

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: AUGUST 8 – 16, 2005

Violence intruding on elite in Haiti

Haitians of means have always occupied a tenuous position in their impoverished nation. Now a wave of violence has pushed many out.

BY JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

August 16, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE - In the quiet green hills above this lawless city, a couple hundred of Haiti's well-to-do gathered last month in the upscale Hotel Montana to attend a daylong seminar. The subject: How to keep one's sanity under the constant threat of violence.

In the past few months, a surge of kidnappings and killings has traumatized Haiti's upper classes. Women and children have reportedly been raped in front of relatives, men have been tortured and families have paid ransoms, sometimes only to retrieve their loved ones in the form of a mutilated corpse.

Some of those wealthy enough to afford it have fled the country, cooling their heels in Miami and Paris and hoping to return once the chaos runs its course. Those who have stayed live in a strange state of comfortable siege, holed up in hillside homes behind iron gates and shotgun-wielding guards, while making panicked runs to work, the grocery store and the rare social event.

These days, having money in the hemisphere's poorest nation does not always entail the easy lifestyle that once got Haiti's privileged few branded by foreign diplomats as MREs -- Morally Repugnant Elites. Now, theirs is a narrow, paranoid world, growing more so.

'My family calls me from Miami and says: `What are you, nuts? When are you getting out of that place?' " said Jean Pierre Mangones, who runs a program that promotes Haitian crafts and owns a second home in Plantation. ``A lot of my friends have left. My wife will be leaving before November."

No one knows how many have left, but the number of Haitians with the money to get a visa and fly out is relatively small. The average Haitian earns less than \$1 a day, and there have been estimates that 1 percent of the country's 8.1 million people controls nearly half its wealth.

The current bout of violence began last year during the armed rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had vowed to help the poor and had vilified the well-off and the skewed distribution of wealth. Since then, the political warfare has evolved into waves of brutal crimes blamed on almost anyone from street criminals to political gangs to drug traffickers.

WANTS TO STAY

Mangones plans to stay. He says Haitians' long tradition of fleeing abroad when things get dangerous at home has created a devastating, long-term brain drain.

"We are a repugnant elite because we haven't taken any responsibilities, which is what the elite should do," Mangones said. ``Instead, we leave for a year and come back when somebody fixes it for us."

And really, nothing is ever fixed.

Wealthy Haitians -- some truly rich, others middle class by American standards -- simply circumvent the country's problems with money. Electricity doesn't work? They buy generators. TV is spotty? They hook up a satellite. Roads are awful? They drive four-wheel-drives. Police force barely functions? They hire armed guards.

And even in relatively peaceful times, the opportunities for education, high culture and amusement are so limited that Haitians of any means tend to have one foot out the door. They send their children to summer camps in the States, or college in Canada. They buy homes in Florida and the Dominican Republic and take long vacations in Europe.

"If you want to open the horizons for your children, you have to," said Mangones, whose son attended Barry University in Miami Shores and whose daughter went to American International in Massachusetts.

But many leave for good, particularly middle-class professionals with no land or business holdings in Haiti.

FACTORY OWNER

Georges Barau Sassine, who owns a garment factory, lost numerous supervisors, his executive secretary, his head mechanic and his computer expert in recent months. Only the latter is expected to return -- his son, whom Sassine told to stay with relatives on the French Riviera until the situation calmed down.

Sassine said he has seen friends kidnapped and had employees who were hit by stray bullets while on the job. The owner of a nearby business was executed on the dirt road in front of the factory.

"People on the street told us we were next," he said.

STRESSFUL DRIVES

In July, when kidnappings hit a frightening high, Sassine woke up in a sweat every day before dawn, worrying about the morning commute.

"I would drive down with one hand on the wheel and one hand on my gun," he said at his office earlier this month. ``The second I arrived, I called my wife and told her I'm here."

In the past few weeks, a slight lull in the crime -- what Sassine calls the "eye of the hurricane" -- has allowed him to put the gun back under his seat. Sassine accuses Aristide loyalists of waging the campaign of violence, sowing chaos to prevent the U.S.-backed interim government from gaining any effective authority. Aristide supporters deny he or his Lavalas Family party are behind it.

As president, Aristide attacked the elite as a light-skinned minority aligned with U.S. business interests and perpetuating a class system that has kept most Haitians in abject poverty.

Business and academic leaders reacted against Aristide in an opposition movement that gained supporters across all sectors, while a band of gang members and ex-soldiers forced him out.

Since then, life for rich and poor alike has just grown worse, and the specter of class war continues to loom over Haiti as it prepares for national elections, scheduled for November.

Business leaders say economic growth is the only way to lift most Haitians out of poverty. Sassine employs 700 workers now, sewing sweat pants for Hanes. If he leaves the country, his employees join the estimated two-thirds of Haitians who have no jobs.

But he says he has no plans to. "We're stuck here," he said. "I have no capital. The hits we have taken have dilapidated our reserves."

After work, he unwinds when he can, but there is little to do. The roads are rife with carjackers and kidnapers. He no longer goes hunting for guinea fowl and doves in the Artibonite Valley. He does not relax on the Ctes des Arcadins, where some own beach homes.

ANXIETY ABOUND

Ginette Maguet, a psychologist in the capital who helped organize the Montana Hotel seminar on keeping one's sanity, said the violence is causing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder -- trembling hands, insomnia, anxiety attacks.

To help them cope, Maguet tutored the participants in yoga and breathing techniques, and urged them to go easy on the sedatives. She told them to be aware of their surroundings without becoming hyper-focused on the possibility of violence.

"We have to be vigilant about being safe, but we don't have to think of it all the time," Maguet said. "Some people just listen to the radio all day and it just increases the fear."

Bernie Leon, 46, joined dozens of others at the Petionville Club on a recent night to drink and get away from that kind of paranoia. A cheerful bear of a man who runs one of the capital's port terminals, he mingled amid the flow of alcohol, beat of music and tropical heat.

It was a momentary break from a different reality. Earlier in summer, his wife moved to Miami due to the violence. While the relief of not having to worry about her was like "taking a piano off my back," the distance has put an obvious strain on his relationship. "She said if I don't move out in a year, we're getting a divorce," he quipped.

He hopes circumstances change and allow him to stay. "I'm devoted to this country. I don't need to be here. I could easily get on a plane and drink piña colodas with you in South Beach tonight, but I don't."

In Haiti, rhetoric trumps human rights

By Todd Howland

Boston Globe

August 16, 2005

THE US-INSPIRED peacekeeping approach being utilized by the United Nations in Haiti is a failure. Members of Boston's growing Haitian community should not get their hopes up for a shift in US policy, following the recent resignation of US Ambassador to Haiti James B. Foley. Major donors, like the United States, have confirmed time and again their unwillingness to experiment with new methods that put human rights of the Haitians first.

While the United States has pledged more than \$1 billion, this money has not measurably improved the level of respect for human rights of the Haitian people, whether access to health care or justice is considered. It is high time we face a prime stumbling-block squarely: the way money flows to countries in crisis.

At present, the international community intervenes in a crisis using two tools: The first is sending in the UN's blue helmets. These missions are approved by the Security Council and paid for by member states according to a pre-agreed payment schedule. It is only natural that the states paying the most, like the United States and Japan, seek to limit the number and breadth of these missions.

To that end, the United States limits UN peacekeeping missions to putting blue helmets on the ground. Thus, peacekeepers normally spend over 99 percent on themselves. The result is situations like Haiti, where the peacekeeping mission's annual budget for its personnel's health care is greater than the annual budget of the Haitian Ministry of Health.

While security does not grow out of the barrel of a gun, many cling to the idea that the international community needs to establish security first and then undertake development. This might work for the conflicts of the past, where a ceasefire between competing armies could achieve a modicum of security. Today, chaos is common, so simultaneous work on security and development is needed.

Realizing this, US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are working in cooperation with USAID and others in an attempt to do "nation-building." In Haiti, UN peacekeepers have provided no real support to community development or implemented projects to build the capacity of institutions needed to bolster the respect for human rights. But have no fear. The international community's second tool is "voluntary contributions."

How generous we are when we know that the money pledged will never actually be disbursed. Traditionally, the central government is required to develop a useful and sensible plan, to demonstrate the capacity to receive money and execute projects in a timely fashion. Under ideal circumstances, this process takes at least two years from conception to disbursement. This may work well for functional government, but for dysfunctional governments in chaotic countries it is not viable. Thus, no money arrives, fueling suspicion and undermining the efficacy of the blue helmets.

While many in the UN have spoken about the need for a new integrated peacebuilding approach highlighting human security, the bureaucracies of donor countries are stuck in their dated methods, and the people of Haiti, Liberia, et al. continue to suffer.

The new UN reforms propose a Peacebuilding Commission that would force peacekeepers and UN agencies to work together -- but unless we change how money flows to countries in crisis, the crises will continue to recur.

Peacekeeping missions should measurably improve the full spectrum of human rights and be given the budget to do so. The UN already has a Peacebuilding Trust Fund that can be used to fill the funding gap in countries like Haiti. Some of the voluntary contributions should be diverted to this fund to support projects using a human rights-based approach. Peacekeepers and agencies should work with communities to prioritize, define, and implement projects.

Communities have already defined small projects like fixing an access road to a regional hospital and tree planting to avoid further erosion and contamination of drinking water. While modest, they would create a completely different relationship between the UN and the Haitian people based first and foremost on human rights.

The US-inspired UN failure in Haiti has numerous causes, but the US unwillingness to change its outdated money-flow modus operandi to peacekeeping operations in order to maximize their transformative potential highlights shows that it is not just the UN that needs reform.

Todd Howland is director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights in Washington.

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U.N. PEACEKEEPERS

Raid a shift for U.N. force

By Colum Lynch

Washington Post

August 16, 2005

U.N. peacekeepers' raid on a Haitian slum -- and gun battle with gangs that left many innocent civilians injured -- showed a shift in tactics for the U.N. force, now more willing to use considerable firepower against groups deemed a threat to peace.

UNITED NATIONS - On July 6, about 1,400 heavily armed U.N. peacekeepers from Brazil, Peru and Jordan, backed by Argentine and Chilean helicopters, marched into a Haitian slum for an early morning raid on the home of Emmanuel "Dread" Wilme, a gang leader who was agitating for the return to power of former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Operation Iron Fist killed Wilme and at least six other gang members, according to a confidential U.N. account of the raid.

But the bloody gun battle between the U.N. forces and Wilme's followers failed to dislodge the gang from its Port-au-Prince slum turf and led to the injury of dozens of civilians, primarily women and children, according to U.N. officials and an American doctor who tended the wounded.

The 12-hour U.N. operation in Cite Soleil signaled an escalation of force in Haiti, where the Brazilian-led U.N. mission had been criticized for months by the United States and others for its failure to confront Haiti's armed gangs.

PEACEKEEPING SHIFT

It also reflected a shift in tactics for U.N. peacekeeping troops, who by the mid-1990s were going out of their way to avoid combat. Now, the blue-helmeted troops are showing a renewed willingness to use considerable firepower against armed groups that they deem a threat to peace efforts.

"There has been a fundamental shift in peacekeeping that very few people have noticed, where U.N. peacekeepers are actually taking proactive, offensive preemptive action against threats," said Nancy Soderberg, who oversaw peacekeeping issues for the U.S. mission to the United Nations from 1997 to 2000. "The United States learned this when they invaded Haiti in 1994. Basically someone tried to attack them, they blew them away and that was the end of that."

