

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: AUGUST 23-30, 2005

Massacre erupts at USAID game

By Reed Lindsay

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

August 30, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- A U.S.-backed effort to reform and disarm anti-government gangs went horribly wrong 10 days ago when hooded police and machete-wielding civilian backers attacked participants at a soccer game, killing at least six persons.

The Aug. 20 incident in the hillside slum of Martissant has fueled fears of further violence in the run-up to presidential balloting in November.

The "Play for Peace" soccer match was financed and sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development, and was designed to steer young people away from the gang violence that has beset Haiti since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled into exile in February 2004.

Witnesses to the Aug. 20 massacre said about 6,000 spectators were packed into the soccer stadium when police officers ordered everyone to the ground. Shots rang out, and people ran for the walled field's only exit.

Police fired wantonly into the crowd, witnesses and relatives of victims said. Outside, they said, civilians armed with machetes and more police officers attacked people trying to flee the chaos.

"They came to massacre us," said Nesly Devla, 20, showing a sewn-up, 3-inch machete gash on his forehead and another on his hand. "Everyone was on top of each other. There was nowhere to run. God saved me."

Anne Sosin, a human rights observer at the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, says she has confirmed the deaths of at least eight persons, but the toll could go much higher.

Police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou said six bodies were brought to the morgue. Mrs. Coicou declined to talk further about the incident except to say that police would conduct an investigation.

A U.S. Embassy representative said: "The embassy is dismayed by reports of violence at the USAID-sponsored soccer match last weekend. We express our condolences to the families of the victims.

"The purpose of these events is to create alternatives to violence for youth in poor communities. We have asked the Haitian national police and their U.N. ... advisers for a thorough investigation."

Less than a month earlier, two other grisly machete attacks also appeared to take place with police complicity.

The incidents all occurred in poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince that are considered bastions of support for Mr. Aristide and have raised doubts about the effectiveness of a U.N. peacekeeping force that has been in Haiti for nearly 15 months.

"These killings set a dangerous precedent," Miss Sosin said. "How can you explain police accompanied by individuals armed with machetes massacring spectators at a soccer match with U.N. troops standing by literally across the street?"

U.N. and government officials portrayed the machete killings as a reaction from angry residents who resorted to spontaneous vigilante justice after becoming fed up with gang violence.

"We are worried about the cases of lynchings in recent weeks," said Jean-Francois Vezina, Canadian spokesman for the U.N. Civilian Police, which is mandated with training and monitoring its Haitian counterpart.

But witnesses at the soccer match said the killings there were neither spontaneous nor carried out with popular support. They said they recognized some of the machete-wielding civilians as "attaches," or local criminals who reportedly are paid police informants and assassins.

"According to the people we work with in the community, this was not popular justice. They are saying this was a planned aggression, an attack to destabilize the community," said Philippe Branchat, an employee of the International Organization for Migration who manages the Haiti Transition Initiative, the USAID-program that sponsored the soccer game.

Venezuela offers Haiti aid, including energy, senior UN peacekeeping official says
UN News Centre
August 29, 2005

29 August 2005 – Venezuela, citing historical ties, has offered to assist Haiti in the areas of energy, education and economic development, the head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Caribbean country, Juan Gabriel Valdés, said.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez made the offer in the margins of a meeting of foreign ministers from the Rio Group of Latin American states, focusing on Haiti, last Thursday and Friday in Bariloche, Argentina, he said.

The Rio Group, some of whose members have contributed troops to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), pledged to continue to support Haiti in its efforts to surmount its current political, economic and social crises, Mr. Valdés said.

In this regard, he urged them to continue providing support beyond the elections and for as long as it took to make the advances gained in Haiti's stabilization irreversible, MINUSTAH said.

MINUSTAH was set up by the Security Council last year to help to re-establish order in the impoverished country after an insurgency forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February.

Football prescription

AP

Sunday, August 28, 2005

Jamaica Observer

POR-T-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Brazilian peacekeepers have tried offering free medical care, film screenings and even haircuts to win over residents of the violence-torn Haitian slum of Bel-Air. Now they're using a tactic a little closer to home: football.

In a sign of easing tensions in the slum, a five-player team from the UN force swapped assault rifles and body armour for shorts and sneakers yesterday in a friendly match against slum dwellers - and got trounced.

"It's amazing. These guys are world champions, and we're trashing them!" said spectator Jean-Marie Pierre, referring to Brazil's national football team, which won its fifth World Cup in 2002. Pierre lost track of the score at around 7-0.

Chile, Jamaica say election in Haiti should include all political forces

AP and Observer reports

Jamaica Observer

Tuesday, August 30, 2005

SANTIAGO, Chile - Chile's president and Jamaica's prime minister said yesterday that all political forces should be allowed to participate in Haitian elections scheduled for later this year, including supporters of former president Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Asked whether this would include Aristide himself, Jamaica's Prime Minister P J Patterson said "all political parties should be allowed to nominate their presidential candidates. This, by definition, includes Lavalas Family" - the political movement of the ousted leader.

Patterson, who arrived in Chile yesterday for a two-day visit, issued a joint statement with President Ricardo Lagos urging "further development of the current efforts to strengthen the security situation (in Haiti), which continues to be a crucial obstacle to hold a credible election process".

Aristide stepped down following a rebellion of former soldiers in February 2004. His supporters claim his resignation was forced by an illegitimate coup, but several groups in Haiti are opposing his return to national politics.

Patterson said the elections scheduled for November and December could help Haiti rejoin Caricom, the Caribbean Community, from which it was suspended after the crisis that forced Aristide's resignation. He said it was important the elections take place in a secure atmosphere, ensuring everybody's right to vote and the participation of international observers.

Some Haitians and foreign observers have expressed concern that Haiti's situation may be still too unstable to hold elections. Several people have been killed in the Caribbean nation in recent months due to gang violence and political unrest despite the presence of 7,400 UN troops.

In the meantime, Patterson was scheduled to hold bi-lateral talks with President Lagos on areas such as trade, tourism, sports, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) initiative and the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Discussions were also expected on UN Security Council Reform and the Organisation of American states.

Patterson will give the keynote address at a conference hosted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and will speak with Chilean entrepreneurs at a business session hosted by JAMPRO in collaboration with the Chilean Embassy.

Prime Minister Patterson is chair of the G77 and China and was given a mandate by the Doha Summit to strengthen South-South cooperation as one means of enhancing the economic and social development of developing countries in a globalising world.

Jamaica established diplomatic relations with Chile in 1963.

Jamaica House said there has been a greater thrust towards strengthening bilateral relations between Jamaica and Chile, through ongoing dialogue between the local authorities in Jamaica and their Chilean counterparts, especially in the areas of tourism and air transportation. The countries last signed a bilateral cooperation agreement for the abolition of visas for tourists in 1994.

Patterson will return to the island tomorrow.

'Buffy' star feared for safety

Tuesday, August 30 2005, 11:50 BST -- by Daniel Saney

Digital Spy

Anthony Head was left shaken after his camera crew were kidnapped in Haiti.

Head, known for playing Rupert Giles in Buffy The Vampire Slayer, is part of reality TV show True Horror which involves him going on location to comment on strange goings-on and interview experts.

However, when he signed up to the project he claims that he was only expecting to perform his part from the safety of a studio rather than being on the field. His unexpected duties have reportedly begun to worry him after his camera crew disappeared.

Contactmusic.com quote him as saying: "I thought I'd be in a studio... Instead, they flew me to Haiti for an episode on zombies and the camera crew got kidnapped."

JOLIE JOINS WYCLEF AS A FAVOUR TO MADDOX

Contact Music

August 30, 2005

ANGELINA JOLIE agreed to attend WYCLEF JEAN's star-studded fundraiser for youths in his native Haiti at the weekend (27AUG05) because her son MADDOX is a huge fan of the hip-hop star.

MERYL STREEP, JON BON JOVI, NORAH JONES and LINDSAY LOHAN joined Jolie at the charity party in The Hamptons, New York.

Jolie confessed, "My son loves Wyclef's music. He dances to it all the time."

She agreed to attend the bash if Wyclef agreed to burn her son "another CD" of music he's currently working on.

Filipino Deserters from UN Force Hiding in Brooklyn?
Filipino Express, News Report
August 29, 2005

NEW YORK --- The American dream may have been too much of a magnet for two Filipino UN peacekeepers who failed to return to duty in Haiti after a rest break in the United States. The Philippine military believes that either or both of the deserters could be in Brooklyn, New York.

A two-man investigative team will be sent to Jacksonville, Florida and Brooklyn to locate the two soldiers.

"It is dreadful to note that two of our peacekeepers have turned into illegal economic migrants," Colonel Daniel Lucero, the former commander of the Philippine contingent in Haiti, told reporters in Manila on Wednesday, August 10.

Navy Lieutenant Senior Grade Valentin Menpin and Marines Sergeant Geoffrey Geslani have not returned from the US since being sent there in April for an official mission and R&R (rest and recreation), Lucero said.

"They have breached the trust that their commander has given to them," Lucero added. Lucero said the Philippine army had "taken steps to arrest the two deserters," who disappeared during two weeks of leave in Florida in April.

In New York, Ambassador Lauro L. Baja Jr., Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, said Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto G. Romulo wants the two deserters located, repatriated and prosecuted for bringing shame to the country.

"No less than Secretary Romulo, during his visit to New York in June, gave instructions for us to exert all means to bring the two deserters back to the Philippines so they could be brought before a military court," Baja said.

The Philippine Mission to the United Nations and the Office of the Defense and Armed Forces Attaché at the Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C. made initial representations with US authorities immediately after Lucero reported around the second week of May the disappearance of Menpin and Geslani.

The Philippines sent a 135-member peacekeeping team to Haiti in December 2004 to help UN forces curb political unrest ahead of elections later this year. Menpin was sent to the US on April 16, four months after the country's 135-member peacekeeping force arrived in the Caribbean island nation in December. Geslani followed on April 29, he said. Lucero and his team arrived in the country last month.

The two disappeared one after the other shortly after Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque became the first Filipino combat fatality in a UN peacekeeping operation when he was killed in a firefight in Cite Soleil neighborhood, Port-au-Prince, one of Haiti's most dangerous areas on 14 April.

The disappearance of the two also followed the almost daily harassment by Haitian gunmen of members of the Philippine contingent serving as the Force Headquarters Support Unit for the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Last month, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said she would send another 200 Philippine troops to Haiti to join nearly 4,000 Brazilian-led peacekeepers after the president of the Caribbean island, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted last year.

New \$6 Mil Fiber Optic Cable To Link Bahamas And Haiti

Minister of Works and Utilities

Bradley Roberts.

August 29, 2005

The Bahama Journal

Minister of Works and Utilities Bradley Roberts recently announced that a \$6 million fiber optic submarine cable network will soon connect Port au Prince, Haiti to Matthew Town, Inagua and the rest of the world.

He said the Government of The Bahamas has approved the deployment of what is known as Bahamas Domestic Submarine Network international (BDSNi).

"I wish to express the appreciation of the Bahamian government to the Government of the Republic de Haiti that it has agreed to the selection of BTC, a company owned 100 percent by the Government of The Bahamas, to work with Teleco de Haiti, a company owned 100 percent by the Government of Haiti, to establish a 10 giga bit fiber optic submarine cable network," Minister Roberts said.

"This project will bring mutual benefits to the citizens of The Bahamas and the Republic de Haiti as both governments seek to provide affordable, modern, reliable, cutting-edge technology to their citizens."

In addition to the increase of offshore bandwidth to the Republic of Haiti, this cable will have the capacity to provide 200 digital television channels while improving the reliability, robustness and scalability of Information and Communications Technology to Haiti, the Minister added.

