

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: AUGUST 22 – 31, 2006

Eyewitnesses Account: UN Forces Open Fire on Poor Haitian Neighborhood Democracy Now! Thursday, August 31st, 2006

United Nations troops in Haiti opened fire last week on a poor neighborhood outside of Cite Soleil. We show footage of the raid, speak with a writer and activist who witnessed the raid and hear from the mother of a nineteen year-old who was killed in the raid. [includes rush transcript]

Is life in Haiti improving under the new presidency of Rene Preval? Well just last week, UN forces opened fire on a poor neighborhood outside of Cite Soleil. An international delegation of activists was in the area and witnessed what happened. They also caught much of the raid on tape. In a moment we are going to play some of that tape. But first we are joined in our firehouse studio by one of the witnesses. Ben Terrall is a writer and activist. He just returned from Haiti this week.

Ben Terrall, writer and activist who just returned from Haiti. His writings have appeared in CounterPunch, In These Times, the San Francisco Chronicle and else where.

We go back to the day of the UN raid in Simon Pele. These are members of the international delegation describing the scene:

Witnesses describe the UN raid as it is caught on tape.

Nineteen year-old Wildert Sanedy was shot and killed by UN troops in the raid. The delegation caught up with his mother, Adacia Sanedy, four days after the shooting. She spoke about her son.

Adacia Sanedy, son killed by UN troops in Haiti.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to stay on this issue of UN forces. Is life improving under the new presidency of Rene Preval? Just last week UN forces opened fire on a poor neighborhood outside Cite Soleil. An international delegation was in the area and witnessed what happened. They also caught some of the raid on tape. In a moment, we'll play a clip of that tape, but first we're joined in our Firehouse studio by one of the witnesses, Ben Terrall, who is a writer and activist, just returned from this delegation in Haiti. Ben, would you set the scene for us about what we're going to see?

BEN TERRALL: Well, I was with other members of this delegation on a road in Simon Pele, which is adjacent to Cite Soleil. It joins it on one side. And we saw two armored personnel carriers come in as we were there and go down one street, and on a perpendicular street there were two other APCs. And I personally saw five or six Brazilian UN troops run out of one of the APCs into the neighborhood. And we went towards the APC, and we got footage.

AMY GOODMAN: This footage is quite something. Let's go to the day of the UN raid in Simon Pele. These are members of the international delegation describing the scene.

SASHA KRAMER: We're in Pele in Cite Soleil, and we just heard several rounds of gunfire. We saw soldiers jump out of the tank and run into the houses nearby. Sounds like they were shooting from inside the houses.

HAITIAN CIVILIAN: [translated] Last week, there were several groups in Cite Soleil who said they would turn over their weapons. But since, MINUSTAH has continued to shoot on the population. They have not done that. As you can see right here, they are continuing to shoot on the population.

DELEGATION WITNESS: There's the MINUSTAH soldiers firing from their tank into a residential neighborhood. And the blue helmets signify that it's UN soldiers. They're wearing the Brazilian uniforms. They're getting instructions over the radio right now. They don't seem to be at all deterred by our presence. More troops have moved into position here, and it looks like a military operation underway. The foot troops are going into the area -- the infantry troops are going into the area. They're positioning themselves for some kind of an attack in this civilian neighborhood.

HAITIAN CIVILIAN: [translated] This is the same formula they used when they killed Dred Wilme on the 6th of July last year. So they are cutting off a street here using bulldozers, so people can't get in and out. They say they are looking for bandits. But we do not know exactly who they are looking for.

AMY GOODMAN: 19-year-old Wildert Sanedy was shot and killed by the UN troops in the raid. The delegation caught up with his mother, Adacia Sanedy, four days after the shooting. She talked about her son.

ADACIA SANEDY: [translated] After I lost my son, I didn't even know what to do. I couldn't even stand up. I felt like I lost him in a very bad situation. My message to the UN is to thank them for the son that they killed. They are always looking for bandits. Apparently they didn't get them. At this time, any innocent civilians just passing can get shot for nothing.

AMY GOODMAN: Ben Terrall, there is a grieving mother. Explain what she's saying, because maybe it misses something in translation, as she says I thank the UN troops.

BEN TERRALL: Well, I was going to ask her if she had a message to the outside world, but we just sort of let her talk about the experience. And she described how her son was fixing the radio on the roof as the snipers came in. And she said, 'This is my message to the UN: I want to thank you for killing my son. You come in here. I don't know why you're here. Civilians are killed all the time.' So this is part of a pattern. This operation --

AMY GOODMAN: She's being sarcastic.

BEN TERRALL: Completely sarcastic. Yeah, she's very obviously very bitter about this. And her son did nothing to deserve this. He wasn't connected to an armed group. He was just fixing a radio on the roof. And this has been true throughout these operations. I talked to an older man who was leaving the neighborhood, who said there had been many people killed. We have him on tape, as we were interviewing him. He said many people had been killed, and they weren't connected to armed groups.

So the UN, they're -- basically the UN is operating without oversight. They're operating with impunity. They're going in, and they're just, quote/unquote, "securing" these neighborhoods at the behest of the ultra-rightwing small elite in Haiti that want to kill as many people as possible in these areas. They're not going after death squads. They're not disarming the rightist-backed forces and the holdover forces from the coup, which unfortunately are still controlling the judiciary. They're controlling much of the Haitian government.

And though there have been a small number of high-profile political prisoners released, as well they've been targeting people. So this week I spoke with an incredible Lavalas organizer who's very close to Aristide. He had been with Lavalas from their early years. They come back from exile. His name is Rene Civil. He had come back from exile, and he was picked up for what looks to be a completely bogus charge. His lawyers denounced the charges on the radio. And I spoke to him, and it just looked completely ridiculous. He left his car in Haiti. He went to the D.R. They're charging him with crimes committed by the police, when they had his car when he was in exile.

So this guy spoke to us earlier in the week about a program he was running, which was getting scholarships to poor kids. He's working with the poorest of the poor, as the Lavalas movement is all about. I mean, their motto was "From misery to poverty with dignity." And apparently, the U.S. continues to just feel -- clearly the U.S., France, and Canada continues to not be willing to accept that. And their friends who are still in power there just want to target these people as much as possible and kill people and do all the things that we heard of in the Lancet reports.

JUAN GONZALEZ: I'd like to ask you about some of these incidents and the atrocities of the UN peacekeepers. What kind of coverage in the media -- first of all, in Haiti, because the rest of the world has already, like, forgotten Haiti, ever since Preval came back, was re-elected as president. But in terms of -- what's happened now in terms of the Haitian media?

BEN TERRALL: Well, the largely rightwing elite-controlled Haitian media is driven by these ultra-rich, ultra-right forces that want the UN to crack down further. They want them to kill more people. There's been a campaign of complete dehumanization of the poorest neighborhoods in Haiti. And so, you're not getting accurate information in most of the Haitian press and a small number of radio stations.

But certainly internationally, we don't hear the broader -- we never hear the broader context of what the UN has been doing, since the beginning of the coup, which is backing up the Haitian police, aiding and abetting slaughters. And this went on in the first two years. A key factor of this is this went on in the first two years. And they were provoking the population by engaging in vast numbers of killings, the police. And it's been thoroughly documented before the Lancet study by the University of Miami Law School, by filmmaker Kevin Pina, by the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

So they kill off, they imprison, they torture the nonviolent leadership. And then a small number of people, after two years of these attacks, take up arms. But they're very limited in number. And it's something that I think people in Houston would do if their neighborhoods were under siege by armed forces for two years. And you have to remember, in the '91 coup, there were like 5,000 people killed, so people have this memory of that. And it's always -- in the media reporting, it's always taken out of that context.