RETREAT AFTER SOMALIA

The United Nations largely retreated from combat after the troubled U.N. operation in Somalia in the early 1990s, where a hunt for Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed contributed to 113 U.N. combat deaths and raised questions about the capacity of peacekeepers to quash even ill-equipped armed

factions. The confrontation also resulted in a disastrous U.S. raid on an Aideed stronghold in Mogadishu that left 18 U.S. soldiers dead and triggered a U.S. pull-back from U.N. peacekeeping.

MORE AGGRESSIVE

More recently, the United Nations has used more aggressive offensive tactics in Haiti, Congo and Sierra Leone. In Congo, U.N. troops supported by Indian-piloted attack helicopters killed more than 50 rebels in a single raid on a marketplace in March.

The fighting has contributed to an increase in U.N. combat fatalities over the past two years, from 64 deaths in 2003 to 91 in 2004. The count reached 64 in the first six months of this year. There have been 22 combat fatalities in Haiti and Congo.

The U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti was established in April 2004 after the withdrawal of a U.S. military force deployed there on the day that Aristide resigned amid an armed revolt. Confronted with violent opposition from Aristide loyalists, the U.N. mission has stepped up its operations in recent months to ensure stability before elections.

SURPRISE ATTACK

Operation Iron Fist began at 4:30 a.m. as an advance unit of Peruvian peacekeepers slipped into the neighborhood of Bois Neuf in Cite Soleil to launch a surprise attack on Wilme's residence. The force quickly encountered resistance from Wilme's well-armed and well-trained followers, who opened fire from three directions. The Peruvians responded forcefully, firing 5,500 rounds of ammunition, grenades and mortars at Wilme's residence.

A Brazilian mechanized company providing perimeter security was also attacked by 30 to 40 gang members. Wilme's fighters pinned the U.N. peacekeepers down for seven hours, targeting them with sniper fire and Molotov cocktails as they struggled to extract two armored personnel carriers from the mud. Battling their way out, the Brazilians fired more than 16,700 rounds of ammunition in the densely populated neighborhood.

'COLLATERAL DAMAGE'

David Olson, an American physician who recently served in Haiti with the French medical agency Doctors Without Borders, said Operation Iron Fist caused "a lot of collateral damage." Olson said 27 Haitians, mostly women and children, streamed into his clinic after the operation. Olson said he could not establish who was responsible for the injuries, but he said that up to half the victims claimed they had been wounded by the U.N. peacekeepers.

At the time, neighborhood residents complained that at least nine civilians were killed.

The top U.N. peacekeeping official, Jean-Marie Guihenno of France, conceded "there may have been some civilian casualties" during the raid. "We have been looking very closely at those accusations."

ENTRENCHED GANGS

A U.N. account of the operation concluded ``the area remains under gang control. Security forces are still unable to enter into the inner areas of Cite Soleil or conduct foot patrols."

Still, Guihenno said U.N. commanders must strike a balance between engaging in all-out warfare and resorting to the passive military posture that characterized U.N. operations in Srebrenica, where Dutch peacekeepers stood down as Bosnian Serb troops killed thousands of unarmed civilians.

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

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 Fammi 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. Weeks before the coup, in February 2004, 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. 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."

Digimarc to Provide Secure Voter IDs for Upcoming Elections in Haiti; Digimarc to Produce Newly Designed, Secure ID Cards for Millions of Haiti Voters
August 16, 2005
Business Wire

BEAVERTON, Ore.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Aug. 16, 2005--Digimarc Corporation (Nasdaq:DMRC) announced today that it has been awarded a contract with an estimated value of \$1.5 million to supply the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) of Haiti with approximately four million secure citizens' ID cards in support of the country's upcoming elections.

Under the contract, awarded by the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), Digimarc will produce Haitian national ID cards at its secure central issuance printing facilities in Mexico. The OAS is providing the CEP with technical assistance for the massive voter registration drive currently underway, and for the provision and distribution of the national ID card, to be used as obligatory identification for eligible Haitian citizens voting in local, legislative and presidential elections, to be held in the coming months.

Secure, photo-based voter IDs play a critical role in countries around the world in fostering democratic elections and, often, as a secure credential for conducting business at banks, government agencies and retail stores. The Haitian program will take advantage of Digimarc's secure ID production facility in Mexico, which currently supports the printing of millions of Mexican voter IDs and employs the industry's best practices for secure materials management and advanced audit and control processes for zero-gap production -- accounting for every piece of material and every piece of identification produced.

"Digimarc is committed to providing state-of-the-art secure identification documents and production processes for citizen identification programs," said Bob Eckel, president of Digimarc ID Systems. "We are pleased to provide this essential secure credential in support of Haiti's electoral process."

This inaugural program with Haiti marks further expansion of services by Digimarc in the Caribbean and Latin America region. Digimarc secure personal identification solutions are currently used in key ID programs in Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, Brazil, Colombia, and Puerto Rico.

About Digimarc

Digimarc Corporation (Nasdaq:DMRC), based in Beaverton, Oregon, is a leading supplier of secure identity and media management solutions. Digimarc provides products and services that enable the production of more than 60 million personal identification documents, including two-thirds of U.S. driver licenses and IDs for more than 20 countries. Digimarc's digital watermarking technology provides a persistent digital identity for various media content and is used to enhance the security of financial documents, identity documents and digital images, and support other media rights management applications.

Digimarc has an extensive intellectual property portfolio, with 200 issued U.S. patents with more than 4,000 claims, and more than 400 pending patent applications in digital watermarking, personal identification and related technologies.

The Company is headquartered in Beaverton, Oregon, with other U.S. offices in Burlington, Massachusetts; Fort Wayne, Indiana; and the Washington, DC, area; and international offices in London and Mexico. Please go to www.digimarc.com for more Company information.

Securities Safe Harbor

With the exception of historical information contained in this release, the matters described herein contain certain "forward-looking statements" that are made pursuant to the "safe harbor" provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Such forward-looking statements include statements relating to the expected benefits of the use of Haiti's new, secure voter ID cards, statements relating to future card production estimates and other statements containing the words "believes," "expects," "estimates," "anticipates," "will" or words of similar import or statements of management's opinion. These statements are subject to certain assumptions, risks, uncertainties and changes in circumstances. Actual results may vary materially from those expressed or implied from the statements herein or from historical results, due to changes in economic, business, competitive, technological and/or regulatory factors. More detailed information about risk factors that may affect actual results is set forth in filings by Digimarc with the Securities and Exchange Commission, including but not limited to those described in the Company's Form 10-Q for the quarterly period ended June 30, 2005, in Part I, Item 2 thereof ("Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations") under the captions "Liquidity and Capital Resources," and "Risk Factors," and in Part I, Item 4 thereof ("Controls and Procedures"). Readers are cautioned not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, which reflect management's opinions only as of the date of this release. We undertake no obligation to revise or publicly release the results of any revision to these forward-looking statements.

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Murdering the poor: Canadian tax dollars at work
Rabble News
by Isabel Macdonald
August 11, 2005

A fast-growing movement in Canada is demanding that the Canadian government support the return of constitutional democracy in Haiti.

Imagine if the U.S. were to hold elections after the Republican Party had rounded up Senator John Kerry and other prominent Democrats and thrown them in jail without charges, while waging a campaign of violence and political assassinations in all “blue states.” To hold Haitian elections under present conditions would be comparable to this, according to one of the panelists at the launch of the Toronto Haiti Action Committee (THAC).

For the THAC launch event on August 4, prominent Haiti solidarity activists addressed a crowd of 80 people as Toronto joined the ranks of other Canadian cities (Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Halifax) that are home to active groups calling for an end to the repression being carried out in Haiti by an illegitimate Canadian-backed government.

Escalating political repression in Haiti

Since a Canada, U.S. and France-backed coup that overthrew the democratically elected Haitian government in February 2004, liquidating 7000 government officials from office and dissolving Senate, political repression has been the order of the day in the Caribbean nation. The constitutional Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune, has been languishing in jail for over a year without even facing charges, while Father Jean Juste, a potential presidential candidate for the Lavalas Party, is also in prison without charges.

Meanwhile, the elected Haitian president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is in exile in South Africa. A University of Miami study has documented escalating human rights abuses and a campaign of violence being waged against Haitians living in poor neighbourhoods around the capital city, Port au Prince.

Lavalas, Aristide's party which is still the Haitian political organization with the most popular support by a large margin, insists that a prerequisite for fair democratic elections in Haiti will be the release of all Haitian political prisoners, an end to political violence and repression by the Haitian National Police, and the return of the elected Haitian president to Haiti. Lavalas is boycotting the elections process until these basic conditions are met.

However, Canada is continuing to push for the elections to be held under present conditions, and has gone to great lengths to legitimate a process regarded by many Haitians as a sham. Prime Minister Paul Martin's Special Adviser on Haiti, Denis Coderre, has scoffed at the reports by the University of Miami as “propaganda reports.” Just last Saturday, Coderre gushed to the CBC about how “moving” he had found the sight, during his recent trip to Haiti, of “thousands and thousands of people who were in line to register for the election.”

A new pretext for political repression

With no legitimate government in power, and the justice system in disarray, there has been a surge in kidnappings and violence in Haiti. The de facto Haitian government and its apologists have repeatedly tried to blame “Aristide supporters” for the violence, a claim which has provided a convenient pretext for continued repression of poor Haitians living in neighbourhoods that have been most vocally opposed to the coup.

This opportunistic argument by Haiti's de facto rulers has been widely challenged. An International Crisis Group report, funded in part by the Canadian government, has stated that “criminal activities, particularly drug-trafficking and contraband ... are behind much of the current wave of violence.” The report noted that criminal elements in Haitian society have much to gain from delaying the reestablishment of the rule of law.

On July 6, the UN Security Council-mandated “stabilization” force in Haiti carried out a massacre on the poor neighbourhood of Cité Soleil, known to be home to many Lavalas supporters. The UN claimed it had gone into Cité Soleil to find “gang leaders” responsible for kidnappings. However, according to video evidence and eyewitness accounts, including by Reuters correspondent Joseph Guyler Delva and Médecins Sans Frontières, at least 23 civilians, including women and children, were massacred.

Canadian media coverage of Haiti: news or propaganda?

The Canadian national media has recently been justifying the continued repression of Lavalas and its supporters by uncritically parroting the Canadian government and the de facto Haitian government's unfounded claims that “Aristide supporters” are responsible for the violent kidnappings. Two recent stories in the Canadian national media provide a case in point. On August 1, The Globe and Mail published an article that emphasized that “many observers believe the current level of political violence is an attempt by gangs loyal to Mr. Aristide to destabilize the country.” The sole evidence cited in the article to back this claim was the opinions of political players in Haiti who are known for being anti-Lavalas and pro-coup partisans.

One of The Globe and Mail's sources was a “virulently anti-Aristide reporter” by the name of Nancy Roc, who until recently worked for a Haitian radio station which was one of the “active players in the U.S. campaign to destabilize Haiti's constitutional government” in 2003-4. The only other source quoted was the privately-funded Washington, D.C.-based Haiti Democracy Project, which has close ties with right wing Haitian élites and U.S. foreign policy élites, and which had been one of the prime groups lobbying in the U.S. for the constitutional Haitian president to step down.

Meanwhile, on the August 6 edition of CBC Radio One's The House, Denis Coderre faced not the slightest challenge when he blamed “people supporting Mr. Aristide” for kidnappings and other “terrorist acts.”

