted progress in the countries' partnership to confront HIV/AIDS in Haiti under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which has trained Haitian health workers and built new clinics and laboratories across the island. (See related article.)

The U.S. president also praised Preval's commitment to confronting corruption and pledged to support Port-au-Prince's new proposals to step up law enforcement against drug traffickers, who use the country as a major smuggling hub into the United States, as well as efforts to expand the country's education system.

♦ I have instructed Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice, along with our ambassador, to work with the government, see if we can help, ♦ Bush said.

Bush also cited improved security in Haiti, where international peacekeepers have been active since 1994, when the United States dispatched a team of negotiators led by former President Jimmy Carter to convince a military dictatorship to step down and restore constitutional government. Following that

development, the United Nations deployed a U.S.-led multinational force to help facilitate the stabilization of Haiti.

That force gave way to a series of peacebuilding and development missions led by the United Nations and the Organization for American States, such as the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), operating in Haiti since 2004 with 7,200 troops and 1,951 civilian police led by officials from Guatemala, Brazil and Canada. The United Nations recently extended MINUSTAH's mandate through October 15, with the possibility of renewing for additional periods as necessary. (See related article.)

◆ The security situation is improving somewhat, and the United States supports the U.N. mission in Haiti, ◆ Bush said.

A transcript of Bush's and Preval ◆s remarks is available on the White House Web site.

For additional information on U.S. policy in the region, see The Caribbean.

(USINFO is produced by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

Haiti Migrants Angry by Alleged Ramming
By STEVENSON JACOBS
The Associated Press
The Washington Post
Thursday, May 10, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Survivors of the worst disaster to hit Haitian migrants in years were "angry and revolted" as they accused a Turks and Caicos police vessel of ramming their crowded boat twice before it capsized, killing dozens in shark-infested waters, a senior official said Wednesday.

The shocking allegation against the British territory's police boat didn't come out until Tuesday because the 78 survivors of the disaster have been locked in a jail-like detention center and barred from speaking to journalists.

Officials say about 160 migrants were jammed onto a rickety sailboat that capsized before dawn last Friday, spilling most of them into the Atlantic Ocean a half-mile off one of the islands in the Turks and Caicos, 125 miles north of Haiti.

"They're very angry and revolted by what happened, because this is a problem that we still can't clarify up until now," Jeanne Bernard Pierre, director-general of Haiti's National Migration Office, told The Associated Press from the Turks and Caicos, where she met with the detained survivors.

The Turks and Caicos government will not comment on the allegations until two investigations into the incident are completed, said Ben Boddy, an official with the governor's office. Britain's Foreign Office also declined to comment pending the investigations.

One probe is being conducted by the local government, and three government experts from Britain are carrying out an independent investigation, said David Stewart, spokesman in London for the Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

Jean-Robert Lafortune, chairman of the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition in Miami, said his group would meet Thursday to discuss the tragedy and might call for the United Nations to investigate.

"We are very concerned that deliberate criminal action may have taken place in the rescue of the Haitian refugee boat," he said.

Turks and Caicos Gov. Richard Tauwhare said Tuesday the sailboat capsized while it was being towed by a police boat in rough seas, contradicting earlier claims by local officials that police did not arrive on the scene until after the migrant boat capsized.

Pierre told AP that she had seen no evidence of a cover-up, but added: "It's too early to say that we're satisfied with the (progress of the) investigation."

On Tuesday, she said the Haitian government would consider the ramming of a migrant boat to be a "criminal" act.

The known death toll rose to 61 late Tuesday after dozens more bodies were found floating in the ocean, some partially eaten by sharks. More than a dozen migrants remained missing and presumed dead.

The decision to tow the overcrowded sloop in stormy seas without giving life jackets to the migrants has raised safety concerns, but lead British investigator Richard Mull said Turks and Caicos police were following procedure.

"The Haitian sloop was on the tow with the Turks and Caicos police boat at the time, as is standard operating procedure, when it capsized," Mull told reporters Tuesday.

Mull said his team interviewed survivors and local police and examined the migrants' sailboat, but he didn't say if the vessel had sustained any damage from a collision. He said a preliminary report should be ready in a few weeks.

Associated Press writer Jessica Gresko in Miami contributed to this report.

Boat rammed, say Haiti survivors
BBC News
May 10, 2007

The capsizing is the worst disaster to hit Haitian migrants in years

Survivors of a capsizing in which 61 Haitian migrants died have said that their vessel was rammed by a patrol boat from the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Survivors told Associated Press news agency that their boat was rammed, towed into deeper water and then abandoned when it overturned.

The boat was carrying about 150 people from Haiti to the US when it sank early Friday 4 May off the Turks and Caicos.

The islands' government has said it is investigating the incident.