And also, you never hear about the people that are running free, you know, the rightwing people like Guy Philippe, who was a key player in the coup forces that came in from the north, who was trained by the U.S., you know; and Jodel Chamblain is out now, too. And these people are running around. They're old Duvalier people running around, who were backing all these death squads, and nobody's disarming them.

**Shocking Lancet Study: 8,000 Murders, 35,000 Rapes and Sexual Assaults in Haiti During U.S.-Backed Coup Regime After Aristide Ouster
Democracy Now!
Thursday, August 31st, 2006**

A shocking new report published in the British medical journal The Lancet has found widespread and systematic human rights abuses in Haiti following the ouster of democratically-elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

New figures reveal that during the 22-month period of the U.S.-backed Interim Government, 8,000 people were murdered in the greater Port-au Prince area alone. 35,000 women and girls were raped or sexually assaulted, more than half of the victims were children. Kidnappings, extrajudicial detentions, physical assaults, death threats, and threats of sexual violence were also common.

Those responsible for the human rights abuses include criminals, the police, United Nations peacekeepers and anti-Lavalas gangs.

The findings are based on a new report published in the British medical journal the Lancet. The study is based on an extensive survey of households in the Port-au-Prince area .

Athena Kolbe, master's level social worker with the Wayne State University school of social work in Detroit Michigan. In December 2005 she coordinated an extensive survey of households in the Port-au-Prince area to determine rates of human rights abuse under the interim Haitian government. Dr. Royce Hutson, assistant professor of social work at Wayne State University. He co-authored the Lancet study on human rights abuses in Haiti.

AMY GOODMAN: The findings are based on a new report published in the British medical journal, The Lancet. The study is based on an extensive survey of households in the Port-au-Prince area of Haiti. Athena Kolbe is one of the authors of the report. She's a Master's-level social worker with the Wayne State University School of Social Work in Detroit, Michigan. She joins us from a studio in San Francisco. We're also joined by Dr. Royce Hutson, on the phone from Detroit, co-author of the report, assistant professor of social work at Wayne State University. We welcome you both to Democracy Now!

Athena Kolbe, these are startling findings. 8,000 murdered. Over what time period? And how do you know this?

ATHENA KOLBE: We started -- well, basically what we did is we randomly selected households in the greater Port-au-Prince area, 1,260 households, and then went and interviewed them about their experiences with human rights violations beginning in February 29, 2004 with the departure of Aristide through December of 2005, which is the one-month period, where we did the interviews. So based on that, we found that 23 households out of the 1260 had members who had been assassinated in that time period. And the figure of 8,000 is derived from estimating that based on the population of the greater Port-au-Prince area.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Now, when you say “randomly selected,” obviously in Haiti, one of the poorest -- the poorest country in the western hemisphere, a lot of people don't have phones -- or even locating folks. Could you explain your use of GPS to actually develop who would be the random households selected?

ATHENA KOLBE: This was actually kind of a unique type of a study, because this methodology hasn't really been used before in public health and human rights studies. It was used a little bit in another Lancet study about Iraq just before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. But what we did is we randomly selected GPS locations, 1,500 of them, and then went and visited each location, eliminated the ones that weren't actually households, the ones that were, you know, the side of a mountain or the airport runway or whatever, and then went and interviewed people at the remaining ones that were households.

And we had an over 90% response rate, which is extraordinarily high and really indicates that even those that were legitimate sites, where we went and talked to people, most people were willing to talk to us, indicating that they had something to say and wanted their story to be told about their experiences with human rights.

AMY GOODMAN: And can you talk about who carried out these killings?

ATHENA KOLBE: Yeah. We had -- the largest number of perpetrators for most of the violations were criminals, indicating that there was high rates of criminal activity. But also, we also had a number of assassinations that were done by members of the Haitian National Police, as well as killings by UN soldiers and killings by demobilized soldiers from the ex-Haitian army that was disbanded by President Aristide in 1995.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And in terms of the rapes and sexual assaults, because you said that you had -- you identified actually 23 families that had actually experienced assassinations or killings within their own families, and in terms of the raw numbers on the actual rapes and assaults, and then how you extrapolated those to this astounding number of 35,000.

ATHENA KOLBE: Dr. Hutson could actually talk a little bit more about that, because he has the figures right in front of him. But I believe that it was 93 families total out of the 1,260 that had sexual assault victims in their household. And some of those had multiple victims within one household.

AMY GOODMAN: Dr. Royce Hutson, could you follow up on that?

DR. ROYCE HUTSON: Sure, absolutely. Yeah, actually, Athena, it was 94, but very close. Yeah, so we took 94, and we essentially extrapolated it to the greater Port-au-Prince area with the estimated number of females in the greater Port-au-Prince area that we got from our own sample. Census data wasn't really available with regards to what the average household size, what percentage of the population is female. So we had to sort of construct those figures for ourselves. And then we took those constructed figures and extrapolated our findings to the greater Port-au-Prince area. And we got to 35,000, roughly, female sexual assault victims.

AMY GOODMAN: We're going to break, and then we're going to come back to this discussion and also go to Haiti, some videotape that is quite shocking of UN forces moving into the neighborhood around Cite Soleil and opening fire. We're also going to talk with an attorney who has brought a lawsuit against a man who now sits in a New York jail. He's sitting there for mortgage fraud charges, but he's a leader of a paramilitary death squad, Emmanuel Constant, and they have brought a lawsuit against him for sexual abuse and rape of women in Haiti. Stay with us.

AMY GOODMAN: On the phone with us, Athena Kolbe, social worker with the Wayne State University School of Social Work in Detroit. We're also joined on the telephone by Dr. Royce Hutson, assistant professor of social work at Wayne State. Athena is in a San Francisco TV studio. Athena -- Juan, a question.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Yes. I'd like to ask Dr. Hutson, these findings are so startling that obviously a lot of people are going to question them, because this is something that really has not been extensively reported in the past. So I'd like to ask you, in your figures you claim that over 50% of the murders were committed by government forces or anti-Lavalas groups and the bulk of the others by criminals, very few by Lavalas supporters themselves. And also in the rapes, about a quarter of them were committed by either government forces, police or anti-Lavalas groups. Now, obviously this is a peer-reviewed study, appearing in the Lancet, but your defense of those who will say that you're basically extrapolating from very small numbers of people that you actually interviewed who were victims of these crimes?

DR. ROYCE HUTSON: Well, actually, I would argue that it was not really that small of a number, though it was 1,260 households that really represented 5,720 individuals. And in survey methodology, that's considered a rather large number of people to be surveying. If you looked at our -- for instance, if you looked at our confidence intervals, you'll find that for at least a number of -- in extrapolated figures, I should explain, that those are pretty tight figures, because our sample sizes are rather large.

With regards to who is committing these, we made a special point of, for instance, not using interviewers that are associated with Lavalas or less political parties, in the interest of trying to keep the study nonpartisan. I mean, of course, there's a possibility that people would claim that someone did something to them when they didn't. But we find that that, in fact, probably was not the case, in that when we look at the figures, you know, it goes across the breadth of various anti-Lavalas groups -- the demobilized army, the HNP -- which are not exactly what I consider to be a sole entity. They are, in fact, separate groups.