"I am looking forward to the very near future when BTC and Teleco de Haiti would have finished the installation that my prime minister, the Rt. Honourable Perry Christie, could make the first telephone call to the Prime Minister of Haiti over this new network," he added.

The Minister also pointed to efforts that were being made to improve telecommunications between the islands of The Bahamas.

On May 28, 2005, he announced that The Bahamas government had given the green light to BTC to build a Submarine Fiber Optic cable connecting Bimini to Grand Bahama at a cost of \$6 million.

This, he said, was in keeping with the government's initiative to allow BTC to provide GSM cellular services and broadband services to Bimini and provide the residents and businesses in Bimini with reliable, cost effective, modern telecommunications.

On August 2, 2005, Prime Minister Christie announced that the government had approved BTC to build a fiber optic submarine cable connecting 14 islands of The Bahamas in a self-healing ring topology at a cost of \$53 million.

"This project is of major national importance since it will facilitate the government's pronouncements of anchor projects on each of these islands. In addition, this project would provide the platform for the

provisioning of e-commerce, e-trade, e-education, e-medicine and other ICT initiatives," Minister Roberts said recently.

"It is the intent of the government to reduce the digital divide in this country and not permit information and communication technology to marginalize the citizens of The Bahamas."

Minister Roberts also noted that as a CARICOM member, The Bahamas supports linkages within the Caribbean and recognizes that these linkages must be enhanced to the betterment of the countries in the Caribbean.

"One of these improvements must be the provision of affordable in-country telecommunications and off-shore broadband services," he said.

"The Republic of Haiti, our sister country, has historical linkages to The Bahamas. As a member of CARICOM and with a large Haitian and Haitian descendants population resident in The Bahamas with large volumes of telecommunications traffic between our two countries, it is only fitting that we seek mutually to enhance the telecommunication systems between our country as well as reduce the cost to our citizens."

A Haitian Slum's Anger Imperils Election Hopes
By WALT BOGDANICH and JENNY NORDBERG
New York Times
August 29, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Sitting at the gateway of the nation's capital, Cité Soleil is a broiling slum of shacks, dust and ditches filled with human waste. It is home to several hundred thousand people who now live with virtually no government services, no police and only an occasional helping hand from international aid groups.

Children in Cité Soleil, which has virtually no government services, no police and only an occasional hand from international aid groups.

Yet, with the first round of national elections now scheduled for Nov. 13, what happens in Cité Soleil is increasingly important to the world beyond its squalor. Not only does it have one of the biggest blocs of potential voters - many of whom back Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the ousted president - but it also can generate the kind of violence that could disrupt those elections.

For United Nations peacekeeping forces, bringing some semblance of order to Cité Soleil and giving its residents a chance to vote in the elections are seen as important steps in establishing a new, credible government in Haiti.

But while United Nations troops have managed to set up command posts in sections of other poor, violent neighborhoods like Bel Air, large parts of Cité Soleil - the country's biggest slum - remain all but impenetrable .

Cité Soleil is now so foreboding that the international peacekeepers, who wear flak jackets and drive armored personnel carriers, conduct no regular patrols in its densely populated neighborhoods. In their last operation, about 400 United Nations troops entered the slum on July 6 and ended up in a five-hour gun battle with gangs who control the area.

Numerous residents were wounded in the cross-fire, and the incident has further embittered many Aristide supporters as elections near.

"Cité Soleil is symbolic of Haiti's potential of creating a new society that is inclusive rather than exclusive," said Robert Maguire, director of international affairs programs at Trinity University in Washington, D.C., and an expert on Haiti. He added that if Cité Soleil is not part of the voting, "I think the elections will be far less than credible."

Gangs regularly monitor who comes and goes on the only two roads leading into the slum, according to relief workers. [On Aug. 24, a Peruvian soldier stationed on the edge of Cité Soleil was shot by a sniper, according to a spokesman for the United Nations force.]

On a recent mid-August day, local political leaders escorted reporters for The New York Times into Cité Soleil, a largely treeless tract of tin huts and crumbling cinderblock. With no running water,

drainage ditches are a rancid mix of human waste and garbage that must be crossed by walking on stones or on a narrow bridge with missing planks.

The neighborhood leaders, all members of Fanmi Lavalas, the political party founded by Mr. Aristide, wanted reporters to see what they say is evidence of indiscriminate killings by peacekeeping troops during the July 6 raid. These leaders blame the international community, particularly the United States, for Mr. Aristide's departure and for setting up an interim government that is now supported by the United Nations.

According to the United Nations account of the raid, soldiers responded to months of violence in Cité Soleil - much of it directed at its own residents - by staging a predawn assault with armored vehicles and helicopters. Their prime target: Emmanuel Wilmer, a gang leader also known as Dread Wilmé. Mr. Wilmer and other gang members were killed in the ensuing battle.

In a cinderblock hut, baking in Cité Soleil's midday heat, 13 residents of the neighborhood, brought together by the political leaders, squeezed around a small wooden bench to tell a different story. There, they laid out seven pictures of people, including women and children, who they said had been killed by United Nations troops.

"Here are the ones we had a chance to photograph before the dogs ate them," said René Momplaisir, a local Fanmi Lavalas leader. Many victims appeared to have been shot in the head, though who fired the bullets - United Nations troops or gang members - could not be independently verified.

"Why do people die like that?" Mr. Momplaisir said. "It's because there's no justice in Haiti."

John Joël Joseph, a Fanmi Lavalas leader, said dozens of residents were killed or wounded during the raid. "This is an extremely sad day," he said.

United Nations officials said in a statement that an undetermined number of innocent bystanders "may have been injured or even killed." They also cited "unconfirmed but numerous reports" that gangs killed residents after the troops left.

During the recent visit, several residents, including three children, showed reporters what they said were wounds inflicted by peacekeeping troops. Adeline Pierre, 28, said she had been pregnant and lost her unborn baby after being shot.

A Visit to the Largest Slum in Haiti "They're on the ground and they're in the air, coming after us," she said. "I was standing in front of my house and I felt all of a sudden something hit my stomach," Ms. Pierre said.

Olivia Gayraud, the administrator of a free hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, about a 20-minute drive from Cité Soleil, said doctors there treated 27 gunshot victims from the raid, but that the number of wounded was very likely to have been higher. Most were children and women, Ms. Gayraud said, including a woman in her 28th week of pregnancy who lost her baby. The hospital declined to identify the woman because of privacy concerns.

Dr. Christophe Fournier, at Doctors Without Borders in New York, said the clinic in Haiti had treated 1,132 gunshot victims since it opened in December. Most appear to be victims of gang violence. But according to Ms. Gayraud, most patients wounded July 6 said they had been shot by international peacekeepers.

Juan Gabriel Valdes, who oversees United Nations operation in Haiti, acknowledged in an interview that some bystanders were shot during the raid, but he also accused gang members of using women and children as shields.

The attack was necessary, Mr. Valdes explained, "because this gang was threatening the whole city and was attacking innocent people." He said the operation took weeks to plan, and that it was changed three times to try to minimize non-gang casualties.

United Nations officials said they are investigating the events of July 6, but declined to provide further details.

Mr. Valdes said Cité Soleil has been particularly difficult to penetrate because it is so big, the gangs so strong and living conditions so wretched. He also said he lacks commando troops trained and equipped for urban warfare.

The Fanmi Lavalas leaders who showed reporters around said they do not believe in violence and they portrayed Mr. Wilmer as someone who tried to protect neighborhood residents from a gang that threatened them. Human rights workers say that some gangs - and there are a variety in Cité Soleil - are terrorizing residents, and that rapes are a particular problem.

According to a report released this year by the University of Miami School of Law, some violence in Cité Soleil had been stoked by Haitian business interests who backed an anti-Aristide gang. The leader of that gang was later killed.

Mr. Valdes said the country was awash in guns, some distributed by political parties and even by "some members of the higher social sectors in this country." He added, "The abundance of weapons in this country is a sickness of the whole Haitian society."

When reporters from The Times walked through Cité Soleil, no weapons were seen nor gunfire heard, which was very unusual, according to a human rights worker who regularly visits the community. The worker speculated that political leaders had helped to ensure that guns were not visible during the visit.

[United Nations troops stationed on the outskirts of Cité Soleil say they are fired on daily from inside the neighborhood, which has kept them from conducting regular operations inside, Col. El Ouafi Boulbars, a spokesman for the United Nations military force in Haiti, said in an interview in late August. "We can do them but the problem is the collateral damage," he said.]

That violence is also hampering election preparations in Cité Soleil.

[Gérard Le Chevallier, the United Nations chief electoral officer in Haiti, said in late August that a voter registration center has been open for several weeks in an industrial area on the edge of Cité

Soleil, but that is not where most people live. Mr. Le Chevallier said a second center opened Aug. 25, in a more populated area of the slum, and workers in one factory have also been registered.]

Registration ends Sept. 15 for national elections this fall.

Political leaders in Cité Soleil are deeply skeptical of elections, having watched as Mr. Aristide, who twice took office in elections, was twice removed - by a coup in 1991 and again in 2004, when, after widespread protests and an armed rebellion, the United States flew him out of the country. He is now in exile in South Africa.

In addition, members of his political party, Fanmi Lavalas, have been jailed under the interim government, sometimes without due process, according to the United Nations. The most prominent of these prisoners is Yvon Neptune, Mr. Aristide's former prime minister.

"Fanmi Lavalas has always said that there's only one way to get power in this country and that's the way of elections," said Mr. Joseph, the party official. "But how can we talk about elections when all of our party officials are in prison?"

Other members of Mr. Aristide's party - who call themselves simply Lavalas - support the elections and are running for government posts.

As the international community tries to assert its authority in Cité Soleil, doctors and human rights groups said in interviews that summary executions with machetes were being carried out in other slums around Port-au-Prince.

"We have reports of executions that are supposedly performed by the Haitian police," said Mr. Valdes, who added that an inquiry is under way.

Mr. Joseph, the Lavalas leader in Cité Soleil, said his community needs help, not bullets. "What we don't understand," he said, "is why those of us who are living here, who don't have money to send our children to school, who don't have money to eat, who can't sleep who don't have anything at all - why is it that the international community doesn't come here to help us?"

Little money has reached Cité Soleil, international observers say, because of the violence there and the desperate need for aid programs elsewhere in Haiti.

Mr. Valdes, the United Nations official in Haiti, said the international community must respond to concerns like those of Mr. Joseph. "Force is not a solution for the security problems in Haiti," he said. "You have to provide water, food, support in health, in education. We have not been able to do that."

Only last month, he said, did the United Nations in Haiti get money to begin providing some of that assistance in Cité Soleil.

New massacre in Haiti; Dominican Republic steps up deportations

Submitted by Bill Weinberg

Mon, 08/29/2005

World War 4 Report

Violence continues to escalate in Haiti, with world paying very little note. In a grim irony, the latest massacre—carried out with the complicity of police forces—took place at a football match organized to promote peace. UN "peacekeeping" forces are also implicated in recent attacks on civilians. Amidst the bloodshed, peasants rallied last week, protesting that a "neoliberal" economic model is being imposed that will further entrench the majority in poverty. Meanwhile, Santo Domingo is stepping up forced deportations of Haitians back across the border to its strife-torn neighbor, even as reports emerge of violent attacks on Haitians in the Dominican Republic. From Weekly News Update on the Americas, Aug. 28:

HAITI: MASSACRE AT "PEACE" GAME

Hooded Haitian police agents and individuals with machetes killed as many as 30 people Aug. 20-21 in the Grand-Ravine section of the Martissant neighborhood on the southern edge of Port-au-Prince. The first attack occurred at an Aug. 20 soccer game, part of a "tournament for peace" funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the interim Haitian government. "Everybody gathered to watch the game," Roland Roy, a Martissant community leader, told the Reuters wire service. "Suddenly the police surrounded the area and ordered everyone to lie on the ground. Then a group of people, armed with machetes, who came with the police, started identifying people one by one, saying here is a bandit, here is another one. They cut them with machetes and killed a number of them." Roy said some victims were shot by police agents.

