

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: AUGUST 1 – 7, 2005

Haiti still in crisis

Friday | August 5, 2005

By Candis M. Hamilton, Contributor

Jamaica Gleaner

I RECENTLY returned from Haiti. This was my second trip in less than one year, and the change has been stark. I was part of an official delegation of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights. What struck me in my first visit last year were the similarities between Haiti and Jamaica. I saw in Haiti in that first visit the Jamaica of our future. I've heard it repeated so many times in Jamaica, "it cannot get any worse" and yet it does. Haiti is a clear reminder that despite our despair for the current plight in Jamaica it can still get worse.

Today, Haiti is in a crisis. Violence continues to rise particularly in Port-au-Prince making it difficult if not impossible to move around without fear. Incidents of violence are meted out indiscriminately on ordinary and affluent Haitians alike. An estimated 700 murders took place in Port-au-Prince alone since September 2004, including over 40 police officers. An estimated 400 persons have been kidnapped since March 2005. Women, children, journalists and human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable. In its press release after the visit, it stated "The Commission has rarely witnessed the situation deteriorate to the current state, where residents in some parts of Port-au-Prince have effectively been held hostage to the unrestrained intimidation and violence of armed gangs with no effective protection from the State or the international community."

Administration of justice in Haiti is weak. All persons in the justice system from the police to the judges face tremendous pressure on the job. Their salaries are woefully inadequate, as are the resources available for their work, leaving the door wide open for possible corruption.

HUMAN RIGHTS

In this context our delegation faced the challenge of promoting the use of the inter-American system of human rights to civil society representatives from around Haiti. This was particularly challenging, given the fact that the prominent journalist Jacques Roche who had been kidnapped on July 10, 2005, was found tortured and murdered by his assailants on the second day of the seminar. Despite this, we managed, I believe, to convince them that Haiti and its situation was not going unnoticed.

We managed to convince them that the fundamental rights enshrined in the American Convention on Human Rights and the mechanisms available before the Inter American Commission on Human Rights to protect these rights offer hope. While international mechanisms may move at a pace slower than most Haitians will appreciate, once initiated the ball keeps rolling. Like any legal system anywhere in the world it is not an instantaneous solution to a problem. There is no single approach to address a country's weak rule of law and administration of justice but such a petition is a viable approach.

Shining the light on the situation in Haiti, and the daily injustices faced by the people of Haiti will remind us here in Jamaica that we are not immune. I know considerable efforts are being made to

address the violence in Jamaica, but when Mr. Vegas' song 'More Love' where his shadow is afraid to walk beside him because of all the guns, resonates with us all, we need to keep shining the light on the situation until each of us can see that we all need to care.

Candis Hamilton, attorney-at-law, is a consultant with the Inter American Commission on Human Rights. Her views are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights.

Meeting Among Political Factions Sets Stage for Haiti's Elections

July 25-26 workshop called example of good governance

By Eric Green

Washington File Staff Writer

U.S. State Dept.

Washington -- A July 25-26 workshop held for the political factions participating in Haiti's elections scheduled later in 2005 is being hailed as an example of "good governance," which involves promoting democracy and human rights.

The purpose of the workshop, organized by the United Nations and Haiti's interim government, was to facilitate a peaceful transition in the troubled Caribbean nation as it prepares for general elections in October and November. Also participating in the event were representatives from Haitian civil society and development agencies working to help lift the country out of its economic morass.

In a July 26 statement, the United Nations said the workshop provided a forum for discussing a Haitian economic, social and political recovery program called the Interim Cooperation Framework. The framework deals with such issues as preparing Haiti's national budget, providing for environmental protection and rehabilitation, promoting poverty-reduction efforts, and achieving U.N. Millennium Development goals to cut hunger and extreme poverty by 50 percent by the year 2015.

The United Nations said local, legislative, and presidential elections in Haiti will lead to a renewal of elected democratic leadership in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The world organization said Haiti is currently in the "grip of a crisis of instability fuelled by social violence that is political in nature."

Haiti's municipal elections are scheduled for October 9. They will be followed by legislative and presidential elections November 13. A new Haitian president is expected to take office February 7, 2006.

The United States is providing \$15 million to support the Haitian elections -- part of a \$44 million commitment from the international community to promote democracy and stability in the Caribbean nation. The United States provided \$8.7 million in 2004 to support Haiti's electoral process.

U.N. official Adama Guindo said that "in a country [Haiti] where it is acknowledged that a culture of dialogue has often been lacking, it is not a simple matter to bring together so many protagonists of different tendencies and divergent interests to listen to the views of the government and development partners on the nation's present and future."

Guindo, who is the U.N. resident coordinator in Haiti, said the Haitian government will have "reason to be proud" of "this example of good governance, which will no doubt mark an important date in the history of Haiti."

Paula Dobriansky, the U.S. under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, wrote in a 2003 article that "perhaps the most basic and important principle of good governance is that a nation's political institutions be democratic" and that the "rights and principles of democratic government can and should be universally applied."

Dobriansky's article, titled Principles of Good Governance, appeared in a State Department electronic journal on President Bush's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). The MCA program is designed to provide U.S. aid to countries that govern justly, invest in their people and open their economies to enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Academic paints gloomy picture of Haiti ahead of polls

DWIGHT BELLANFANTE,

Jamaica Observer

Saturday, August 06, 2005

President of the Rotary Club of New Kingston Athelestan G Bellamy confers with Dr Marie-Jose N'Zengou-Tayo, head of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of the West Indies, Mona, following her address to the club yesterday on current social developments in Haiti. (Photo: Michael Gordon)

A Haitian academic who lectures in Jamaica yesterday painted a frightening picture of insecurity, marked by growing crime and political apathy, ahead of impending elections in that Caribbean country.

Dr Marie-Jose N'Zengou-Tayo, head of the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at the University of the West Indies, Mona, told the Rotary Club of New Kingston yesterday that both the business and government sectors were on their knees in Haiti, and that the rich, middle and working classes were under siege from robberies, extortion and daily kidnappings which had the effect of creating panic in that French-speaking republic.

"When you go to work in the morning, you don't know if you will come back alive. As we say in Haiti, you are in the hands of God," said N'Zengou-Tayo.

N'Zengou-Tayo told Rotarians that leading up to and after the departure of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide last year February, there was a wave of growing anarchy in Haiti which reached its peak three days after his departure, when virtually all the banks in the capital Port-au-Prince were "attacked and systematically destroyed".

Aristide said he was kidnapped on February 29 by Americans, who flew him to the Central African Republic, and was later granted temporary asylum in Jamaica. He was subsequently granted asylum by South Africa. The United States has denied that the former Haitian president was kidnapped.

"Money was not stolen. but all the buildings, equipment such as computers and furniture were destroyed, gas stations and the industrial sector were also targetted," N'Zengou-Tayo told Rotarians yesterday.

At the same time, she said government buildings, including ministries were attacked and looted.

"When the new minister of agriculture arrived he did not even have a chair to sit in," said N'Zengou-Tayo.

She said within six months after Aristide's departure the entire private sector was bankrupt or heavily indebted to banks, which were also failing.

The clampdown on the drug trade by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), had also led to a rise in kidnappings to replace the illicit income, N'Zengou-Tayo said. She said that anyone with a stable income was a potential target, to the point where it had "become a way of life".

Extortion had also grown to the point where businessmen would have their goods stolen at the wharf and had to pay to have them released, said N'Zengou-Tayo.

The impact, she said, was that people were fleeing the country in droves by any means, including a massive migration of the upper and middle classes, and even established businesses were closing daily, N'Zengou-Tayo said.

The academic said that interim prime minister Gerard LaTortue recently had to re-negotiate to extend the stay of UN peacekeeping forces as the local police force was "useless".

She said in the past two weeks there had been a slight lull in crime and violence, but it was widely foreseen that this was just temporary, noting that "nobody is expecting much from the election".

UN says its presence has improved Haiti's security
China View
Aug 5, 2005

HAVANA, Aug. 4 (Xinhuanet) -- The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti said on Thursday UN troops had improved the country's security over the last several weeks, reports from Haiti's capital Port-Au-Prince said.

Speaking to reporters, Colonel Ouafi Boulbars from the UN mission said that "the operations by the UN troops and members of the Haitian police have improved security in the Haitian capital and neutralized the actions of armed groups."

"Kidnapping, murder and auto theft are down," he added.

Boulbars also announced the upcoming arrival of fresh troops to bolster the 6,263 soldiers and 1,401 police.

Since the 2004 ouster of ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is now living in exile in South Africa, over 1,000 people have been killed due to violence and clashes between police and followers of Aristide.

BYU alumni, volunteer dentists bring smiles to Haiti
By Tyna-Minet Ernst Daily Universe Staff Reporter
5 Aug 2005
BYU NewsNet

The country, slightly smaller than the state of Maryland, is home to roughly 8 million people, more than 1 million of those are orphans, Dort said. Nearly half of the population lives below the poverty line and are undernourished.

Since 2002, International Aid Serving Kids, an organization co-founded by Dort, has worked to improve the living conditions of orphans and abandoned children in the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere -- Haiti.

"It gives us an opportunity to give back 'where much is given, much is required,'" Dort said.

This year IASK recruited a dentist to join other volunteers for their humanitarian trip to Haiti. Dort approached Dr. Bret Tobler, former president of the Academy of LDS Dentists, to ask if he knew anyone who could help.

Tobler volunteered himself for the June trip. He also recruited his son, Nate, a BYU graduate who just finished his first year at dental school in Cincinnati, a current BYU student to be their interpreter, and two other dental assistants.

The group set up at an orphanage in a village outside the capital city, Port-Au-Prince. Dort said the trip was not publicized in Haiti because they feared more people would show up than they could help. He said news of the volunteers spread by word-of-mouth throughout the village.

"Many patients that the team saw traveled long distances and arrived early so they could secure a spot in the long lines and receive care," Dort said.

Tobler said there were always about 30 people waiting outside, some waiting for hours.

"We worked really, really hard while we were there," Tobler said. "We stayed until dark; we stayed until we couldn't see any longer."

One day, when their interpreter was gone making arrangements to get out of the country. The group was left with limited communication skills. Tobler said they knew enough to say "open," "close" and "am I hurting you?"

Tobler and his group worked for two and a half days, during which time they were able to treat nearly 200 people -- performing around 50 cleanings, 50 fillings and 250 extractions.

"We were planning on working for five days, but Haiti is always in some amount of turmoil," Tobler said. "While we were there the church pulled the missionaries out and the IASK group uses the church to gauge if it's safe to be there or not."

Tobler said the group would have liked to stay for the whole time to help more people, but he understood it would have to wait until their next trip.

The current unrest is tied to upcoming elections for a new government. The fall elections will be the first legislative, municipal and presidential elections since the resignation of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

The orphanage where the volunteers stayed was protected by security guards armed with sawed-off shotguns. Tobler said there were also several U.N. Peacekeepers in the area.

“It is difficult for a foreigner to understand what’s going on in Haiti and how the government, politics and the historical, social backdrop has brought Haiti to where it is today,” Tobler said. “Suffice it to say, there are many innocent Haitians that suffer the consequences of the unrest, violence and economic repercussions of such instability.”

The organization decided to cancel its September trip but will return to Haiti next spring. More information about the group can be found at www.iask4kids.org.

Mother and daughter travel to Haiti with medical mission
Pepperell Free Press
August 5, 2005

My daughter-in-law, Sandy Hartnett, recently completed her second trip to Haiti as part of a 12-person medical team of doctors and nurses. The group provided daily clinics in this war-torn third-world country in the central Caribbean, over an eight-day mission. Sandy is a registered nurse in the cardiac telemetry unit at Lahey Clinic, as well as a part-time staff nurse at Nashoba Valley Medical Center. This year Sandy took her daughter (and my granddaughter) Jenilynn. Jenilynn, 17, is entering her senior year at Bishop Guertin High School and is a member of the French National Honor Society. Jeni was added as a member of the French-to-English translation team which assists the doctors and nurses in communicating with the mothers and sick children.

While the group was primarily self-funded, the medical team was traveling as part of the Haitian Apostolate, affiliated with the Worcester Diocese. Each member of the team brought only a carry-on bag while all 24-pieces of checked luggage contained the vital medical supplies used at the clinics. Landing in Port-au-Prince, the group was met at the airport by the Sisters of Charity (Mother Theresa's order) who were instrumental in navigating the team around the chaotic capital city to a smaller airport on the city's outskirts.

A one-hour flight on a twin propeller transport brought the team to its destination of Les Cayes on the southwestern coast. As guests at the St. Paul Mission House of the Haitian Apostolate, the daily clinics were held at pre-arranged sites throughout the region, treating hundreds of children during the week. While no one was refused treatment, the primary focus of the clinics was children. Sandy said the Haitian mothers were always so appreciative and thankful for the care and medicine provided.

Needless to say I'm very proud of Sandy and Jenilynn, and thankful that the trip was both successful and safe.

Fund-raiser to help couple adopt Haitian sisters

By ANTHONY CARDINALE

Buffalo News

News Staff Reporter

8/4/2005

After nine years of marriage, Brian and Tracey Brown-Cashdollar of East Aurora were about to travel to Haiti to adopt 2-year-old Claudane, when they discovered that she has 5-year-old twin sisters, Emmanuelle and Danielle.

"They are very close and very much depend on each other," said Brian, "and after much consideration we decided that we would do whatever we could to keep them together."