AMY GOODMAN: And just to explain, Lavalas being pro-Aristide forces. Aristide removed in Haiti in 2004 in a U.S.-backed coup against him. We're talking about this period after his removal.

DR. ROYCE HUTSON: That's correct. We didn't find any -- we didn't detect any Lavalas atrocities with regards to murder or sexual assault. We did detect some physical assaults by Lavalas members and some threatening behavior by Lavalas members. So they're not completely exonerated from any human rights abuses. However, as the questioner noted, a vast majority of the atrocities that weren't committed by criminals, but by others, were from groups affiliated in some fashion with anti-Lavalas movements.

AMY GOODMAN: Athena Kolbe, who are the restaveks?

ATHENA KOLBE: The restaveks are unpaid domestic servants. They are children, usually from the countryside, who come into the city, and they work with Haitian households in exchange for room and board. And we found that girls who were restaveks were particularly at risk for sexual assault, more so than other children, although children in general were particularly at risk, but also more so than even adult women.

And this really begs the question of, when you have so many restaveks who were sexually assaulted -- and when we're talking about sexual assault, also I want to clarify, we're not just talking about molestation or someone grabbing someone sexually when they don't want it. We're talking about more than 90% of the sexual assaults in our study involved penetration. And some of the them involved multiple perpetrators, involved penetration with inanimate objects, like a piece of metal. These were very brutal sexual assaults that we recorded. And when we're looking at such high numbers of children being sexually assaulted by officers from the Haitian National Police, and then particularly this vulnerable group of child domestic servants, it really makes you wonder what exactly was going on under the interim Haitian government in regards to the sexual assault of children by police officers.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And what about the international peace monitoring force that is stationed there? Did you find any indication of violations, human rights violations, by them?

ATHENA KOLBE: We certainly did. Although the rates were lower than some people might have expected, we found that they had very high rates of threatening behavior, of committing death threats, threats of sexual and physical violence. And by threats, we mean not just pointing your gun at someone, because when you're a peacekeeping soldier, you know, you carry a gun. If you have to point it at people, then some people might interpret that as a threat. We didn't count that as a threat. We counted threats as something verbal, a verbal, you know, "Do this, or I'll kill you," where the person really felt like they were legitimately threatened, like their life was really at stake or the life of their family was really at stake. And they had actually relatively high numbers of death threats and threats of sexual and physical violence, which is perhaps indicative of a pattern of perhaps a lack of training, or since it was so many troops from different countries, as well, who are involved in this threatening behavior, that perhaps the United Nations forces are not interacting with the Haitian populous in a really appropriate way.

**Press Release: AIDS Healthcare Foundation
AHF Celebrates New Global AIDS Partnership in Haiti
Thursday August 31, 2006**

AIDS Healthcare Foundation Joins with Management Sciences for Health (MSH) to Provide Technical Assistance in Scale Up and Delivery of HIV/AIDS Treatment in Haiti

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), the largest AIDS organization in the United States, which operates free AIDS treatment clinics in the US, Africa, Asia and Latin America/Caribbean, has joined Management Sciences for Health (MSH), a Boston-based private, nonprofit international organization working in public health areas to improve management and access to medical care and services, in a new partnership through which AHF will provide technical assistance in the scale up and delivery of lifesaving HIV/AIDS treatment and services in Haiti.

Since 1995, NSH has been the prime contractor for the implementation of the USAID funded Haiti Health System 2004 Project (HS2004), working to improve the Haitian population's access to high-quality health services, while building systems that can be sustained by Haiti's own technical and financial resources in the future. MSH and its partners established an NGO network-currently numbering 31 members to streamline services, deliver a minimum package of services, and develop strategies to inform and educate the public. In October 2004, MSH under a new three-year contract with USAID, HS 2007, began a new phase which continues the successful strategies of HS 2004, included in this is the provision of HIV/AIDS management, care and services at facilities throughout Haiti.

In this new partnership, AHF, which has close to twenty years of experience delivering HIV/AIDS medical care and services, including hospice and medical care, anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and voluntary HIV counseling and testing services (VCT), will team with MSH to provide assistance in areas including: scale up of the delivery of lifesaving ART, expansion of the number of people on treatment as well as improved patient adherence to HIV protocols and HIV/AIDS drug regimens; expansion of access to VCT for HIV; and improved access to services to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV (PMTCT).

"We are honored to announce this new partnership in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Haiti," said Scott Howell, MD, Latin America/Caribbean Bureau Chief for AIDS Healthcare Foundation. "This collaboration between AHF and Management Sciences for Health offers a focused opportunity to improve and expand HIV prevention and HIV/AIDS care and services in this hard-hit Caribbean country. Through this partnership, AHF will collaborate with our esteemed partners by providing technical support and related services to increase and strengthen the scale up of antiretroviral therapy (ART) and the delivery of HIV/AIDS medical care at ART delivery sites throughout Haiti."

"We are very excited about this new partnership with AHF," said Paul Auxila, MSH's representative in Haiti. "We are counting on AHF's recognized expertise to help us demystify HIV/AIDS care and treatment, and to build systems and strategies more adapted to Haiti's resource constraints and conducive to longer-term sustainability."

"HS2007 Project affords me the opportunity to come back to Haiti and apply all the experiences that I have acquired with the AHF team in Florida and to once again serve the Haitian population and to contribute to the Integrated Management of HIV/AIDS and related diseases in people living with HIV/AIDS in Haiti," said Ermane Robin, MD, Haiti Medical Project Coordinator for AIDS Healthcare Foundation, who will spearhead AHF's participation in this new partnership in Haiti.

HIV/AIDS in Haiti

Following are some general background statistics on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Haiti provided by the international charity organization, avert.org:

- * More than 2% of the adult population in Haiti is currently living with HIV. Higher prevalence rates are found only in sub-Saharan Africa, making the Caribbean the second-most affected region in the world. More than half of adults living with the virus are women.
- * An estimated 16,000 lives are lost each year to AIDS in Haiti, and tens of thousands of children have been orphaned by the epidemic.

Trends and transmission routes

- * The predominant route of HIV transmission in the Caribbean is heterosexual contact. Much of this transmission is associated with commercial sex, but the virus is also spreading in the general population, especially in Haiti. Cultural and behavioral patterns (such as early initiation of sexual acts, and taboos related to sex and sexuality), gender inequalities, lack of confidentiality, stigmatization and economic need are some of the factors influencing vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in the Caribbean.
- * Haiti's prevalence levels have been very high since the late 1980s (the estimated rate in 2005 was 3.8%). With very low condom use among young people, and about 60% of the population under 24, much scope exists for renewed growth in Haiti's mainly heterosexually transmitted epidemic.

"The recent '2006 UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic' cited Haiti as one of only four Caribbean countries that has dented the progress of HIV," said Michael Weinstein, President of AIDS Healthcare Foundation. "We recognize the laudable efforts undertaken by the Government of Haiti to treat its people living with HIV/AIDS and to try and arrest and eliminate the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Haiti, and we look forward to assisting our partners in scaling up HIV prevention, treatment and care services throughout the country."