The second police operation in Grand-Ravine, on Aug. 21, also involved armed civilians. Resident Lionel Mondestin, a local leader in the Republican Unity Movement (MUR), said at least 20 people were killed in the two operations, which he said included the participation of soldiers from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

On Aug. 24, Haitian National Police (PNH) spokesperson Gessy Cameau Coicou told a press conference that the police still didn't have enough information on the incident; she said a total of six bodies with machete wounds had been taken from Grand-Ravine to the morgue at the State University of Haiti (UEH) Hospital. Lt. Col. Philippe Espie, head of the MINUSTAH police unit, announced the same day that an inquiry had been opened into the reported police support for lynchings. MINUSTAH has opened a number of inquiries into alleged police misconduct over the past year, including killings at the National Penitentiary in December; so far, it has not published the results from any of the investigations. (Haiti Support Group News Briefs, Aug. 26 from Reuters; HSG letter to Philip Alston, Aug. 26; AHP, Aug. 22, 24; Haiti Progres, NY, Aug. 24)

HAITI: PEASANTS PROTEST NEOLIBERALISM

Several hundred Haitian peasants marched in the town of Petite Riviere de l'Artibonite, in the rice-producing northern plain, on Aug. 22 to protest the impact of the government's neoliberal economic

policies on rural production. "I'm demonstrating against the Miami rice which floods our markets, against the neoliberal plan of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), against Haiti joining the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)," said a delegate from a peasant organization from the Bas-Artibonite region.

The march was part of a gathering of peasant representatives from around the country sponsored by the Movement of Demands of the Artibonite Peasants (MOREPLA), the Network of Trade and Agricultural Production Cooperative Associations of the Bas-Artibonite (RACPABA) and the National Platform of Haitian Peasant Organizations (PLANOPA). The gathering agreed on a plan including agrarian reform, improved irrigation and protection of the environment through reforestation; they also called on national forces to make a common front around opposition to neoliberalism and the occupation of Haiti by foreign troops. (AlterPresse, Aug. 24)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: 700 MORE HAITIANS DEPORTED

Unidentified Dominican immigration officials told local media on Aug. 24 that they arrested some 700 undocumented Haitians on Aug. 24 and Aug. 25 in the northern municipalities of Janico, San Jose de las Matas, la Canela and el Rubio. They said the immigrants would be deported to Haiti in the coming hours. (El Caribe, DR, Aug. 25 via Alterpresse) A wave of mass deportations of suspected undocumented immigrants began on Aug. 4, along with attacks by civilians on suspected Haitians; Haitian and Dominican human rights groups said in a joint declaration on Aug. 22 that 2,000 Haitians had been expelled in the past month. (Agence Haitienne de Presse, Aug. 23)

On Aug. 25, Dominican officials turned over the bodies of Haitian nationals Gilbert Dominique, Willy Pierre and Paul Marc (whose name is also given as Cinius Paul) to Haitian civil groups in a ceremony on the border at Malpaso. The three young workers had been bound and set on fire on Aug. 16 in Haina, near Santo

Domingo (see our last report, where their names were misspelled, following reports in the Dominican press). Paul Marc died in a Dominican hospital burn unit on Aug. 23; the other two had died earlier in the same hospital. A fourth Haitian, Berlius Pierre, was wounded with a machete but managed to escape before the attackers could set him on fire. He said the attackers had asked for money and then assaulted the Haitians when they didn't get it; according to Pierre, one was wearing a Dominican police uniform and carried a revolver.

At the ceremony, Sonia Pierre, a Dominican of Haitian descent who heads the Haitian-Dominican Women's Movement (MUDHA), said that 24 Haitians had died in the Dominican Republic in suspicious circumstances in the last two months. (AlterPresse, Aug. 26; El Nacional, DR, Aug. 25 via AlterPresse; AHP, Aug. 24)

Fix Haiti, narrow gap between Port-au-Prince, Santo Domingo

Published August 29, 2005

Orlando Sentinel

John C. Bersia

Opinion

When nature raises its voice -- as it did with Hurricane Katrina in recent days, the freak monsoon floods that struck India earlier in the summer and a tsunami of epic proportions late last year -- one cannot help but listen. Such disasters, which suggest evidence of a planetary protest, typically send people scurrying to the assistance of the afflicted.

In more peaceful times, though, when no compelling threat -- natural or human-made -- looms, public concern often diminishes or disappears altogether. I am reminded of Haiti, which seems to find itself not only in a perpetual crisis but invariably marginalized. The rest of the world tends to pay attention and react only when Haiti's woes spill into the Caribbean and make their way to other shores, including those of the United States.

I would like to see that benign neglect end and encourage a chance for Haitians to enjoy stable, productive lives. To begin, the international community should take a more aggressive stance in helping Haiti separate itself from a dysfunctional past of oppressive rule, poverty and environmental devastation. In addition, a tighter bond should be established between Haiti and its neighbor on Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic.

The ideal opportunity to resolve the Haitian conundrum came in early 2004, with the departure of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Despite apparently good intentions, Aristide accelerated Haiti's plummet toward failed-state status. The international community dutifully expressed alarm and dispatched troops, but unfortunately its quick-fix technique has not succeeded in creating an environment that will allow free, fair and safe elections later this year. Even a recent decision to boost the size of the United Nations stabilization force in Haiti falls short of the challenge.

The size and scope of Haiti's problems demand at least 20 years of hands-on assistance by the global community. Now, I suspect that such a proposal will resonate poorly among Americans who already clamor for the United States to withdraw from other nation-building enterprises, notably in Iraq. But if they desire long-term security for nations bordering the Caribbean, they would be unwise to handle Haiti hastily and fade away. That approach merely would guarantee a repeat of past failures.

The most promising solution lies in the temporary suspension of Haiti's sovereignty and in the imposition of a comprehensive plan that would remove the influence of past regimes, bolster the society, revamp education and training, and build a constituency for democracy and free markets.

At the same time, it would help for Haiti and the Dominican Republic to work more assiduously to reduce the historical tensions that plague them. They have a common interest in dealing with just about every issue, from hurricanes to economic development. Expanding critical discussions at the national leadership level would make a difference.

Beyond that, the two countries would stand to gain from establishing a permanent institute devoted to research on Dominican-Haitian affairs. I am not talking about a make-work, one-person office that would generate insipid trivia about the two countries. Rather, I envision a serious, public-private partnership that would produce ongoing, substantive assessments for the use of policy-makers and other interested parties.

In the panorama of worthwhile issues, fixing Haiti and narrowing the gap between Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo deserve a closer look and a proactive sense of urgency.

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Haitian officials change pro-Aristide priest's prison

Associated Press

Bradenton Herald

Posted on Fri, Aug. 26, 2005

PONT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Authorities have transferred a jailed Roman Catholic priest and prominent supporter of Haiti's ousted president from the National Penitentiary to a more secluded prison often used for high-profile detainees, his lawyer said Friday.

The Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, who is considering a run for the presidency, has been sent to an annex of the National Penitentiary in Pacot, an upscale neighborhood in the capital of Port-au-Prince, said attorney Mario Joseph.

Yvon Neptune, a former prime minister under Aristide who has been jailed for more than a year without trial on charges of orchestrating political killings, is also being held in Pacot.

Jean-Juste, who has been in jail since July without charge, is accused of being behind the abduction and slaying of prominent Haitian journalist Jacques Roche. Police detained him while he tried to attend Roche's funeral, saying they were responding to the "clamor" of protesters demanding his arrest.

Jean-Juste, who was in Miami when Roche was kidnapped, has denied the allegations.

Joseph said he did not know when Jean-Juste had been transferred. The Associated Press interviewed him at the National Penitentiary on Tuesday when he said he would run for president if he received approval from Aristide, who was ousted in a 2004 armed uprising and is in exile in South Africa.

Jean-Juste also said he planned to start a hunger strike Thursday to demand the release of other Aristide loyalists he described as political prisoners. Joseph had not seen Jean-Juste since his transfer and it was unclear if he had gone through with the strike.

Jean-Juste is one of hundreds of prisoners in Haiti who have been held without sentence - or in some cases charges.

The U.S.-backed interim government has faced mounting international pressure to release prominent prisoners, whose prolonged detention have fueled allegations from Aristide loyalists of political persecution and focused attention on the nation's crumbling judicial system.

'Play for Peace' soccer match turns into massacre
By REED LINDSAY
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
Newsday.com
August 28, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- The crowd applauded when camouflaged and black-hooded police officers entered a packed soccer match in the hillside slum of Martissant on Saturday afternoon a week ago. They assumed the officers were there to provide security.

Suddenly, the officers ordered the 6,000 spectators to the ground of the walled, dirt field. Gunshots rang out and people began to run for the only exit. Police began firing wantonly, witnesses said, and outside, civilians armed with machetes and more police officers attacked those trying to flee the chaos.

Some people were shot and killed by police, according to witnesses and family members; others were hacked to pieces by the machete-wielding civilians.

The "Play for Peace" soccer match, financed and sponsored by USAID, an independent agency that provides economic, development and humanitarian assistance in support of U.S. foreign policy goals, was to help plan for disarmament by steering young people away from gang violence. Instead, it became a scene of mayhem in a country rife with human rights and criminal abuses.

'They came to massacre us'

The killings came less than a month after two other, similarly grisly machete attacks that also appeared to take place with police complicity. The incidents, all in poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince considered bastions of support for exiled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, have fueled fears in this nation with a history of such violence of state-sponsored terror before national elections in November.

"They came to massacre us," said Nesly Devla, 20, showing a three-inch, stitched-together gash on his forehead and another on his hand from a machete. "Everyone was on top of each other. There was nowhere to run. God saved me."

Anne Sosin, a human rights observer at the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, said she had confirmed the deaths of at least eight people and said all the deaths may not have been reported yet. Police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou said six bodies were brought to the morgue but declined to talk further about the incident except to say police would be investigating.

The killings have drawn increased scrutiny of a nearly 15-month-old United Nations peacekeeping mission that critics say has done little to curb human rights abuses or provide incentives for gangs to disarm.

"These killings set a dangerous precedent," Sosin said. "How can you explain police accompanied by individuals armed with machetes massacring spectators at a soccer match with UN troops standing by

literally across the street? This event needs to serve as a wake-up call for the international community, which for more than a year has failed to respond to grave violations of human rights in Haiti."

The United Nations has a permanent station across from the soccer field, but it is unclear if officers were there that day. UN human rights officials say they are investigating the killings.

Since taking power after Aristide was escorted from the country by U.S. soldiers amid an armed revolt in February 2004, the U.S.-backed interim government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue has spurned dialogue with the former president's supporters. Leaders of Aristide's Lavalas party have been imprisoned without being formally charged or brought before a judge, and the police force has carried out brutal crackdowns in Port-au-Prince's slum areas.

A setback for communities

Meanwhile, armed Aristide supporters, in addition to armed groups of other political affiliations and non-political criminal gangs, have clashed with police and UN peacekeepers and carried out a wave of kidnappings and other crimes in the capital.

The poor, as is often the case in the hemisphere's most destitute nation, has suffered the brunt of the violence. The recent machete killings have been portrayed by UN and government officials as a reaction from angry residents who have resorted to spontaneous vigilante justice after becoming fed up with gang violence.

"We are worried about the cases of lynchings in recent weeks," said Jean-Francois Vezina, Canadian spokesman for the UN Civilian Police, which is mandated with training and monitoring its Haitian counterpart but was absent the day of the Martissant killings.