Adding two adoptions boosts the cost into the \$20,000 range. So the Brown-Cashdollars will hold a Three Sisters Fund-Raiser on Friday, from 7 to 9 p.m., at Teamsters Local 264 at 35 Tyrol Drive, Cheektowaga.

Those attending will have dinner and see "Children of the Shadows," a film by Karen Kramer about the children of Haiti who are given away into slavery.

"We had decided last year to do an open adoption in the States - then we saw this film on Link TV, and we figured, well, we're going to adopt from Haiti," Brian said. "Haiti is so poor that, instead of watching their kids starve to death, they give them away."

A former Peace Corps volunteer, Brian, 40, is project director at the Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health, seeking to enhance workplace conditions.

A former teacher, Tracey, 42, is a service coordinator for Aspire of Western New York, working with cerebral palsy clients, and is studying to become a licensed practical nurse.

"We love having children around," said Tracey, whose sons by a previous marriage are in high school and college. "I guess we don't want to become empty-nesters."

In 1996 Brian Cashdollar of Buffalo was introduced to Tracey Brown of East Aurora, just three weeks before he was to leave for the People's Republic of Angola to work with the International Medical Corps.

"My sister introduced us," Brian said. "I think she tried to fix me up so I wouldn't get killed. I would have been taking doctors to the front during their civil war. I met Tracey and put it off."

After getting married, the couple adopted the name Brown-Cashdollar and moved with the boys to New Zealand, where Tracey taught primary school. This lasted just three months.

"It was the start of the recession in Asia," Brian recalled, "and we lost everything we had - \$30,000 in savings."

Returning to Buffalo, Tracey began teaching in the pediatric unit of the Deaconess Center and Brian became coordinator of youth and family service for Hispanics United of Buffalo. A JFK High School graduate, Brian studied fine arts at the University at Buffalo for four years but graduated with a degree in political economy from Friends World College, a Quaker school in Nicaragua.

Now he's planning a trip to Port-au-Prince to adopt the three Desrosiers sisters, who were placed in an orphanage because their parents were unable to care for them. Claudane, now 21/2, is ready to come to America, and the couple will work with authorities to hasten their adoption of Emmanuelle and Danielle.

"We might resort to a medical visa for the twins," Brian said, "because they both need surgery."

SA mercenaries off to Haiti?
Johannesburg, South Africa
Mail and Guardian Online
02 August 2005 09:17

South African mercenaries are said to be involved in Haiti in the run-up to that country's elections later this year, News24 reported on Tuesday.

It said an e-mail to members of the SA Special Forces League mentions that league members and former members of the police task force have apparently "positioned" themselves for "fireworks in a small, controversial, Caribbean country".

The league's official stance is that it "aggressively condemns all mercenary-related activities".

Those involved are warned to abandon the operation, no matter what promises have been made to them.

"The whistle has been blown; the game is over; get out and stay out," is the warning.

News 24 said this might confirm certain South Africans' involvement, mentioned in newspaper and radio reports in Port au Prince, the capital of Haiti.

These reports claimed between 10 and 15 South African mercenaries travelled to the Dominican Republic, presumably to obtain visas to enter Haiti.

They are supposed to cause chaos in the country in the run-up to the elections.

An international security company, which previously supplied bodyguards to former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is thought to be involved in recruiting the latest group.

It is known that several South Africans had worked for the security company previously, said News24.

The Dominican security forces are reportedly investigating the possible presence of the men in their country.

Reports on the matter also appeared in Le Matin in Haiti.

This newspaper linked the alleged mercenaries to Aristide. It said their mission apparently was to murder political leaders, disrupt business, and foment civil resistance.

The report states the Dominican security forces are contacting their peers in Haiti to try to prevent any attempted violence.

About 7 600 UN peacekeepers have been deployed in Haiti to help stabilise the country.

Canada bolstered its reputation as a country of immigrants on Thursday when a Haitian-born refugee was named as the personal representative of head of state Queen Elizabeth.

Aug. 4, 2005

Reuters

Former television journalist Michaelle Jean is the first black person ever to be nominated to the post of governor general and only the third woman.

"Her personal story is nothing short of extraordinary ... she has known what it is to come to a new country with little more than hope -- hope and a belief that with hard work a new country can bring new opportunity," said Prime Minister Paul Martin.

Jean, 48, was born in Haiti but fled with her parents to Canada's French-speaking province of Quebec in 1968. She joined public broadcaster CBC in 1988 and made her name with a series of documentaries focusing on people at the margins of society.

"I have come a long way. My ancestors were slaves. I was born in Haiti, the poorest country in our hemisphere. I am a daughter of exiles driven from their native land by a dictatorial regime," she told reporters.

Jean said she was proud to be part of Canada "with its immense and unlimited possibilities, rich with the daily contributions of people who have come from all over the world."

Canada, which has a population of 32 million, aims to attract between 220,000 to 245,000 immigrants a year and is moving away from its roots as a country made up of French and British settlers as well as aboriginals.

Statistics Canada said in March that its projections showed that Canada's population of visible minorities could more than double between 2001 and 2017, rising from 4 million to up to 8.5 million.

The post of governor general is largely ceremonial but the incumbent is responsible for settling constitutional crises.

Jean replaces fellow journalist and immigrant Adrienne Clarkson, who was born in Hong Kong.

Jean -- who will take up her new position on Sept. 27 -- is married to film maker Jean-Daniel Lafond. They have a six-year-old daughter.

Ex-Klansman pleads guilty to building bombs to harm immigrants

By Associated Press

Aug 05, 2005

The Daily News Online (Longview, WA)

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) -- A former Ku Klux Klansman charged with building pipe bombs to use against Mexicans and Haitians changed his plea to guilty Thursday.

Daniel Schertz, 27, built five pipe bombs and sold them to an undercover federal agent and a confidential informant for \$750 in April, authorities said.

The bombs were to be "detonated on a bus carrying Mexican workers to work in Florida" according to a plea agreement filed Thursday. Schertz also was accused of building and transferring two pipe bombs to the informant in March to harm Haitians in Florida.

Schertz said Thursday that he was guilty of all six charges, including teaching and demonstrating how to make a weapon of mass destruction and interstate transport of explosive material with intent to kill or injure.

Interstate transport of explosives carries a minimum sentence of 10 years, while the other charges combined carry a maximum sentence of 60 years, Assistant U.S. Attorney James Brooks said.

Schertz's attorney, Mike Caputo, said the plea agreement allowed him to "avoid a harsher sentence."

Schertz's former Klan leader, White Knights Imperial Wizard Billy Jeffery, has said Schertz was "banished" from the Klan in mid-May for unrelated disobedience.

Japan contributes to Haiti elections

UPI

Aug. 5, 2005

Science Daily

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug. 5 (UPI) -- Japan has offered Haiti nearly \$900,000 to help in its upcoming elections, Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura said Friday.

The money will be appropriated to Haiti via the U.N. Development Program, Japan's Kyodo News reported.

The embattled Caribbean nation is set to have local elections in October, followed by legislative elections and the first round of presidential elections the following month. The final round of presidential balloting is scheduled for December.

Haiti's former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left office in February 2004 amid widespread violence and a threat by armed rebels to him from office. Since then an interim government has led the hemisphere's poorest country, while U.N. peacekeepers try to establish stability.

No Justice for Haiti's Jean-Juste
Interim government jails an opposition leader
by Aina Hunter
August 5th, 2005
Village Voice

Father Jean-Justice has been in jail since July 21.

Haiti's interim government, led by a prime minister hand-picked and hand-fed by the Bush administration, has seen fit to jail a potential presidential candidate. Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest, may be the only figure one large faction of the Fanmi Lavalas party could accept as a candidate in elections planned for this October and November. Lavalas is the party of exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

"We are waiting for Aristide to return. If he approves it, we could support [Jean-Juste]," Rene Momplaisir recently told the Voice, through a translator, in a stifling-hot schoolhouse in Cite Soleil. Cite Soleil is a huge Port-au-Prince slum, whose approximately 250,000 residents overwhelmingly identify with Lavalas. Like the three other men who spoke with the Voice in what amounted to a sort of roundtable, Momplaisir identified himself as a member of the "Cite Soleil Lavalas cell."

Jean-Juste was taken away two weeks ago on charges that international aid groups are calling laughable. Best known for his vocal denouncement of state-sponsored violence and his decades of work feeding poor children from a church in the working-class Delmas section of Port-au-Prince, Jean-Juste is accused of murdering cultural writer Jacques Roche.

Roche, who worked for the Haitian newspaper Le Matin, was kidnapped for ransom on July 10. Five days later his body was found near Cite Soleil, still wearing handcuffs and showing signs of torture. He had apparently been shot to death.

Amnesty International has gotten involved, saying Jean-Juste was in Miami at the time Roche was abducted. He was there to organize a series of protests in front of the Brazilian consulate for that country's role in a deadly U.N. Cite Soleil incursion on July 6. Last Thursday, Amnesty issued a report calling the priest a "prisoner of conscience detained solely because he has peacefully exercised his right to freedom of expression," awaiting trial on "apparently trumped-up charges."

Reports in the Haitian media, which is largely controlled by anti-Aristide forces, suggested that Lavalas was behind Roche's death. At his funeral on July 21, Jean-Juste was attacked by an angry crowd of mourners and ultimately arrested.

Doug Spalding, of the San Francisco-based Haiti Action Committee, saw Jean-Juste at the local precinct where he and his lawyers were interrogated, and at the "medieval" National Penitentiary where Juste has been housed ever since. "He's being held with one cellmate in a windowless cell four feet wide, 12 feet long. It's hot, dark, grimy. A urine and feces smell permeates. His neck was swollen and bruised, and when we asked how he was holding up he said, 'Well, I'm surviving.' He asked for reading material."

Although Haitian police have beaten Jean-Juste before, Spalding says guards seem to have shown restraint this time. He says Jean-Juste told him the bruises were from being attacked by the mourners.

In October, the 59-year-old priest was beaten and snatched out of a rectory window by masked police while serving free meals to parishioners. No formal charges were filed, but Prime Minister Gerard Latortue told reporters Jean-Juste was “associated with people suspected of organizing against the government.” He was imprisoned for about seven weeks before international pressure forced his case before a judge; it was dismissed.

Jean-Juste is the most prominent Lavalas leader to be jailed lately, but since the Latortue government assumed control in February 2004, hundreds of activists and politicians have been locked up on dubious charges. Among them are former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, activist folk singer Anne Auguste, and former minister of the interior Jocelerme Privert—all of whom have been imprisoned without trial for months.

Haiti tense as key election approaches

By Gary Marx

Tribune foreign correspondent

Chicago Tribune

Published August 5, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Renowned poet and journalist Jacques Roche was visiting his younger brother last month when gangs kidnapped him at gunpoint.

Roche's friends and colleagues quickly scraped together \$10,000 for ransom. It was not enough to save his life.

Four days after he disappeared, Roche's body was found faceup in the street, his arms handcuffed and chained behind his back.

"Jacques was like a father to me," said Chenald Augustin, 27, a reporter at Le Matin, where Roche, 43, worked as the newspaper's cultural editor. "His death hit me so hard."

Roche's slaying also sent a shock wave through a country reeling from an epidemic of kidnappings that police, diplomats and others say is being carried out by armed supporters of exiled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to sow chaos as Haiti's U.S.-backed interim government prepares for elections in the fall.

But Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Roman Catholic priest and prominent Aristide supporter who has been jailed in connection with the crime, said government officials are trying to pin Roche's slaying on him to destroy the political opposition and sweep the elections.

"I had nothing to do with [Roche's death]," Jean-Juste, 59, said in an interview at Haiti's National Penitentiary. "They don't have any proof. I know that I am going to be exonerated."

A longtime Miami resident and advocate for Haitian immigrants in the U.S. whose populist sermons have galvanized the poor, Jean-Juste is the third major opposition figure to be jailed since Aristide fled Haiti in February 2004 in the face of an armed rebellion and U.S. diplomatic pressure.

Former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert have been in custody for months while a judge investigates whether there is sufficient evidence to charge them in connection with killings in the city of St. Marc.

The two former Aristide government officials deny involvement and, like Jean-Juste, say they are being singled out because they are leaders in Aristide's Lavalas Family party.

`Political murder'

Juan Gabriel Valdes, the United Nations envoy to Haiti, said UN police are helping local law-enforcement officials investigate Roche's death, which he said "has all the elements of a political murder."

The outcome of the investigation into Roche's death and the case involving Neptune and Privert are likely to have profound implications for Haiti's future as a 7,600-strong UN peacekeeping force struggles to regain control of a nation racked by poverty and violence.

Lavalas leaders remain divided over whether to participate in the elections, with Jean-Juste and other hard-liners favoring a boycott unless Aristide is returned to power and political prisoners are released.

Diplomats and experts describe interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue as incompetent and say free elections that include Lavalas--Haiti's largest political movement--are the only way to restore stability.

After a slow start hampered by security concerns, officials now have registered about one-third of the estimated 3 million Haitians they hope will sign up for the elections, which are likely to begin in mid-November.

At one registration center guarded by blue-helmeted UN peacekeepers, Ernest Sauvignon, 56, an unemployed father of five, said the biggest problem facing Haiti is the violent crime.

"No one is able to function," said the gray-haired Sauvignon, sweat dripping from his forehead as he waited in a long line to register. "Commerce is shut down because merchants can't go out and sell. A lot of shooting makes people scared."