The US Coast Guard has said the migrants' vessel capsized as it was being towed to Providenciales, one of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Dangerous crossing

The Associated Press interviewed six of the survivors after they were repatriated to Haiti. They all gave the same story, AP said.

"When they hit us the first time," said Dona Daniel, "water rushed into the boat and everybody screamed."

He said crew on the Turks and Caicos patrol boat ordered them to lower their sails and began towing them into deeper water.

The boat then capsized, the AP witnesses said.

Another survivor, Lovderson Nacon, said he was in the water for 15 minutes before another patrol boat arrived and began pulling people out of the shark-infested waters.

The Turks and Caicos Islands, a British overseas territory, is located to the north of Haiti and south-east of the Bahamas.

The government of the islands has said it will not comment on the capsizing until two investigations being conducted are complete.

Three British government experts are carrying out an independent investigation.

The number of Haitian migrants attempting the dangerous crossings to the US or to other Caribbean islands has increased in recent months.

Some 909 Haitians have been caught by the US Coast Guard since January, officials say.

Search Suspended in Haiti Boat Disaster

Saturday May 5, 2007

By VIVIAN TYSON

Associated Press Writer

Guardian Unlimited UK

SOUTH DOCK, Turks and Caicos Islands (AP) - The U.S. Coast Guard suspended its search for about 40 Haitian migrants missing after their boat sank in the Caribbean, saying officials believed there was little likelihood of finding more survivors.

Local authorities, however, were continuing the search even though no survivors or corpses had been found at sea Saturday, a day after the deadliest maritime disaster to befall Haitian migrants in years. Thirty six people were confirmed dead in addition to the 40 missing.

Authorities on this British territory asked the U.S. Coast Guard to suspend its search, "apparently because they believed the likelihood of finding more survivors was very slim," Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Barry Bena told The Associated Press on Saturday.

But Turks and Caicos Premier Michael Misick said Saturday that his government would "use all the resources at our disposal to ensure that all bodies are recovered."

Several boats and helicopters belonging to the British dependency were searching on Saturday. Police Inspector Hilton Duncan would not speculate on when Turks and Caicos planned to suspend its search.

Roughly 160 Haitian migrants were packed aboard a 25-foot boat when it ran into stormy weather before dawn Friday off the coast of this British territory. The remaining passengers have been rescued.

Survivors said passengers panicked and shifted to one side, overturning the vessel and spilling most of the migrants into the shark-infested waters.

At least three of the bodies fished from the water on Friday had been attacked by sharks, and some had limbs chewed off, Duncan said.

Duncan said the confirmed death toll rose to 36 when authorities found four bodies in the hold of the capsized sloop after it was towed back to port on the territory's main island of Providenciales, about 120 miles north of Haiti.

Every year, hundreds of Haitians set off in rickety boats, fleeing economic and civil disorder in the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation in hopes of finding a better life by sneaking into the United States or Caribbean islands such as the Turks and Caicos.

The capsized boat departed Cap-Haitien in northern Haiti on Wednesday and was headed toward the Turks and Caicos, although it was unclear whether that was the migrants' final destination or merely a stop.

So far this year the U.S. Coast Guard has intercepted 909 Haitians, compared to 769 during all of 2006 and 1,828 in 2005. During turbulent 2004, 3,078 were interdicted.

Haiti: Prison Reform and the Rule of Law
Latin America/Caribbean Briefing N°15
International Crisis Group
4 May 2007

OVERVIEW

Haiti's overcrowded, understaffed and insecure prisons are powder kegs awaiting a spark. Any explosion of violence or mass prisoner escape could undermine recent steps by the government and UN peacekeepers (MINUSTAH) to combat urban gangs and organised crime. The immediate needs are to ensure that the most dangerous prisoners, including newly arrested kidnap suspects, are held in maximum security cells; there are more guards to protect and ensure minimum care for prisoners; and a fast-track government/donor-financed plan to build more secure prisons begins. As President René Préval's government nears the end of its first year, failure to respond with greater urgency and resources to the prison crisis not only would complicate police and justice reform but could add to national insecurity.

Haiti's seventeen prisons hold more than 5,500 inmates but fewer than 10 per cent have been convicted and many are yet to be charged. In the National Prison in Port-au-Prince, which is filled to eight times capacity with 2,500 prisoners, there are only 25 guards, and disease is rampant. In the system countrywide access to food is minimal and to water insufficient, while 90 per cent of inmates have some form of scabies or chronic itching, and the risk of tuberculosis (TB) is far higher than the national norm. Prisoners have to take turns sleeping or sitting, and a walk to sanitation facilities – granted only once daily and for not more than 30 minutes – is often the prisoners' only opportunity to leave cells. The National Prison is a labyrinth of dormitories and yards, where the response as elsewhere in the system to crumbling walls and inadequate security is to keep prisoners penned in their cells. An obsession with escape feeds on and drives the cycle of misery, humiliation, frustration and violence.