Legitimizing the war on the Haitian poor

This recent national media coverage calls for the escalation of repressive forces. The Globe and Mail article stated that UN forces had recently not used as much force as they ought to have.

This comes less than a month after the UN carried out the documented massacre on the poor neighbourhood of Cité Soleil. While the recent Globe and Mail story did make mention of this event (referring to it as a positive and much needed “show of muscle” by the UN), the newspaper failed to mention the civilian casualties, stating only that it “left six armed gang members dead.”

Growing Canadian resistance to a violent Canadian occupation

The impressive number of participants who have been turning out at recent Haiti solidarity events suggests that Canadians are increasingly tuning in to hear what's going on behind the media charade. The launch of the Toronto Haiti Action Committee saw a turn-out of about 80 people, and a talk about Haiti the following day in Hamilton by Justin Podur (a frequent Znet and rabble.ca contributor) drew a crowd of over 40 people. With five Canadian cities now officially hosting active groups integrated with the cross-border network of Haiti Action Committees, and with residents of Hamilton now talking about forming their own group, the movement seems poised to keep growing.

This movement has already enjoyed a significant victory. The massacre in Cité Soleil saw protest actions in cities across Canada on July 21, organized in concert with actions across Brazil and the U.S.. The UN, which had initially denied that any massacre had taken place, was shamed into announcing that it would investigate the July 6 Cité Soleil massacre.

Isabel Macdonald is a Peterborough-based freelancer active in the Canadian student press.

MINUSTAH lies, Haitians die
by Shirley Pate
San Francisco Bay View
August 10, 2005

Street children hold an impromptu march to support President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Nov. 22, 2002.

On Friday, MINUSTAH, the Brazilian-led UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, issued a curious press statement concerning a training course it will offer to political parties preparing for Haiti's upcoming elections. The course will emphasize the harmful effect that conflict has on children and the need for politicians to incorporate concerns of children into party platforms.

After months of pleas to the UN by Haiti solidarity activists to investigate sexual abuse and other forms of violence, including murder, against street children in Haiti, the UN wants Haitian politicians to place children front and center in their political agendas. The hypocrisy of the UN is stunning – the only thing they have put children in front of so far is the barrel of a gun.

In the wee hours of the morning on July 6, in the poor Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Cité Soleil, UN troops entered a home during a massive raid and shot, at close range, a mother and her two children, aged 18 months and 4 years. The 4-year-old received a bullet to the head.

I know this because I saw the video footage of the aftermath of this raid in which the shattered husband and father tells the story as his wife and children lie dead on the floor at his feet. UN forces had thrown a colored smoke bomb into his house before they entered. He thought his wife and children were close behind him as he ran from the house.

Only hours before this footage was shot, the UN “peacekeeping” forces entered this poor man's neighborhood with 300-400 troops, 20 tanks and two assault helicopters with the stated objective of disrupting “gang” activity. This husband and father is trying to understand how his whole family could have been mistaken for gang members.

Other families are wondering the same thing. Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) runs a hospital in Haiti. Officials at the hospital reported that, in the later morning hours after the raid, they received 26 gunshot victims – 20 were women and children. In a July 25 press statement, MINUSTAH said they killed five gang members on July 6 in Cité Soleil and that any other casualties were due to “gang” violence. MINUSTAH lied, and men, women and children died.

In the video footage of the carnage left by UN troops, wounded victims and relatives of dead family members state repeatedly that the trigger men were the “casques bleus,” or blue helmets, the nickname given to UN peacekeeping troops because of the light blue helmets they wear. If you saw the film “Hotel Rwanda,” you may remember the initial relief with which Rwandans received the news that the “casques bleus” were coming to help them. The UN Security Council handcrafted a particularly anemic mission for the peacekeepers in Rwanda and strung the world along for several days by feigning willingness to strengthen the mission if needed. The Security Council lied, and over 800,000 people died.

In Haiti, the “blue helmets” are immersing themselves in a sea of bloody red as they go from impotent bystanders to a proxy army for the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The U.S. and France are the architects of this particular slaughter. Why? The US, France and Canada plotted and implemented the overthrow of Haiti’s democratically-elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, because he refused to play neo-colonial ball.

With fall elections rapidly approaching and an overwhelming number of Haitians supporting President Aristide and demanding his return, the coup plotters are starting to sweat. Election fraud is a given. The exact number of young, poor Aristide supporters who have come of voting age since the last national elections in 2000 is unknown but must pose a serious threat to the victory of a Haitian elite government that the U.S., France and Canada desperately seek.

The problem is that support for Aristide is so massive in Haiti, no amount of fraud can conceal the farce that is about to unfold. So a potential voter reduction program in poor, Aristide-supporting neighborhoods is underway. Rather than U.S. Marines committing the massacres, the “casques bleus” are doing the deed.

The UN dodged a bullet by resisting Bush’s crusade to Iraq. But Brazil, vulnerable to the U.S.’ treacherous promise of a permanent seat on the Security Council, sold its soul and agreed to head up the UN forces in Haiti. Rather than becoming the first Latin American country to win a permanent seat on the Security Council, Brazil will be remembered for presiding over the most deadly, violent and destructive peacekeeping operation in UN history.

Haitian street children have always been the victim of unimaginable violence – most often at the hands of the Haitian National Police. Violence against these children has risen markedly since the coup. Demands that the UN investigate these crimes have gone unheeded, because the Haitian police are the UN’s partners in the political slaughter in Haiti.

As late as Thursday, Haiti solidarity organizations sent out alerts about a major upsurge in assaults on street children. MINUSTAH, knowing that their massacre on July 6 is still fresh, needed to do some damage control – after all, we’re talking about kids here. So, it comes up with a training course to teach Haitians how to protect their children. How patronizing. How dare the UN use the children of Haiti to cover their murderous ways?

In Haiti, it matters not whether children live in the streets or in homes with their parents – if they are poor, they are targets of the UN “peacekeepers.” The U.S., France, Canada and their UN accomplices are lying as they always have, and Haitians are dying as they always have.

Shirley Pate is a Haiti solidarity activist in Washington, D.C. Email her at magbana@aol.com.

Petition for the Protection of the Street Children of Haiti

Having received several reports of orphaned children living on the streets of Haiti being profiled, terrorized, beaten, raped, imprisoned and murdered by the HNP and former military under the authority of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, we the undersigned organizations and

individuals insist that MINUSTAH and UNICEF facilitate the immediate protection and care of these children by:

I. Supervising the HNP and prohibiting them from abusing or terrorizing the children, or taking them off the street without the presence of a human rights observer or member of UNICEF.

II. Facilitating the immediate release of those hundreds who have been taken off the streets in the past several months to be secretly detained in subhuman conditions in buildings behind police stations throughout the country.

III. Obtaining appropriate housing and care for the orphaned children who have been imprisoned or are living on the streets of Haiti, and supporting those few organizations that continue to work for their safety.

IV. Insisting that the interim government, which has publicly announced that it has and will continue to “sweep” these children off the streets, is held accountable for their illegal and immoral actions as termed by international law for the protection of children.

To sign this petition, along with the Haiti Action Committee, the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, the San Francisco Bay View and many more, email Lynn Currier at haitkaah@yahoo.com.

Readers are urged to contact UNICEF in Haiti and at UN Headquarters: UNICEF-Haiti, P.O. Box 1363, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, (509) 245-3525, fax (509) 245-1877, PortauPrince@unicef.org; UNICEF House, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, (212) 326-7000, Fax (212) 887-7465, www.unicef.org.

Lone Voice in the Wilderness

Haitians here are treated like the Black South Africans were during Apartheid

By Raymond Kongwa, Guardian Staff Reporter

The Nassau Guardian

August 10, 2005

You could see the anguish in Pastor Carlton Dorsette's eyes when he talked about the painful lives most Haitians lead in Abaco.

Dabbing tears from his cheeks, the reverend said, "Haitians here are treated like the Black South Africans were during Apartheid."

An advocate for the community for more than 16 years, and pastor of Trumpet Assembly of God, the multiethnic church he founded in Marsh Harbour, Rev Dorsette said he had watched a "wicked system" of segregation take hold.

"This can't be right," he said passionately, explaining how Haitian women were made to give their bodies in exchange for police character certificates, a stay of repatriation or even the right to hold a bank account. And when they don't give it up, sometimes these women are raped," he added.

Alleging that rogue elements within the Police Force and Department of Immigration had carried out such atrocities in the past, the advocate of Abaco's Haitian community said the women had accepted this treatment as a way of life.

According to Dorsette, the misery was just as great for the thousands of Abaco-Haitians denied Bahamian citizenship.

"Because of their stateless position, they can't buy land, they can't open a bank account," he explained. "It's difficult for them to save. You don't want to save a lot of money in your home when you could be robbed or your house could burn down. Imagine paying \$30 for a police record that costs only \$2.50 or paying a bank manager hundreds of dollars for a service others get free."

Highlighting the case of Michael Joseph (named changed), Pastor Dorsette said his parishioner has applied for and been denied citizenship more than four times since his 18th birthday.

Because his Certificate of Identity expires at 18, he has no passport and can't travel. Nor can his wife, who shares the same status. His two sons have also already started to go down the same dead end road. "Why are you making them criminals in the womb," Reverend Dorsette asked in a trembling voice. "You have already told them they are illegal."

The pastor said he feared the hopeless state of Abaco's disenfranchised youth could explode into violence.

"This frustration is boiling and at some point in our history – God forbid and I'm praying it never happens – it will explode," he claimed.

"It may not go off today, but as sure as God sits high, looks low, if we don't deal with it, it could explode."

Underscoring his fears, Reverend Dorsette went on, "The [Haitian] children feel inferior, they feel they've lost hope," he warned. "And if there is no hope that tomorrow will be better than today, they will say, 'Lets get those who created the hopelessness'."

"I am very concerned" he added, "When I go into Pigeon Peas and The Mudd and I see these little children, I cry because I say, 'You don't know what you're going to face in years to come. You're going to be ostracized and pushed aside, and you will not be allowed to go anywhere'. It just breaks my heart."

Having received promises from successive governments – the present Christie administration included – Reverend Dorsette said it appeared the country didn't possess the political will to help Haitians in this country.

He claimed Prime Minister Christie had failed to live up to promises he made when he visited the Pigeon Peas shantytown.

"[Prime Minister Christie] toured the Peas, seemed very compassionate and promised the people he was going to do something about the situation," Pastor Dorestte said. "But Bishop Neil Ellis preached and made comments that if the Prime Minister helped these Haitians, 'all hell would break loose and that just stopped everything'."

Pastor Dorsette also felt that the church, like the political directorate, had failed to help the Haitian community.

"The Haitian people have retained their Voodoo more than any other people coming out of Africa and I believe they are coming to The Bahamas to find God," he said. "But the church is lacking in its duty to evangelise these people."

Pointing to a page in the bible, he said Haitians in The Bahamas had arrived as part of God's 'predetermined destiny' and that the church was in jeopardy of missing an opportunity to advance the Kingdom of Heaven.

But despite being a man of compassion, he still insisted that The Bahamas had reach-ed saturation point as far as immigrants were concerned.

"We need a Defence Force base in Inagua, so when these people are apprehended, rather than bring them to Nassau they can be sent straight back," Pastor Dorsette recommended. "It's closer and it's cheaper than taking them to Nassau."

But for the nearly 200 Haitians in his congregation, he said he prayed that all who qualified and applied for citizenship would be granted it by the end of the year.