The violence increased after Aristide's ouster as hundreds of former Haitian soldiers defied the government and took up positions across the country.

At the same time, armed pro-Aristide militants seized control of Bel Air, Cite Soleil and other Port-au-Prince slums, and declared war against the outmanned Haitian police and seemingly ineffectual UN force.

But UN troops have struck back in recent months, ousting the former soldiers from their strongholds and killing a half-dozen powerful gang leaders.

Today, UN forces and Haitian police have bases in Cite Soleil and Bel Air, where Brazilian troops in armored personnel carriers and jeeps patrol tense streets largely empty of pedestrians and automobiles.

Nadal Rashdan, a Jordanian who is acting commissioner of the UN police force, said the strengthened UN presence has sharply reduced kidnappings, which in early summer reached as many as 20 a day.

The victims have included business people, doctors, students, foreigners and others. Most have been released after ransoms of \$25,000 or more have been paid, but some have been raped and tortured during captivity, according to human-rights officials and police.

Jean Henold Buteau, a physician and Aristide opponent, said kidnappers dripped melted plastic on his feet and crushed his fingers and toes with pliers during his 18-hour ordeal in April.

"It was very, very cruel," recalled Buteau, 52. "The pain was terrible."

Michael Lucius, inspector general of the Haitian National Police, said the gangs use the ransom money to buy weapons and loyalty. But he said Roche's kidnapping was atypical, having less to do with money than politics.

"I don't think at first the kidnappers knew who he was, but they found out," said Lucius, who led the police investigation into Roche's death.

Born near the southwestern city of Les Cayes, Roche moved to Port-au-Prince at an early age and studied art history in college. He lived in the U.S. for many years but returned to Haiti in the early 1980s to begin a career as a poet and journalist.

Roche was a soccer fanatic, and in addition to working at Le Matin, he co-hosted a sports talk show on Radio Ibo. He also anchored a TV program financed by business leaders and others who fought to unseat Aristide.

The television show apparently set him up as a very public enemy in the eyes of pro-Aristide militants.

"He was afraid, and he told me he was going to stop doing the television program," said Roche's fiancée, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal. "He felt his life was in danger."

The two gunmen who seized Roche on a downtown street July 10 asked for \$250,000 in ransom. The next day, colleagues prayed in Le Matin's white-tiled newsroom and collected \$10,000.

Even kitchen staff chipped in

"Everyone contributed money, even the person who worked in the [newspaper's] kitchen," said Quesnel Durosier, 31, a reporter at Le Matin.

The kidnappers were unmoved. They told Clarens Fortune, Le Matin's editor and the chief negotiator, to come up with the remaining \$240,000 or Roche would die, according to Durosier and other reporters briefed by Fortune.

On July 13 the kidnappers called Fortune back and told him to forget the money, implying that Roche--who was tortured during captivity--was too important to be set free.

"There was no more hope," Durosier recalled.

Lucius said a gang leader who remains at large ordered the execution.

And while police have turned up no evidence linking Jean-Juste to Roche's killing, Lucius accused the priest of sharing responsibility for the crime because he maintains ties to pro-Aristide gangs.

Jean-Juste rejected the accusation, saying pro-government politicians are exploiting Roche's death for "political mileage."

"I have always denounced violence," he said. "I serve the God of life."

Reports allege widespread corruption under Haiti's ousted president

AP

Jamaica Observer

Thursday, August 04, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Two new reports investigating corruption under former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide accuse the ousted leader's allies of defrauding Haiti's government of \$55 million (euro44 million).

About US\$50 million was allegedly embezzled from various state-run agencies between February 2001 and February 2004, according to the Commission for Administrative Investigations, an independent body that authored one of the reports.

The 300-page report, compiled at the request of Haiti's interim government, contains copies of bank statements, check duplicates and money transfer orders that the commission claims is proof of widespread corruption under Aristide.

The funds originated from Haiti's customs agency, municipal governments and other public offices in the impoverished country of eight million, the report said. The money was then transferred into the accounts of nonexistent local companies and private overseas bank accounts, it said.

"Aristide's power was based on corruption. Everything was done to misappropriate the state's meager resources," said Paul Denis, a former senator who heads the Commission for Administrative Investigations.

An official from Aristide's Lavalas Family Party denounced the report as false and politically motivated.

"It's more a character assassination piece than a serious accounting document," Jonas Petit said by phone from the United States.

Some US\$19 million (euro15 million) in cheques from state-run companies were deposited into accounts at the Banque Populaire Haitienne between 2001 and 2003, the report said. Some cheques were signed by Aristide's private secretary and officials from the Presidential Palace, it alleges.

Another report for the interim government alleges US\$5 million was embezzled from Aristide's Foundation for Democracy and other groups linked to the former president, who was toppled in a February 2004 revolt.

The report by the state-run Central Unit for Economic and Financial Investigations says the alleged fraud took place between 2001 and 2004, citing bank statements and other financial data.

Both reports were obtained by The Associated Press last week and are being reviewed by Haiti's judiciary, which has three months to decide whether to prosecute suspects.

Neither report specifically names Aristide as a beneficiary of the alleged fraud, although Haiti's interim government has accused him of involvement in widespread corruption and mismanagement of state funds.

Aristide, who is in exile in South Africa, has denied any wrongdoing.

Haiti tied with Bangladesh as having the highest level of corruption in Transparency International's 2004 corruption perception index.

Report: Aristide diverted millions**BY JACQUELINE CHARLES****Miami Herald****Aug 4, 2005**

Former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government illegally pumped at least \$21 million of his country's meager public funds into private firms that existed only on paper and into his charities, government investigators allege.

The investigators reported that about \$2.4 million went directly to charities tied to Aristide and his political party, allowing him to take credit for humanitarian works and strengthening his image as a champion of Haiti's poor.

But the bulk of the money is still unaccounted for, according to a report by the Central Unit for Economic and Financial Investigations, or UCREF, created by the interim government that replaced Aristide after his ouster last year.

"Instead of contributing to the improvement of the people's living conditions . . . the Aristide Foundation . . . participated in the erosion and embezzlement of public funds," said UCREF, created specifically to look into allegations of corruption during Aristide's term.

Jonas Petit, a top Aristide ally living in South Florida, said the report was part of a witch hunt by UCREF Director Jean-Yves Nol. An experienced financial auditor, Nol had no known political affiliation when he was named to head the investigative unit.

The confidential 69-page report, dated April, does not say whether Aristide, now in exile in South Africa, received any of the money for personal use. Nor does it say how the private enterprises used the public funds.

But it contends that the payments violated government spending regulations and broke Haitian laws on money laundering.

'LAUNDERING OF MONEY'

"Large sums are . . . displaced from one enterprise to another, in order to blur the trail . . . This chain of operations characterizes the laundering of money," the report said.

The report was submitted to a judge in June as the first step in a possible prosecution of Aristide, who was elected in 2000 but was ousted by an armed rebellion last year. It was obtained by The Herald and authenticated by three people who have copies, including Petit, acting head of Lavalas Family, Aristide's political party.

Aristide has been under investigation for corruption in Haiti since his ouster. Federal prosecutors in Miami also are looking into whether he took bribes from drug traffickers, The Herald has reported.

The former president has denied all allegations of corruption. Miami lawyer Ira Kurzban, an Aristide advisor, said he had not seen the report and could not comment on it but defended the use of government funds for charity.

"If money is going from the Haitian government to organizations like the Aristide Foundation, which was designed to help poor people, that's not corruption," Kurzban said. "There was not one penny spent by the Aristide government that did not go to help the vast majority of Haitians."

REPORT CRITICIZED

UCREF's findings could not be independently confirmed and the report has been criticized as poorly written. A similar report by another government organization, the Commission for Administrative Investigations, supports the UCREF report but is considered by some Haitians to be politically biased.

"A lot of facts in it are true," Gervais Charles, head of the Bar Association in Port-au-Prince, said of the UCREF document. "But it was not a job well done -- not the substance, the presentation."

UCREF's report said investigators froze about \$4.9 million in Haiti bank accounts belonging to some of the 54 people and enterprises it listed as "suspects." Attempts by The Herald to contact them were unsuccessful.

The report bases the allegation of money laundering on the elaborate movement of the money -- funneled to the three alleged shell enterprises and four humanitarian entities, and then swished around among them in a way that made the origin and destination of the money more difficult to trace.

It said nearly \$6 million -- both directly and through the alleged shell companies -- went to the Aristide Foundation for Democracy, the Aristide University, the Lafanmi Selavi orphanage he founded and Se Pa'n, a food-for-the-poor program linked to his Lavalas party.

Aristide launched the foundation in 1996, and it quickly became the face of his populist programs and headquarters of sorts for Lavalas. UCREF's investigators say the foundation never filed financial reports and received most of its backing from donors who were bankrolled by the public treasury.

Four years ago, the foundation launched the university as a medical school for poor students, largely using Cuban teachers. The school later evolved into a full-fledged university renamed the Professional and Technical University. Both the university and foundation are closed.

Aristide founded the orphanage in 1986, when he was still a priest. Supporters praise it as helping street children, while critics say it raised members of armed pro-Aristide gangs.

UCREF's report listed Jonas Petit as a director of Se Pa'n. Four employees of other food-for-the-poor programs in Haiti said they had never heard of Se Pa'n.

Petit shrugged off the report, saying it made him "laugh." But he would not discuss Se Pa'n or the allegations in the UCREF report.

FOLLOWING THE CASH

According to the report, the three allegedly nonexistent firms listed by UCREF received \$18.6 million from public coffers that remains unaccounted for.

- The largest amount went to VJLS Computer Services and Accessories, which received \$14.5 million during the three-year period that UCREF investigated. It also sent nearly \$2.6 million to Se Pa'n, the university, foundation and orphanage.

"Our investigation has revealed that VJLS is a fictitious enterprise financed by the funds of the public treasury," the investigators reported, saying its registered address does not exist.

- Quisqueya Store, another company that UCREF said exists only on paper, received nearly \$2.3 million from the government and gave about \$523,000 to Se Pa'n, the university and the foundation.

Kurzban said he had heard that Quisqueya bought bulk quantities of rice and sold it to the poor.

- COCSOBFO, listed as a peasant cooperative in the city of Leogane, west of Port-au-Prince, received about \$1.8 million in public funds and gave about \$568,000 to the university, foundation and orphanage. The report said COCSOBFO did not exist, and several Haitians said they had not heard of it.

Herald staff writer Nathalie Gouillou contributed to this report.

Inquiry accuses Haiti's Aristide of embezzlement

03 Aug 2005

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug 3 (Reuters) - Investigators appointed by Haiti's interim government accused ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide of misusing up to \$50 million in public funds, much of it believed to have been embezzled.

The head of the Administrative Inquiry Commission, Paul Denis, said a good deal of the money ended up in the personal bank accounts of close collaborators of Aristide, who fled Haiti in February 2004 after an armed revolt and under U.S. and French pressure to quit.

"From February 2001 to February 2003, about \$50 million was used without justification, including \$19 million that went through (president) Aristide's secretariat to land in private bank accounts," Denis told Reuters on Tuesday.

The commission was one of two inquiries launched into government finances under Aristide after the former priest and champion of the Caribbean country's poor was replaced by a U.S.-backed interim administration. Accused of despotism and corruption, Aristide is now in exile in South Africa.

Earlier this year, Haiti's Central Unit of Financial Inquiries reported that Aristide and senior aides had tried to siphon off around \$5 million from government accounts into private institutions controlled by Aristide. Aristide's party dismissed those accusations, and the new ones from Denis.

Denis said his inquiry found that the Aristide government routinely misappropriated millions of dollars in customs payments by companies importing products into Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas.

He said a rice importer, Chako, paid up to \$5 million in customs fees to the head of the government-run bank, Banque Populaire Haitienne (Haitian Popular Bank), instead of to the customs agency.

"Aristide's office made sure that the amount was not paid to customs authorities, but directly to ... the head of Haiti's popular bank, appointed by Aristide," said Denis. He added that Chako's chief executive officer, Joseph Dieuseul, had confirmed that and said he always paid in cash.

Denis said the head of customs under Aristide received orders to allow companies that had paid money to the state-owned bank to take their goods out of customs.

"Aristide and his accomplices should be prosecuted to make sure such corrupt practices don't occur in the future," said Denis, adding that he believed the cases his commission had unearthed were just the tip of an iceberg.

Neither Aristide, from exile, nor the former head of the popular bank could be reached for comment.

But officials in Aristide's Lavalas Family party said the accusations were a "political lynching."

"I think the de facto government is trying to destroy Aristide and to kill him politically," said Felito Doran, a party spokesman.

"Paul Denis was the most outspoken and fiercest opponent of Aristide. So how can any government ask someone like that to investigate the administration of the president he hated and fought against, even with the most illegal and violent means," Doran said.

CORRECTED-Aristide's party split over Haiti election

03 Aug 2005 16:52:36 GMT

Reuters

In July 28 story headlined "Aristide's party split over Haiti election," please read in second paragraph ... the possibility of doing so without the Lavalas movement that has dominated politics for 20 years ... instead of ... without the party that has dominated politics for 20 years ... (Clarifies that the Lavalas movement has been the dominant force in Haitian politics for 20 years, while the Lavalas Family party, which emerged from the movement, was formed more recently.)

Please also read in eighth paragraph ... He ended up exiled in South Africa after he was driven out in February 2004 by an armed uprising and prompted to go by Washington and Paris ... instead of ... He left for exile in South Africa in February 2004, driven out by an armed uprising and prompted to go by Washington and Paris (Clarifies Aristide did not go into exile in South Africa immediately).