Ironically the increase in arrests of gang members and serious crime convictions risks further aggravating prison overcrowding. The most dangerous offenders are not separated from petty criminals for lack of space. Justice and police reforms could fail if prison infrastructure is not immediately improved but neither donors nor the government are taking adequate account of the correctional element of security sector reform. The Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) of 2004 identified basic commitments but the response has been minimal. While some technical support and emergency repairs have begun, only Canada has pledged to pay for construction, maintenance and substantial modernisation. There have been no significant steps to rehabilitate prisons and none at all to build them.

The Préval government was to mark a new era: it recognised the need to fight impunity through comprehensive reform of the security/justice sector, including police, judiciary and prisons, but the latter have only recently drawn any attention. Stakeholders in justice reform, including MINUSTAH and donors, need to undertake the following immediately to ensure that the critical third leg of the security stool is solid:

make certain the most dangerous prisoners are kept under adequate security in strengthened portions of the National Prison or moved to secure temporary facilities, while a maximum security prison is built; modernise existing prisons and concurrently plan for and begin to expand prison capacity to reduce overcrowding permanently;

hold an emergency donors' conference to establish a prison construction fund to meet all urgent 2007 prison construction needs and pledge towards long-term prison reform requirements;
give the new detention commission additional staff, advisers and computerised databases, and monitor its efforts to identify prisoners who should be released on bail or unconditionally because no charges are pending, no trial has been held, they are not a threat to society or they have served their time; and bring guards more rapidly into the same vetting process as the Haitian National Police (HNP), as part of a comprehensive human resource plan to recruit, train and staff prisons.
Port-au-Prince/Brussels, 4 May 2007

Haiti prison population rises; US aid ineffective, audit says

By Neil Roland

Caribbean Net news

Thursday, May 3, 2007

WASHINGTON, USA (Bloomberg): Haiti's prisons are swelling with people awaiting trial, and US aid aimed at alleviating the situation is having little impact, an audit said.

The number of prisoners has been climbing since February 2004, when jails were emptied upon the resignation of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The average time in pre-trial detention has risen from 76 days in September 2004 to 408 days in December 2006, said a report by the inspector general of the US Agency for International Development.

AID's \$3.7 million program to improve the flow of cases is insufficient, and monitoring by US officials has produced misleading, overly optimistic reports, said the 28-page report posted Wednesday on the agency's Web site.

"Thousands of Haitians are imprisoned -- often in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions -- while they await trial," the report said. "This problem requires urgent attention."

About 2,000 inmates were awaiting trial in the National Penitentiary as of November 2006, and Haiti's courts have the capacity to handle only between 160 and 320 jury trials a year, the report said.

Judges are perceived as corrupt and incompetent, and poor defendants often are represented by law students who don't press for speedy trials, the report said.

AID's two-year program started in September 2005 aims to train judges, prosecutors and court personnel and make Haitians more aware of their legal rights.

In AID's fiscal 2006 annual report, it said US assistance was "demonstrably improving the lives of Haitians," and "judges, prosecutors and justice officials are applying the law more professionally, impartially and consistently."

The audit released Wednesday said, "No evidence exists to show that judges, prosecutors and justice officials are applying the law more professionally, impartially and consistently."

Auditors said, though, that while AID "has not yet produced measurable improvements," it "has helped lay a basis for future progress."

AID's top official in Haiti, Paul Tuebner, said the agency is planning a five-year program that seeks to "increase the extremely low conviction rate to better reflect the growing crime rate that grips the nation."

"Justice sector change is a long-term, multi-faceted endeavor," he said in an April 11 letter appended to the report.

AID spokesman Harry Edwards in Washington didn't respond to a request for a comment.

Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest, quit under pressure from rebels and the governments of the US and France, and went into exile in the Central African Republic.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with about 54 percent of its 8.4 million people living on less than \$1 a day. It has been beset for decades by political and economic instability as well as kidnappings and other violent gang crimes.

UN Says Haiti Elections Were Successful

By VOA News

01 May 2007

The top United Nations envoy to Haiti has congratulated the country on its successful holding of local, municipal and legislative elections.

A U.N. statement says more than 300,000 voters in 25 communities voted in 69 centers and 770 polling stations to choose their representatives.

The statement says all polling stations opened on time with the help of the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH, and the Haitian national police.

Last month, the U.N. said it had mobilized nearly 600 members of its staff in Haiti to support the country's electoral process.

The head of electoral support for the U.N. mission, Marc Plum, said the elections would show the international community that democracy is still alive in Haiti.

Haiti is the Western Hemisphere's poorest country and has been plagued by violence.

UN advisory group reports on mission to Haiti
Caribbean Net News
Saturday, April 28, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A recent mission to Haiti by the UN Economic and Social Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti had been struck by the magnitude of the challenges in that country, but encouraging factors included the achievement of a measurable degree of political stability, John McNee, Permanent Representative of Canada and head of the mission, said at a Headquarters press conference.