"AHF is honored to join forces with such forward-thinking leaders to implement appropriate and relevant medical care and support services to those living with HIV/AIDS in Haiti," said Henry E. Chang, AHF's Chief of Global Affairs in a statement from AHF's Global Secretariat in Amsterdam.

Source: AIDS Healthcare Foundation

Woman Recounts Gang-Rape Horror in Haiti

By TOM HAYS

The Associated Press

Washington Post

Wednesday, August 30, 2006

NEW YORK -- One of three women who claim she was gang-raped by soldiers loyal to a former Haitian strongman testified Tuesday that one attack took place as her five small children watched.

Masked men burst into her home in Port-au-Prince in 1994 and raped her while her children saw "everything that was being done to me," she said through an interpreter and behind a large video screen to shield her identity.

The hearing was about whether Emmanuel "Toto" Constant owes at least \$1 million in compensatory damages and unspecified punitive damages to each of three women named as plaintiffs.

The witness, who fled to the U.S. in 2003, has accused Constant of sanctioning the systematic rape of women in the early 1990s to silence slum-dwellers still devoted to the ousted former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

U.S. District Judge Sidney Stein granted her anonymity based on fears she still could be targeted for retribution.

The defense table was vacant: Constant remains in jail on Long Island after being charged in July with mortgage fraud. His attorney in that case has declined to comment.

Constant emerged as the feared leader of a right-wing paramilitary group after Aristide was deposed in 1991. It terrorized and slaughtered Aristide loyalists between 1991 and 1994, human rights groups say.

The alleged rape victim testified that her ordeal began when her husband, a taxi driver and fierce Aristide supporter, vanished in 1992. She described taking to the streets and voicing her despair.

Even after being jailed and beaten, she remained vocal until five men arrived at her door in April 1994. They beat up her 8-year-old son and took turns raping her, she said. Two months later, the nightmare was repeated.

Three months later, she saw a doctor who delivered some shocking news: She was pregnant by one her attackers. A son was born on Feb. 12, 1995. He and the rest of her children still live in Haiti.

Haiti spared devastation
Some seaside homes lost; few deaths are reported
By Ruth Morris
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
August 29, 2006

Pelted by torrential rains, but spared catastrophic damage, Haiti awoke from Ernesto's passage Monday to reports of at least two storm-related deaths and seaside homes carried out to sea.

Dr. Michaele Gedeon, president of the Haitian Red Cross, confirmed the storm system had caused two deaths, one in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, and one in the southern peninsula, where rains were heaviest.

She said the relief agency was looking into reports of a third victim on Gonave Island, opposite the capital.

In South Florida, meanwhile, Haitian-Americans entered a wearisome routine of redialing phone numbers disconnected by the storm, hoping for any scrap of information about loved ones, while simultaneously preparing for Ernesto's arrival themselves.

Bito David, a Haitian-born public-relations officer for Palm Beach County, tried repeatedly to reach friends in southern Haiti on Monday, even as he prepared a news release for the U.S. media saying schools would be closed as South Florida residents hunkered down.

David said he repeatedly tried to help a friend contact his mother in the Haitian city of Les Cayes, on the wide southern finger of land that had fallen into the storm's path.

"We've made 15 calls," he said. "It's not easy to get in touch with them."

David said he still worried about Ernesto's potential to wreak havoc, mindful that Hurricane Jeanne did not come ashore in 2004 but caused more than 2,000 deaths in Haiti.

The flooding that followed knocked the country back for months.

Natural disasters tend to affect Haiti disproportionately because the country is ill equipped to respond.

Rampant deforestation means mudslides are common after storms. Phone service is patchy and rebuilding materials scarce.

David was optimistic about Ernesto's aftermath in Haiti, as it shed most of its rain in the south, where mountainous terrain gives way to a fringe of coastline, helping drainage.

But Haitian Americans in South Florida were nevertheless concerned.

Dr. Aldy Castor, a physician living in Weston, said he owns a 12-room hotel in a southwestern Haitian town called Aquin. He called the manager Monday morning to learn a nearby river had overflowed.

"He said they had a lot of wind, about 60 kilometers per hour," Castor said. "They had some crop damage."

Haitian physicians in South Florida would meet soon to assess the situation and prepare to respond if necessary, said Dr. Yves Jodesty, a native of Les Cayes,.

"The first basic necessity they would need now is food and water, and down the road there may be medical problems," he said.

Gedeon, of the Red Cross, said that relief organization evacuated some 30 families Sunday evening in the southern quadrant of Port-au-Prince.

There was also flood damage to homes in the western part of the city, she said.

"Our goal was zero deaths," Gedeon said in a phone interview. "The poverty is a crucial problem, but we are rich because we have so many volunteers who come to help us."

Staff Writer Alva James-Johnson contributed to this report.

Cuba, Haiti brace for storm

Cuba prepared for a hit, and Haiti worried about floods, as already one person is dead.

By JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

August 28, 2006

With authorities on a tiny island off Haiti's southwest coast reporting one storm-related death, government officials remained concerned Sunday that Ernesto's rains could spark flash floods in the severely deforested country.

No details were immediately available about the death on Ile-a-Vache, said Marie Alta Jean-Baptiste, a spokeswoman with Haiti's civil-protection department.

Meanwhile, Cuba -- the next country in Ernesto's path -- ordered the mandatory evacuation of tens of thousands of residents in anticipation of a hit today.

The Cuban government suspended railroad service in the eastern provinces until further notice and issued a hurricane warning for the provinces of Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Holguin, Las Tunas and Camaguey. More than 35,000 people were evacuated from Holguin, 20,000 from Las Tunas and 17,000 in Camaguey, and other evacuations were underway, according to the Cuban media.

FLOOD FEARS

Back in Haiti, fear of a storm like Ernesto remains in a country still recovering from Tropical Storm Jeanne, which killed more than 3,000 people near Gonaives two years ago.

"We are monitoring the situation," Haitian Prime Minister Jacques Edouard-Alexis told The Miami Herald by telephone Sunday.

Alexis, who was in a meeting with Haitian President René Préval, said the government was urging residents to remain vigilant because life-threatening floods were possible. Alexis said there was also an unconfirmed storm-related death reported in Gonaives.

Alexis said the Haitian government was working closely with U.N. peacekeepers, and receiving periodic updates from across the island as Ernesto pelted Haiti's southern coast with heavy rains and winds of near 60 mph, down from 75 miles per hour earlier in the day.

Port-au-Prince, the capital, experienced heavy rains and Haitian authorities also logged reports of downed telephone lines in parts of the country. Jean-Baptiste, the government spokeswoman, also said about a dozen homes on the reef-fringed island of Gonave, located west of Port-au-Prince, were destroyed due to the heavy rains.

MANY WILL `SUFFER'

Pierre Leger, a Les Cayes businessman, said he was very concerned about the possibility of mudslides.

"The deforestation is terrible," Leger told The Miami Herald from Port-au-Prince, where he was in contact with family members in the seaside town about 94 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince.

The largest employer in the area, Leger, who produces vetiver oil for the leading fragrance houses in Europe, said the rains will cause him to shut down his factory for three weeks.

"That is very bad," he said. ``Farmers used the roots to send their kids to school; 27,000 families are going to suffer."

Herald translator Renato Perez and Herald Staff Writer Martin Merzer contributed to this report.