A corrected story follows.

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, July 28 (Reuters) - Ten weeks before elections in Haiti the largest political party, the Lavalas Family of ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the poor masses, still does not know if it will participate.

Overwhelmed by political and gang violence that has killed some 900 people since September, the Caribbean state is struggling to put its derailed democracy back on track. But it faces the possibility of doing so without the Lavalas movement that has dominated politics for 20 years.

One faction within the party -- which emerged from the grass-roots movement that helped turn the country from dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s -- believes Lavalas should not take part unless Aristide, exiled after a bloody revolt last year, is allowed to return.

"No one, no party wants elections more than us, because we'll win any democratic and free elections," said Samba Boukman, a spokesman for grass-roots organizations affiliated with Lavalas. "But it makes no sense to go to vote when you know your president can be kidnapped any time."

Another faction, saying Lavalas must continue to fight for the masses in the poorest country in the Americas, believes the party should indeed participate in the local, presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October and November.

"We definitely want to take part in those elections, but as election dates draw near, the government is doing everything to make sure we don't participate," said Yvon Feuille, a moderate senator from Lavalas.

Some party officials say Aristide's position will be critical. "Aristide is still the leader of the party," said Felito Doran, a party spokesman. "His position is key in any decision to go to election."

Aristide, whose movement helped forced Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier from power in 1986, became Haiti's first freely elected president in 1991 and won a second term in 2000. He ended up exiled in South Africa after he was driven out in February 2004 by an armed uprising and prompted to go by Washington and Paris.

The Lavalas faction arguing for Aristide's return says such a move is necessary to restore Haiti's constitutional order but the U.S.-backed interim government repeatedly accuses the former president's supporters of fomenting violence.

HUMAN RIGHTS CRITICISM

Human rights groups, in turn, have criticized the government for jailing Aristide supporters, including his former prime minister, Yvon Neptune, and Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Roman Catholic priest who has become a popular figure with the poor in Aristide's absence.

"When the government keeps former Prime Minister Neptune in jail illegally, when they arbitrarily arrest and detain Father Jean-Juste, and when they detain so many other political prisoners, the authorities are just trying to prevent us from running," Feuille said.

In a report issued on Thursday, the London-based rights group Amnesty International said Haitians remained mired in a human rights crisis that could worsen as the election nears. It said little progress had been made since the interim government took over and U.N. peacekeepers arrived last year.

"Politically motivated arbitrary detentions, ill treatment, extrajudicial executions, deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, rape, death threats and intimidation are routine and are perpetrated with impunity," the group said.

Fr. Jean-Juste, pastor of the poor
by Margaret Trost
San Francisco Bay View
August 4, 2005

Fr. Jean-Juste preaches liberation.

Two weeks ago, I received an email from Fr. Gérard Jean-Juste of St. Clare's Catholic Church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Fr. Jean-Juste and I have worked together through the What If? Foundation for over five years to bring food and education to impoverished children in his community. He wrote to tell me his excitement about the expansion of our food program and the start of this year's Summer Camp.

"We are very happy to start this week another day of hot meals – on Thursdays. Thanks be to God! Also, 400 + youngsters enjoyed a very beautiful first day of Summer Camp. It is a great joy to watch the youngsters develop their skills in workshops such as: Floral Arts, Macramé, Baneko (using banana peels to make beautiful cards), Calligraphy, Sewing, Embroidery ... We keep the kids busy and are teaching them something useful. They are having a good time in recreation while also being fed.

The children who rely on Fr. Jean-Juste to feed them and love them wait faithfully for his return. "I've met some desperate mothers today who want their children to participate in the Summer Camp. One said: 'I understand you have no more seats. I'll bring you three more benches if you accept my children.' Thanks to these programs, hope is kept alive in the midst of troubled days. Here, there is a place where people are loved, respected and fed at least four times a week. It is an islet in the middle of the ocean. God's blessing always! Peace and love to you and all! Gerry" (Fr. Jean-Juste).

Today, Fr. Jean-Juste sits in a jail cell at the Haitian National Penitentiary. His crime? It keeps changing – just like last year when Haitian authorities locked him up for seven weeks, finally releasing him as a result of international pressure and the fact that there was no evidence to support the charges against him. This time, although it's still not official, he's been charged with "inciting violence."

Inciting violence? Tell that to the children who walk for miles to come to his church for their only meal of the day. Tell that to the campers who come to his church for a respite from the chaos and suffering of daily life in Port-au-Prince. Tell that to the mothers who rely on him to put their children through school. Tell that to the residents of his neighborhood who have watched him build the first public restroom and water pump in the area. Tell that to the hundreds of people who gather in the sanctuary at St. Clare's Church on the first Wednesday of every month for a special healing service. With no money for doctors or medicine, the materially impoverished look to Fr. Jean-Juste to lead them in prayer for the healing of their illnesses.

Putting the word violence and Father Jean-Juste in the same sentence is an outrage! His commitment to non-violence has never wavered. During his arrest in October 2004, which took place as he was feeding hundreds of children at our Wednesday afternoon meal at St. Clare's, hooded men stormed the church rectory with guns and ordered the children to lie face down on the floor. When they started to pray, they were told to keep quiet. Nevertheless, they continued to pray and sing as their handcuffed priest was dragged through their midst.

Fr. Jean-Juste told me how he was tempted to strike the masked “police.” But when he clenched his fist, he felt the metal cross that’s attached to a ring on his finger. Remembering his commitment to non-violence, he did not strike those who beat him, pushed him through a broken window and threw him into a truck. As the Haitian “police” sped away, they shot into the crowd that had gathered in support of Fr. Jean-Juste. Three children were wounded by the bullets.

This courageous, compassionate priest, known as “the pastor of the poor,” one who feeds over 600 children desperately needed meals four days a week, a person who is greeted every time he walks along the rugged roads of his neighborhood by children waving and calling out “my father,” who leads Mass daily with a reverence and joy that’s authentic and inspiring, whose goal is to provide food, water, education, health care, shelter, electricity and jobs to the poor – this man is behind bars?

Fr. Jean-Juste has been beaten, jailed – ripped away from his congregation and the children who look to him for comfort, encouragement and hope in the midst of chaos. What kind of world do we live in where a priest is locked up on false charges of inciting violence while the real violence of weapons and lies and oppression and power rage on in Haiti seemingly unchecked?

What has our world come to when a priest who loves and serves the little, vulnerable ones, feeding the hungry, speaking truth to power, and who carries only his rosary and a cross on his finger is arrested, while hooded “police,” machine guns in hand, roam the streets and countryside in Haiti? What will it take to stop this madness?

Margaret Trost, president of the What If? Foundation (www.whatiffoundation.org) of Berkeley, Calif., can be contacted at MargaretTrost@yahoo.com.

Fr. Jean-Juste’s latest messages from prison

This message was given to Dave Robinson of Pax Christi USA during a visit with Fr. Gerry in the Haitian National Penitentiary. Fr. Jean-Juste is in a very hot place and is still in significant pain from injuries suffered in the attack on him in St. Pierre’s Catholic Church.

Dear Friends, Militants for Justice & Peace, Family Members, Veye-Yo in Miami, Religious Brothers and Sisters & All of You Distinguished People,

With God’s blessing & grace, with your support on all levels, I am fighting to stay alive & well. The service to the needy brothers and sisters are continuing at St. Clare’s Tiplas Kazo, the 425 member summer camp is running.

I am suffering physically but spiritually I am in good shape.

Victory is coming. I am innocent of all invented charges. Praise be God & to all of you who serve humanity!

Brotherly Love, N Jeri

This message was written Tuesday, Aug. 2:

Dear Friends:

Thank everybody across the world for all your support. I am still in prison. Please keep pushing for democracy and human rights in Haiti – they are feeling it.

I went to court today before Judge Peres-Paul. There are reports on the radio that several political prisoners are going to be released soon. If they do that, it will be because of international pressure.

Please remember all the people in prison – there are so many young people here who have never seen a judge. Please keep up the pressure – democracy will return to Haiti!

God bless, GJJ

Think tank questions Haiti election
By UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
Published August 4, 2005
World Peace Herald

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Haiti is not prepared to hold elections later this year and may be forced to delay them, says the Brussels-based think tank International Crisis Group.

The embattled Caribbean nation has been mired in violence since early 2004, when armed rebels began taking over the country calling for the resignation of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The Haitian leader left the country in February of last year. Since then hundreds of people have been killed in political violence despite the presence of 7,600 U.N. peacekeepers.

"Massive technical, political and security obstacles must be overcome very quickly or Haiti's elections ... will have to be postponed," said ICG in its latest report.

Elections for local leaders are slated for October, while federal elections for parliament and the presidency are scheduled for November. A runoff presidential election will be held in December.

Haiti not ready for elections
Friday, August 5, 2005
Caribbean Net News

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U.S. Sends Guns to Haiti Ahead of Election

By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU

Associated Press Writer

Newsday

August 5, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- The United States will provide Haitian police with firearms and tear gas to aid the fight against militants ahead of elections this fall, the American ambassador said Friday.

The shipment is an exception to the arms embargo that the United States imposed on the Caribbean nation in 1991, U.S. Ambassador James Foley said.

"Given the state of insecurity in this country, the attempts to create chaos, we had to do our best to protect the people from the forces of insecurity and criminality," Foley said.

U.S. officials previously acknowledged giving 2,600 used firearms to the Haitian National Police last year to help re-equip and professionalize the force.

Haitian officials have claimed that police are outgunned by gangs and militants, some of whom are loyal to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Human rights groups, however, have alleged that the force is corrupt and brutal and responsible for unjustified killings.

Foley did not specify the arrival date for the \$1.9 million shipment, which officials said will include some 3,000 handguns, several hundred rifles and tear gas.

The United States imposed the embargo in 1991 when Aristide was overthrown the first time.

Aristide pleaded to have the embargo lifted after 20,000 U.S. troops returned him to power in 1994. But U.S. officials cited the police force's links to cocaine trafficking and the slaying of government opponents -- charges still made by human rights groups.

Violence and kidnappings are a constant threat in Haiti, undermining efforts to organize the elections in October and November to replace the interim government that was put in place after an armed rebellion toppled Aristide in February 2004.

UN peacekeepers in Haiti free fifth kidnapped person, perpetrators flee

Aug. 4 2005

Press Release - U.N. News Center

United Nations peacekeepers in Haiti freed a kidnap victim this week, bringing the total to five persons whose release they have forced in six weeks, the mission said.

The latest victim was Ali Rafael Araujo, a Dominican Republic national in his 20s who was held by his abductors for two weeks, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) said.

A six-member Brazilian MINUSTAH patrol spotted five armed men on Tuesday near the central market in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and drove towards them. On seeing the patrol, the five ran away, abandoning their victim. Witnesses later told the mission that the gunmen had been moving from their initial hiding place.

In other operations in Port-au-Prince on the same day peacekeepers arrested a man suspected of belonging to a gang in the Bel Air shantytown and turned him over to the Haitian National Police, the mission said.

Fri, August 5, 2005
From Haiti to the hall
Editorial
Ottawa Sun

The choice of Haitian-born Michaelle Jean as Canada's next governor general is both interesting and laden with creative possibilities.

The CBC French-language journalist, who will become the first black to take up residence at Rideau Hall, brings credentials that match the way the vice-regal assignment has evolved.

In a country where many Canadians still think they shouldn't be troubled to learn two languages, Jean is fluent in five: French, English, Spanish, Italian and Haitian Creole. This will serve her well in discharging the ceremonial aspects of an office that has undergone dramatic change under Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson, and includes traditional duties as well as representing Canada around the world.

Largely unknown outside Quebec, Jean was 11 when her family sought refuge in Thetford Mines, Que., in 1968, after fleeing the regime of Francois Duvalier in Haiti. She remembers how other schoolchildren wanted to touch her and her sister, because they were not accustomed to seeing persons of colour.

In our emerging Canada, where immigration of people of all colours, cultures and faiths has become commonplace, Jean will not only relate well to new Canadians but symbolize their potential to prosper and truly be at home here.

The keys to Rideau Hall, the governor general's residence, were the sole reserve of men until Jeanne Sauve became the first woman to assume the position as the queen's representative in Canada in 1984.

Now, three of the last five governors general have been women, which is more representative of a new Canada that encourages equality, rewards aspiration and welcomes the world. Sauve made her mark as an advocate for youth. Clarkson visited Canadian troops at Christmas, savoured our national diversity and championed the North.

While many Canadians were rightly offended by some lavish spending, she succeeded in taking the vice-regal office far beyond the borders of official Ottawa.

The challenge for Jean will be to put her own signature on Rideau Hall in a way that is both frugal and meaningful to all Canadians. Few come better equipped for that task.

And another thing ...

So the Tories have proposed making transit passes tax deductible. What a good idea, especially as gas prices near \$1 a litre. If the NDP and Grits can quit squabbling about where the plan came from, maybe we can actually make it happen.

Thursday, August 04, 2005 13:58

Haiti needs help in establishing health-care system

BY VICKI RIDOUT KETT

Northern Life (Greater Sudbury, Canada)

Haiti is considered to be the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, with about 80 percent of its population living below the poverty line. With all the violence and unrest of the last two years the health-care system is at an all-time low.