He said stability had been achieved through the holding of presidential, parliamentary and local elections facilitated by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), adding that there had also been a considerable recent increase in the level of basic security.

The mission's ability to walk freely in Cité Soleil, which would have been unthinkable in one of the "toughest" neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince even three or four months ago, was thanks to the strong leadership of Edmond Mulet, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the MINUSTAH Force Commander, on the one hand, and to the decisiveness of President René Préval, on the other.

They had decided to go into Cité Soleil and "take on the gangs head-on on their home turf" in an operation that had been very successful, he said.

The mission, which also included representatives from the Permanent Missions of Benin, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and Haiti, had also been struck by the Government's commitment to achieve both immediate gains and long-term development, and by the engagement of the United Nations and bi- and multilateral donors.

He said the Advisory Group followed the situation in Haiti closely and tried to advise the Government on long-term development strategies, with the aim of promoting recovery and stability, and ensuring the country received the sustained long-term international support it needed.

The Group's last visit had taken place precisely two years ago, and it had returned this year to assess progress and reinforce the long-term commitment of the United Nations to the people of Haiti.

It had also taken a close look at how MINUSTAH and the Organization's funds and programmes worked and coordinated on the ground.

In a "particularly intense" visit, the mission had met with the President, the Prime Minister and most of the Cabinet, he said. It had also met with parliamentarians and representatives of major donors and the private sector.

Besides Cité Soleil, it had visited Ouanaminthe, a provincial town in the north-east, to see conditions outside the capital.

The next step was to report to the Economic and Social Council, and the Advisory Group would be convening "shortly" to come up with recommendations and share its analysis with the wider United Nations membership.

It was too early to predict what those recommendations might be, but it was imperative that Haiti remain on the international agenda and receive appropriate support.

Asked about progress in the provision of basic goods and services throughout the country, Mr. McNee said that besides huge infrastructure challenges, what was also striking was the flow of basic foods like eggs, chickens and bananas across from the Dominican Republic, since they would have been thought to be home grown.

Regarding the success in securing Cité Soleil, he told another correspondent that the situation remained fragile and it would be foolhardy to predict that the problem had been solved. Some, but not all, key gang leaders had been arrested and the assumption was that the others had "gone to ground".

On the other hand, local residents had been surprisingly receptive towards MINUSTAH, whereas in an earlier phase they would not have dared welcome a visiting mission, even in passing, for fear of reprisals.

The real challenge was creating employment and economic growth that would give people an incentive to pursue a peaceful path rather than a criminal one.

Another journalist asked what role Canadians were playing in terms of securing Cité Soleil and how long Canadian police officers would remain in the country.

McNee replied that the operation had been led by the Brazilian battalion responsible for that sector, which had demonstrated impressive professionalism and treated the local population respectfully.

Police officers from Montreal and other cities would be in Haiti as long as MINUSTAH was there, as part of a major Canadian commitment, including training the Haitian police.

Asked if there was a role for the United Nations in taking on Haitian drug lords, he said the real question was how to reform the entire security sector and inculcate respect for the rule of law.

Reforming the police and the judicial system was a long-term task that was very much related to building Government capacity to fulfil its role.

The same journalist asked why the United Nations could take on the "petty gangs" in the slums but not the rich gangs with connections among the governing elite.

McNee, while acknowledging international efforts to interdict the serious problems occasioned by the drug trade, stressed that the mission's mandate had been to look at how the international community could best help Haiti implement development strategies.

Responding to a question about long-term strategy to bring Haiti out of its current situation, he noted that tourism was one of the main economic elements of the Caribbean region. Haiti, an "extraordinarily beautiful country", had once had a significant, but now withered, tourism industry.

One entrepreneur had transformed the local Club Med into a Haitian hotel with a high occupancy rate, according to the Minister for Tourism.

In addition, the largely agricultural country had once grown high-grade coffee that had fetched a good price abroad.

European Union funds RD\$2B in works in the Dominican-Haiti border
The Dominican Today
May 7, 2007

Dajabón, Dominican Republic.- The Office of the National Coordinator for the European Development Funds (ONFED) has disbursed some RE\$2 billion in works of social interest in the Dominican-Haitian border, where extreme poverty registers its highest indicators.

"More than the amount, the social impact, the repercussion and our participation concern us. That is, the fact that we are creating citizenship," said ONFED director Onofre Rojas.

The ONFED said the European Union contributes the money and the Government's representatives select the location and nature of each project from requests by the communities.

The assistance is distributed in the provinces Montecristi, Dajabón and Santiago Rodriguez, in the northwest, and in Independencia, Pedernales, Elías Piña, San Juan, Bahoruco and Barahona, in the southwest.