Manhattan Court Hears Tale of Gang Rape in Haiti
1010 WINS, New York
August 29, 2006

NEW YORK (1010 WINS) -- At times gasping and weeping behind a large video screen set up to shield her identity, a woman testified Tuesday that she was gang-raped in 1994 by paramilitary soldiers loyal to notorious Haitian strongman Emmanuel ``Toto" Constant.

The masked men burst into her home in Port-au-Prince and ``raped me in front of my children," she told a Manhattan judge through an interpreter in a hushed courtroom.

The five small children ``were, with their own eyes, looking at everything that was being done to me," she said.

The witness, who fled to the United States in 2003, testified in a lawsuit accusing Constant of sanctioning the systematic rape of women in the early 1990s to silence slum-dwellers still devoted to the ousted former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. U.S. District Judge Sidney Stein granted her anonymity based on fears she still could be targeted for retribution.

Earlier this month, Stein ruled in favor of a human rights organization that sued Constant because he never responded to a complaint filed in December 2004. The hearing on Tuesday was held to determine whether he should pay damages to three women named as plaintiffs.

The defense table was vacant: Constant remains in jail on Long Island after being charged in July with mortgage fraud. His attorney in that case has declined to comment on the suit filed by the San Francisco-based human rights group Center for Justice and Accountability.

Constant emerged as the feared leader of a right-wing paramilitary group, the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, or FRAPH, after Aristide's presidency was toppled in 1991. FRAPH terrorized and slaughtered Aristide loyalists between 1991 and 1994, human rights groups say.

Once Aristide returned to power in 1994, Constant slipped into New York, where he lived in exile while battling deportation.

Using the name ``Jane Doe," the alleged rape victim testified that her ordeal began when her husband, a taxi driver and fierce Aristide supporter, vanished in 1992. She described taking to the streets and voicing her despair.

``I was yelling and crying out for justice," she said. ``I couldn't remain silent."

Even after being jailed and beaten, she remained vocal until five men arrived at her door in April 2004. They beat up her 8-year-old son, her eldest, then took turns raping her, she said.

Two months later, the nightmare was repeated: five armed men, raping her in front of her children. The men, she said, slashed open one of her breasts as a parting gesture.

“The only thing that kept me alive was God,” she said.

The traumatized family fled to the hills and survived by begging. Three months later, she finally saw a doctor who delivered some shocking news: She was pregnant by one her attackers.

A son was born on Feb. 12, 1995. He and the rest of her children still live in Haiti with relatives while their mother prays for a reunion.

“I’m always thinking about his future, considering the type of blood line he came from,” she said.

Island nations soaked, but no major damage

BY NANCY SAN MARTIN

Miami Herald

August 30, 2006

Clean-ups began in Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic on Tuesday as a weakened Tropical Storm Ernesto left the Caribbean nations with some flooding and wind damage but no serious destruction.

Missing from the helm of storm preparations in Cuba was the ailing Fidel Castro, who traditionally gave weather reports, issued mandatory evacuation orders and inspected affected areas in the aftermath.

Also out of public view was Raúl Castro, who assumed control on July 31 after his older brother Fidel ceded power to him following surgery for a still undisclosed ailment.

But the Castros' absence did not appear to have hampered preparation and recovery efforts, and several hundred thousand residents of eastern Cuba who had followed evacuation orders began to return home Tuesday.

"Ernesto Has Left," Granma, Cuba's Communist Party daily, said in a front-page headline.

All tropical storm warnings for the island were lifted by early morning and no major damage was reported, although flooding lingered in some cities along the eastern part of the island. The southeastern province of Guantánamo was soaked with nearly eight inches of rain.

Ernesto moved over open seas after drenching eastern Cuba and began strengthening on a northbound track. It was expected to hit South Florida with intermittent rain and strong winds through Wednesday.

Cuban authorities said efforts were concentrated on eliminating mosquito breeding grounds. Large outbreaks of dengue fever were reported on the island even before the storm.

"We are immersed in cleanup and hygiene efforts that began prior to the arrival of Ernesto to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds," Granma reported. "Those labors will continue as part of recovery efforts following the storm."

In one bit of positive news from the storm, some reservoirs in the drought-plagued eastern region were filled to 100 percent capacity for the first time in a decade, Granma reported.

Ernesto left Cuba in the predawn hours, exiting through Cayo Romano, one of several islets along the northeastern coast, just north of Ciego de Avila.

No casualties were reported in Cuba or the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, two storm-related deaths were reported.

Recovery efforts also began in Haiti, battered by Ernesto on Sunday with strong winds and rainfall. More than 200 homes were destroyed, Haitian authorities reported, and several banana fields were wiped out.

"Damage was limited to the south of Haiti, where there was a lot of wind damage," Fred Blaise, a spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission said in a phone interview. ``But there is nothing on a major scale."

In the Dominican Republic, flooding and landslides damaged about 400 homes. But no serious structural damage was reported.

Talks between Haiti, Dominican Republic held in Norway
People's Daily Online
August 30,2006

Religious and political leaders from Haiti and the Dominican Republic are meeting this week in Norway for a dialogue on peace and reconciliation, said reports from Oslo on Tuesday.

Facilitators for the talks are the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs (UD) and the Norwegian Church Aid, as they have been since talks began in 1999, according to a press release from the UD.

The conference started in Oslo on Monday and the dialogue will continue in Kristiansand this coming weekend.

The talks focus on the possibilities for concrete cooperation on security, migration and education.

The meetings are a direct follow-up of a conference in Santo Domingo in May this year, arranged by a Haitian-Dominican church network.

A constructive development of relations between the two nations is seen as crucial for the stability of the whole Hispanola, the Norwegian facilitators state in a press release.

Source: Xinhua

Government clarifies over Dominican-Haitian event slated for Norway
The Dominican Today
August 30, 2006

SANTO DOMINGO.- The Dominican Government stated that it has neither sought nor needs the Norwegian Government's mediation to address problems of the migratory topic with Haiti's authorities.

This Foreign Ministry's declaration comes in the wake of Dominican media reports –whose source is the Spanish news agency EFE- on a conference held in the Norwegian city Kristiansand, whose role has been erroneously attributed as a reconciliation forum for the two nations to solve their migratory problems.

The Foreign Ministry specifies that it has understood that what will be held in Norway is a conference on the "Future of the Relations between Dominican Republic and the Republic of Haiti," under the auspices of Norway's Foreign Ministry and Cooperation Agency, and its Lutheran Church.

The event's organizers have invited, and will be attending as an observer, the ambassador Inocencio Garcia, head of the Dominican Foreign Ministry's Haitian Topics Division.

The topics to be addressed are those which were proposed in the workshops on "The future of the Relations of the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Haiti," held in Santo Domingo last May.

Norway hosts talks between Dominican Republic and Haiti
The Dominican Today
August 29, 2006

Oslo.— Religious and political leaders from Haiti and the Dominican Republic are this week meeting in Norway for a dialogue on peace and reconciliation.

Facilitators for the talks are the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Church Aid, as they have been since talks began in 1999, The Norway Post reported.

The conference started in Oslo on Monday and the dialogue will continue in Kristiansand this coming weekend.

The talks will focus on the possibilities for concrete cooperation on security, migration and education.

The meetings are a direct follow-up of a conference in Santo Domingo in May this year, arranged by a Haitian-Dominican church network.