The average life expectancy is just shy of 50 years of age and infant mortality is 79 per 1000 live births. One in five children will die before age five and one in 16 women will die in childbirth. The largest of the public hospitals in Port au Prince has been functioning with little or none of its nursing and medical staff on duty because it is based in an area considered to risky to travel in.

Close to 50 percent of Haitians have little access to health care and rely very heavily on visiting teams of health-care providers, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders), and medical missionary's clinics. This band-aid solution is OK for now but Haiti needs help in establishing a sustainable health-care system.

Project Haiti has been assisting a number of clinics and hospitals in the past and one of the reasons for my trip was to re-evaluate the needs, remove some from the list and maybe seek out a new project.

Preparing to travel to Haiti to assist in anyway with the beleaguered health-care system takes some planning. Most of the equipment and medicine that has been collected is shipped to Haiti on an ongoing basis, but last minute requests have to be packed and weighed.

After a number of trips to Haiti, I have learned the secrets of packing for the possible greeting one might receive from the custom agents at the Port au Prince airport.

The search of suitcases can take a great length of time if they choose to inspect every bag. This time we were lucky and breezed through, but a doctor from the United States was not so fortunate and had his entire bag containing medicine and equipment dumped out on the floor of the customs hall. His travel experience to Haiti helped and within an hour he was on his way, after treating the agents for their medical conditions! This is health care- Haitian style.

Close to 50 percent of Haitians have little access to health care and rely very heavily on visiting teams of health-care providers, Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders), and medical missionaries' clinics.

Many of health issues facing the average Haitian are determined by their living conditions. Most live without access to potable water, proper sewage systems and reliable electricity. The average life expectancy is just shy of 50 years of age and infant mortality is 79 per 1000 live births. One in five children will die before age five and one in 16 women will die in childbirth. With statistics as these and high levels of infectious disease and a desperate health-care system, any help that the outside world can supply is gratefully received.

Working in a travelling medical clinic in Haiti is an overwhelming experience. My daughter and I were only in Haiti for a couple of days before we were immersed in a clinic in a town called Caberat, north of Port au Prince.

The medical team made up of mostly Americans was in the area for a week. The team consisted of doctors, dentists, nurses, a pharmacist, a translator and support staff. This team is all volunteer, they pay their own way and bring their own medicine, equipment and food.

During the week the team saw more than 1,400 patients. They pulled hundreds of teeth, diagnosed many diseases, did minor surgeries and filled more than 3,500 prescriptions. This was accomplished in poor conditions where the temperatures were over 38 C with no electricity, (we used flashlights) little running water and no equipment to do blood or urine tests or X-rays.

A good eye, good touch, good communication with lots of experience make the diagnosis. Treatment consists of whatever is available in the medicine cupboard. The additional essential item is a book titled Where there is no doctor – a village health-care handbook.

This book is tremendously valuable even for doctors, since many of the infectious diseases in Haiti are not generally seen in countries outside the Third World. Not ideal health care, but when that is all there is the patients are thankful. Considering many of the patients have walked for hours to get to the clinic, they usually arrive with smiles on their faces and always come wearing their best clothes.

What we saw at the clinic was varied from mild to severe fevers, dysentery, asthma, scabies, shingles, herpes, ringworm, skin ulcers, chest, eye and ear infections, broken bones that had never been treated and had healed poorly, severe anemia, syphilis, sickle cell anemia, HIV and cancers. We also saw children suffering from kwashiorkor caused by severe malnutrition, and birth defects from poor nutrition during pregnancy or vitamin deficiencies.

Many of these conditions are treatable but in Haiti many are fatal due to the lack of suitable medicine. Kwashiorkor is treatable through care and proper nutrition, but the affected children rarely reach their height or growth potential.

Tears flow easily at the clinic, maybe due to health-care provider's fatigue, but sometimes due to the inability to "fix" things. We had seen more than 350 patients when a beautiful, 15 year old told me the reason she was attending the clinic. She said she, "could not get her head out of her bed and she would wake up in the middle of the night covered in sweat." Her glands in her neck and under her arms were so enlarged they were obvious to the eye. With consultation of several doctors including a pediatrician, she was diagnosed with advanced lymphoma. With no options for surgery or treatment in Haiti, doctors were only able to treat her with antibiotics to treat secondary infections and sent her on a long walk to her home in the hills.

Tears did flow that moment and the feeling of helplessness took over for a short time, but grief can't last long when there are many more patients to see.

We saw a number of HIV patients that day. Treatments for HIV are scarce. One of the most common infections in people with HIV in Haiti is oral thrush. No treatment was available, so cider vinegar is prescribed.

I found the scarcity of treatment available for HIV positive pregnant women very frustrating when we know that if treatment is given during pregnancy and delivery, it can dramatically reduce the risk of HIV being transferred to the baby.

HIV has infected approximately 10 percent of the population in Haiti and many people choose not to be tested because of the discrimination they face. And as they say, “what is the point when there is no treatment.”

We had some giggles when a local pastor took translation into his own hands. They had just made a diagnosis of a primary infection of syphilis in a young man. After his treatment, I talked to him about the seriousness of the infection, following the treatment and the importance of talking to his partners and asking them to go to a clinic.

I also explained how dangerous syphilis could be to pregnant women and to adults if it remained untreated. The message was clear and he was listening through a Creole translator.

Immediately after winding the discussion up, the patient’s face turned to a look of horror. I asked pastor what he had said.

The pastor told me I had not been tough enough. He told the young man that if he continued with any relationship now or in the future that his private part was going to fall off. We spent some time reviewing the correct information and the young man left. Health care in Haiti!

After a trip to Haiti, I always ask myself if we have made a difference. Yes, to some, but for the seriously ill, no.

To the young teenager with lymphoma whose face is as clear to me as it was that day in the clinic, we are unable. To the HIV positive people we cannot treat, not today, but maybe when the medications are available through a lower cost. It is all so frustrating.

Did we make a difference? I hope so.

Washington's Short-Sighted Policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean

Aug. 5 2005

Press Release - Council On Hemispheric Affairs

This analysis was prepared by COHA Research Associate Océane Jasor.

- Neighborly relations have been neglected far too long, making the U.S. an increasingly isolated nation among Western Hemisphere states. Assistant Secretary of State, Roger F. Noriega's departure is unlikely to shift the situation.
- After installing the controversial Haitian Interim Government, the U.S. virtually fled the scene, and all but refuses bona fide Haitian refugees from migrating to the U.S. in an effort to escape the increasing lawlessness on the island, spurred by the White House's island protégés.
- Panama, Nicaragua and Grenada are examples of countries which once were obsessively important to perceived U.S. national security objectives. Now, despite rampant corruption and drug trafficking besieging these favored governments, the U.S. has failed to pay due attention to their political and economic malaise.
- Washington has shown little concern for Latin America's democratization process beyond pitching some pro forma, pro-democracy rhetoric at a serious problem that requires inventive solutions.
- Noriega's legacy: ideological formulations, an incapacity for administration and an undermining of his Latin American bureau's morale, by his non-stop fulminations against Cuba, his abysmal failures on the FTAA and slowing MERCOSUR's momentum, which threatens Washington's trade aspirations in the rest of the hemisphere.

U.S.-Latin American policy has been marked by erratic and often discontinuous relations with its southern neighbors, betraying an ambivalence toward the region that does not augur well for its future political development. All too often, Washington's desire to protect narrowly defined U.S. interests has relegated Latin America's authentic democratization and development requirements to a legislative and budgetary sideline, leaving unaddressed some of the region's most grave economic, political and social concerns. The White House's monetary priorities (mainly longstanding anti-drug, national security and anti-terrorism interests) have encouraged its pursuit of paper thin policies ranging from claims of dedicated commitment to Latin America's welfare all the way to hints of the abandonment of the region. Through it all, the U.S. has oscillated between the roles of "good neighbor" and a careless, often an abusive bystander. But Washington may soon have to taste the bitterness of its short-sighted and half-baked policies as illegal immigration from Mexico as well as the Caribbean (especially Haiti) begins to build. Increased drug trafficking from the Caribbean and Central America increasingly penetrates porous U.S. borders, and corruption weakens the stability and coherence of many Western hemisphere nations.

The erosion of laudable democratic processes and the pervasiveness of corruption in the Caribbean and Central America do not only affect their governments and people. Washington would be wise to realize that instability in its neighborhood translates into a poisoned environment for trade negotiations and muddled efforts at various forms of political cooperation. The U.S. must find a way to pragmatically

assess and be responsive to the social and economic problems of its fragile neighbors in accordance with Washington's long-term political interests. However, given its track record of neglect and abuse, any usable formula still sits far off on the horizon. Hopefully, Washington may learn to look after its long-term hemispheric goals in a more perceptive, constructive manner, upon which more lasting friendships will be made and genuine interests be served.

Problematic Relations Between the U.S. and CARICOM

As the U.S. became increasingly security-driven after 9/11, it turned to the Caribbean for support at the UN concerning the war in Iraq and other Middle East issues. To Washington's surprise, CARICOM did not automatically align itself with the U.S. cause, despite President Bush's threat—passed on to the Caribbean by its then hardline White House Latin America aide, Otto Reich, via Barbados television—where the latter stressed that the U.S. would always “remember” those countries that did not give their entire allegiance to the U.S. in its overseas engagements. But CARICOM's decision should have come as no shock to a Bush administration that repeatedly has ignored the Caribbean's vital economic problems, centering on trade issues.

Washington has put great pressure on Caribbean economies by opposing the EU's preferential agreements on agricultural products (specifically bananas) with Caribbean producers under first the Lomé and then the Cotonou Agreement, and by applying new regulations concerning the numerous offshore financial services based on the various Caribbean islands. So far, the Bush administration has failed to grasp that the negative effects of its policy on those sectors will more than likely encourage drug trade and illegal immigration from the Caribbean, issues of prime concern to U.S. security. For example, many small-scale farmers in Dominica, where bananas constitute 90 percent of the nation's exports, have predicted that they will have to resort to illegal dealings, including drugs, in order to survive.

It is in the U.S.' best interest that its policies toward its neighbors be fair and consistent, if only because it shares mutual interests with CARICOM. Economic and political stability in the region is crucial if the U.S. wants to prevent the surge of more illegal activities across its borders and achieve a successful trade relationship with the CARICOM and Central American countries, now that the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) has been joined by Central America-Dominican Republic Free trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA). At the same time, it should be aware of the portentous consequences that could arise from the U.S. using its financial and trade leverage to bully the region over relations with countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Haiti.

Erosion Hits Washington's Original Commitment to Haiti

Haiti best illustrates how Washington's episodic concerns can affect its stability while undermining democracy's prospects throughout the Caribbean. On May 27, 2005, the U.S. Department of State urged American citizens as well as its non-emergency embassy personnel in Haiti to leave the country for security reasons. Washington's decision triggered noticeable disappointment among Haitian officials, fearful that this would further contribute to the island's isolation. Others were not surprised that the White House was only mildly cognizant of the plight of the benighted Caribbean country.

The Bush administration seems unable to make up its mind on a course of action, affirming Haiti's instability by deeming it unsafe for U.S. personnel and their families in the country, but summarily insisting on returning would-be Haitian refugees to the island after being intercepted on the high seas, denying that they are in fact attempting to escape harsh violence in their country. After supporting the ousting of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and installing Gerard Latortue to lead Haiti's Interim Government (IGH), the U.S., publicly shunned any further substantive role in the country. On May 28, Latortue declared that the U.S.' advice to its nationals concerning Haiti's dangerous conditions was "regrettable, and occurred at a time when Haiti was desperately in need of international friends."

Moreover, there have been recent rumors that U.S. Marines may be sent to Haiti, despite the White House's previous commitment to not involve its forces there. The deployment of Marines would clarify that one of Washington's primary interests was all along to try to prevent Haitian 'boat people' from seeking asylum on U.S. shores, and that the Bush administration was not prepared to do anything to expedite the issuance of temporary parole status for Haitians in this country. On August 20, 2004, twenty Haitian asylum seekers were arrested for illegally entering the U.S. after their boat landed at Hutchinson, Florida. They were detained and quickly sent back to Haiti. Moreover, from February to August 2004, the Coast Guard has interdicted roughly 2, 000 Haitians and quickly repatriated them in spite of the general violence and possible reprisals facing them.

If illegal immigration ranks high on the U.S. agenda, the movement of illicit substances unquestionably is a major threat to U.S. security, since counternarcotics efforts became merged with the U.S. War on Terrorism.

Who Remembers Grenada?

Grenada is the perfect example that engaging in non-democratic processes cannot be the best way to solve the rampant Caribbean drug problem. As illegal drug trafficking has overtaken Grenada, Washington may dearly come to regret its inconsistency in overlooking the fact that the final destination of narcotics transiting through the Caribbean is mainly the U.S. Grenada along with other agriculturally-based economies need relief.

Grenada was once seen by the Reagan administration's ideologies as vital to the protection of the kind of democracy that the U.S. was promoting in the Caribbean and Latin America. In 1983, at the height of the friction between Castro and the Reagan administration, Grenada was moved to the top of the U.S. regional agenda. On the pretext that hundreds of American medical students attending St. George University were under the threat of the recently staged bloody coup by hard-line Marxist Bernard Coard, the U.S. invaded the island. In reality, the Grenada invasion was a small-scale manifestation of a larger conflict, as the coup gave President Reagan an excellent opportunity to display his unswerving anti-communist policy throughout the rest of the region by ordering hundreds of U.S. troops to seize the island.