Witnesses at the soccer match say the killings there were neither spontaneous nor carried out with popular support. They say they recognized some of the machete-wielding civilians as criminals who had been driven out of the adjacent neighborhood of Grand Ravine by residents and are now working as "attachés," or paid police informants and assassins.

"According to the people we work with in the community, this was not popular justice. They are saying this was a planned aggression, an attack to destabilize the community," said Philippe Branchat, an employee of the International Organization for Migration who manages the Haiti Transition Initiative, the USAID-program that sponsored the soccer game.

Branchat said the killings represent a setback in efforts to gain the trust of gang members and ordinary residents of Martissant and Grand Ravine, which is a crucial first step toward disarmament. He said unlike other slum areas in the capital, these neighborhoods have been relatively free from violence since November.

"We're not involved in violence and disorder. We don't shoot at police, we don't kidnap people, we don't rape women ... This is a very peaceful area," said Luckner Innocent, a Grand Ravine resident who went to the soccer match with his nephew Wasnay Alcidas, 21, and found him at the morgue two days later.

Innocent said he saw police shooting in Alcidas' direction and then didn't see his nephew again until he viewed the body -- shot six times in the stomach and hacked with a machete.

"The police were working in concert with the same guys doing kidnapping, terrorizing people, raping women. Those are the ones [with the machetes]," he said.

Fair Elections in Haiti
Imagine the Possibilities!
by Jean St-Vil
August 26, 2005
ZNet Magazine

All indicators suggest a fiasco for the scheduled fall elections in Haiti. The International Crisis Group (ICG) observed that 18 months after former President Jean Bertrand Aristide was forced out of the country, Haiti remains insecure and volatile. On the part of much of the population ICG saw "disenchantment, apathy and ignorance about the electoral process." Rightfully so, this reputable Geneva-based organization concluded it is essential and urgent that those conditions be reversed.

Apathy and lack of familiarity with the electoral process is no surprise. Last April Ron Gould, a consultant with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), wrote "the voter registration process is technology driven as a result of a decision of the Organization of American States." Gould, who openly worried about the "the high cost, high risk nature" of this decision given Haiti's lack of infrastructure, concluded still "there is no turning back."

It is hardly surprising that ICG reported "a week before the scheduled close of registration, only 870,000 [of 4 million] potential voters had registered, and none had yet received the new national identity card required to vote."

So, could authentic elections be held in today's Haiti? The answer is linked to the willingness of powerful countries like Canada to let Haitians control their destiny and determine the political fate of their leaders.

There are several critical developments that offer a basis for believing that a genuine election remains possible. First, Aristide, the exiled president, confirmed he shall not defy the Haitian Constitution to seek a third mandate. Second, Aristide's return to complete a botched second mandate is being demanded by himself and by his supporters as part of a national reconciliation process which they insist must include free elections. Thirdly, all members of the interim government signed an agreement confirming they shall not seek political office in the upcoming elections. And finally, the fully deployed UN mission (MINUSTAH) by far outguns and outnumbers Haiti's armed factions and, consequently, has suffered minimal casualties. Provided adequate political direction, a MINUSTAH refocused on true peacekeeping rather than targeted political repression could easily secure the country for elections.

Clearly, the challenge facing the foreign powers (Canada, U.S., and France) that supervised the disastrous "regime change" in Haiti is political rather than military. The question, then, is whether the necessary shift in political vision can take root in the minds of Martin, Bush and Chirac. Will they recognize that the main problem is the illegal nature of the post-coup regime they installed, which Haitians and foreigners alike find difficult to take seriously?

Meanwhile, it is generally recognized and even admitted by senior officials at Canada's Foreign Affairs department that Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas remains Haiti's most popular party. It goes without saying that an election without Lavalas would be considered a sham. Yet, the U.S., Canada, France, and the

interim government have openly and actively sought to destabilize and eliminate Lavalas from the running, by promoting a split within the party. Martin's Special Advisor on Haiti, Denis Coderre, has gone so far as to name two individuals he deems suitable replacements for Aristide. This ill-inspired strategy has served to irredeemably discredit these foreign-blessed "moderates" who have lost the respect of Haitians. It has become such a cynical farce that news broke on Aug. 4 that Guy Phillippe, the infamous paramilitary now presidential candidate who headed the violent coup from the Dominican Republic, has announced seeking an alliance with moderate Lavalas. As could be logically expected, Lavalas officials reaffirmed that the condition of their participation in the elections remain unchanged: release some 1,000 political prisoners, end political persecutions and return President Aristide to complete his mandate.

What does Canada offer?

Despite the efforts of a growing number of Haiti solidarity activists, Martin shows no signs his official policy is diverging from the course championed by Pierre Pettigrew, who continues to openly embrace the character assassination of the exiled president. Most disturbingly, Pettigrew continues to dismiss the many reports from credible independent organizations such as the Miami School of Law, Harvard University, the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey and Amnesty International which indicate that post-coup civilian killings and political assassinations have been primarily directed against Lavalas supporters. According to Pettigrew, the painstakingly documented horrors described in these reports are mere "Lavalas propaganda." Consequently, the violations are ignored and the illegal regime committing them continues to enjoy Canada's unflinching complicity.

Claude Boucher, Canada's Ambassador to Haiti, told the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas on Dec. 9, 2004: "We hope that Aristide is going to disappear... I believe that he should never come back. [...] We hope [an enquiry into alleged corruption by the Aristide government] will show Aristide is guilty of so many criminal actions." Obviously, for Canada to play a productive role in Haiti, official Canadian policy cannot be so partial and paternalistic. Pettigrew and Martin must accept that Haitians have the final say in matters concerning their nation's future, that CARICOM (Caribbean Community Secretariat) and South Africa are important players whose peace-seeking role must be accorded due respect, and that voices of moderation both from within and outside Haiti must be heard and listened to.

Canada is openly supporting the machinations of an economically powerful but unlawful minority in Haiti. The just grievances of Haiti's impoverished, now humiliated, disempowered and marginalized majority are still being ignored. What is urgently needed, as recommended by Thabo Mbeki and Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC), is a genuine peace initiative that actively and respectfully engages exiled President Aristide as well as his opponents. Canada could play an active role in this, but only if a significant paradigm shift occurs in its foreign policy towards Haiti.

Our fast growing movement of solidarity with Haiti shall not be detracted by opportunistic political statements or symbolic appointments made to deviate attention from the real issues. From Prince Edward Island to British Columbia, and certainly in Pierre Pettigrew's Papineau riding in Québec, our cry will continue to resonate loud and clear: No to sham elections in Haiti! Yes to genuine and fair elections, following the release of all political prisoners and the return of Haiti's exiled constitutional president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

There remains one question: Does our prime minister, who recently shocked everyone with the surprised nomination of Haitian-born Michäelle Jean as Governor General of Canada, have the courage to do the right thing when there are few evident political points to gain - even if risking disapproval from Bush?

Mr. Prime Minister, won't you surprise us again, this time, by boldly taking a foreign policy roundabout to embrace the rightful aspirations of the Haitian people to social justice, recovered dignity and sovereignty?

Jean Saint-Vil is a founding member of the Canada Haiti Action Network: www.canadahaitiaction.ca

Release of Former Haitian Paramilitary Leader Draws Condemnation

Aug 26, 2005 Cap-Haitien

PolitInfo.com

In Haiti, the recent release of an imprisoned former paramilitary leader has drawn condemnation from diplomats and human rights activists. Many Haitians are expressing cynicism, saying their country, with its history of violence and extreme poverty, has never had justice. Some are skeptical that November elections will bring significant change.

Louis Jodel Chamblain was a co-leader of the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, or FRAPH, a paramilitary group blamed for thousands of killings during the military dictatorship that took over after driving President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power in 1991.

Mr. Chamblain fled Haiti seeking exile in the Dominican Republic after U.S. forces disbanded FRAPH and restored Mr. Aristide to the presidency three years later.

He was convicted in absentia for the murder of a pro-Aristide businessman and for ordering the massacre of an estimated two dozen Aristide supporters in the northern town of Gonaives.

In February 2004, as gang members and former soldiers swept through the country, killing police officers and calling for Mr. Aristide's ouster, Mr. Chamblain returned to Haiti to join their rebellion, which led to Mr. Aristide's resignation and exile.

Under Haitian law, those convicted in absentia are entitled to a retrial, and in April of last year, Mr. Chamblain turned himself in to Haitian police.

His convictions were overturned, but he remained behind bars during an investigation into charges that he was responsible for the burning of a section of the Aristide stronghold slum, Cite Soleil, in 1993. This month, the courts declared there was not enough evidence to keep him in jail, and he was released.

In the northern town of Cap-Haitien, where rebels patrolled the streets until they were driven out by U.N. peacekeepers last spring, reactions to Mr. Chamblain's release were mixed.

Lucner Obas, a 26-year-old farmer, said it illustrates how bad the system is.

"Naturally, it's proof we don't have justice in Haiti, because the process was never completed," he said. "Chamblain was accused, and the process was badly done on the correctional, as well as the judicial level."

Mr. Obas believes Mr. Chamblain's decision to turn himself in was part of a plan.

"It was a sort of charade. Everyone can see that, even a baby," he said.

Meanwhile, Yvon Neptune, who was prime minister under Mr. Aristide, remains in jail. He was arrested in June 2004, on charges he ordered the killing of anti-Aristide activists in the coastal town of St. Marc during the February 2003 uprising.

Haitians remain deeply divided between supporters and opponents of Mr. Aristide's Lavalas party. Mr. Obas is among those who is angered by the ex-prime minister's continuing imprisonment.

"On the subject of the former prime minister, Yvon Neptune, the people in general, and the justice system as well, must demand his liberation," he said. "The incarceration of Mr. Neptune is a crime."

Members of the U.S. Congress have repeatedly called for Mr. Neptune's release, calling his detention politically motivated and a human rights violation.

In his final news conference before leaving his post in Haiti this month, U.S. Ambassador James Foley called Mr. Chamblain's release a "scandal," particularly while Mr. Neptune remains in jail without the presentation of any evidence against him.

As under former President Aristide, the vast majority of Haitians behind bars have not yet been tried, and many go months before seeing a judge.

A 36-year-old taxi-driver, who refused to give his name for fear of being targeted, said it was too dangerous to comment on Mr. Neptune, but he called the Chamblain release fair.

"If someone's going to turn himself in, and in a country like this, where it's particularly easy to go to jail and hard to get out, it must be because they didn't find he had done anything wrong, and he must be liberated," he said.

Yet, like many Haitians, the driver has little faith in his country's justice system and believes elections planned for November will make little difference, saying previous elections were not seen as credible. He also criticized the international community, the United States and former colonial power France, in particular.

"Generally, we're never going to have justice in Haiti," the driver said. " We're never going to have it because although we have laws they are not respected, you know? And elections. I don't think we'll ever have elections in Haiti. We've never had elections and we never will have elections in Haiti. Even if there are people elected, it's always a selection."

A transitional government has been running Haiti since early 2004, and elections have been set for November, but logistical problems have delayed voter registration, and pessimism about elections is widespread. Potential voters cite the problems of violence, particularly in the nation's capital, and widespread apathy about the candidates.

To Jean-Louis, a 27-year-old unemployed technician who declined to give his last name, Haitians are too concerned about putting food on their tables to worry about elections or what goes on in the courts.

"What matters is social justice, because, you see, really, there is a gap in the society between those with the economic means to live and those without," he said. "And that's a form of injustice for people who don't have, because, essentially, that causes all the problems of insecurity across the country now... Is the country prepared for elections? I don't really think so, considering the level of security we must have by October."

Local elections scheduled for October have been postponed until December, with presidential and Parliamentary elections planned for November. Mr. Aristide's still popular Lavalas party is split on whether to participate.