"After 32 years of Independence, there is a need for us to amend the Constitution of The Bahamas to reflect the current social standing of the country," he added. "Over the last 32 years The Bahamas has absorbed many people from many countries, and their children, who were born here, are not going to go anywhere. This is their home."

Man's \$25,000 gift boosts church effort
Miami Herald
August 15, 2005

The fundraising drive to build a new Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church in Little Haiti received an unexpected, but pleasant, surprise Sunday.

Haitian-American physician and businessman Dr. Rudolph "Rudy" Moise donated \$25,000 to the church's construction fund. The donation was met with roaring applause from the more than 1,000 parishioners who crowded the former cafeteria at Northeast Second Avenue and 62nd Street for the 9 a.m. Mass.

Not even Moise's wife or siblings, who joined him onstage, were aware of how large the donation was until he unveiled a giant check bearing \$25,000.

"Wow," said Father Reginald Jean-Mary, the church's current leader who has embarked on a campaign to raise \$3 million toward the construction of a new Notre Dame on the current site.

Moise made the donation in honor of his mother, Josette Moise, a Notre Dame parishioner who died a year ago.

"We loved our mother. She lived a life of sacrifice," Moise told congregants. "She adopted Notre Dame . . . and after her two sons, Father Reginald was her third and she knew of his desire to build a new church."

UW-L student working to help Haitian town

**By KATE SCHOTT |
La Crosse Tribune, WI
August 15, 2005**

Maseline Benjamin would like your help.

The 28-year-old is studying to become an anesthesia nurse at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and Franciscan Skemp Medical Center.

She arrived last year from Pignon, Haiti, where she had worked as a nurse for more than three years with Dr. Guy D. Theodore, who founded a small clinic in Pignon in 1983.

This clinic is now a 60-bed hospital with four outlying clinics.

She was asked by Theodore to get further training in the U.S. and return to Pignon upon completing her degree.

"He said I was a responsible person and could handle (the) responsibility," she said Friday.

Benjamin said she's homesick for Haiti and her student visa doesn't allow her to return home until she graduates in 2007. But she hopes talking about her country will encourage others to support her hometown.

Children can only attend school if their parents pay tuition. Benjamin's parents paid for her childhood education, and her boss paid for her three years at a university in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

She's not the only one hoping Coulee Region residents will become interested in forming some sort of partnership with Pignon. Faculty from UW-L and members of the La Crosse Valley View Rotary made a trip to Pignon in June to make connections and brainstorm ways La Crosse can help.

Marcia Naber, a Rotary member who works at UW-L in Career Services, was inspired to go after reading "Mountains Beyond Mountains" by Tracy Kidder. The book talks about the health-care crisis in Haiti.

The Rotary club got involved because they were looking for a new international service project, she said.

Priorities identified so far include:

Improving the safety of their water;

Improving community health education and sanitation;
More business and leadership training;

Cross-cultural communication improvements.

The College of Business Administration at UW-L already is looking into helping with the business training. Several faculty have secured a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to increase the number of international education opportunities for faculty, students and staff at both the university and the local school district.

Marketing professor Gwen Achenreiner said Haiti is just one location they are looking at, but said the college has expressed interest in sending two students in 2006 and 2007 for internships to Pignon.

Other proposed ideas include offering scholarships to Hatians to study in the U.S. and offering a distance learning class of English for Speakers of Haitian Creole.

Sunday Morning
Sunday, August 14, 2005
By Candice Cunningham
Marietta Daily Journal, GA

Sunday mornings at Marietta's Olive Springs Baptist Church on are as diverse as a meeting at the United Nations.

Haitians, Philipinos, Hispanics and native-born Americans, both blacks and whites, attend services at the Austell Road church organized to suit their respective cultures.

Pastor Cavin Cawthon says church members are a reflection of the surrounding neighborhood, which has also become culturally diverse in recent years.

"That's who we are," he said. "That's our community in this area."

Olive Springs Baptist Church has evolved with its surroundings during its 125-year history and has developed services that are inclusive of different groups in the community.

There is a saying, Cawthon says, that "the most segregated time in America is on Sunday mornings."

"We want to put that away," he said. "We do want to reach every person in this community."

He said, however, that while race might change, the church's message stays the same.

"Our goal is to share the love of Christ," Cawthon said.

The church switched gears when the community began changing from predominantly white residents to its current melting pot of cultures.

Olive Springs Baptist Church has an official membership 1,070, with about 300 regularly attending services. About 80 percent of the congregation now is white. Another 15 percent is Hispanic and 5 percent is Haitian, Cawthon said.

Associate Pastor David Bello leads a Hispanic worship service Sundays at 11 a.m.

Cawthon said a growing immigrant population has contributed to the church's membership, some of whom are not legal residents.

"We don't condone them being here illegally but we try to minister to them during that time to work with them and encourage them in different ways," he said.

Cawthon, who has been at the church three years, leads its traditional Sunday service in English, also held at 11 a.m.

Pastor Niseron Beauge, a former judge in Haiti, leads a service for Haitians on Sundays at 12:30 p.m.

Pastor Eddie Banquillo leads a service for Philipinos at 11 p.m. Sundays.

"We're starting to reflect more of what the community is than what we are," Cawthon said.

That is what makes Olive Springs Baptist Church stand out, he said.

"Some churches get into a frame of mind of ministering to who is there and they don't necessarily change with their community," Cawthon said.

Or worse, he said, some churches move to communities to serve the people they are used to serving.

Instead, Olive Springs approached its new surroundings by organizing clothes drives, helping members with access to healthcare and dental exams and becoming involved in local schools.

Cawthon said he has even judged a spelling bee and helped with a school field day.

"The mission of our church is to be true to the community," he said.

Olive Springs' traditional service, made up mostly of whites, is the most sedate of the four services offered at the church. The others include drums, guitar and lively, upbeat music.

"Ethnic churches are more alive," Cawthon said. "It's just a different style."

For children, programs remain in English, he said, because that is the language they use most.

Their parents are a different story and church services can be in their native tongue.

Beauge speaks the French-Creole language of his Haitian congregation.

The church also has a strong following of Nigerians, and Cawthon said the church wants eventually to have a special service for them, as well.

And Olive Springs also plans to reach out to the community's senior population.

"We've got to be a part of our community," Cawthon said.

For more information on services, call Olive Springs Baptist Church at (770) 427-8066, or visit the church's Web site at www.olivesprings.org.

ccunningham@mdjonline.com

17 illegal immigrants picked up in Palm Beach Shores

By Dwayne Robinson

Palm Beach Post

Monday, August 15, 2005

U.S. Border Patrol Agents nabbed 17 illegal immigrants in Palm Beach Shores Monday morning in the vicinity of the Sailfish Marina Restaurant.

Sixteen Haitians and a Jamaican were unloaded from a boat on the Intracoastal where a border patrol agent saw them scatter and run, said Mike McClarnon, supervisory boarder patrol agent. "We believe we have everybody in custody who was dropped off," McClarnon said. "We had a real quick response."

Palm Beach Shores and Riviera Beach police assisted with the capture. There were two women, 15 men and all were adults, the boarder patrol reported. The immigrants were still being interviewed and processed late Monday morning.

Three weeks ago to the day, 17 illegals came ashore in the Town of Palm Beach in similar manner. These boat incursions are not uncommon, especially during this time of year, McClarnon said.

"Weather is a factor," he said. "If the seas are calm, it makes it more conducive for someone to ride from the Bahamas and drop people off. It goes on year-round. It's something that we deal with."

Political cartoonists lighten the mood in troubled times

BY TRENTON DANIEL

Miami Herald

Aug 15, 2005

Using bold colors that belie an otherwise crumbling landscape, cartoonist Marc "Fréo" Francois sketches a rakish rendition of Haiti today where leaders struggle to govern, everybody gets kidnapped and United Nations peacekeepers are on holiday instead of on patrol.

Political cartoonists such as Francois are trying to make light of a decidedly bleak situation. Violence and kidnappings threaten fall elections called to replace an interim government after an armed rebellion toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide last year.

"We take politics so seriously," said Francois, 27, whose work appears on a Miami-based website, sakapfet.com. ``It's a way for people to take a look at it and laugh about it. We have to make something funny about it."

There are only a handful of Haitian political cartoonists at work today, and their caustic commentary -- in English, Haitian Creole and French -- appears sporadically in Haitian newspapers and more so online. The money they make won't exactly allow them to quit their day jobs.

But their cartoons don't go unnoticed. They circulate the Internet, elicit commentary on Haitian talk radio, and have fans awaiting the next target of jest.

"Haiti's not a society where you can poke fun at people in power. They're not used to it," said Michael Emeran, owner of sakapfet.com, which also publishes the work of Titosh, perhaps Haiti's most prominent cartoonist.

``They get a lot of hate mail. They think you're taking sides. But they are popular -- I know they are e-mailed everywhere."

A NEW ERA

The fall of despot Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986 gave rise to a fresh era of free speech and sharp-witted cartoons -- despite an undercurrent of violence that can force self-censorship, political caricaturist Charlot Lucien said.

"Freedom of expression is one of the legacies of 1986," said Lucien, a Boston resident who released a collection of his illustrated sketches last year in the book *Our Comedians*. ``But at the same time, certain people may be less receptive to cartoons. I feel that it's less safe now having cartoons target some individuals, compared to a few years ago."

He cites the deaths of two Haitian journalists since 2000 who were killed for their work as a sign that freedom of speech is not exactly welcome.

Today, Lucien says his portraits of Aristide and Guy Philippe, a leader in last year's revolt, wouldn't pose security problems if he returned to Haiti.

But he wouldn't feel completely at ease, either.

"Yes, I can do them in Haiti," said Lucien, 41. "But I would be more anxious."

MULTIPLE VICTIMS

Francois, who moved to South Florida last year after completing his university studies in graphic design in Ecuador, casts a wide net. Victims of late include former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, who served under Aristide; current premier Gerard Latortue; and the U.N. peacekeeping mission, which has been widely criticized for not doing its job.

In one recent cartoon, Haitians call the U.N. for help. Peacekeepers, meanwhile, ogle a chesty Haitian hooker at the Little Darling Café. They ask: "Are you hurt??? Can we help you . . . with cash?!"

Another cartoon of Francois' shows former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell on a late 2004 visit to Haiti at the National Palace during which gunfire rattled outside. Powell places a hand over a podium microphone and whispers to Latortue, the prime minister: "I'm very disappointed, Mr. Latortue. Those savages started shooting outside."

The premier, also covering a microphone, shoots back: "Don't worry, they watch too much news on Iraq."

HATE MAIL

Francois, who started drawing political cartoons last year, gets only occasional hate mail.

But William "Titosh" McIntosh, who divides his time between Port-au-Prince and Kendall, is a frequent target.

He says much of it came under the Aristide administration; his cartoons were noticeably acerbic about Aristide's record.

"I think it's important to laugh when there's so much sadness and misery," said McIntosh, 35, who tries to keep a low profile on his trips back home.

Last year, when Haiti was supposed to fete its 200th year of independence from France but instead saw yet another leader ousted, McIntosh drew a cartoon that he said triggered many angry replies.

"After 200 years of independence . . . Thank you, Lavalas," the caption said, referring to Aristide's populist party.

Above the caption was the National Palace and two flags -- one French, the other American. After Aristide's departure, both the French and the United States dispatched troops to Haiti to pave the way for the U.N. mission.

GOOD MATERIAL

McIntosh says his critics' disgust makes for good comic material.

In one cartoon, McIntosh drew himself at a computer checking e-mail.