Ernesto Kills at Least 2 in Haiti

By ANDREA RODRIGUEZ

The Associated Press

The Washington Post

Tuesday, August 29, 2006

CAMAGUEY, Cuba -- Tropical Storm Ernesto killed at least two people in Haiti, but otherwise let the Caribbean off relatively easy before heading north for Florida on Tuesday.

Tens of thousands of people who evacuated before Ernesto drenched eastern Cuba began returning home Tuesday morning as the storm pulled away from the island's northern coast. They were grateful to find houses still standing and belongings dry after the storm turned out to be relatively tame.

A man on a bicycle rides on a flooded street caused by heavy rains from Hurricane Ernesto in Les Cayes, Haiti, about 91 miles (147 kilometers) from Port-au-Prince, on the southern coast in Haiti on Sunday, Aug. 27, 2006. (AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos) (Ariana Cubillos - AP)

"I'm desperate to go back, one misses their bed, and their home," Ramona Montero Ruiz, said in Santa Cruz del Sur, a low-lying community in the eastern province of Camaguey considered at high risk for flooding.

No deaths, injury or major damage were reported in Cuba, where communist officials regularly evacuate huge numbers of people before storms to minimize loss of life. More than 700,000 people were evacuated in recent days in this country of 11.2 million.

And none of the prisoners held at the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay were exposed to the weather although the storm passed over the area on Monday. For years now, detainees have been kept in cells without windows or with a single window that can be covered with a heavy steel hurricane shutter. The cells replaced the open steel cages where prisoners were initially held.

Military personnel, except for guards and people in other critical jobs, stayed in their quarters until the storm passed, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jeffrey Gordon, a Department of Defense spokesman.

But Ernesto was blamed for the deaths of at least two people in Haiti, including a woman washed to sea from a tiny southern island on Sunday, the country's civil protection agency said Tuesday. No details were available on the second victim.

The storm weakened from a hurricane as it skirted Haiti's southern coast Sunday. It destroyed more than 200 homes in the impoverished country, wiped out banana crops and washed away a bridge linking the southern peninsula with the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Elisabeth Verlutyn, an emergency coordinator with the Pan American Health Organization, said Ernesto devastated poor people living in flimsy shacks along rivers and coastlines, including fishermen who lost their boats.

"One simple rainfall can put them back a few years," Verlutyn said. "If this had happened on a well-developed Caribbean island, they would have been able to handle the rain."

U.N. peacekeepers were working with local officials to ensure people hit by the storm were getting help, U.N. officials said.

The Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, saw little damage compared with some past storms and no deaths or injuries were reported.

Nevertheless, flooding and landslides in the capital of Santo Domingo and nearby San Cristobal province damaged about 400 homes and forced the evacuation of 1,655 people.

The Dominican agriculture secretary said the heavy rains along the country's southern coast were beneficial, telling the newspaper El Caribe that the extra rainfall would be good for crops after a relatively dry summer.

As storm passes, Cuba and Haiti begin cleaning up

By NANCY SAN MARTIN

Miami Herald

August 29, 2006

Ernesto moved over open seas after drenching eastern Cuba and began strengthening on a northbound track. It was expected to hit South Florida with intermittent heavy rain and blustery wind conditions through Wednesday.

"Ernesto Has Left," Granma, Cuba's Communist Party daily, said in a front page headline Tuesday morning.

All tropical storm warnings for the island were lifted by early morning and no major damage was documented. However, flooding was a problem in some cities along the eastern part of the island. The southeastern province of Guantánamo was soaked with nearly eight inches of rain.

Authorities said efforts were concentrated on eliminating mosquito breeding grounds. Large outbreaks of dengue fever were reported on the island even before the storm.

"We are immersed in cleanup and hygiene efforts that began prior to the arrival of Ernesto to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds," Granma reported. ``Those labors will continue as part of recovery efforts following the storm."

Some of the nearly 620,000 people evacuated from their homes around the eastern region began to return home Tuesday, according to Cuban news media.

In one bit of positive news from the storm, some reservoirs in the drought-plagued eastern region were filled to 100 percent for the first time in a decade, Granma reported.

Ernesto left Cuba in the predawn hours, exiting through Cayo Romano, one of several islets along the northeastern coast, just north of Ciego de Avila.

No casualties were reported in Cuba or the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, two storm-related deaths were reported.

Recovery efforts also began in Haiti, battered by Ernesto Sunday with strong winds and rainfall.

"The only damage was limited to the south of Haiti where there was a lot of wind damage," Fred Blaise, a spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission said in a telephone interview. ``But there is nothing on a major scale."

Ernesto also isolated the southern portion of the region when heavy rains severely damaged a bridge in Grand Goave. The bridge, located on a main road, connects Port-au-Prince with the south.

Ernesto Pounds Haiti, Heads for Cuba

By Stevenson Jacobs

Associated Press

Washington Post

Monday, August 28, 2006

LES CAYES, Haiti, Aug. 27 -- Ernesto became the first hurricane of the Atlantic season Sunday, then weakened to a tropical storm as it lashed Haiti's southern coast with heavy rain and flooded homes in the impoverished country.

The storm was projected to regain strength as it steamed toward Cuba and the Gulf of Mexico, and forecasters said it could again reach hurricane force before striking Cuba on Monday morning.

Cuba ramped up emergency preparations and forecasters said the storm would be close to the island's southeastern coast Monday morning, with a brief return to hurricane force possible.

"We do expect it to reach the Gulf, maybe as a Category 1 hurricane, possibly a Category 2," said John Cangialosi, a meteorologist with the U.S. National Hurricane Center. "We expect it to be a significant system as it moves over Florida."

It was uncertain where Ernesto would make landfall as it moved toward the Gulf Coast, but the storm did not appear to pose a threat to New Orleans, forecasters said. Hurricane Katrina, a Category 3 storm, devastated the city a year ago Tuesday.

"It's difficult to say where it will be, but in three days we're projecting it anywhere from the eastern Gulf near the Florida Panhandle to the western Bahamas," Cangialosi said.

By late Sunday night, Ernesto's winds slowed to near 50 mph, down from 75 mph earlier in the day when it became the first hurricane of the Atlantic season, according to the hurricane center.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush declared an emergency, ordering tourists to evacuate the Florida Keys.

"It's on a track toward the Florida Peninsula early this week, and all of Florida is in the area that's being threatened, from the Keys all the way up to the panhandle," said Michael Brennan, a meteorologist at the hurricane center.

Ernesto was moving northwest at 7 mph on Sunday night. It passed near the tip of Haiti's southwestern peninsula in the afternoon. Forecasters said as much as 20 inches of rain could fall in some mountain areas, raising fears of flash floods in the heavily deforested country.

Marie Alta Jean-Baptiste, director of Haiti's civil protection agency, said by telephone that one person on Vache island off Haiti's south coast died in the storm.

In Cuba, the government issued a hurricane warning for six eastern provinces. The hurricane was predicted to lose strength while crossing west-central Cuba late Monday but emerge in the Gulf of Mexico with winds up to 110 mph.

Heavy rain and winds were expected in southern Florida by early Tuesday. In Key West, officials told visitors to head for the mainland and ordered travel trailers and recreational vehicles to leave. The low-lying Keys are connected to one another and the mainland by one highway, U.S. Highway 1.

At 11 p.m., Ernesto, the fifth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, was centered near the western tip of Haiti about 115 miles south-southeast of Guantanamo, Cuba.