Haiti recalls top diplomat
ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU
Associated Press
San Jose Mercury News
August 25, 2005

POR-T-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Haiti recalled its top diplomat to the Dominican Republic on Thursday after three Haitian migrants were beaten and burned to death in an attack that has added to growing tensions between the uneasy Caribbean neighbors.

The three men, ranging from 19 to 22 years old, were attacked Aug. 16 near the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, where they worked, Dominican police said.

According to the Dominican Attorney General's Office, they had been drinking with a group of Dominicans who later demanded money. When turned down, the Dominicans attacked the Haitians, doused them with a flammable liquid and set them ablaze. The men died days later.

In response to the killings, Haiti recalled its charge d'affaires "for consultation," said Jean Daniel Lafontant, a spokesman for Haiti's Foreign Ministry.

"The Haitian interim government energetically condemns these criminal acts. It deplores that such deeds have occurred at a time when significant efforts are being made to lastingly improve relations between the two countries," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The Dominican National Police said Thursday it had formed a commission to investigate the attack and find the killers.

In May, the Dominican government deported at least 2,000 Haitians following the killing of a Dominican woman. No one was arrested in the slaying, but Dominican neighbors went on a retaliatory rampage, beheading two Haitian migrants.

Although Haitian migrants are considered a burden in a country whose own citizens flee poverty by the thousands each year, Dominican farm owners often truck in Haitians to work in the fields, saying they need the cheap labor.

UN troops in Haiti aid repression, critics charge

Tim Pelzer

People's Weekly World Newspaper

08/25/05

On July 6, 350 soldiers from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah) stormed the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Cite Soleil, one of the capital's poorest districts and a hotbed of support for ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

"The foreign soldiers came with helicopters and their war machines and started shooting at everything that moved," said Rene Momplaisir, a neighborhood activist. "They killed 40 people who carried no weapons."

Among the victims were 22-year-old Sonia Romelus, who was killed by the same bullet that passed through the body of her 1-year-old son Nelson, who also died. Found next to their bodies was Sonia's 4-year-old son Stanley, killed by a single shot to the head.

Doctors Without Borders reported receiving 27 patients with gunshot wounds after the incident, three-quarters of them women and children.

Minustah commander Lt. Gen. Augusto Heleno Ribeiro initially claimed the attack was an attempt to "curb violence" in the neighborhood, alleging that no civilians died and that soldiers shot out of self-defense. However, after outraged protesters held demonstrations across the U.S., Canada, France and Brazil, Minustah issued an apology for its actions and promised to investigate.

As a result of this incident and others, critics charge that Minustah is not protecting human rights in Haiti. Instead, they say, it is aiding the coup-installed government's campaign of repression against Aristide's supporters.

Journalist and filmmaker Kevin Pina, producer of the documentary "Haiti: the Untold Revolution," told the World in an e-mail interview from Haiti that UN forces have been involved in other massacres besides the one on July 6.

"Ordinary Haitians who continue to support Lavalas and Aristide are frightened and angry by their [Minustah's] presence," he said. They sometimes find themselves "verging on helplessness, especially when the UN continues to support armed incursions in their neighborhoods by the Haitian National Police (HNP). They [Minustah] are always in the background of these deadly raids."

According to Brian Concannon Jr. of the Oregon-based Center for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, "Minustah has been involved in a lot of killings and is most certainly supporting police in murderous raids in poor neighborhoods."

Pina's and Concannon's statements are supported by two recent studies.

"Keeping the Peace in Haiti?" by Harvard University Law School and the Brazil-based Global Justice Center, accuses Minustah of violating its own mandate. The report, published last March, points out

that Security Council Resolution 1542 requires that Minustah help with monitoring and reforming the HNP.

Instead, “Minustah’s most visible efforts have involved providing logistical support to police operations … implicated in human rights abuses such as arbitrary arrests and detentions and extrajudicial killings.”

A University of Miami Law School report issued last November and titled “Haiti: Human Rights Investigation” says that the HNP routinely launches “guerilla attacks” against poor neighborhoods, carrying out illegal killings with Minustah’s backing.

Journalist Ben Terral, who recently visited Haiti, said that he watched a video recording of an HNP-Minustah operation made by a Haitian journalist in downtown Port-au-Prince. “It included images of a Bel Air resident named William Perry who was in a wheelchair in the courtyard of his residence when UN troops burst through the gate and blew the top of his head off. William’s sister testified on camera that Brazilian UN troops fired gas and came into courtyard with no provocation. … The survivors testified that UN soldiers were shooting ‘without any control.’”

Concannon said that ordinary Haitians sometimes welcome Minustah into their neighborhoods because “they are less brutal than the police or armed groups that they displace.”

“But Haitians would prefer that Minustah protect them without having to shoot them as well,” he said.

tpelzer @ shaw.ca

Texan seeks change for his native Haiti
By BRAD HAWKINS / WFAA-TV
Friday, August 26, 2005

POR-T-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The streets are jammed with far more people than cars.

7,000 United Nations peacekeepers now circulate through the capital of this Caribbean nation, where just two months ago kidnappings and murders went hardly noticed.

Alan McKenzie / WFAA-TV

Dumas Siméus speaks to an enthusiastic crowd in Haiti during his quest to become president of his native land. Four hours northwest of Port-au-Prince, 65-year-old Texan Dumas Siméus has come home to the village of Pont Sonde. He came to tell them that he, a father of three, wants to be their next president - and transform his native land.

Siméus, who founded a multi-million-dollar food industry giant in North Texas, said the hunger for responsible leadership in Haiti called him from his mansion outside Mansfield back to the village where he began an inspirational life.

"My dream is create a Haiti where our brothers and sisters are proud to say they are Haitians," said Siméus. "(A place) where they can work, where they can feel they are part of society."

Haitians are indeed gearing up for a new government. It's been 18 months since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left the country in a violent coup - and the gang violence, kidnappings and crime haven't stopped since.

The unrest is threatening a planned Presidential election in early November. And you don't have to speak Creole to hear Siméus' hope - or know the citizens' desperation.

Most Caribbean countries make the news during hurricanes, but in Haiti the most destructive storms have been manmade - a turbulent two centuries with winds fueled by unbelievable hunger. The lack of food is only worse in Somalia and Afghanistan, other countries where the governments have vanished into lawlessness.

So how does one go about fixing such a situation?

"It's very, very difficult ... it's broken, Siméus said. "We have to start somewhere."

Siméus started a life of great success in a concrete closet of a house.

"This is my home," he said, looking around the tiny abode with history in his eyes. "This is where my mom was in labor, and that's where I was born; they cut my umbilical cord, dug a hole and put it right there."

His drive took him to the United States, to Howard University and then the University of Chicago. He quickly developed a global resume, leading companies across the continents before starting his own.

Siméus Foods International in Mansfield is the largest black-owned food processing business in the U.S. The multi-million-dollar company produces everything from the breakfast sausage served at Denny's to the supertime soups of Quizno's Subs.

The Siméus Foundation has pumped millions back to Haiti for medical care and water treatment. They know and love him in his homeland, and he said he has no worries when stuck in one of the massive crowds that often crowd streets in Haiti's capital.

"I feel that the people really love someone who they believe loves them," Simeus said. "We really have a peaceful Haiti; Haiti is a very peaceful country. Unfortunately, we have a few gangs."

He faces great obstacles in his quest. This friend to Washington has been a U.S. citizen for 45 years, has no party and faces a constitutional ban on non-Haitians running for president.

Still, he perseveres.

"No one could kill that dream, my friend, because it had roots right here in Pont Sonde," he said. "My parents kept watering (those roots) so that the tree of the dream could bloom in the United States, could come back and help enrich other lives here in Haiti."

For Dumas Siméus, hope hangs on the next wave of change.

Haiti: UN peacekeeper shot in leg as violence continues in capital city
UN News Centre
August 25, 2005

A United Nations peacekeeper in Haiti was shot in the leg and seriously wounded when his patrol came under fire from armed bands in Port-au-Prince, the capital, yesterday as violence in the city continued to raise serious concerns.

The peacekeeper, a Peruvian, was part of a patrol in the Cite Soleil area helping a group of people who had been attacked by “bandits” throwing stones, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) said today.

“The blue helmets reacted efficiently to this attack, forcing the bandits to flee and seek refuge among the civilian population,” the mission added. The Peruvian was seriously wounded in the left leg and underwent surgery.

Meanwhile, the UN police force in the strife-torn country has strongly condemned a rash of lynchings in the city over the past several weeks.

“MINUSTAH expresses its very serious concern over this new settling of accounts and firmly condemns these acts of violence which are considered as crimes under Haiti’s constitution and laws,” UN Police (UNPOL) spokesman Jean-Francois Vezina told a news briefing yesterday.

He called on “citizens who have participated in these criminal acts” to end them at once.

Violence in Haiti’s capital has been one of the major problems facing MINUSTAH since it was set up by the Security Council last year to help to re-establish order in the impoverished Caribbean country after an insurgency forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004.

Earlier this month the mission sent out armoured patrols into various districts of the capital in an effort to reduce criminal activity, securing the release of half a dozen kidnap victims.

More machete lynchings in Haiti: 7-20 hacked to death in Grande Ravine district
San Francisco Bay View
August 24, 2005

Haiti Progres reports: "The State University Hospital Morgue registered some 40 corpses from poor neighborhoods during the second week of August. The victims all had bullet wounds. Those who died by lynching are not included in the 40."

Port-au-Prince (AHP) - Several people were hacked to death and close to a dozen others were injured Saturday and Sunday in the populist district of Grand Ravine as a soccer match was taking place. The mutilated victims were accused of being "bandits."

Some witnesses said that seven people were murdered, while others said the toll was more than a dozen. Pro-government sources said that only two or three people were killed.

For his part, Lionel Mondestin, one of the leaders of MUR (Republican Unity Movement) who lives in the Grand Ravine district, indicated that some 20 people were murdered during this attack.

According to Mondestin, members of the National Police accompanied by men armed with machetes looking for presumed bandits encircled the neighborhood before the killings started.

He also indicated that MINUSTAH officers were present at the scene. Efforts to obtain a reaction from MINUSTAH regarding this incident have been unsuccessful.

As for the Haitian police, PNH spokesperson Gessy Cameau Coicou indicated she was not aware of the reported killings. "I have not yet received any report on these incidents," she said.

Several homes were also set on fire during the grave incidents at Grand Ravine.

"This is unacceptable," said the MUR leader, asserting that these criminal acts are part of a vast campaign of instant justice.

He called for the arrest of the killers and their accomplices and for them to be turned over to the judicial authorities. Several area residents have abandoned their homes for fear of being murdered.

A spokesperson for Fanmi Lavalas, Marc Floreste, condemned the criminal acts that took place in Grand-Ravine.

He appealed to human rights organizations and the international community to assume their responsibilities in the face of these repugnant acts perpetrated at the very moment when the public is asked to take part in the electoral process.

Many sectors recently spoke out in condemnation of the distribution of machetes in the populist districts carried out with the intention of finding ways to provoke area residents to kill one another.

What you can do

The UN has charge of the Police in Haiti. To contact UN Forces in Haiti, call or fax a letter to Juan Gabriel Valdes, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Haiti, phone 011-509-244-9650 or 9660, fax 011-509 244 3512.

Also contact David Beer, Commissioner of CIVPOL the UN Civilian Police in Haiti, phone 011-509-525-5279, email beer@un.org, fax 011-509-244-9366.