After the U.S.' quick victory, its obsessive Cold War interest in Grenada precipitously waned, shortly after which Grenada became a major center of drug-trafficking and money laundering once U.S. forces departed. Along with six other Caribbean islands (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Grenada forms the eastern edge of the Caribbean transit zone for drugs - mostly cocaine and marijuana products - traveling from South

America to the U.S. and other global markets. It is estimated that 20% of all drugs entering the U.S. pass through this corridor.

Nicaragua Has Reached the Desperation Point Washington has failed to act upon the realization that it has good reason to be interested in the economic, political and social stability of the Caribbean Basin nations. As a result, Central American and Caribbean countries are suffering from the effects of inadequate and inconsistent U.S. policies. After a long period of profound neglect, following an obsessive period of concern over the advent of leftist regimes in power in Grenada, Panama, Nicaragua and Guyana, Central America became once again *à l'ordre du jour* for Washington ideologies. However, stability, growth, and democracy are not as much the foci of this renewed attention as are the economic and political benefits that the Bush administration hopes to reap from the advancement of the now enacted DR-CAFTA.

Like its predecessors, the Bush administration offered entrance into the free trade blocs (FTAA, CAFTA) it was pioneering as the curative agent for Nicaragua's problems. Salvador Stadthagen, Nicaragua's economic and social ambassador to the United States even observed, "CAFTA will be good for preserving democracy. It will be a vaccine against instability." However, such a miraculous transformation seems unlikely since no fundamental rethinking of the country's post-war political, economic and social conditions had been conducted or are even distantly fathomed. Roughly 75 percent of Nicaragua's population is still mired in poverty, reflecting an annual per capita income of \$750. In March 2005, violence peaked with the outbreak of protests throughout the country in which scores were injured. Social unrest gave way to political instability, and President Bolaños was forced to seek a remedy to what was fast becoming a fatal malady or resign his post.

In 1990, after a decade of civil war under Sandinista rule, the successor conservative government, with Washington's encouragement, adopted neoliberal economic policies, hoping to drag the country out of its economic plight. After an intense electoral campaign in which the U.S. overtly and covertly spent millions of dollars to defeat Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega in the 1990 presidential race, a majority of Nicaraguans elected U.S.-backed candidate Violetta Chamorro, hoping that forthcoming U.S. aid would put their country on the path to economic and social development. More than a decade later, however Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in the hemisphere, only slightly better off than strife-ravaged Haiti. Throughout the years, the U.S. has extensively campaigned both publicly and privately for its preferred candidates in the country's presidential races, with little concern for the democratic credibility of those being backed. Poverty and corruption have deteriorated state institutions, yet the U.S. maintains its ambivalence toward the country.

High crime rates resulting from poverty, unemployment, and the seeming impossibility of achieving acceptable standards of living has bedeviled all of Central America. In Nicaragua, drug-related activities, which fuel the ubiquitous street gangs, have become fundamental to the economy. While the country was becoming a guinea pig for post-war neoliberal economic experiments, the U.S. lost its interest in a region no longer at the forefront of its foreign policy priorities. This is extremely unfortunate, because poor economic and social indicators are the corollary of political crisis. In the latest Latinobarómetro poll, 70% of Nicaraguans said that they would be willing to accept a *de facto* authoritarian government provided it resolved the country's grim economic crisis. This choking popular consensus is not good news for the hemispheric champion of democracy, since U.S. economic interests in the region depend, among others, on the political stability of the Caribbean Basin countries.

From the Panama Canal To An Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Panama's experience with U.S. interventionist tactics strangely resembles Washington's defining misapprehension of Latin American realities. As with Nicaragua, security concerns intermittently have come to the forefront of their bilateral relations, with Washington's security and economic interests being aggressively pursued while social concerns tend to remain an afterthought.

The signing of the Panama Canal Treaties in August 1977, although constituting a geostrategic victory for the U.S., increased political unrest among Panamanians. Some of the most nationalist among them, who viewed the canal as a symbol of national pride, felt betrayed by the Torrijos government and insisted that the treaties were fraudulent due to the additional stipulations that the Panamanian strongman had agreed to after the treaty had been signed, treaty that gave the U.S. residual rights to intervene in the canal's operations and security.

On December 17, 1989, the U.S., under the first Bush administration, re-engaged itself militarily in Panama. Earlier, Washington had charged General Manuel Noriega, an ex- U.S. Intelligence official, with drug offenses and eventually ordered its troops into Panama after attempting to marginalize the now pariah government through economic and political means. Because control of the canal was scheduled to be transferred to Panama by the year 2000, the U.S. felt it could not afford to permit an independent-minded Noriega to remain in power. Throughout its diplomatic relationship with that country, Washington has not been able to see past the canal, except perhaps when the Bush administration initiated talks in 2003 for a possible bilateral FTA between the two nations, even though the waterway had a diminishing silhouette for U.S. policymakers.

In the post-Noriega period, after the deposed leader had been installed in his Florida jail cell, corruption became rampant in the country, in part perpetuated by the ambivalence of U.S. government officials. Not only is corruption widespread in the Panamanian service-based economy, but the country has also been involved in illegal arms transactions, drug trafficking and money laundering, all functions of Panama's well-developed blackmarket economy. Illicit business practices have become the norm, almost sewn into the fabric of Panamanian society. The depth of this corruption is particularly ominous for U.S. interests, which could be threatened over the long term by the weakening of state institutions. The U.S.' short-sighted neglect in the region has put its vital long-term goals at risk.

In April 2004, an FTA with Panama was being drafted which would incorporate U.S. trade ambitions, but at the final moments the countries were unable to reach a consensus. After the prospect of a U.S.-Panama trade relations cooled down, the White House trade office, which initially was so enthusiastic about formulating a trade pact with Panama, seemed to lose interest. The passage of DR-CAFTA in the Senate and House has since eclipsed U.S.-Panama bilateral relations on Washington's agenda, although the Panamanian legislature has yet to approve the agreement. The prospects of a comprehensive trade agreement have now taken precedent over Panamanian concerns like social stability and the economic well-being of its citizens. Panama's experience illustrates the fact that trade agreements have had some difficulty in being accepted by the home population of a country whose political, social and economic institutions have been so severely eroded that they have become almost non-functional. The benefits of free trade, without proper social cohesion, cannot be assumed to

automatically trickle down to the overwhelming poor majority of the country, a truism with which Washington is reluctant to accept.

A New Vision of Hemispheric Relations

Inevitably, popular discontent with current economic and political outcomes in the region will affect the U.S.' most pressing interests in forthcoming hemispheric free trade agreements. Washington's self-serving policies, together with its application of tough-fisted, military or diplomatic intervention stratagems and the imposition of its trade interests, simply will not do it for Latin America and the Caribbean anymore. Washington is likely to face greater challenges in coming years from the same Latin American and Caribbean countries that so complacently adjusted to its favored policies in the past or even at the present time. Over the last few decades, the U.S.'s foreign policy in the region has been characterized by a cold war-era power bloc mentality. Limited and self-absorbed foreign policy initiatives have facilitated the illicit activities such as drug running. Meanwhile, Washington was concentrating on neoliberal economic reforms. But for the Caribbean Basin countries, local socio-political insecurities and disappointingly low human development indicators dominate regional discourse. In its dealings with Latin America, the U.S. has shown only intermittent interest in local politics and comprehensive economic and political growth, with little evidence being exhibited of Washington's capacity for long-term constructive engagement.

Considering Latin America's proximity to the U.S. and its current economic, social, and political instability, Washington's relations with the Latin American-Caribbean region must be further up on its list of foreign policy interests. Andrew Selee, a senior program associate in the Latin American program of the Woodrow Wilson Center said in an interview with COHA, that "neighborhood makes a lot of difference. This is one of the most important lessons governments have learned over the years. Regrettably, the U.S. has not yet learned it very well." Latin America is one neighborhood where engaged diplomacy, paired with the genuine pursuit of human rights and an acceptable standard of living, are fundamental to regional stability.

Washington should prepare itself to restructure its emphasis on seeking pragmatic, comprehensive approaches to poverty alleviation, the elaboration of social justice and the encouragement of democratic institution-building, in order to augment the region's capacity for political and economic cooperation with the outside world and the advancement of the common good.

U.N. force in Haiti to get new commander
UPI
Science Daily
August 2, 2005

BRASILIA, Brazil, Aug. 2 (UPI) -- Brazil has named a new commander to take charge of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti, Brazilian officials said Tuesday.

Current mission leader Gen. Augusto Heleno Pereira will be replaced by Maj. Gen. Urano Teixeira da Matta Bacellar.

The change of command must still be approved by the United Nations.

Officials gave no indication Tuesday as to why Pereira, who has led the forces for more than a year, is being replaced.

Brazilian forces lead the 7,600 troops and international policemen in Haiti, where they arrived just months after the Caribbean nation was plunged into violence following departure of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Crisis: Haiti not ready for elections

UPI

August 4, 2005

Science Daily

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug. 4 (UPI) -- Haiti is not prepared to hold elections later this year and may be forced to delay them, says the Brussels-based think tank International Crisis Group.

The embattled Caribbean nation has been mired in violence since early 2004, when armed rebels began taking over the country calling for the resignation of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The Haitian leader left the country in February of last year. Since then hundreds of people have been killed in political violence despite the presence of 7,600 U.N. peacekeepers.

"Massive technical, political and security obstacles must be overcome very quickly or Haiti's elections ... will have to be postponed," said ICG in its latest report.

Elections for local leaders are slated for October, while federal elections for parliament and the presidency are scheduled for November. A runoff presidential election will be held in December.

Haiti: Advocating for children in conflict
International Organization for Migration
Aug. 5, 2005

The rights of children and the sensitive situations children face in times of conflict are issues that are being addressed in a series of workshops for the leadership of Haiti's political parties, a few months before fresh elections in the country. The workshops are co-sponsored by IOM, the UN and a local organisation.

Children in Haiti face numerous challenges, particularly in the current context of political unrest. Thousands of Haitian children fall victim to trafficking, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS, and many thousands more have no access to basic education. Children are also used in armed gangs that have been terrorizing Port-au-Prince in recent months.

In a bid to ensure children are not forgotten in Haitian politics, the workshops aim to use the unique role of political leaders as public figures and community motivators to promote children's rights and the condemnation of their involvement in gangs. It is expected that leaders participating in the workshops will inscribe these principles in their party platforms.

"This training is one part of IOM's broad strategy to promote positive alternatives to gang violence, particularly for the youth," says IOM Haiti chief of mission, Maureen Achieng. "We hope that by raising the awareness of political leaders to the issue, they can help spread the message to their constituents and we can keep children out of armed gangs."

The training is being conducted by the Child Protection Unit of the UN Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and UNICEF with cooperation from the Haiti Institute for Social and Political Training. The seminars include members of major political parties and take place over several days in August in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince.

IOM is co-sponsoring the workshops as part of its Haiti Transition Initiative programme, funded by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. The programme, which began in May 2004, aims to stabilise communities by bridging the gap between the government and the general population by creating dialogue between them and by rehabilitating community infrastructures. A key component of this programme is to provide alternatives to gang violence through employment and community activities.

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U.N. to Investigate Alleged Haiti Massacre
Local Red Cross tells of handing out body bags and shovels
by Aina Hunter
August 4th, 2005 5:01 PM write to us
Village Voice

In a written statement quietly released last Monday, the United Nations admitted it was possible that civilians were injured in a raid by its peacekeepers on July 6 in Cite Soleil, a vast concrete-block shantytown of about 250,000.

Haitians both in that country and in the United States have been protesting the actions of the troops, saying a number of innocent people were killed.

The U.N. plans to investigate exactly what happened in the predawn raid. Officials didn't return Voice calls, but by their own account 400 peacekeepers invaded the Cite Soleil neighborhood carrying machine guns and driving tank-like APCs. They entered the bowels of what is arguably the most miserable slum in the Western Hemisphere, seeking to ferret out the infamous Dred Wilme. A politically astute community leader and harsh critic of the interim government and MINUSTAH, Wilme had a large, loyal following in Cite Soleil. He and his followers were feared for their ruthlessness.

They claim to have killed Wilme and four associates in the raid. Two weeks after the killings, they said they knew of no civilian casualties that day, but now they acknowledge there might have been some.

People in the Bois Neuf section of Cite Soleil tell the Voice peacekeepers shot from helicopters and tanks while families slept or were just getting up to start their day. At a recent meeting in a cramped Port-au-Prince cafeteria, Pierre Alexis, director of Cite Soleil's tiny Red Cross infirmary, said his team was first on the scene after the U.N. pulled out around 6:45 that morning. Twenty-six people, mostly women and children, were injured, and taxi-vans were hired to transport them all to the Doctors Without Borders hospital. In an interview, hospital chief Ali Besnaci later confirmed Alexis's account.

They call Cite Soleil home.

Theoretically, peacekeepers from MINUSTAH, the U.N. Mission in Haiti, are there to quell the violence between Haitian National Police and armed groups—some truly political in nature, others merely hired by political factions—until the country is stabilized. Their mission began in June 2004. At first, MINUSTAH tried to stop police from gunning down peaceful demonstrators for the ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, only to have the interim government accuse the U.N. of overstepping its mandate—which is, after all, to help the cops and support the interim government. MINUSTAH commanders backed down, but they couldn't win for losing.

By spring, human rights groups were criticizing the peacekeeping force for doing nothing as police continued to have their way with Aristide supporters. Meanwhile, the rich and powerful criticized the troops for doing nothing while armed groups terrorized the streets.