Gunmen in Haiti kidnap, release lawmaker
Sun. Aug. 27 2006
Associated Press
CTV.ca Canada

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Gunmen kidnapped and briefly held a Haitian legislator before releasing him unharmed, local radio reported Saturday.

Rodney Alcide, a deputy in the lower house of Parliament, was seized late Friday in a suburb north of the capital of Port-au-Prince along with his driver and bodyguard, Kiskeya radio said.

Alcide was reportedly freed unharmed two hours later, but the driver and bodyguard were still held Saturday.

It was unclear whether a ransom was paid to free Alcide, the first lawmaker to be kidnapped in a recent spate of abductions sweeping Port-au-Prince.

Kidnappings surged to their highest level in months in July, with at least 60 abductions reported. Authorities say many more go unreported, as families prefer to negotiate with kidnappers rather than notify police.

Authorities blame the kidnappings mostly on well-armed street gangs based in the capital's violent slums. The crimes have raised fears of a return to the lawlessness seen in the aftermath of a bloody revolt that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Earlier this month, President Rene Preval ordered gangs to disarm and rejoin society or face death.

The gangs have said they won't lay down their weapons until U.N. peacekeepers patrolling the Caribbean nation halt offensives in the slums.

The United Nations, which has 8,800 troops and police in Haiti, has said it won't change its operations.

Haiti Emergency Relief Fund designates special hurricane aid for grassroots organizations
Haiti Action Committee
August 27, 2006

In anticipation of likely devastation, the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund (HERF) responded to Hurricane Ernesto today by setting up a special hurricane relief fund that will place designated funds with grassroots organizations in Haiti. As it did in 2004 - in response to the disaster of Tropical Storm Jeanne and Hurricane Ivan - HERF plans on getting funds directly to the community organizations in the affected areas.

In September of 2004 Tropical Storm Jeanne passed off of the north-east coast of Haiti and dumped massive amounts of rain in the northern regions and Gonaives was inundated by the flash floods. While the same storm initially hit the Dominican Republic as a "hurricane," causing 18 deaths, Haiti was totally unprepared for the disaster — as a result of the U.S.-led coup d'État in February of that year. It's estimated that over 3,000 perished as a result.

When larger relief organizations were finally able to get some badly needed emergency supplies on the ground, the well-equipped UN occupation forces allowed anti-Aristide gangs overpower the locals and take most of the supplies. HERF believes that the popular organizations that are on the ground already, and have been living in the affected regions, have shown to be more effective in distributing whatever aid they get:

"We have little faith that the U.N. occupying forces will direct their relief efforts to the communities most in need. We do, however, have faith in the many Haitian popular grassroots organizations throughout the country now gearing up to aid victims and rebuild communities."

HERF is a project of the Vanguard Public Foundation that has had an extensive hurricane relief program in New Orleans. Over US\$100,000 in emergency relief was distributed by HERF in the last year for schools, organizations and human-rights needs.

"Record amounts of rain are being dumped over the entire island, including as many as 20 inches in some of the isolated higher terrain," says the HERF press release. "Of course, we hope that the civil defense teams have gotten everyone out of harms way. However, with the extent of this hurricane, there will be something to fix. There was a big need, before last week, that we are actively raising funds for. All funds designated for hurricane relief will be used for that purpose, as they were in 2004."

UN “Peacekeepers” Shoot Into Poor Neighborhood in Haiti

by Judith Scherr

ZNet Magazine

August 28, 2006

On a quest to evaluate whether life in Haiti is improving under the new presidency of René Préval, retired postal employee David Welsh of Berkeley, Calif. and Haiti Action Committee activist Ben Terrell of San Francisco got a poignant answer – from the barrel of U.N. rifles.

On Thursday, Welsh, Terrell and three others in a delegation that had been meeting with Haitian activists in Port-au-Prince, went to Cité Soleil, a desperately poor seaside shantytown where Lavalas remains strong.

(Lavalas is the political movement of the popular leader Jean Bertrand Aristide, forced out of office in 2004 by U.S. forces and exiled in South Africa. After his removal, the U.S. sent in Marines to police the country. A few months later, the Marines were replaced by UN troops, which occupy Haiti today.)

Accompanied by four Haitians, the foreigners entered Simon Pele, a Cité Soleil neighborhood where U.N. troops had reportedly attacked people in recent weeks. The plan was for the group to interview residents to ascertain what actually had happened at that time.

“We saw a church and a health clinic and a school that had been completely blasted away and couldn’t operate any more,” Welsh said.

They had just begun to interview people, when they saw four UN armored personnel carriers approaching. “Two went down one street and two came down the street we were on,” Welsh said in an interview in Berkeley on Saturday. Market stalls were operating in front of the houses and there were many people on the street, including children, Welsh said.

Accompanying the APCs, manned by Brazilian soldiers, was a UN bulldozer and a UN dump truck filled with sand. The sand was dumped and the bulldozer scooped it up, placing it to form a barrier in a roadway “apparently to block an escape route from the neighborhood,” said Terrell in a phone interview from Haiti on Sunday.

From previous experience, people understood that this was the first step in a U.N. “operation” that would culminate in an attack on the neighborhood, Welsh said, adding that the bulldozer and dump truck seemed to scare the people more than the familiar sight of the occupying troops atop the APCs.

Then the troops started firing. “They were shooting down the street and into houses,” said Welsh, describing the shots as repeated and apparently random. Both Welsh and Terrell said they heard two pops coming from the direction of the houses, which they said could have been return fire from a small caliber weapon.

The soldiers ignored the foreigners, who filmed and photographed the incident, hoping that their presence would deter a full-scale assault by the UN soldiers on the people. “We tried to talk to them, but they wouldn’t talk to us,” said Welsh, who, for some of the time, was as close as five feet from

where the soldiers were shooting. At one point, “I saw five or six Brazilians run out of the APCs and into the neighborhood,” Terrell said.

Welsh commented that one of the Brazilians firing his weapon waved the foreigners out of the way, so that he could shoot down the street.

In discussions with Haitian friends after the incident, Terrell concluded that “The UN is not telling the truth to Préval and those in the administration who want to help the people. They’re saying people in the neighborhoods fired first. That’s not what we saw and it’s not what we’ve been told. The UN so called ‘peacekeepers’ are playing a very destructive role. If these are legitimate cases where they need to arrest people, they can do it like police operations.”

One death and nine injuries were reported that day, Terrell said, although, having left the area as soon as it was safe to do so, members of the delegation were unable to independently verify these figures.

Judith Scherr is a San Francisco Bay Area-based Reporter

Haiti recalls overseas diplomats

AP

Thursday 24th August, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) – Haiti will recall several overseas diplomats for alleged incompetence, including some suspected of corruption, the foreign minister said Wednesday.

The diplomats, all appointed by the U.S.-backed interim government that ruled the Caribbean nation between 2004 and 2006, could be fired or punished upon a review of their cases, Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Raynald Clarisme told The Associated Press.

The announcement came a day after Haitian legislators alleged that several million dollars (euros) may have disappeared during that period from at least three foreign missions: the Haitian Embassy in Washington, and missions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

The move could open the door for the first major probe into alleged corruption under the interim government, which was appointed after a revolt toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Clarisme said the recalls "should happen very quickly" but declined to say which diplomats would be ordered home or from what countries. He said the move was first suggested by lawmakers, who recommended recalling diplomats for a review.