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HAITI: UN MISSION CONDEMS RASH OF LYNCHINGS IN CAPITAL

Aug. 25 2005

U.N. News Center

Facing a new show of disorder in Haiti, the United Nations police force in the strife-torn country has strongly condemned a rash of lynchings that has erupted in the capital, Port-au-Prince, over the past several weeks.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) "expresses its very serious concern over this new settling of accounts and firmly condemns these acts of violence which are considered as crimes under Haiti's constitution and laws, UN Police (UNPOL) spokesman Jean-Francois Vezina told a news briefing yesterday.

He called on "citizens who have participated in these criminal acts" to end them at once.

Violence in Haiti's capital has been one of the major problems facing MINUSTAH since it was set up by the UN Security Council last year to help to re-establish order in the impoverished Caribbean country after an insurgency forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004.

Earlier this month the mission sent out armoured patrols into various districts of the capital in an effort to reduce criminal activity, securing the release of half a dozen kidnap victims.

CHIEF OF UN MISSION IN HAITI SAYS MISSION MUST NOT LEAVE PREMATURELY

Aug. 25 2005

Press Release - U.N. News Center

The chief of the United Nations mission in Haiti says the peacekeepers should not leave the Caribbean country prematurely, thereby repeating the same mistake that previous UN missions have made.

Speaking to reporters in Brasilia, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and chief of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Juan Gabriel Valdés, said: "Previous missions have failed because they pulled out their troops prematurely. MINUSTAH must avoid making the same mistake."

Haiti needed substantive advances in its development before it could consolidate a democratic system, he added.

The international community had to involve itself more deeply for the time necessary, especially in bolstering law enforcement and the judiciary, Mr. Valdés said, and all political parties that renounce violence had to be given a guaranteed opportunity to take part in the elections to form a democratic and legitimate government.

He thanked Brazil, especially MINUSTAH Force Commander General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira, for its leading role in the mission's successes.

After an insurgency that forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004, MINUSTAH has spent more than a year trying to re-establish law and order in the Caribbean country.

5000 soccer fans in Haiti witness machete and hatchet massacre by police and the new death squads

by Tom Luce with AUMOHD investigators

Haiti Information Project

Haiti Action.net

August 26, 2005

Dredging up fearsome memories of days thought to have gone by forever, eyewitnesses here in Port-Au-Prince have portrayed an unbelievable massacre-by-machete/hatchet rampage by red-shirted killers, backed up by the Haitian National Police (PNH), of up to 50 victims on Aug. 21 at a soccer field in Gran Ravin-Martissant. This summary, extra-legal execution follows similar type massacres in Bel Air and Solino earlier this month. This time the killings were done in plain daylight in front of and involving 5000 soccer fans, an incredibly bold assault by Haitian police and their civilian accomplices in the presence of troops from MINUSTAH. As has been the case this entire past year, the "targets" in Saturday's massacre, were all identified as "bandits", "Lavalas" scum (Rat pa caca).

Eyewitnesses described to a group of human rights agents today this super t.v. drama styled event. As fans were being entertained during one of the breaks in the soccer game--highly attended because national league players had joined the local teams--a group of police and men wearing red tee shirts and head bands entered the playing field and took over the microphone from the announcer. The people in the crowd at first thought that this was a friendly show of security by the police. But that idea was immediately dashed when the red shirt announcer stopped the music being played by the DJ and then demanded everyone to lay on the ground. A shot was fired into the air and people began a panicked response. Some tried to run away, some tried scaling the walls to escape and several of these were shot. Others tried running into the adjoining rooms of the stadium and later were found hacked to death. The red shirts, backed up by the police began demanding specific individuals lying on the ground if they were affiliated with Aristide, asking for confirmation from others whether these people were "bandits". Then without mercy these red shirts either hacked their victims to death or hacked them and then had their victims shot by the police. According to eyewitnesses and the family members of the victims interviewed today, the victims of the executioners were innocent people and were attacked only because they were allegedly Lavalas supporters.

The red shirts were equipped with machetes and hatchets that were distributed, according to witnesses, by the police at the Martissant police station. These same civilians who appeared in red shirts and head bands at the soccer game, armed with machetes were recognized by people in the area as the same people who at least a month previously were thrown out of the area as trouble makers among whom were some prison escapees and thieves. Some of these executioners were named by witnesses: Georges Jean Yves, Gérard, aka, Gwo l'Ombril (Big Belly Button), ...lifet aka TÍte Calé (Shaved Head), Ti Clody, Rudy, JoÎl, Eddy, Apouann aka Colonel, Ronald Toussaint, Kiki , Rocky Rambo, and Cliska. The chief of police of Martissant was also implicated in the operation by the witnesses and according to the witnesses threatened to come after them and "wipe them out the next day."

On Sunday, Aug. 21 the same red shirts, accompanied by the police, invaded residential areas and burned more than four houses alleged to be inhabited by Lavalas supporters. They also severely damaged an electricity transformer in the area. They also damaged several other houses.

U.N. to investigate Haiti slum lynchings

Thu Aug 25, 2005 2:12 AM BST

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

POR-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - The U.N. mission in Haiti has launched an inquiry into the lynching of at least 20 people by vigilantes armed with machetes and by Haitian police last weekend, U.N. officials said on Wednesday.

During a soccer game on Saturday funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the interim Haitian government, hooded police and individuals with machetes attacked people they called "bandits," according to residents of the Port-au-Prince slum of Martissant.

"Everybody gathered to watch the game, suddenly the police surrounded the area and ordered everyone to lie on the ground," said Roland Roy, a community leader in Martissant.

"Then a group of people, armed with machetes, who came with the police, started identifying people one by one, saying here is a bandit, here is another one. They cut them with machetes and killed a number of them," said Roy. He said up to 30 people died, some shot by police.

Another community leader, Lionel Mondestin, said at least 20 people were killed on Saturday during the soccer game and on Sunday during another police operation. Many other residents gave similar accounts.

French Lt. Col. Philippe Espie, the head of international police who are part of a U.N. force keeping the peace since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by an armed revolt last year, said the incident was being investigated and would not be tolerated.

"In the first place, we can only condemn what happened. It is intolerable to accept that sort of situation where people take justice into their own hands," Espie told Reuters.

The soccer game was part of a "tournament for peace," funded by USAID and the interim Haitian government that took over after Aristide fled into exile at the end of February 2004, organisers said. Once viewed as a champion of Haiti's fledgling democracy, Aristide faced increasing accusations of corruption and despotism.

POLICE ABUSES ALLEGED

The head of a U.N. human rights unit, Thierry Faggart, said his office was also investigating the incident and several other cases of human rights abuses blamed on police.

Haiti's new police chief, Mario Andresol, said he was ready to punish any officers, if their involvement were confirmed.

"We are here to protect the population, not to repress them or kill them. Such behaviour won't be tolerated while I'm there," Andresol told Reuters.

Both the Haitian police and U.N. forces have previously announced investigations into alleged abuses by police officers. To date, no reports have been published.

Dozens of people have been hacked to death in vigilante justice that often accompanies police operations in slums regarded as strongholds of support for Aristide.

The authorities blame Aristide supporters for violence that has killed at least 700 people in the past year while Aristide's Lavalas Family party says it is being persecuted. Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, is scheduled to hold elections in November.

UN envoy proposes extension of peacekeeping forces presence in Haiti
China View
August 24, 2005

BRASILIA, Aug. 23 (Xinhuanet) -- UN peacekeeping forces presence in Haiti should be extended for another four years, UN special envoy to Haiti Juan Gabriel Valdes was quoted as saying by local media Tuesday.

Valdes made the remarks when meeting with Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim on the situation of the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Brazil is in charge of the military command of MINUSTAH and has the largest contingent in Haiti with 1,200 troops.

MINUSTAH troops will be reinforced in September to maintain security in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince before the year-end presidential election.

Meanwhile, Valdes rejected the suggestion by some analysts for postponing the election due to insecurity in the country.

"I absolutely dissent, because nothing produces more lack of stability than postponing the existence of an acting government," he said.

Since the 2004 ouster of former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is now living in exile in South Africa, more than 1,000 people have been killed in violence and clashes between the police and Aristide's followers.

The UN Security Council said in June that the number of MINUSTAH troops will be increased from 6,700 to 7,500 due to escalating violence in Port-au-Prince. Enditem

**Haiti Under U.S. Pressure to Release Neptune
But no mention of Jean-Juste or Annette August
by Aina Hunter
August 15th, 2005 6:41 PM
Village Voice**

Folksinger/community Annette August is among hundreds who have been imprisoned without trial
phot: courtesy of Haiti Information Project

The outgoing U.S. ambassador to Haiti recently joined a chorus of politicians expressing outrage over the unlawful imprisonment of former prime minister Yvon Neptune, who, along with many other politicians and activists belonging to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Famni Lavalas party, has been kept in the notoriously foul National Penitentiary for over a year without trial. Last Tuesday Juan Gabriel Valdes, U.N. special envoy to Haiti, suddenly insisted on Neptune's immediate release, and soon after Haiti's new justice minister reportedly denounced the U.S.-backed interim government's practice of imprisoning people without any hope of trial.

Why the sudden outrage?

Insiders predict that the interim government is preparing to stage a massive release of imprisoned Lavalas politicians—but only the soft ones. Ira Kurzban, former lawyer for the Aristide government of Haiti, says the release has been calculated to make it easier for a faction of Lavalas that appears to be in the U.S.'s good graces to run a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections.

"Neptune cooperated with them from the beginning—they'll let him go, and probably a hundred or so others," Kurzban tells the Voice. Last June Neptune was arrested on charges that he'd ordered the killings of several anti-Lavalas rebels after a well-publicized clash between pro- and anti-government armed groups in February 2004. Last week U.S. ambassador James Foley told reporters that no one has come forward with "the least evidence, the least clue, the least testimony" that would implicate the former Prime Minister.

"They never have any evidence," says lawyer Mario Joseph, who represents Neptune through a non-profit organization. "You have to understand that this is a dictatorship. They do what they want. I just try to do my job as best as I can, and I do a good job, but I cannot say what they will do."

Neptune may stand a good chance of being released soon, but others aren't likely to see the light of day until after the election. The interim government doesn't want populist leaders like Gerard Jean-Juste and Annette August to rile up the Lavalas faithful, says Kurzban.

Last year the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission estimated that there are about 700 political prisoners in Haitian jails. Now, activists say, there are hundreds more, with Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest, being the most recent high-profile addition since his arrest by Haitian police last month.

Even more disturbing story is the story of Haitian born, 20-year Brooklyn resident Annette Auguste, a grandmotherly community activist and folk singer affectionately known as "So Anne"—which means "Sister Anne" in Creole. She was arrested in her home in May 2004 by U.S. Marines who, her lawyer says, blasted through her door with grenades, shot the barking family dogs, and put everyone,

including four children, in handcuffs before marching them off to the police station in the middle of the night.

Lt. Col. Dave Lapan, a spokesman for the U.S. Marines in Haiti, last year told Newsday that only one dog was shot, not two, and that although Auguste was originally arrested for allegedly helping a group of Haitian Muslims organize attacks on the United States, the charges were dropped. Now she is being held by the Haitian government on charges of paying people to attack anti-Aristide demonstrators. At a hearing last Thursday, lawyer Joseph says his client was questioned by a judge about the allegations, and that it seemed to go well.

"But people like her and Jean-Juste—they have good mouths when it comes to speaking to the people. So I think [the interim government] will hold them until after the elections."

Mercosur

Saturday, 27 August 2005

MercoPress

Rio Group confirms support for Haiti and Chavez

The Foreign and Deputy ministers of the Rio Group kicked off a two-day extraordinary meeting at Bariloche tourist centre in Argentina's Patagonia, following postponement of the Rio Summit of their presidents.

Rio Group Minister R. Bielsa

The Argentine Foreign Ministry said the central topic will be the situation in Haiti, where many member countries have contributed troops to the UN multinational peacekeeping mission.