"You better poke fun at your mother instead. I hope you enjoy the money from 184 group [a Haitian opposition group unpopular among Aristide partisans] and Bush," are among the few printable comments.

Then McIntosh turns to the reader: ``Freedom of expression at its best! Wouldn't you say?"

U.N. Peacekeeping More Assertive, Creating Risk for Civilians

By Colum Lynch

Washington Post

Monday, August 15, 2005

UNITED NATIONS -- On July 6, about 1,400 heavily armed U.N. peacekeepers from Brazil, Peru and Jordan, backed by Argentine and Chilean helicopters, marched into a Haitian slum for an early-morning raid on the home of Emmanuel "Dread" Wilme, a gang leader who was agitating for the return to power of former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Operation Iron Fist killed Wilme and at least six other gang members, according to a confidential U.N. account of the raid. But the bloody gun battle between the U.N. forces and Wilme's followers failed to dislodge the gang from its Port-au-Prince slum turf and led to the injury of dozens of civilians, primarily women and children, according to U.N. officials and an American doctor who tended the wounded.

The 12-hour U.N. operation in Cité Soleil signaled an escalation of force in Haiti, where the Brazilian-led U.N. mission had been criticized for months by the United States and others for its failure to confront Haiti's armed gangs.

It also reflected a shift in tactics for U.N. peacekeeping troops, who by the mid-1990s were going out of their way to avoid combat. Now, the blue-helmeted troops are showing a renewed willingness to use considerable firepower against armed groups that they deem a threat to peace efforts.

"There has been a fundamental shift in peacekeeping that very few people have noticed, where U.N. peacekeepers are actually taking proactive, offensive preemptive action against threats," said Nancy Soderberg, a former U.S. ambassador who oversaw U.N. peacekeeping for the U.S. mission to the United Nations from 1997 to 2000. "The United States learned this when they invaded Haiti in 1994. Basically someone tried to attack them, [the Americans] blew them away and that was the end of that."

The United Nations largely retreated from offensive combat operations after the troubled U.N. operation in Somalia in the early 1990s, when a hunt for Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed contributed to 113 U.N. combat deaths and raised questions about the capacity of peacekeepers to quash even ill-equipped armed factions. The confrontation also resulted in a disastrous U.S. raid on an Aideed stronghold in Mogadishu that left 18 U.S. soldiers dead and triggered a U.S. pull-back from U.N. peacekeeping.

More recently, the United Nations has used more aggressive offensive tactics in Haiti, Congo and Sierra Leone. In Congo, U.N. troops supported by Indian-piloted attack helicopters killed more than 50 rebels in a raid on a marketplace in March.

The fighting has received relatively scant attention at a time when U.S. forces are engaged in more extensive conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it has contributed to an increase in U.N. combat fatalities over the past two years. The death toll for U.N. peacekeepers increased from 64 deaths in 2003 to 91 in 2004. The count reached 64 in the first six months of this year. There have been 22

combat fatalities in Haiti and Congo, including nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers killed February in an ambush in Ituri, Congo.

Soderberg, now a vice president of the nonprofit International Crisis Group, said her organization has urged the Security Council to explicitly authorize peacekeepers in Congo to use force preemptively to counter possible threats from armed groups. But she said the United Nations will have to balance such assertiveness against the potential for civilians to become caught in crossfire.

The U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti was established in April 2004 to maintain peace after a U.S. military force withdrew from Haiti. U.S. forces had gone to Haiti to restore peace after armed opponents of the government launched an insurrection against President Aristide. The United States pressed Aristide to flee into exile or face likely death at the hands of the insurgents.

Confronted with violent opposition from Aristide loyalists, the U.N. mission has stepped up its military tactics in recent months to ensure stability in advance of elections.

Operation Iron Fist began at 4:30 a.m. as an advance unit of Peruvian peacekeepers slipped into the neighborhood of Bois Neuf in Cité Soleil to launch a surprise attack on Wilme's residence. But the force quickly encountered resistance from well-armed and -trained followers of Wilme, who opened fire from three directions. The Peruvians responded forcefully, blasting 5,500 rounds of ammunition, grenades and mortars at Wilme's residence.

A Brazilian mechanized company providing perimeter security for the Peruvians, meanwhile, was attacked by 30 to 40 gang members. Wilme's fighters pinned the U.N. peacekeepers down for seven hours, targeting them with sniper fire and Molotov cocktails as they struggled to extract two armored personnel carriers from the mud. Battling their way out, the Brazilians fired more than 16,700 rounds of ammunition in the densely populated neighborhood.

David Olson, an American physician who recently served in Haiti with the French medical agency Doctors Without Borders, said Operation Iron Fist caused "a lot of collateral damage." Olson said that 27 Haitians, mostly women and children, streamed into his clinic after the July 6 operation. Olson said that he could not establish who was responsible for the injuries, but he said that as many as half the victims said they had been wounded by the U.N. peacekeepers.

He said one woman in her 26th week of pregnancy suffered a bullet wound in her uterus that killed her baby. He recalled tending another woman who had been struck by a bullet that sliced through a wall in her home. "I asked her who shot her and she said, 'Minustah,' " a French acronym for the U.N. Stabilization Mission. "She was sitting in her house going about her day and got a bullet in the back."

The United Nations does not compile records on civilian deaths during peacekeeping operations, but the top peacekeeping official, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, conceded that "there may have been some civilian casualties" during the raid. "We have been looking very closely at those accusations," he said. There is no reliable tally of civilians or gang members killed.

A U.N. account of the operation concluded afterward that "the area remains under gang control. Security forces are still unable to enter into the inner areas of Cité Soleil or conduct foot patrols."

Still, Guéhenno said it was necessary to stand up to armed groups that threaten to undermine peacekeeping missions. But he said U.N. commanders had to strike a balance between engaging in all-out warfare and resorting to the passive military posture that characterized U.N. operations in Srebrenica, where Dutch peacekeepers stood down as Bosnian Serb troops killed thousands of unarmed civilians. "You don't want any Srebrenica, and you don't want Mogadishu," he said.

Haitian Gangster Ready to Surrender

By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU

Associated Press Writer

Newsday

August 13, 2005

PORT-AU-PORT, Haiti -- One of Haiti's most powerful gang leaders said he would be willing to surrender if U.N. peacekeepers guarantee his safety.

Armed gang members controlled by the man known as General Toutou are believed to be behind many of the kidnappings and killings that have added to the instability in Haiti as the country prepares for fall elections to replace the interim government.

Toutou, in an interview Friday with The Associated Press, said he has begun talks on a possible surrender with the U.N. peacekeeping mission that came to Haiti to restore order following the ouster of the country's first freely elected leader, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in February 2004.

"If the (U.N. mission) is ready to guarantee our security, we'd be ready to give up the fight," said Toutou, whose real name is unknown.

A U.N. official declined to discuss any possible deal to guarantee the Toutou's safety, but said the peacekeeping mission was negotiating with gangs in Bel-Air, the sprawling slum where the gang leader commands a well-armed force of street fighters.

"A window of opportunity is opening for us to reduce violence ahead of the elections," said Desmond Molloy, head of the U.N. disarmament program in Haiti.

Haitian authorities have accused Toutou of involvement in the slaying in July of a prominent journalist, Jacques Roche, along with dozens of other killings and kidnappings, and any deal could not include amnesty, said Judicial Police Chief Michael Lucius said.

"The best I can guarantee is that he will not be hurt in prison if he surrenders," said Lucius, who added that Toutou's offer suggests that his power has weakened.

Toutou, 28, denied any connection to the death of Roche, whose killing prompted widespread outrage and was blamed on supporters of Aristide.

"I swear I have nothing to do with the death of Jacques Roche," Toutou said.

Authorities have said Roche's death is part of a campaign by supporters Aristide to force the government into allowing the ousted leader to return to Haiti from exile in South Africa.

Toutou also said he would do nothing to prevent people from participating in the fall elections, pointing out that the U.N. has not been prevented from operating two voter registration centers in Bel-Air -- home to about 300,000 people.

Haiti's leading political party condemns "sham" elections, proposes censure of former Lavalas representatives

Haiti Action Committee

August 14, 2005

Yon sèl randevou: randevou bò tab la

Fanmi Lavalas asks its members not to stand in line to be assassinated once more, as has occurred in Solino, Bel-Air, Cite Soleil, Grand Ravines, La Saline, Barriere Bouteille, etc.

Fanmi Lavalas Press Release:

Whereas President Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected National Representative at the last convention of Fanmi Lavalas.

Whereas Article 29 of the Fanmi Lavalas Charter states: "The National Representative is the chief executive of the Organization and must ensure that the organization is run effectively. The National Representative is obligated to protect and defend the organization and its rights and to promote its work. The National Representative executes all tasks as described in the statutes."

Whereas the April 19th 2005 press release by the National Representative of Fanmi Lavalas, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, stated: "Today in 2005, who can expect free, fair and democratic elections in Haiti while thousands of Lavalas members and supporters are in jail, exile and hiding?"

Whereas the May 14th 2005 New York Resolution of Fanmi Lavalas, delegates from Haiti, the 11th department, militants in exile, representatives from Haitian peasant, trade union organizations and grassroots organizations issued the clear position of the Organization regarding the next elections.

Whereas the July 28th 2005 press release by President Aristide's spokeswoman denounced the allegations made by some sectors that they had reached agreement with President Aristide to participate in the upcoming sham elections.

Whereas the August 4th 2005 press release by the interim representative of Fanmi Lavalas reiterated once more, to whomever would listen, that Fanmi Lavalas will neither participate nor send anyone to participate in the sham elections organized by the February 29, 2004 Coup d'État regime.

The Political Organization Fanmi Lavalas denounces and strongly condemns the behavior of Senators Yvon Feuille and Louis-Gerard Gilles, and Congressman Rudy Heriveaux and others who have neither the authority nor the mandate to register the Organization into the next elections. To register Fanmi Lavalas into these sham elections is a demagogic maneuver and will not succeed.

The Political Organization Fanmi Lavalas will take the legal and disciplinary measures that are appropriate in this case.

Because the people refuse to follow the de facto government's logic of "election-by-selection", Fanmi Lavalas is asking the people not to stand in line for the rigged electoral card.

Furthermore, Fanmi Lavalas asks its members not to stand in line to be assassinated once more, as has occurred in Solino, Bel-Air, Cite Soleil, Grand Ravines, La Saline, Barriere Bouteille, etc. People will not bring themselves to the butchers. Remember November 29th, 1987 in Ruelle Vaillant; remember September 11th, 1988 in Saint Jean Bosco.

Remember, the one causing the pain may forget, but the one who bares the scar always remembers.

Fanmi Lavalas asks the people to redouble their efforts to relentlessly reinforce their mobilization and non-violent resistance until the return of constitutional order and the hoisting of the people's flag of dignity.

With continuous mobilization and peaceful resistance, our liberation and deliverance will come very soon. **LIBERATION AND NON-VIOLENT MOBILIZATION GO HAND IN HAND.**

Fanmi Lavalas Communication's Commission

Mr. Angelot Bell

Mr. Mario Dupuy

Dr. Maryse Narcisse

Positive signals from Haiti, now for concrete action

Analysis

Rickey Singh

Jamaica Observer

Sunday, August 14, 2005

With parliamentary and presidential elections in Haiti on the horizon, possibly in November, there are indications of significant shifts in policies and programmes, both in Washington and Port au Prince, to improve the human rights climate in that Caribbean nation.