"The deputies have suggested we recall people who have been nominated by the interim government," Clarisme said. "I think it's a wise approach and I'm willing to do that."

"We are working on cleaning house and putting order in the administration," he added.

Clarisme said the Haitian consul in Barahona, Dominican Republic, was fired this month for selling entry visas to Chinese migrants. He said other diplomats will be disciplined, but noted that most are accused of incompetence, not corruption.

"Some will be recalled, but we have to take it on a case-by-case basis," he said. "People involved in corruption will be severely reprimanded for their behavior."

In a legislative session Tuesday, Sorel Francois, a deputy in the lower house and president of the Commission on Foreign Affairs, said receipts showed that US\$250,000 vanished from Haiti's Embassy in Washington in June 2005.

He said another US\$1.9 million was transferred from the same embassy to a nongovernment account in October 2005.

Reached by phone in Washington, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Raymond Joseph denied embezzling any funds.

"No money disappeared in Washington," Joseph said. "It didn't go into my pocket or the pocket of anyone else."

Joseph, appointed by former interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue in 2004, said the money may have been used to pay bills owed by the government, including the purchase of weapons for Haiti's police force.

"If there is a full audit of this embassy I have no doubt that everything will be very, very clear," he said.

Joseph said he didn't know if he would be recalled, but said he would be present for an audit.

Joseph is the publisher of the New York-based weekly newspaper Haiti Observateur, and was an outspoken critic of Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas political party. Francois, the legislator who alleged that funds disappeared, is a member of Fanmi Lavalas.

Joseph declined to say whether he thought the allegations against him were politically motivated.

HAITI: Gov't, gangs discuss peaceful disarmament
Friday, August 25, 2006
Jamaica Gleaner

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CMC):

Armed gangs and government representatives are discussing the terms of an agreement for a peaceful disarmament in the violence-torn Caribbean country, police commissioner Frantz Lerebours said yesterday.

Lerebours said the Haitian government was doing all it could to ensure that illegal armed groups peacefully hand over their weapons, but he warned the police, backed by U.N. peacekeepers, would use force to disarm gangs if they failed to do so voluntarily.

"The operational framework for the surrendering of the weapons is being discussed and the gangs will have an interlocutor to whom they may hand over the weapons," the police spokesman stated.

These comments were made two days after gangs in the volatile slum of Cite Soleil in the capital Port-au-Prince decided to shelve their plan to disarm, demanding first that U.N. troops stop conducting raids in the country's gang-controlled largest slum.

Waging attacks

Several gang leaders have accused U.N. soldiers of waging repeated attacks against them while they were planning to surrender their weapons as demanded by the country's new administration. A spokesperson for the 9,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, Sophie De Lacombe, denied accusations that U.N. blue berets had attacked gangs who vow to disarm voluntarily.

"U.N. peacekeepers only returned fire when they were attacked by gangs," said De Lacombe, adding that gang members may enter the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Rehabilitation (DDR) programme, run by the United Nations.

Haitian and U.N. authorities have been trying to achieve a massive disarmament in an attempt to end a cycle of violence which has already left scores of Haitians killed and wounded.

Need, risk are both escalating in Haiti
Missionary work stymied by security concerns, violence
August 25, 2006
By STEVENSON JACOBS
Associated Press
The Houston Chronicle

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI — An American minister and his companion snatched on their way to church. Franciscan friars abducted on a busy street. A Canadian pastor seized at gunpoint from his rural orphanage.

Foreign missionaries have become prime targets in Haiti, where an upsurge in violence has made their jobs more difficult and dangerous at a time when they are needed most.

Religious workers, mostly Protestant and Roman Catholic, say they are trying to lower their profile in the often-lawless country, cloistering themselves in fortified compounds protected by razor-wire walls and armed guards and going out as infrequently as possible.

Others have decided to stay in their home countries. Several groups said the violence has scared off volunteers who once streamed into Haiti on short-term mission trips to build homes, install plumbing and pass out meals in some of the poorest, most desolate areas.

"It's really shut down the visitors," said Tom Osbeck, of Fort Wayne, Ind., whose Protestant-run Jesus in Haiti Ministry operates a school in a rural town north of the capital. "People are leery of coming. They read about the kidnappings in the news."

There is no official census of foreign religious workers in Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, but there are an estimated 1,000 in the country of 8 million.

Besides seeking converts, missionaries and church groups run a vital network of hospitals, orphanages, schools and food-distribution sites, bolstering Haiti's cash-strapped new government.

For many Haitians, missionaries fill an urgent need that the weak government simply can't fill, especially in education.

Missionaries run or support 2,000 primary schools attended by 600,000 students — a third of Haiti's school-age population, said Adriano González-Regueral, the UNICEF representative in Haiti.

"Because of missionaries, half a million children can go to school," González-Regueral said. "They are irreplaceable."

But the kidnappings have kept workers away, depriving missions of sorely needed staff, along with the donations they typically bring, said Matthew Marek, Haiti-based director of Norwich Mission House, part of the Connecticut-based Haitian Ministries.

"We've been hit pretty hard financially," said Marek, whose Catholic group welcomed about 200 volunteers a year during calmer times.

Missionaries say they believe they're targeted only because they stand out as foreigners and are more vulnerable than U.N. and foreign embassy personnel, who often travel in armored convoys.

Most of the kidnappings are blamed on well-armed street gangs, which have flourished in the aftermath of the February 2004 revolt that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Some gangs are loyal to Aristide and want his return from exile in South Africa.

An 8,800-strong U.N. peacekeeping force has stepped up offensives against the gangs, but it hasn't penetrated most of the dense slums where the gangs operate.

The threat was highlighted last week by the bold, daylight kidnapping of two North Carolina missionaries as they drove to church. Days later, two Franciscan friars, an El Salvadoran and a Haitian, were seized near the airport. All were released unharmed.

Haiti isn't the only dangerous place for missionaries. An American nun and rain-forest defender was shot to death in Brazil last year in a land dispute.

Yet missionaries have been coming to Haiti for decades, and most say it's never been so risky.

Daniel Phelsumar, a Haitian-born missionary based in Tampa, Fla., arrived in December to deliver supplies to an orphanage. Minutes after leaving the airport, 15 men armed with automatic rifles jumped out and fired on the car, which had a "Jesus Loves You" sticker on the back.

Phelsumar's companion, Canadian missionary Ed Hughes, was wounded and lost an arm in the attack. Last month, kidnappers struck again and snatched Hughes from his orphanage and held him for a week.

Faced with the threats, missionaries are ramping up security, syphoning away resources that could go to development projects.

At the Protestant-run Mission of Hope in rural Titanyen, just north of Port-au-Prince, officials put up an 8-foot chain-link fence, built a new security post and imposed 24-hour patrols by armed guards after gunmen on horseback attacked the property in January.

"The worst thing that could happen is for everyone to leave," said Brad Johnson, president of Mission of Hope, based in Hope, Ind. "This is when we're needed most."

15 Cameroonian policemen for peacekeeping in Haiti
Angola Press, Angola
August 26, 2006

Douala, Cameroon, 08/26 - A first batch of 15 Cameroonian policemen left Douala on Wednesday for UN peacekeeping duties in Haiti, official sources affirmed here Thursday. Two other departures are scheduled 2-6 September, to bring to 40 Cameroonian policemen on peacekeeping duties in Haiti which is endeavouring, with the support of the international community, to get out of a destructive war.