"Institutional normalization together with the registration process for the coming elections are essential for Haiti's stability and regional peace", said Argentine Foreign Affairs minister Rafael Bielsa.

The first meeting of top representatives from the 19 member countries of the Rio Group was attended by Organization American States (OAS) Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, and the UN representative for Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdés.

Other issues under discussion will be the strengthening of the group and a common position for the Summit of the Americas, promoted by the United States and to be held in Mar del Plata on Argentina's South Atlantic coast on November 4-5.

The Rio Group presidential meeting was postponed due to the inability of some heads of state to attend. It is now likely to be held in December, diplomatic sources said.

One of the first statements from the meeting was in support of Venezuela following US preacher Pat Robertson's call to kill president Hugo Chavez.

The Group said it expects "legal actions" to be taken against the former US presidential candidate closely linked to the extreme right of the Republican Party who said "US does not need another 200 billion US dollars war to get rid of a violent dictator that is bankrupting his country. It's much cheaper to send undercover agents to do the job".

Mr. Robertson later apologized in his official web site but insisted in comparing Mr. Chavez with former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The Rio Group is made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and Guyana as representative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). However, only eleven of the nineteen members are present at the current meeting in Bariloche.

Presidential Candidate Seeks to Claim Haiti for Christ

Janet Chismar

Senior Editor for Faith

Crosswalk.com

August 25, 2005

On Aug. 14, 1791, a black slave and witch doctor named Boukman led Haitian slaves in a voodoo ritual, drinking the blood of a sacrificed pig to form a pact with the devil. The slaves agreed to serve Satan for 200 years in exchange for freedom from French colonizers who ruled their island. Beginning on Aug. 22, 1791, the slaves rose up against the French, and by Jan. 1, 1804, they declared Haiti the world's first independent black republic.

On the tiny Caribbean nation, voodoo still pulses as an undercurrent of culture. By some counts, 75 percent of Haitians actively practice the ancient melding of West African spiritism and witchcraft. Folk tradition says Haitians are 70 percent Catholic, 30 percent Protestant and 100 percent voodoo.

Even former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fell under voodoo's spell as he sought – unsuccessfully – to re-ratify the ancient Boukman Blood Pact with the devil on August 14, 2003. Before his ouster in 2004, Aristide passed a law officially recognizing voodoo as an official religion and culture.

As Haiti prepares for its first presidential elections since Aristide was forced into exile in February last year, a number of evangelical Christians are working to reclaim Haiti for Christ. Overcoming 200 years of political corruption, poverty and voodoo is an ambitious agenda, but for Pastor Chavannes Jeune, his faith demands no less.

Jeune, an influential Christian leader and evangelist, formally announced his candidacy for president of Haiti in his hometown of Les Cayes on Aug. 10.

The president of the Baptist Church of South Haiti (MEBSH), Jeune also was the visionary and catalyst for HAVIDEC, or Haiti for the Third Century. Its purpose is simply to: "Take Haiti back from the devil, and dedicate her to Jesus Christ."

HAVIDEC is currently involved in teaching Haitian citizens about their right and responsibility to vote. The organization also teaches Haitian Christians about the importance of electing God-fearing men and women to all positions of leadership in the 2005 elections, and is trying to motivate two million Christians to register to vote.

Out of the efforts of HAVIDEC grew a political party, UNCRH, a French acronym for "National Christian Union for the Reconstruction of Haiti." Jeune was elected as its leader – and by extension – its presidential candidate.

Jeune currently is campaigning throughout Haiti, as well as in the Haitian Diaspora, which is made up of about 2.5 million expatriated Haitians living in the United States, Canada, France and Africa. They are eligible to vote and send millions each year to friends, family and businesses on the island of Haiti.

In an interview in Washington, D.C. this spring, Jeune told Crosswalk.com he is “very confident that God is calling me to do something for my country.” I’ve been very active as a pastor, as a civil engineer, I’ve worked in public administration. But now, more and more, God has laid on my heart the desire to go one step farther by filling the gap – the spiritual gap, the social-political gap and the economic gap – by building a team of good, respected and honest people together and see what we can do to reverse the poverty trend and the situation of Haiti.

Jeune believes his Christianity will positively influence Haiti if he is elected. “Good, solid Christian values like justice, truth, transparency and integrity are lacking in Haiti, so I think that with the gift of God and the help of God, I can bring these things to my country.”

He does not plan to exclude prayer from his office. “George Washington said that you cannot run a country without God and the Bible; I think that is true,” Jeune adds.

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles Jeune faces is the lack of trust among Haitians for people in power. “There is a lot of instability in the government of Haiti,” Jeune explains. “Sometimes people are trying to get services under cover. They encourage that kind of mentality in Haiti – ‘use your power to steal.’”

According to Jeune, another obstacle is the “cult of personality” in Haiti. “People start looking at you as God, as Superman. If you are in power, you need to act that way and then you are more likely to engage in corruption and abuse your power. Also, there are some people with big wallets and they try to twist your arm and give you money so you can take some measures that lead very likely to corruption.”

Jeune points out that if a leader does not submit in his or her heart to Christ, “they are more likely to fall into temptation and grab whatever they can get to make them rich. They don’t have much compassion for the people who are suffering. Instead of serving the people, they are serving themselves.”

After being raised in a Christian home, Jeune accepted the Lord as his personal savior when he 7 years old. He attended seminary in Haiti and in North Carolina at Columbia Bible School, and did part of his training in Chicago.

The biggest challenge for all Christians in Haiti, according to Jeune, is how to live out their faith in the politics of violence, corruption, and bad government. “So the church needs to stand up for moral values, for Bible teachings. It is very difficult and very tough for the Christian church Haiti.”

But, adds Jeune, these very difficulties are causing the church to grow. “If there is one thing that accompanies all these difficulties, it is the growth of the church. It is a phenomenal growth. Every small church now is experiencing a rate of conversion of at least 10 people per Sunday.”

A huge challenge is encouraging Christians to overcome a long-term distaste for politics, but Jeune sees hopeful signs. “Now there is an awareness from the churches, and especially from the younger generation, that as long as we leave the political realm for the dirty people, politics in Haiti will always be dirty.”

Voter registration has begun in a number of cities. It is hoped that out of the 4.5 million people who are eligible to vote, 3.5 million will sign up. The deadline for registration has been extended from Aug. 9 until Sept. 15 in an attempt to reach this goal.

The latest schedule calls for the presidential and legislative elections to be held on Nov. 27 with a runoff on Jan. 8. But these dates are in a state of flux. The interim government is still due to hand over power on Feb. 7.

Haiti's planned election timetable is looking somewhat doubtful as officials say there are problems with finance, and violent clashes between police and supporters of ousted President Jean Bertrand-Aristide continue.

Despite a United Nations stabilizing force having been present for more than a year, violence has continued. The UN's representative in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes fears that armed gangs could disrupt the election process. Observers have warned that the current climate of fear could prevent people from turning out to vote.

Partners Worldwide, in conjunction with Haitian and North American NGOs, announces the formation of the Consortium for Civic Education. The Consortium is a joint effort of NGOs, denominations, churches, schools and businesses to promote civic education and voter registration to their respective constituencies in Haiti.

The short-term objective of the Consortium is to educate and register two million voters in time for the next election. The long-term objective of the Consortium is to foster indigenous democratic processes and awareness for the purpose of creating long-term political empowerment and sustainable democracy.

Ted Boehrs, a volunteer fundraiser for the Consortium, says he believes "God is up to something in Haiti. There is continued evidence of Christians working together to bring the peace of God to this country. We, at Haiti for Christ, are doing what we can to help. Would you support us through your prayers?"

If things are ever to change in Haiti, Jeune concludes, "we need to attack the root problem, which is the devil, so we want to do everything that we can in our power and with God's grace to claim this country for God."

SMITTY: 'I want to do for Little Haiti what Biggie did for Brooklyn and Outkast did for Atlanta.'

From Little Haiti to the big time in rap

BY BRETT O'BOURKE

August 24, 2005

Miami Herald

Miami rapper Smitty does indeed have -- as advertised on his much-rotated single -- diamonds on his neck. Built like a pit bull, all shoulders and sinew, he is slouching on an over-stuffed couch in a lounge at North Miami's Circle House studios. The mid-morning sun slides in through a small window and dances on the coaster-sized, encrusted medallion hanging from his thick neck.

"This is the biggest hip-hop studio in Miami," Smitty says. ``They used to not even let me in here."

But that was before he started writing for Dr. Dre and Diddy, before he signed with J Records and put together an album featuring the likes of Swizz Beatz, Timbaland, Kanye West, John Legend and Scarface. Before the Biggie-sampled single, Diamonds On My Neck, dropped in May and became one of the hits of Memorial Day weekend, catapulting Smitty into Miami's hip-hop consciousness.

"It's a good time right now," he says. ``I've been out on the road a lot traveling, being out there in the clubs and things . . . The record will be out in September, so it's nice to be home for a little while and relax."

Home is the cracked concrete of Little Haiti. The 25-year-old rapper (born Varick Smith) says he has two younger sisters and two brothers, raised by a mother who works in billing at Broward General Medical Center, and a father who he says has been in and out of jail.

``I call it the beautiful struggle. Even though we didn't have the best family environment, we were loved people. Being on welfare with a parent on drugs, growing up in Little Haiti taught me independence. It gave me the edge to brush my shoulders off."

Smitty says hanging out on the street freestyling gave him a place to be and the outlet he needed to stay out of major trouble. In 1997, he started getting serious about rapping while in college at Florida A&M in Tallahassee.

"I got into school, luckily," he says with a grin. ``I saw my whole world open up. When I got to Tally, I thought this is good, but I've gotten this far, I might as well go farther."

The summer after his sophomore year, he and a friend decided to drive out to L.A., in his friend's beat-up '91 Nissan Stanza, to try and make inroads into the rap game.

"We had to fill the car with water in every state, but we were so anxious to get there it felt like we got there overnight," Smitty says. ``We had saved as up as much money as we could and got an apartment for three months figuring if it didn't work out we'd come back and go back to school."

It didn't take long for Smitty to find work. A contact hooked him up with a meeting at Will Smith's Overbrook Entertainment, where he got some work writing rhymes for some of its artists.

But his first big break came while stalking Dr. Dre on the set of the 2001 movie The Wash.

"I waited all day and all night for him," Smitty says. ``Finally, he came over and I just started spitting for him, the kind of stuff I figured he wanted to hear. Two weeks later, I was writing for him for the Truth Hurts album."

After he penned Hollywood for the soundtrack for The Wash, Smitty says he and Dre talked about a recording contract but nothing solid ever came from it. A few months later, another stalking -- this time Diddy doing an appearance on Jay Leno -- landed Smitty another writing job.

"I told him I don't want to sign, I just want to write for Bad Boy [Records]," Smitty says. ``He gave me a song to work on and I went home and wrote six or seven verses. I don't even remember if they were hot, but the next thing I know I'm staying in Puffy's penthouse on Broadway, writing for Bad Boy."

For Puff, Smitty worked on hit singles Shake Ya Tailfeather (which Diddy performed with Nelly and Murphy Lee) and B2K's Bump, Bump, Bump and co-wrote three songs on the Bad Boys II soundtrack, which sold more than 300,000 copies its first week and remained No. 1 on the Billboard pop charts for four weeks.

Then he met Breyon Prescott, a businessman-producer-impresario with extensive industry connections. Smitty's manager, Calvin Valrie, introduced him to Prescott, who set off a bidding war among Arista, Capitol Records, Def Jam, Elektra, Jive and J Records. In the end, Prescott says they chose J Records because of its legendary founder Clive Davis.

"Clive gave us an incredible amount of leeway to make the album we wanted," Prescott says. ``He also gave us a lot of support. The producers on this album are the best in the business . . . Hype Williams shot the first video. That never happens unless maybe you throw a million dollars at him."