Rickey Singh

This includes ending the policy of long imprisonment, without charges and court trials, of presumed political prisoners and advocates of violence.

Since September last year there have been more than 900 reported killings by armed political gangs and criminals, despite the presence of a 7,000 plus UN peace-keeping force.

Former Haitian prime minister, Yvonne Neptune, is expected to be one of the immediate beneficiaries of this unfolding policy that has come in the face of the appointment of new United States ambassador assigned to Port au Prince and with increasing pressures on the interim regime of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue from the United Nations.

Arrested since last year for alleged murder, Neptune, who was prime minister under the administration of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was only charged after months of protests at home, in the region and internationally for him to be placed before the courts or be set free.

Bertrand Aristide

A recent significant voice for the immediate release of Neptune was that, last week, of UN special envoy to Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, who said the former Haitian prime minister's continuing imprisonment was a source of deep concern for Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the UN Security Council itself, according to a Reuters report.

Latest political developments suggest a deal that involved key American and Haitian players for the release of some high-profile political prisoners who have been associated with killings and political violence during the administrations of Aristide as well those that followed the downfall of his government in February 2004 with the support of the USA.

One of the best known of such prisoners, recently released, is a frontline leader of the notorious former CIA-funded anti-Aristide organisation, FRAPH, Louis Jodel Chamblain, who had fled to the USA after Aristide was returned to power under the Bill Clinton administration.

Gerard Latortue

Critics of US policy on Haiti and of the interim regime in Port au Prince argue that it is simply untenable to have Chamblain freed from detention while Neptune remains a prisoner.

Leading human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue to point to the threats to Haiti's future by armed groups, both supporters and opponents of Aristide's Lavalas Family Party.

Like another controversial, violent anti-Aristide campaigner and beneficiary of US intelligence support, Guy Philippe, Chamblain is not without ambitions for high political office. There will have to be close monitoring by the UN peace-keeping forces in Haiti to prevent influential elements like Chamblain and Phillippe disrupting arrangements for the coming elections.

While the Electoral Council is pressing ahead - amid continuing political tension and sporadic killings and violence - to complete an electoral roll for the parliamentary and presidential elections, those who remain pessimistic about such elections this year have reminded that the local government elections, originally scheduled for October, have already been postponed.

By last week, the Electoral Council was still below 50 per cent of its targeted four million eligible voters on the election roll. But the Latortue administration is hopefully to have at least more than two million armed with the laminated identification cards in readiness to vote in the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

At the close of nominations last week, there were some 63 parties registered to contest the elections, among them that of Aristide's Lavalas, which is still reputed to be the most popular mass-based organisation of all contenders for state power.

But Aristide, who remains in exile in South Africa, will not be in Haiti to assist Lavalas, which could face an internal leadership problem of its own, especially in the choice of a presidential candidate.

This possibility looms larger, according to some Haitian human rights activists, since the arrest on a charge of murder of the priest and political activist friend of Aristide, Fr Gerard Jean-Juste.

He is accused of the kidnapping and murder last month of the popular Haitian journalist and poet, Jacques Roche, a crime he firmly denies amid conflicting reports that he was in Miami at the time of Roche's death.

Kidnappings for ransom has been on the increase - a concern for the UN peace-keeping mission, the Latortue regime as well as the US government, which has allocated some US\$2.5 million to assist the administration in Port au Prince to expedite the reform over a system that leads to arbitrary detention and lengthy imprisonment without charges.

A clear signal that the Latortue administration and the US State Department might be signing from the same hymn sheet on ending arbitrary detention, with pro-Aristide elements and Lavalas activists being affected, came last week when new Justice Minister Henri Dorlean publicly declared his opposition to judges and prosecutors misusing their powers to keep people in prison in violation of Haitian laws.

According to a Reuters report out of Port au Prince, Dorlean estimated that approximately 95 per cent of the 1,300 prisoners at the national penitentiary had been jailed for months without being charged or tried. A similar situation existing in the country's other prisons.

Human rights advocates view Dorlean as a "breath of fresh air" in Latortue's administration since his replacement in June of the controversial Bernard Gousse, who was forced to resign. Ex-prime minister Neptune was one of the leading sufferers of Gousse's concept of administration of the criminal justice system.

Meanwhile, in another significant development, the US State Department has decided to replace Tom Foley, its ambassador to Haiti, with Tim Carney, who was America's ambassador in Port au Prince during the 1990s.

What perhaps makes Carney's appointment significant, is the fact that until his nomination to replace Foley, he was chairman of the Haiti Democracy Project in Washington, an organisation known for some sharp criticisms of the George Bush administration's policies and strategies on Haiti.

However encouraging the signals from the Latortue regime and its backers in Washington, the reality is that life for the Haitian masses remain quite grim as the poverty-stricken nation lurch from crisis to crisis.

Indeed, the prevailing mood, based on various reports, point to serious doubts that the coming elections would indeed herald a new beginning for democratic governance and a brake on political violence, corruption, fear and grinding poverty.

U.S. envoy criticizes release of Haiti rebel

12 Aug 2005 23:04:22 GMT

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug 12 (Reuters) - The U.S. ambassador to Haiti on Friday called the release from jail of a former death squad leader "a scandal" and criticized the detention of former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune as a human rights violation.

U.S. Ambassador James Foley said the release on Thursday of Louis Jodel Chamblain, who helped lead the armed rebellion that drove president Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power last year, was proof that Haiti's judicial system was not working.

Chamblain is a former army officer who was one of the leaders of the paramilitary group Front for the Advancement of Progress of the Haitian People, which was blamed for some 3,000 deaths after a military coup ousted Aristide in 1991 during his first presidency.

"The release of Chamblain is a scandal for the country and for its image around the world," said Foley, who is about to leave his post in Haiti.

Chamblain was convicted of the 1993 murder of a Haitian businessman and for the 1994 killings of more than two dozen people in the northern city of Gonaives.

He surrendered in April 2004 under international pressure. His convictions were overturned but Haitian authorities continued to detain him on other allegations.

Chamblain was released on Thursday after judicial authorities decided there was no evidence to hold him.

"We know that he is a man who had been found guilty on several occasions of horrible crimes," Foley said. "Imagine, one moment, the tarnished image of Haiti today, with Chamblain being released and a former prime minister who continues to stagnate in prison."

Neptune, who served as prime minister under Aristide, was arrested in June 2004 on allegations he masterminded killings in the village of La Syrie in February 2004.

Neptune has denied the accusations and has accused the U.S.-backed interim government of holding him for political reasons. Human rights groups have criticized the government for jailing hundreds of Aristide supporters.

Foley said Neptune's detention was a violation of human rights and questioned whether he was involved in the deaths in La Syrie.

"Was he part of it, did he give any order?" Foley said. "No one has ever provided the least evidence, the least clue, the least testimony about Neptune's involvement ... They bear a grudge against him for Aristide's legacy."

Aristide left Haiti on Feb. 29, 2004, in the face of an armed rebellion and under pressure from Washington and Paris. He is living in exile in South Africa.

Haiti Frees Rebel Leader Blamed in Deaths

By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU, Associated Press Writer

Los Angeles Times

August 13, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- A Haitian rebel leader who once led a paramilitary group accused of killing and torturing thousands of people has been released from prison, his lawyer said Friday.

Louis-Jodel Chamblain, a leader of the armed uprising that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, was released Thursday from the National Penitentiary, attorney Stanley Gaston said.

Chamblain, 51, was jailed in April 2004 on two counts of murder. He was acquitted but kept in prison while authorities investigated allegations that he masterminded a 1993 fire that devastated part of Cite Soleil, a vast waterfront shantytown outside of Port-au-Prince, Gaston said.

An appeals court ordered him released on July 26, ruling there were insufficient grounds to hold him for the arson, Gaston said. The lawyer said it took three weeks to push authorities into carrying out the order for Chamblain's release.

A former army sergeant, Chamblain was one of two leaders of the Front for the Advancement and Progress of the Haitian People, a paramilitary group suspected of killing and torturing thousands of people during the 1992-1994 military regime that seized power in the coup that first ousted Aristide.

A U.S. military intervention restored Aristide to power in 1994, and Chamblain went to the Dominican Republic. He returned to Haiti in February 2004 to help lead the revolt that ousted Aristide a second time.

Jean-Claude Bajeux, the director of the local Ecumenical Center for Human Rights, condemned Chamblain's release.

"Chamblain is a hired gun. Killers like him are always ready to serve dictatorial regimes," Bajeux said. "What makes us indignant is not Chamblain's release but the shortcomings of the judicial system and the incompetence of its investigations."

U.S. Ambassador James Foley, speaking at his final news conference before he leaves the post, said contrasted the rebel leader's release to the situation with Yvon Neptune, the former prime minister who has been jailed for more than year without going to trial on charges of involvement in political killings.

"Imagine the tarnished image of Haiti today, with a Chamblain released and a former prime minister who continues to languish in jail," Foley said.

In 1995, Chamblain was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment for his alleged role in the 1993 slaying of businessman Antoine Izmary, an Aristide financial backer. In April 2004, he turned himself in to face a retrial in the case and was acquitted four months later.

He remained in prison pending a retrial for his alleged role in a bloody 1994 raid on Raboteau, a shantytown and Aristide stronghold in the western city of Gonaives. Chamblain had been sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment for that charge in 2000.

In May, Haiti's Supreme Court declared the original Raboteau trial a mistrial, annulling the convictions of 38 former army and paramilitary leaders.

35 killed in latest Haiti unrest
From: Agence France-Presse
By correspondents in Port-au-Prince
Breaking News 24.7
News.com.au, Australia
August 12, 2005

At least 35 people have been shot to death in violence-wracked Haiti in the past four days.

Dozens of bodies riddled with bullets were processed at the morgue in Port-au-Prince's general hospital between Saturday and today, according to hospital sources.

At least 23 bodies were taken there last week, sources said.

The staggering figure came as nine suspected criminals were killed in a police operation in the Port-au-Prince slum of Bel Air today, police said.

Police this week have conducted raids in Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods considered bastions of supporters of former president Jean Bertrand Aristide, who fled the country amid a popular uprising last year.

In other unrest, former chamber of deputies president Kelly Bastien was kidnapped yesterday in the capital, relatives said.

Kidnappers are demanding more than \$260,000 from the family.

OAS SATISFIED WITH VOTER REGISTRATION IN HAITI

Aug. 15 2005

Press Release - Organization of American States

Harold Doan and Associates, Ltd.

With all 427 voter registration offices open and operational in Haiti, the Organization of American States (OAS) is pleased and encouraged by the number of Haitians who continue to register to vote for the upcoming national elections, Secretary General José Miguel Insulza said today.

Insulza said the Haitian people have demonstrated their strong commitment to participating in the elections, with nearly 1.3 million Haitians currently registered and eligible to receive their National Identification Card. The OAS Electoral Technical Assistance Program in Haiti is providing support to registration efforts being conducted by the country's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP).

The recent National Registration Day (Journée nationale d'inscription), organized by the OAS, was a key component of the OAS strategy to support and promote a civic atmosphere surrounding the electoral process and the registration campaign in particular.

The decision by the government of Haiti to extend the voter registration period to September 15, 2005, is a positive development that will further strengthen democracy in Haiti, Insulza said.

"The OAS is confident that the peaceful and collaborative climate of the voter registration campaign will continue," said the Secretary General, who urged all Haitians to continue to reject violence as the country prepares for elections and a democratic transition.

Unspinning Haiti's 'Spiral of Violence'

Misplaced blame on UN, Aristide Some media finally get it right. Not the Globe, though.