In late spring a prominent Haitian industrialist went on the radio accusing the U.N. of complicity with “bandits” for the majority Lavalas party. Then the U.S. embassy started muttering about sending in the

marines. At the beginning of June, James Foley, U.S. ambassador to Haiti, told AP reporters that MINUSTAH wasn't doing its job. That's about when, critics say, MINUSTAH started hammering down on the poor—in the name of killing off “bandits” and “gangsters.”

After the raid, outraged human rights activists began funding pilgrimages to Port-au-Prince to see the damage for themselves. They returned with eyewitness accounts and photos of dead children, igniting a nationwide series of protests.

Cite Soleil residents showed the Voice bandaged wounds, tin roofing ripped up by what they said was gunfire from helicopters, schoolhouse walls riddled with bullet holes. One man stood on the unmarked grave—a mound of dirt strewn with garbage—of a man he said was shot in the face by a U.N. peacekeeper. Jean-Joseph Joelle, a member of a pro-Aristide Lavalas group in Cite Soleil, spoke for many residents when he said they “can't really call it a massacre anymore. To us it seems like genocide.”

MINUSTAH left many more men, women, and children dead, residents claim, not only that morning, but in days to follow as injured people slowly died. They say these bodies are now buried in random places throughout the broken cement, weeds, and canals of sewage. The Red Cross's Alexis confirmed that Port-au-Prince's infrastructure has fallen to such a level that workers from the state-run General Hospital no longer transport bodies from Cite Soleil to the morgue—he says people just deal with their dead as best as they can.

Loisne Nelio points to where he says gunfire from a helicopter showered his home. He says his wife was in bed at the time and lost both of her legs due to the bullets.

On July 7, the day after the incursion, Alexis says slum dwellers walked to his outpost and asked for the black plastic body bags and “pikwas”—digging implements the Red Cross tries to keep on hand. The 50 bags he distributed offer the bodies some protection from flies, and lock in the rotting smell while family and friends dig the grave with the borrowed tools.

In a country this destitute, with virtually no ability to conduct forensic science, the agency accused of atrocities is the only organization with the resources to get to the bottom of things. Activists are calling for an independent investigation, by someone.

As it stands it's a big mess. According to the U.N.'s statement, the Haitian National Police (who reportedly stood in the background as MINUSTAH conducted the operation) said that “gangs” were seen killing civilians later that morning, and that those deaths were wrongly attributed to the U.N.

Brick mason Mira Nelson, 56, says he was shot in the leg by a U.N. soldier on a tank while walking to work around 6:15 a.m. on July 6.

A human rights worker familiar with the intricacies of Cite Soleil says that though he is no fan of how the U.N. has been conducting itself, it is not inconceivable that some part of the civilian damage could have been inflicted by friends of Wilme after MINUSTAH left. There's always the chance, he says, that some desperate Cite Soleil resident tipped off (or was suspected of tipping off) the U.N. and was forced to pay with his or her life.

In an effort to sort fact from rumor, Anne Sosin of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti has assigned the case to a Port-au-Prince based investigator. Still, without the ability to order autopsies or ballistics tests, all the activists can really do is ask questions.

Un-spinning Haiti's 'spiral of violence'

ESSAYS & REVIEWS

August 4 , 2005

Derrick O'Keefe

Seven Oaks Magazine

In recent weeks, the Canadian media's embargo against critical coverage of this country's role in Haiti has begun to be broken. Montreal activist Yves Engler got the ball rolling with his splashing of a red substance on Pierre Pettigrew's favourite suit jacket (June 17 2005). Engler's substantive critique might have been lost amid the Foreign Minister's jokes about his stained Calvin Klein; fortunately, another Klein had just interviewed Haiti's president-in-exile, who confirmed the growing assessment that Canada indeed "has blood on its hands." ('Aristide: on the record about Canada and Haiti,' Rabble.ca, June 23 2005)

This breakthrough – followed by the Toronto Star's (July 25 2005) publication of a critique of Ottawa's role by Aaron Mate -- for opponents of the 2004 Franco-American-Canadian coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide threatens to explode the government and establishment discourse of Ottawa's interventions as mere benevolent peace-keeping and/or nation-building, in Haiti and elsewhere.

Enter journalist Maria Jimenez of the Globe and Mail.

Her August 1 article in Canada's 'newspaper of record' is rather innocently headlined: 'Haiti's spiral of violence picks up speed. As criminal gangs spread increasing terror, the world is accused of silence.' Unfortunately, the article spins the blame for the bloody spiral right back onto the victims.

Jimenez places the culpability for the worsening violence in Haiti where it clearly doesn't belong: at the feet of the overthrown government and its supporters. Throughout the article, the reporter bemoans the current United Nations military mission's supposed lack of toughness:

The U.S.-backed interim government has been unable to re-establish order, and the 7,400-member United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or Minustah, been criticized for failing to quell the violence. (On July 6, however, Minustah did show its muscle in an eight-hour operation in the slum of Cité Soleil that left six armed gang leaders dead.)

The 'show of muscle' was a full-scale military operation in a crowded neighbourhood that left at least 23 dead, including infants. The reported target of the mission, 'gang leader' Emmanuel Wilmer, alias 'Dread Wilme', was also killed. An independent journalist working for Haiti Information Project was able to capture grisly images of the death and destruction (see Haitiaction.net). In an incredible display of courage and resistance, 5000 residents of Cité Soleil took to the streets on July 21 to protest the massacre.

The Globe and Mail article, of course, neglects to mention this and other ongoing demonstrations, many of which have been fired upon by the Canadian RCMP-trained Haitian police forces. Jimenez makes a brief reference to Haiti's "long history of oppression, political instability and economic inequality" without mentioning the culprits – the governments of France, the United States and now

Canada, and the greed and corruption of their Haitian collaborators. She then cites recently exiled Haitian journalist Nancy Roc, who asserts that behind all of the violence in her country today is none other than the (apparently) omnipotent Aristide:

The United Nations has not been active enough and when they do intervene, all these human-rights groups complain about it. Aristide is fighting an information war from his exile in South Africa.

Roc's complaint is an echo of outgoing U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Roger Noriega, who claimed that "...Aristide and his camp are singularly responsible for most of the violence and for the concerted nature of the violence." ('Aristide accused of fostering violence,' The Miami Herald, June 24 2005)

A number of in-depth reports, however, put the blame for the vast majority of the violence in Haiti on the forces of the de facto government of Gerard Latortue, the Haitian National Police, and the occupying forces. Supporters of Aristide, and of the Lavalas Party, have been specifically targeted, with mass casualties having been inflicted especially in the poorest neighbourhoods where, Jimenez concedes, many "remain loyal to the deposed leader." (The reporter does not deem it necessary to examine the reasons for the foolish loyalties of the urban poor).

The most comprehensive report on the human rights situation in post-coup Haiti was authored by U.S. lawyer Thomas Griffin (see 'Haiti Human Rights Report, November 11-21 2004,' available at <http://www.law.miami.edu/news/368.html>). The document, which activists have made available to a number of Canadian cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament, debunks the simplistic notion that all of the violent gangs in Haiti's slums are agents of Aristide.

In fact, a number of the most ruthless and brutal gang leaders are paid operatives in the service of the country's wealthy elite. The evidence of this is detailed on page 3 of the 51-page Griffin report, where it explains that "Thomas Robinson, alias 'Labanye,' receives financial, firearms, and political support from wealthy businessman and politico Andy Apaid and businessman Reginald Boulous." Yet official police wanted posters featured only suspected Lavalas supporters, "but not Labanye, perhaps the best known of all gangsters."

Given the clearly politicized nature of who in Cité Soleil is deemed to be a legitimate target for the occupying UN forces, it is worth looking at how the recently slain Dread Wilme explained his own motivations, and the conditions in which Haiti's poor exist today:

If the bourgeoisie wanted to do something for the people of Site Solèy [Cité Soleil], this is not the way they would go about doing it because they have never done anything to benefit the people of Site Solèy. They want the people to be their slaves. They want the people to go and vote but to continue living in the same conditions we are living in today.

We have been living for 1 year now under this de facto government which is destroying the country. 95% of the people from the masses who were working government jobs have been fired. Children cannot go to school. Students cannot advance in their studies. We are wondering just how far this crisis will be allowed to go.

All of this is why we are in the streets, demonstrating and demanding the physical return of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Haiti immediately. This is the only issue the people are interested in today. ('Interview with Dread Wilme,' Lakou New York , April 4 2005)

The Globe and Mail article ignores this record, choosing instead to quote the certainties of a member of the dubiously named Haiti Democracy Project (which featured none other than Roger Noriega at their founding convention):

There is incontrovertible evidence that Aristide supporters are responsible for the lion's share of violence in Port-au-Prince. This is not amorphous violence but a campaign to seize power.

It is not possible for Jimenez to be unaware of the political motivations of the sources she chooses. Her article can only be viewed as a blatant attempt to restore the narrative that focuses on explaining away Haiti's misery by demonizing Aristide, the Lavalas Party and its supporters. Despite such journalistic endeavours to rehabilitate the coup and occupation in Haiti, a much broader range of people and organizations are beginning to question the Canadian government's role.

Rather than playing Jimenez's tired and cynical game of blaming the victims, people in Canada have a responsibility to examine the real impact of Ottawa's policy in Haiti.

It's time to blame the aggressors. Better yet, it's time to stay their hand and return sovereignty and democracy to Haiti.

Society of Professional Journalists Statement on Haiti
AScribe Newswire
Wed Aug 3 2005

INDIANAPOLIS, Aug. 3 (AScribe Newswire) -- The Society of Professional Journalists today released the following statement.

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The situation in Haiti remains of growing concern not just for journalists but also for all people who cherish freedom of speech and press.

Ever since the demise of the dictatorships in the late 1980s, Haiti has had a number of governments, many of which tried to install democratic institutions and which also sought to protect independent media. In too many instances these efforts failed and chaos in the society and political system rose up.

Now, Haiti is once again being ripped apart by roving gangs. Some are loyal to the ousted former president. Some are loyal to other political organizations but many more are loyal to the drug lords, people traffickers, and money launderers.

Journalists are being intimidated by these gangs and by government edict. As a result rumors run wild and accurate information is difficult to get. As journalists we have always believed allowing free media to operate means less misinformation and greater understanding. What is happening now in Haiti creates and exacerbates an atmosphere of distortion that increases violence and human rights violations.

It is for this reason the Society of Professional Journalists finds most disturbing that apparently the existing government of Haiti has been persecuting journalists and has allowed gangs to beat and kill journalists. The government also has sought to control reporting of natural disasters. In addition the government has apparently redefined what is fair reporting to exclude any opposition voices.

We now draw attention to the current case involving Georges Venel Remarias, founder and director of Haitian Press Agency (AHP) and Radio Solidarite.

Now we have learned that Mr. Remarais was recently served with a summons to appear before a Haitian court. Mr. Remarais was outside of Haiti when the summons was served but a member of his staff reported the document accused him of "criminal associations" and "fraud."

Little is known of exactly who issued the summons or the exact nature of the allegations. We at SPJ do not pretend to be able to judge the legality of such a summons or of these charges. We are concerned, however, that this action seems to be a part of an overall plan by the government to silence AHP and Radio Solidarite.

Apparently the government is upset that AHP and Radio Solidarite have been unflinching in their efforts to report the violations of human rights by Haitian forces. While other independent media

outlets exist, AHP and Radio Solidarite are, by best estimate, the only ones left who vocally oppose the current government.

The ruling "Council of the Wise" had ordered radio stations that permit "bandits" to speak over the airwaves would be shut down. The definition of "bandits" is vague and is seen by some journalists as anyone opposing the government. Apparently it is the continued reporting by Radio Solidarite from shantytowns and poor neighborhoods about human rights violations that has so upset the Haitian government.

We call on the Haitian government to cease its attempts to stifle the media.

We further call on it to ensure the safety of Mr. Remarais during his hearings and to make those hearings open to the public and the international media.

We ask that the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces and the U.S. government closely monitor this situation and make public their observations.

And lastly, we call on all other international journalism groups to speak out on behalf of reporters and editors being persecuted in Haiti.

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ABOUT SPJ: The Society of Professional Journalists works to improve and protect journalism. SPJ is dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior. Founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi, and based in Indianapolis, SPJ promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed public, works to inspire and educate the next generation of journalists, and protects First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press.

Can Haiti Hold Elections in 2005?

Aug. 3 2005

Press Release - International Crisis Group

Harold Doan and Associates

Port-au-Prince/Brussels - Extraordinary efforts are needed in the next few months to turn a bad situation around or Haiti's elections will have to be postponed.

Can Haiti Hold Elections in 2005?, the latest briefing from the International Crisis Group, describes the massive technical, political and security obstacles that must be overcome very quickly in order to hold a municipal and local vote in October, and parliamentary and presidential polls in November.

"Adequate security, public understanding of the elections, and broad participation by those who want to register and vote are essential if there are to be fair and free elections", says Alain Déléroz, Crisis Group's Latin America Program Director. "Unfortunately, there is little sign any of these are possible right now".

"A legitimate, transparent and participatory vote is the goal for all concerned with Haiti, not just the formality of elections without substance to meet a deadline", says Mark L. Schneider, Crisis Group's Senior Vice President. "Empty elections that produce a government with little legitimacy could drive Haiti into permanent failed state status, run by drug and criminal networks".