The video is out this week, the album, Life of a Troubled Child, is tentatively scheduled to drop Sept. 23 and an episode of MTV's My Block in which Smitty takes host Sway for a tour of Little Haiti, first aired Aug. 13.

At Circle House, Smitty has slouched so far into the couch he is practically lying on his back. He tilts his head back and stares up at the ceiling, enjoying the relative peace of the moment and contemplating his next moves.

"I want to do for Little Haiti what Biggie did for Brooklyn and Outkast did for Atlanta," Smitty says. ``I may or may not be the voice of Miami but I'm one of the voices. And I'm pretty loud right now."

U.N. Stabilization Mission Condemns Wave of Lynchings in Haiti

Acts of violence occurring in Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince

By Eric Green

Washington File Staff Writer

US Dept. of State

August 25, 2005

Washington -- New violence in the form of lynchings has erupted over the last several weeks in Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince, reports the U.N. Stabilization Mission in the Caribbean country.

The U.N. mission, known as MINUSTAH, in an August 25 statement expressed its "very serious concern over this new settling of accounts and firmly condemns these acts of violence which are considered crimes under Haiti's constitution and laws."

MINUSTAH called on "citizens who have participated in these criminal acts" to end them at once.

The mission has said it is continuing to support Haiti's transitional government in its efforts to reform and strengthen the country's institutions. Such efforts, said MINUSTAH, "are fundamental for the establishment" of a Haitian state "based on the rule of law as the only guarantee of social and political stability."

Violence in Haiti's capital has been one of the major problems facing MINUSTAH since it was set up by the U.N. Security Council in 2004 to help re-establish order in the impoverished country after an insurgency forced former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004.

The United States is providing some of the civilian police and military personnel for the approximately 1,000-person MINUSTAH force working to stabilize Haiti.

The warning from MINUSTAH follows its August 23 statement that its peacekeeping force in Haiti must not leave the Caribbean country prematurely.

MINUSTAH said other missions in Haiti "failed because they pulled out their troops prematurely. MINUSTAH must avoid making the same mistake."

ABOLITION OF TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE COMMEMORATED

In a separate event involving Haiti, the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) marked the "International Day for the Remembrance of Slavery and its Abolition" August 23 by recalling the "lasting consequences" of the slave trade in the Americas, Europe and the Indian Ocean region.

UNESCO chose that date as the international day of remembrance to commemorate an August 22-23 insurrection in Saint-Domingue (today Haiti), which was to play a pivotal role in the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the emancipation of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Haiti declared its independence from France in 1804, becoming the second independent republic in the Western Hemisphere after the United States.

Migrant slayings trigger tensions between Haiti and Dominican Republic

Canadian Press

Canada.com network

Friday, August 26, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Haiti recalled its top diplomat to the Dominican Republic on Thursday after three Haitian migrants were beaten and burned to death in the neighbouring country, an official said.

Pierre Willy, Dominique Gilberto and Paul Cinius were attacked Aug. 16 in a small suburb just south of the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, where they worked at a furniture factory, Dominican police said.

According to the Dominican Attorney General's Office, the three men, aged 19 to 22, had been drinking alcohol with a group of Dominicans at a neighbourhood store. Later that night, the Dominicans went to a house where the Haitians were staying and demanded money from one of them.

After he refused, the group jumped the men, beat them, doused them with a flammable liquid and set them ablaze, the Attorney General's Office said in a statement. The men died days later from burn wounds in a Santo Domingo hospital.

In response to the killings, Haiti's interim government recalled its charge d'affaires "for consultation," said Jean Daniel Lafontant, a spokesman for Haiti's Foreign Affairs Ministry.

"The Haitian interim government energetically condemns these criminal acts. It deplores that such deeds have occurred at a time when significant efforts are being made to lastingly improve relations between the two countries," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The Dominican National Police said Thursday it had formed a commission to investigate the attack and find the killers.

The slayings seemed likely to further inflame growing tensions between the uneasy Caribbean neighbours, which share 390-kilometre border on the island of Hispaniola.

In May, the Dominican government deported at least 2,000 Haitians following the killing of a Dominican woman. No one was arrested the slaying, but Dominican neighbours went on a retaliatory rampage, beheading two Haitian migrants.

Although Haitian migrants are considered a burden in a country whose own citizens flee poverty by the thousands each year, Dominican farm owners often truck in Haitians to work in the fields, saying they need the cheap labour.

Dominican Republic continues to force Haitians out of the country

26.08.05

Christian Aid

Christian Aid partners voice concern as the Dominican Republic continues to force Haitians to leave the country. More than 2,000 Haitians have already been forcibly returned home across the border.

Over the past few weeks the Dominican Republic has been rounding Haitians up, forcing them onto buses and dumping them on the border in the middle of the night. More than 2,000 have already been forced to return home.

Christian Aid partner, the Haiti Support Group (HSG) says: ‘These people have been arrested by the Dominican police, army and immigration agents, on the basis of the colour of their skin and their inability to speak fluent Spanish. Some Dominicans have been mistaken for Haitians and deported.’

Christian Aid partners have been monitoring the situation on both sides of the border. The Support Group for Refugees & Repatriated Persons (GARR) in Haiti has been working closely with the Jesuit Refugee & Migrant Service (SJRM) in the Dominican Republic.

GARR and SJRM claim that thousands have been forced to leave their homes with only the clothes on their backs. They are not allowed to take their belongings or their identity documents. If they do have documents, they are being confiscated or destroyed. In some cases children have been separated from their parents

According to a joint report by GARR and SJRM: ‘Prior to deportations, detained people have been kept for three to five days without food or access to toilets. Deportees have been mistreated and beaten. There have been acts of aggression and intimidation.’

Heavy rains mean that conditions on the border are appalling. The deportees are forced to walk for twelve miles before reaching Belladere, the nearest town in Haiti. Helen Spraos, Christian Aid’s representative in Haiti says: ‘Belladere already has a severe water supply problem, no public toilets and a typhoid and malaria epidemic.’

In a joint declaration, GARR and SJRM point out that the Dominican government is breaking an international agreement on deportations. This agreement was drawn up by the Haitian and Dominican governments in 1999. It states that no deportations should be carried out at night and no families separated. The recent deportations clearly breach these conventions.

GARR and SJRM want the Haitian government to challenge the Dominican government for the 1999 agreement violations. They also want the Haitian government to help the deportees.

Colette Lespinasse, the GARR Coordinator, says: ‘We condemn the recent repatriations and the violence that has accompanied them. The problem of illegal migration will not be solved in this way and must instead be tackled at its roots.

'Long-term migrants must be granted residency and their descendants must be given Dominican nationality in accordance with the constitution.

The Dominican government carried out mass repatriations in 1991 and 1999. However, large numbers of Haitians continue to cross the border fleeing the desperate situation in their home country. They work as sugar cane cutters, tobacco and coffee pickers and construction labourers.

Making a difference in Haiti

By Lee Ostrom

Glencoe News (Glencoe, MN)

August 26, 2005

Upon reaching their goal of building 100 school desks for 300 Haitian children, a team of Minnesotans — including Glencoe Rotarian Rogers Hilgers (far right, with red bandanna for a hat) and former Glencoe Rotarian Tom Hauer (in front of Hilgers, wearing sunglasses) posed for a photograph.

Roger Hilgers has been a Rotarian since 1967; Tom Hauer, for about the last 25 years. They have been active Rotarians, too, involved in various humanitarian projects — while collecting perfect-attendance pins and heeding the service organization's "Service Before Self" credo.

Never before, though, had either man gone off on one of Rotary's international missions. Never, that is, until Aug. 8, 2005, when they joined 10 other Minnesotans for an eye-opening week of work, interaction and reflection in Haiti — reputed for being the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

"I thought I'd seen poverty," Hilgers said, noting a visit he, his wife Gloria and another couple made to Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1998. "(Haiti) is much, much more."

"My idea of a Third World was Tijuana," Hauer said, adding that the Mexican border city offers no comparison to the poverty of Pignon, Haiti.

For seven days, the Minnesotans lived in a world without electricity, hot water, or telephones and televisions — where the average per capita income is not even a dollar a day; where life expectancy is shy of 50 years; where travelers take shots for hepatitis A and B, tetanus and typhoid, plus malaria pills, before entering.

"Their concern is survival," Hauer said about the Haitians he observed. "'Where's my next meal coming from?'"

"A big portion of their day, in my opinion, is carrying water," Hilgers added.

Yet, Hilgers and Hauer came away from their experiences with a paradox.

The kids of Haiti, Hilgers said, seemed happy. Daily, they greeted their visitors with enthusiastic waves and big smiles. Freely and easily they engaged. And come Sunday, families — men in clean slacks and long-sleeved shirts; women in colorful dresses; the children neatly clad, too — packed a local church for a three-hour celebration of song, dance and worship.

"You want to feel sad for them," Hauer said, "but they're happier than we are."

Maybe, he reasoned, there is no way for the people of Pignon to compare their lives to anywhere else.

To Haiti, team members brought along school supplies — Hilgers said he donated 35 pounds for distribution. While in Haiti, the team built school desks — 100 of them, providing space for three students a desk.

They also observed a few of the safe-water wells built by Rotary dollars. (Glencoe Rotarians contributed for one well themselves last year, and then club president Don Rudy matched that, donating more than \$1,200 alone.)

Hilgers, who in 1999 sold the Hilgers Hardware Inc. of Norwood and Hilgers Appliances & TV of Glencoe business he and a brother, Dennis, operated for more than 18 years, sits on the Glencoe City Council these days. When local Rotarians first discussed making a hands-on trip to Haiti, he said he leaned with those members who thought it better to donate the money it would cost a Rotarian to travel to the Caribbean nation.

He no longer feels that way.

“I think it’s better to go there,” he said, “... because you see how they live.”

Better to go once, he said, and then recruit more Glencoe folks — beyond Rotarians — to go with you next time.

Beyond that, he does not believe the school desks would have been built had Rotarians just sent dollar donations; nor would the lessons taught to Haitians about working with tools been delivered.

Hilgers said he came home mindful of a parable: Give a man a fish, and he’ll eat today. Teach him how to fish, and he’ll eat for a lifetime.

Hauer, who worked 24 of his 28 years in the newspaper business at McLeod Publishing Inc., agrees.

“It’s not the money,” he said. “We have to educate them, and train them, so they can do this work themselves.”

Even the wells, he said, require good money management and a know-how for timely repairs to properly maintain.

When he speaks to other Rotarians about the trip, Hauer said he will tell them that their dollars are being well-spent, but that more trips are necessary.

Beyond all that, though, Hauer said his week in Haiti makes him more appreciative of the life he has.

The Minnesotans’ daily routine in Haiti saw them climb aboard a one-ton Chevy truck (three up front; nine hanging on to a railing in back) and travel across treacherous roads from the mission compound where they stayed to their work site, about four miles away. Top speed was 15 mph, and the short trip took about 20 eventful minutes each way.

“I won’t ever complain about a pothole or road construction again,” Hauer said.

— Don Rudy also made the trip to Haiti, but left about 24 hours after arriving to attend his mother's funeral. He received word of her passing upon arriving at the airport in Port au Prince.

Another Glencoe Rotarian, Mike Long, joined a Rotary District 5950 advance team to Haiti earlier this year. The emphasis of that trip was to determine the safety of Rotarians making future trips.

— At a meeting for a committee overseeing one of the safe-water wells, Hilgers recalls a Haitian expressing to him the importance of the well: "Now, our children don't get sick," the man said.

— Hauer said he would like to "check back" in five years, to see how much progress is made in Haiti.

— "It's something I hope I never forget," Hilgers said about the trip, "... and I don't think I will."