By Derrick O'Keefe

The Tyee.ca

August 12, 2005

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

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

Enter Maria Jimenez of the Globe and Mail.

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

Blaming a wimpy UN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What in-depth reports say

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

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

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

Ignoring class divide

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

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

We have been living for 1 year now under this de facto government which is destroying the country. 95% of the people from the masses who were working government jobs have been fired. Children cannot go to school. Students cannot advance in their studies. We are wondering just how far this crisis will be allowed to go. All of this is why we are in the streets, demonstrating and demanding the physical return of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Haiti immediately. This is the only issue the people are interested in today. (Interview with Dread Wilme,' Lakou New York, April 4 2005)

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

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

Rehabilitating the coup

It is not possible for Jimenez to be unaware of the political motivations of the sources she chooses. Her article can only be viewed as a blatant attempt to restore the narrative that focuses on explaining away Haiti's misery by demonizing Aristide, the Lavalas Party and its supporters.

Despite such journalist endeavours to rehabilitate the coup and occupation in Haiti, a much broader range of people and organizations are beginning to question the Canadian government's role.

Rather than playing Jimenez's tired and cynical game of blaming the victims, people in Canada have a responsibility to examine the real impact of Ottawa's policy in Haiti. It's time to blame the aggressors. Better yet, it's time to stay their hand and return sovereignty and democracy to Haiti.

Derrick O'Keefe is co-chair of the StopWar coalition in Vancouver and a founding editor of Seven Oaks, an on-line journal of politics, culture and resistance.

Haiti justice minister urges release of prisoners

By Joseph Guylor Delva

Reuters

Red Nova News

10 August 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haiti's new justice minister called on Wednesday for the release or trial without delay of hundreds of prisoners being held without charge, which he denounced as a violation of human rights.

Justice Minister Henri Dorlean said it was unacceptable for judges and prosecutors to use their powers to keep people in jail in violation of the law and urged police and judges to make sure those who are punished are real criminals.

"Depriving people of their freedom is a serious matter and keeping people in jail for months and months without trying them is a serious and unacceptable violation of their human rights," Dorlean told Reuters in an interview.

Human rights groups have criticized Haiti's U.S.-backed interim government, installed after the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, for illegally imprisoning members of Aristide's Lavalas Family political party, including ex-Prime Minister Yvon Neptune.

The U.N. special envoy to Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, called on Tuesday for Neptune's immediate release and said his detention was a source of concern for the U.N. Security Council and secretary-general.

Aristide left amid bloody rebellion and pressure to quit from Washington and Paris. Elections to choose a new government are planned for October and November, and U.N. peacekeepers are trying to stem political and gang violence that has killed more than 900 people since September.

Dorlean, a former human rights activist and adviser to President Boniface Alexandre, took over as justice minister on June 22 following the resignation of Bernard Gousse.

He said 95 percent of the 1,300 prisoners at the national penitentiary had been jailed for months without being charged or tried and the situation is the same in most of the Caribbean nation's prisons.

"The justice system should not be an instrument for injustice and revenge and while I am here, I won't allow that to happen," Dorlean said.

"A judge cannot decide to keep people in jail just because there is too much criminality in the streets," he said.

Neptune was arrested on allegations that he masterminded killings on Feb. 11, 2004, in the village of La Syrie, which Aristide's opponents have called a massacre. Neptune, who served as prime minister under Aristide, denies the accusations and says his detention is politically motivated.

Dorlean said he had asked the investigative judge in the case to release Neptune or formally charge him, in which case he would be sent before a criminal court to be tried.

Another leading figure of Aristide's party, Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, has been detained since July 21 on allegations he played a role in kidnapping and killing journalist Jacques Roche. Jean-Juste has denied the accusations.

Source: REUTERS

Haiti: 60 Parties Register For Elections
Friday, 12 August 2005, 9:40 am
Press Release: United Nations

More than 60 political parties have registered for the Haitian elections scheduled to be held later this year and the United Nations mission "will not allow persons still attached to the past to prevent the candidates from campaigning, or depriving the population from learning about the candidates," the mission chief has said.

After an insurgency that forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has spent more than a year re-establishing order in the Caribbean country, especially in two shantytowns, Bel Air and Cité Soleil, in the capital Port-au-Prince.

In a wide-ranging news conference earlier this week, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Juan Gabriel Valdés said: "I say clearly that MINUSTAH will continue to use the necessary force that our mandate permits" to remove the capacity to inflict injury from those who do not understand the disarmament appeal or who understand only the language of violence and weapons.

In the difficult year, the mission's drive to respond to the armed gangs seeking to prevent the elections had not weakened, he said. Since the cabinet was re-shuffled at the end of June and recent appointments were made within the Haitian National Police (HNP), tangible progress has been made in the fight to increase security.

For the first time since MINUSTAH's arrival, he said, they could see a significant improvement in security, with abductions and other criminal acts having decreased considerably since mid-July, and these successes had to be followed up.

Party registration was closed on Monday and all parties would have representatives and all the voters would have the opportunity to vote for the candidates of their choice, Mr. Valdés said.

"We believe in an inclusive electoral process because it confers a profound legitimacy," he said, adding that the parties had agreed that 30 per cent of the candidates fielded would be women.

A new government would be installed by 7 February no matter the changes in other deadlines, he said. The Government's electoral commission has extended the voter registration period by six weeks, until 15 September, for the elections scheduled for November and December.

For voter registration, more than 429 centres were operating across the country, he said.

Since last Friday the residents of Bel Air were able to register at the National Fort, where Brazilian UN peacekeepers and the Haitian National Police were providing permanent security. On the first day, more than 400 voters signed up, Mr. Valdés said.

In Cité Soleil, registration was also continuing under strict security surveillance, he said.

He called on the political parties to accept the challenge of working out concrete programmes to solve the big social, economic and security problems facing the country, saying the rights of Haitians included access to objective information on which to base their choices.

On behalf of the mission, Mr. Valdés congratulated Haiti and Canada on the appointment of Haitian-born, award-winning broadcast journalist Michaëlle Jean of Québec as Governor-General of Canada.

Haiti's economy to benefit from IDB loans
Jamaica Observer
Friday, August 12, 2005

Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, is to benefit from a number of loans granted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) valued at US\$161 million.

The loans are earmarked to finance urban rehabilitation, rural roads, damage caused by floods, agriculture and economic governance.

At the official signing at the National Palace, Port-au-Prince, IDB's President Enrique Iglesias said: "We have signed contracts for six loans to finance major projects that should assist Haiti in its economic development. These projects are a demonstration of the IDB's commitment to support not only urgent social and economic development needs but also Haiti's efforts to strengthen core institutions. The projects will help create the basis for long-term economic progress and social justice for the people of Haiti."

These new loans now mean that the IDB's total loan package to Haiti now stands at US\$532 million. Since 1961 the IDB has made 50 loans totalling \$984 million with disbursements of \$661 million. Its loans to Haiti are for 40-year terms with 10-year grace periods. The annual interest rate is one per cent during the first decade and two per cent thereafter.

Haiti's roads are in need of major reconstruction and modern transportation is vital to its economic ambitions. To that end, the IDB has identified the country's roadways as one of the priority areas for immediate rehabilitation and has granted the country a loan of US\$50 million to improve approximately 170 kilometres of highways and bridges and 300 kilometres of secondary and tertiary roads.

The country's poor living standards are a particular cause for concern. Here a loan of \$US50 million has been granted to finance an urban rehabilitation programme and access to government services . The aim here among other things is to build administrative and civic centres in urban communities to house government offices.

The agricultural sector ravaged by hurricanes requires some immediate attention. Rural farmers stand to benefit from a US\$27-million loan to assist them with diversifying their farming practices, irrigation and modern agricultural technologies.

Haiti is particularly susceptible to flooding, and the recent spate of hurricanes caused major damage mainly because there were inadequate flood warnings. A US\$5-million loan will finance a national programme that will establish a flood early warning system in communities in high-risk areas.

A US\$25-million fast-disbursing loan and a US\$5-million investment loan will support Haiti's efforts to carry out reforms to strengthen economic governance and improve effective transparency. In order to increase public sector revenues, the IDB-assisted initiatives will help in improving the country's tax bureau and customs administration by providing resources to improve their legal frameworks, train officials and modernise information technology systems.

CARIBBEAN BUSINESS REPORT FACT FILE ON HAITI.

Prime Minister: Gerard Latortue

Population: 8.5 million

Annual population growth: 2 per cent

Life expectancy: 52 years

GDP: 2.8 (US\$ billion)

GDP annual growth average: 0.0 per cent

GDP per capita average annual growth: -1.8

Source: World Bank

Haiti's political quagmire
Friday | August 12, 2005
Jamaica Gleaner

IN BETTER times, organising elections in Haiti has never been easy. The current chaos that prevails in the country will make more difficult the administration of the elections that are planned for later this year. It is not surprising that the authorities this week said that they will be extending deadline for voter registration.

The target set by Gabriel Valdes, the United Nations envoy in Haiti, of registering 3.5 million of the estimated six million eligible voters is immediately threatened by political unrest and violence that have been troubling the country.

Haitians have little reason to expect that the voting will bring an end to their troubles. The interim government of Gerard Latortue is increasingly impotent. The police, undermanned and poorly equipped, is only marginally effective in parts of Port-au-Prince, the capital.

The U.N. force, euphemistically described as 'peace keepers', is reluctant to confront gangs that control parts of the capital, and many of the bigger towns. Disorder prevails in most parts of the country.

The U.N., the peacekeepers, Mr Latortue and the Americans and French who have installed him are all in no position to generate enthusiasm among Haitians for first registering to vote, and then exercising that vote.

The pain for Haiti is this: the elections are needed to restore a semblance of law and order, to clear the concerns of countries that say they want to help but will not until an elected government is in place, and to give Haitians some breathing space in which they can try to end decades of economically painful instability.

For Haitians to be encouraged, the U.N., the United States and the French must make clear the nature of their continued support for the country after the voting. The elections by themselves will not produce what Haiti needs.

One need is an efficient constabulary that can deal with the rampant gangs, and which must be supported by continued and increased foreign military assistance for some years to come.

Another is the rebuilding and reform of fundamental institutions that have been corrupted, such as the civil service and the judiciary. By all indications, Haitians have lost confidence in these pillars of social order.

A pressing need also is for credible and effective government after the election, and not one that is forced to confine itself to the capital, but which can be nationally effective through restructured provincial councils.

All this must be supported by indications from those who promised an improvement after the departure of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the former president; of the nature and volume of the economic assistance that all agree is the most immediate need for the country.

Haitians, weary of the current chaotic environment, will not be encouraged to vote by being told that the country is getting used guns from the U.S. They will be more inclined to do so if they are told why it will be good for them.

Witnesses: Haiti police kill 5 in raid
By ALFRED DE MONTESQUIOU
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
August 10, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Police stormed a volatile slum in the capital Wednesday in an attack on well-armed gangs that witnesses said left at least five people dead - including a pregnant woman and a teenage boy.

The witnesses said the police, some of them masked, fired indiscriminately during the operation in the Bel-Air slum. Police then stood by as men in civilian clothes attacked suspected gang members loyal to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou said the officers raided Bel-Air to arrest gang members but only opened fire because a mob was trying to lynch some of the suspects before they could be arrested. She said one or two people had been killed, but said she had no further details.