There is no quick fix, and there can be no early exit by the international community if Haiti is not to collapse again. All parties concerned, including the Organisation of American States, the UN, the U.S., Canada, donors and the key Latin American and European countries involved with Haiti, should make a long-term commitment to support development, democracy and security together with a new, legitimate government chosen in a credible election.

For the next months, the most pressing task is to create the conditions for voter registration and elections to proceed. Only one fifth of the potential voters and none of the country's scores of political parties have yet registered even though that process has been running for more than three months and is scheduled to conclude in a week.

Above all, more security is needed. Citizens do not feel safe in most of Port-au-Prince, which has almost a third of all voters. The UN mission (MINUSTAH) should continue recent, more active tactics to confront -- but in a more targeted fashion -- the armed gangs in the capital's vast slums. That requires more troops, particularly the rapid reaction force the UN Security Council approved in June.

To reverse the deep-rooted political crisis, major changes are also needed after elections. To avoid the old winner-take-all mayhem, broad coalitions must be promoted including the major parties and civil society. The predatory manipulation of government for private gain should cease, and citizens' faith in democracy must be rebuilt.

"Elections are part of a long process of recovering from state failure, not the final step in that process", says Schneider.

Jordan not adding to troops in Haiti

UPI

Science Daily

August 2, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug. 2 (UPI) -- Jordan officials said they are not sending additional troops to Haiti, but are replacing existing forces there, Haitian radio reported Tuesday.

Last week several news sources reported that 750 additional troops from the Middle Eastern nation were heading to Haiti to join the 7,600 soldiers and policemen that are part of the U.N. peacekeeping forces.

Instead, said Jordanian Maj. Bashir Daaja, the troops are replacing the 750 soldiers Jordan has already on the ground in the troubled Caribbean country, the Jordan Times reported.

U.N. forces arrived in Haiti last May amid widespread violence. In February 2004, then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left office as armed rebels were taking over the country calling for his resignation.

Blinded by the devil
By Michael Barrick
North Carolina Rumors
August 4, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – Clerzius Liberus is the pastor of Evangelic Church of Horeb Rock (Exodus 17:6) here. We will be visiting the locations of his many endeavors over the next few days, but last evening, we had a pleasant meeting after dinner.

A gentle man, he calls himself a “hard preacher.” But then again, some might say the same about Jesus. He was uncompromising about God’s call upon his life; should a believer do any less? Liberus, 52, does not think so.

He explains, “I was raised in a Christian family.” But of course, he had his own decision to make. He explains, “When I turned 15, I got Jesus Christ is my life.” As a result, he started to preach the Gospel in a small town, and then came to the Theological Seminary of Port-au-Prince, graduating in the early 90’s.

Still, being a pastor is not enough. Along with his Bachelor’s in Theology, he is a dentist, businessman and school founder. His small sewing factory, with 11 employees, serves a valuable purpose in his Kingdom-building efforts. He explains, “I try to give jobs to people, because it helps with dignity. The big thing that God put in my heart is to help people.”

And, he adds, “Haiti is a good country, but there are so many people that don’t have Jesus Christ in their life. The first thing we have to do is bring lot of people to Jesus Christ. It is the only way Haiti is going to change. There are a lot of problems with politics, but we trust in God. But if people come to Jesus Christ, I think a big, big, change comes to Haiti.”

Still the nation, must overcome its cycle of poverty, insists Liberus. “When in poverty, people will do what they need to do to survive. It is often a bad thing. For example, there is a lot of prostitution.”

Still, he does not despair. He is patient. “Well, the first step to bring someone to the Lord is to talk to them about God. First of all, that God wants to forgive their sins. After we talk, if the person has a problem, I tell them God can solve it or help them through it if they trust in Jesus.”

He is apparently successful – admittedly under the complete control of the Holy Spirit. He has about 150 people attending his small church, which he hopes to expand with the help of Christians so moved. But, he insists, “It’s not me doing these things. My deep desire – my priority – is to preach the Gospel. That’s the first job God gave me. My confidence and motivation comes from Jesus.”

He adds, “Sometimes God has me to preach the hard Gospel. I am not an easy man. I always see results in the church. I want the preaching to be alive before God. Sometimes when I preach I cry. Sometimes I imagine the kind of message I’m going to preach, I cry so much. I can’t understand that.”

Asked if it was evidence of God's Spirit living in him, he paused, leaned back in his chair, and simply nodded his head up and down as – aptly – tears welled in his eyes.

So, he focuses on training disciples, making sure that new Christians are immediately put in a Bible class for new believers.

In addition to the blessings of God, he also points to his family as a source of support. He and his wife, Venamie, have two girls, Rebecca and Marsha. “My family supports me. They support me by prayer. My wife is always encouraging people to pray for the church, for me, the ministry.” And he added with a hint of laughter, “She always helps keep me ...focused.”

Indeed, he is, as he is determined to raise a little over \$37,000 U.S. dollars to double the size of his church, a relatively small amount by U.S. standards.

In the meantime, he stays busy with other ministry opportunities, hoping to open a dental clinic next year also.

But perhaps most importantly, he is devoting much of his efforts to the children of Haiti, as he has established a school here. “God put it on my heart to teach them.” While he focuses on one-hour of Bible study a day with the students, he is equally concerned about their physical welfare. In short, he says, “The parents can't give them anything to eat before going to school.” So, he feeds them, knowing a child with a rumbling stomach can not focus on much of anything else. Then, he says, “The first thing I do is teach them the Bible.”

Presently, he is serving about 40 children on just \$400 a month. But he notes, “I will need more than that, because I will have more children coming to school this year.” Indeed, he expects to have about 100. Why? “The parents are very happy. They see a change in their children. We're not only feeding food, but also the Bible. Many things change as a result.” He also needs money to pay the teachers, so that the children will have the highest quality education possible. That would take about \$100 per month, per teacher. Presently, he operates the school with six teachers, two cooks and a secretary, all generally volunteering their time.

Yet, he notes, “But feeding is first thing, because sometimes they don't have anything for a day, but if they come to school they will know they have something to eat.”

Still, he says, Bible study is crucial. “That's my priority, to lead children to Christ. I never talk to the children without talking to them about coming to the Christ.”

While he needs help to continue his school and add on to his church, and would welcome it, he also wants potential donors to do so prayerfully. “It would be a pleasure for me for American Christians to know what we're doing. They can choose for themselves whether to help me.”

While he is proud of his factory, he utilizes it, too, as a witnessing tool. “The first thing I tell them is that I am a pastor. Once I have done that, I can introduce them to God. When I tell them I'm a pastor, they realize the standards of industry come from God.”

This is a message that they – and all Haitians – must hear, says Liberus, “The last president (Jean-Bertrand Aristide) gave the country to Satan.” Indeed, it is widely reported that Aristide regularly allowed voodoo “worship” in the Haitian White House. As a result, says Liberus, “Every area in Haiti has a bad spirit.” But he is hopeful, for at least two Christians, including evangelical pastor Chavennes Jeune, have indicated they will seek the presidency in elections scheduled for later this year. “That is the first reason I would like Chavennes to be president. He will claim Haiti for Christ. I know it. He will do that.”

Regardless of the political situation however, says Liberus, “I keep my hope by faith. I know who is God. God is stirring me in His Word. What He says is true.”

Haiti preparing for polls amid ongoing violence

By Carmen Gentile

ISN Security Watch (03/08/05)

Haiti is gearing up for presidential elections set for later this year even though the embattled Caribbean nation is far from ready to conduct an impartial and fair vote due to the ongoing violence plaguing the hemisphere's poorest nation.

Gun battles, reprisal killings, and kidnappings have become common place in the capital since September last year, when the already violent nation was further plunged into the depths of chaos and despair.

It was then that supporters of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide decided to step up their resistance to the interim government that followed him and the thousands of UN peacekeepers struggling to bring security and stability to Haiti.

Armed backers of Aristide and his once ruling Lavalas Party began what became known as "Operation Baghdad", a grisly campaign against local Haitian police, several of whom were captured and beheaded. It was a particular brand of cruelty its perpetrators said they had borrowed from Iraqi insurgents.

Haiti, a nation with a legacy of political violence dating back to its independence from France in 1804, was drawn into its latest bout of unrest in early 2004 when armed rebels began taking over the country calling for Aristide's resignation based on charges that the former president had allegedly ordered the torture and deaths of political opponents.

The president, who had been deposed once before in a military coup and returned to power with the help of US forces in 1994, was adamant about not leaving Haiti. But in February last year, he finally departed.

Much mystery surrounds Aristide's departure. The former Haitian leader says he was coerced by US forces arriving in Haiti on 29 February 2004 to leave aboard a US plane that took him to the Central African Republic.

US officials in Port-au-Prince and Washington deny the accusation, saying Aristide left of his own volition.

No one has come forward to bear witness to what really happened that day; the details of Aristide's departure have become a lost footnote in the saga of mayhem he left behind.

Since February 2004, hundreds of people have been killed in clashes between Aristide supporters and detractors and in gunfights between the president's loyalists and the 7,600 international UN peacekeepers in Haiti.

Adding to the unrest is the extraordinary number of assault rifles and small arms in the hands of its citizens. A recent report by human rights watchdog Amnesty International said there were 170,000 small arms floating about Haiti's 8.5 million citizens.

"Small arms are being used by illegal armed groups and former military to kidnap, sexually abuse, and kill Haitians with absolute impunity. Without disarmament and effective justice for the victims, Haiti will sink further into crisis," Amnesty International warned in late July.

The group went on to blame the interim government for its failure to implement viable disarmament programs.

"The lack of political will from the interim government to put in place urgently needed reforms [...] or to implement a disarmament program is hampering the efforts of MINUSTAH [the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti] to solve the crisis," said Amnesty.

Looming elections

The changes the nation most desperately needs, say Haitian officials, can only come via presidential elections set for mid-November, with a runoff race the following month, if necessary. Haitians are also set to go to the polls to elect legislative lawmakers.

However, changes in Haiti's approach to ending the violence are essential before the elections, says Amnesty, in order for them even to occur, leaving the nation in a Catch-22 of dire proportions.

"I think the whole country should stand up against the architects of violence ... and vote them out," Haitian Ambassador to the US Raymond Joseph told ISN Security Watch on Tuesday, referring specifically to lawmakers from Aristide's Lavalas, which remains a viable political force in the country.

"The continuing violence is depriving common people of their livelihood," he added, regarding the rampant poverty and joblessness that was a result of the fighting in the capital, which is also Haiti's economic hub.

The ambassador's call for change might be easier said than done considering the difficulty the interim government has had getting people to register to vote. Only in recent weeks have Haitians begun to come forward, many of them afraid of being targeted for termination by armed political zealots if they are seen taking an interest in elections.

So far, some 660,000 people have registered to vote, said Joseph, who added that Haitian electoral officials would continue signing up eligible voters until the last minute in order to give everyone a chance to cast their ballot.

The ambassador would not speculate just who would emerge as the leading presidential contenders, though he predicted that at least five candidates would vie for Haiti's highest office.

According to Haitian law, in the event that no candidate receives 50 per cent plus one vote in the November elections, the top two winners will square off in a December runoff - a near certainty considering the fragmented nature of multi-party politics in Haiti.

What appears certain, notes Joseph, is that interim President Boniface Alexandre does not have any aspirations to remain in office.

Both Alexandre and interim prime minister Gerard Latortue, the real architect of post-Aristide Haiti, have said they are prepared to step aside and allow a democratically elected leadership to assume what can be best described as the Herculean task of restoring some semblance of order to the nation.

Rebuilding the nation

Regardless of who takes over Haiti, nothing can happen unless the UN forces remain in country and the Haitian military and police are bolstered to tackle the violence issue and get the guns out of the hands of Haitians on both sides of the fight.

“Without the permanent demilitarization of armed groups, humanitarian assistance and development will be continually endangered,” read a report issued earlier this year by the Geneva-based research group, the Small Arms Survey.

The UN has already committed to extending the mandate of the troops for another year, well into 2006. And in the meantime, Haiti is hoping to restructure its own armed forces and augment its civilian police.

The nation’s armed forces were disbanded by Aristide after his return to power in 1994, setting the stage for the insurrection that forced him from office a decade later as most of the rebels sweeping the nation were former military.

The woefully ill-prepared police are particularly unpopular with armed gangs of Aristide supporters for allegedly targeting them for torture and executions.

In addition to addressing the need for a well-armed military and police, Haiti’s new leaders will also have to take on the daunting task of reconfiguring the country’s notoriously corrupt and inefficient judiciary and courts.

Their first task is to figure out a way to deal with Aristide, who insists from exile in South Africa that he is still Haiti’s rightful leader and will one day return to resume his role as president.

Haiti’s interim leaders have expressed no desire see that happen, though pro-Aristide demonstrations continue to draw thousands of his supporters to march in front of the presidential palace he once occupied.

Still others would like to see Aristide shipped back from his asylum home in South Africa to face corruption and murder charges. “He’s going to have to one day face the those charges against him,” Joseph said.

When or if that's going to happen is one just one of a million uncertainties facing Haiti in the coming months as it prepares to find a new leader amid the continuing madness.

Carmen Gentile is ISN Security Watch's senior correspondent in Latin America. He is based in Rio de Janeiro and travels extensively throughout the region. He has written for a number of prominent daily newspapers, including The Boston Globe and the San Francisco Chronicle. He also reports for Voice of America radio.