One witness, 25-year-old Genel Gilo, said police fired at him and others as they hid inside a house in the massive slum, killing the teenage boy. They brought the youth to U.N. peacekeepers, using a door as a makeshift stretcher, but he died on the way.

"We brought him back here for his family to find him," Gilo said as he stood near the corpse hours after the raid.

Nearby, Peterson Larose, 18, wept as he described how the civilians accompanying the officers stabbed to death his 17-year-old pregnant girlfriend.

Witnesses said the civilians who came with the officers lynched three other people as police watched. Video footage taken by a news agency appeared to support their account.

Human rights groups have long accused Haiti's police force of killing Aristide supporters under the pretext of restoring order to the violent capital.

In a report last month, the human rights group Amnesty international said Haiti's ill-equipped police force executes and arbitrarily arrests people with impunity. It also criticized the U.N. for not preventing such police action.

The 7,600-member peacekeeping mission is intensifying operations to stop a wave of shootings and kidnappings that could threaten November elections meant to replace the interim government set up after the February 2004 rebellion that forced Aristide into exile.

Haiti: Ex-president Aristide's party signs up for elections
China View
August 9, 2005

HAVANA, Aug. 8 (Xinhuanet) -- Representatives of the Lavalas Family Party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti signed up Monday for elections scheduled for later this year.

Former legislators of the party went to the office of the Acting Electoral Council to sign up as the procedures required for the registration of the party, according to reports from Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti.

To the moment, as many as 63 parties have been registered for the upcoming elections, though the international community has called for the fusion of political forces.

Last week, Juan Gabriel Valdes, UN special envoy to Haiti, asked the Lavalas Family Party to register for the elections.

He said "the registration of Lavalas Family Party is essential for the elections."

Haiti is to hold municipal elections on Oct. 9, followed by legislative and presidential elections on Nov. 13. If needed, a runoff will be held on Dec. 18.

Since the 2004 ouster of ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is now in exile in South Africa, more than 1,000 people have died in violence and clashes between the police and the ex-president's followers. Enditem

Philippines hunts deserters from Haiti mission
Reuters
Wed Aug 10, 2005

MANILA (Reuters) - The American dream may have been too much of a magnet for two Filipino peacekeepers who failed to return to duty in Haiti after a rest break in the United States.

"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.

The United States is home to about 3 million Filipinos who left their country in search of a better life.

Lucero said the Philippine army had "taken steps to arrest the two deserters," who disappeared during two weeks of leave in Florida in April.

Earlier that month, a Filipino sergeant was killed in an attack on a United Nations peacekeeping checkpoint in the impoverished Cite Soleil neighborhood, one of Haiti's most dangerous areas.

The Philippines sent a 135-member peacekeeping team to Haiti in December 2004 to help U.N. forces curb political unrest ahead of elections later this year.

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.

Lucero said the army would seek to have the passports of the two missing soldiers canceled and ask U.S. authorities to find and deport them to face a military trial.

"They have given an awful name to our mission in Haiti," he said.

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Aristide party faction to run in Haiti elections

09 Aug 2005

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug 9 (Reuters) - A moderate faction of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party has registered for general elections later this year, but it was unclear whether its radical members would participate.

The country's electoral officials also said on Tuesday that local government elections, due to be held on Oct. 9, would be postponed -- a sign of the troubles that Haiti faces organizing a vote amid political and gang violence that has killed some 900 people since September.

But officials refused to delay legislative and presidential elections in November, which are seen by the United Nations as key to restoring democracy.

Aristide, a former priest credited with helping to end the Duvalier dictatorship, was ousted in February 2004 by an armed revolt, facing growing accusations of corruption and despotism and pressure from the United States and France to quit.

But many of Haiti's poor masses still support him and the country has been riven by violence since he fled, despite the presence of around 7,500 U.N. peacekeepers and police.

A win by his Lavalas Family party could be embarrassing for Washington, which spearheaded international opposition to Aristide. A victory would open the way for Aristide to return to Haiti.

"We registered to participate in the election, which we will win, in order to end the political persecutions, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the summary executions our members and sympathizers have been subject to," Rudy Herivaux, a spokesman for the Lavalas faction, said.

"It would have been totally absurd of us to refuse to participate in an election we can win," Herivaux told Reuters, saying victory would allow for the return of all political exiles, including Aristide, who is in South Africa.

Members of the moderate faction within Lavalas, led by former senator Yvon Feuille and others, said the decision to run in the election was not unanimous. But they are in discussion with more radical factions of Lavalas that have refused to participate unless Aristide is allowed to return.

Leaders of the radical group within Lavalas said they would meet on Wednesday to decide their position.

U.N. representative Juan Gabriel Valdes welcomed the decision for the Lavalas to run, and warned that any attempt to prevent anyone from participating in the elections would not be tolerated.

The legislative and presidential elections are set for Nov. 13, with a runoff on Dec. 18.

According to the latest figures released by the Electoral Council, 1.7 million out of Haiti's 4.5 million eligible voters have registered for the elections.

Haiti: 29 Members of Congress pressure Bush for the release of political prisoner Father Gerard Jean-Juste

Haiti Action Committee

August 12, 2005

Washington, D.C. -- Today, Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) sent a letter to President Bush, urging him to take action to obtain the release of Father Gerard Jean-Juste from prison in Haiti. A total of 29 Members of Congress signed the Congresswoman's letter. Copies of the letter were sent to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Special Representative Juan Gabriel Valdés, and Ambassador James Foley, the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti. The text of the letter follows:

We write to express our profound concerns about the unjust imprisonment of Father Gerard Jean-Juste in Haiti. We urge you to take action at once to seek his immediate and unconditional release from prison.

Father Jean-Juste is a widely-respected Catholic priest and a courageous advocate for peace and human rights in Haiti. During the 1970's, he founded the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami, Florida, where he worked to provide assistance to refugees who were fleeing persecution under the Duvalier regime. He returned to Haiti in 1991 and currently serves as the pastor of Saint Claire Church in Port-au-Prince and runs a soup kitchen for impoverished children in his parish. Fr. Jean-Juste has always spoken out forcefully against all forms of violence.

Father Jean-Juste was arrested on July 21, 2005, while attending the funeral for Jacques Roche, a Haitian journalist who was kidnapped, held for ransom and then murdered. Haitian police claimed he was arrested because a "public clamor" at the funeral accused him of murdering Jacques Roche, although he was in Miami at the time of the murder. He currently is being detained in the Haitian National Penitentiary.

Amnesty International has determined that Father Jean-Juste is a prisoner of conscience, who is detained solely because he has peacefully exercised his right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International has urged that he be immediately and unconditionally released.

We respectfully request that you urge the Interim Government of Haiti to release Father Jean-Juste immediately and unconditionally. We appreciate your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Maxine Waters Jan Schakowsky Barbara Lee
John Conyers Charles Rangel Barney Frank
Lynn Woolsey Sherrod Brown Maurice Hinchey
Sheila Jackson-Lee Corrine Brown Earl Blumenauer
Eleanor Holmes Norton Edolphus Towns Melvin L. Watt
Tammy Baldwin Kendrick B. Meek Raúl Grijalva
Donna Christensen Al Green Julia Carson
Carolyn Kilpatrick Gregory Meeks Dennis Kucinich

Donald Payne James P. McGovern Robert Wexler
Major R. Owens Bob Filner

Haiti to Postpone October Local Elections

By Associated Press

August 9, 2005, 10:25 PM EDT

Newsday.com

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Local elections scheduled for this fall will be postponed until after legislative and presidential elections, Haitian officials said Tuesday.

The electoral council decided to postpone the Oct. 9 local elections until late December so that the nation could better prepare for the November legislative and presidential elections, said interim Chief of Cabinet Michel Brunache.

The presidential and legislative votes will be moved up from Nov. 13 to Nov. 6, Brunache added. A runoff presidential election is scheduled for Dec. 11, he said.

The changes will not affect the interim government's goal of handing over power by Feb. 7, said Max Mathurin, the head of the Provisional Electoral Council.

The elections are the first since Haiti's first freely elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted following a violent rebellion in February 2004.

About 1.5 million people, or a quarter of the electorate, have registered to vote so far, Mathurin said.

Can Haiti Hold Elections in 2005?
08 Aug 2005 09:39:00 GMT
International Crisis Group
Reuters AlertNet
International Crisis Group - Belgium
Website: <http://www.crisisgroup.org>

Port-au-Prince/Brussels, 3 August 2005: Extraordinary efforts are needed in the next few months to turn a bad situation around or Haiti's elections will have to be postponed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*Read the full Crisis Group briefing on our website: <http://www.crisisgroup.org>

OAS considers Haiti's elections as fundamental
China View
2005-08-11

HAVANA, Aug. 10 (Xinhuanet) -- The coming elections are "fundamental" to improve the political and economic situation of Haiti, said the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) Jose Miguel Insulza Wednesday.

Insulza, the former Interior Minister of Chile, met with Evans Paul, the Haitian presidential candidate for the political party Alliance for Democracy, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. After the meeting, Insulza told the press that the OAS was working closely with the United Nations and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in order to ensure that the elections would take place under the best possible conditions.

He also told a press conference at the Dominican Foreign Ministry that he believed the elections could help Haiti create the foundations necessary to recover institutionalization and to improve social conditions.

Paul, for his part, told the press that they discussed governance in Haiti and the need to hold "transparent elections."

Haiti's electoral commission decided to postpone local elections, previously slated for Oct. 9, to late December in order to give the country more time to prepare for the legislative and presidential polls, which will be advanced to Nov. 6 from Nov. 13. A presidential runoff has been set for Dec. 11.

Meanwhile, the commission extended the deadline to register for the elections from Tuesday to Sept. 15 in order to allow at least 3.5 million voters to go to the polling stations. Enditem

**From lawless homeland, demand for ransom
Haitian relatives highlight wave of abductions by gangs
By Yvonne Abraham,
Boston Globe
August 15, 2005**

One evening in late June, Roberthe got the call everyone with relatives in Haiti has come to dread.
com

Armed men had snatched three of her close family members from their car on a busy street in Port-Au-Prince. The kidnapers wanted \$300,000 to release them. If Roberthe and her family did not raise the money in a few days, their relatives would die.

"It's like our life was stopped," said Roberthe, who did not want her last name published because she is afraid for her family's safety. "It was very hard for my family and I. . . . We were crying and praying, because we were waiting for a miracle to happen."

Dozens of people are kidnapped in Haiti each week, victims of a crime that has become an industry in the desperate and deteriorating Caribbean nation. The epidemic of abductions is the talk of Boston's 15,000-strong Haitian community, the graphic stories passed around at the Haitian churches and at a Bon Appetit restaurant in Dorchester.

Because so many Haitians have relatives in the United States, each of the kidnappings touches the community here. Many people seem to know someone who has been a victim, or a relative who has received frenzied calls from Haiti begging them to help raise thousands of dollars. Few who have ransomed relatives are willing to speak about it, afraid that those who remain in Haiti are still vulnerable and that the gangs will come back for them.

"This is affecting the community a lot," said Jean Peres Nazaire, a Mattapan doctor who treats many Haitians and whose classmate from medical school was recently kidnapped and killed in Haiti. "It's terrible. A lot of people are getting depressed; a lot of people cannot go home. People's minds are affected."

Fewer local Haitians dare venture home to see relatives, or even to attend funerals. They say they would be easy targets: The violence in the nation of 7.6 million has become too commonplace, too random.

"When I was in Haiti [in June], I nearly got snatched," said Pierre Nicolas, 50, a math and science teacher who has lived in Milton for 27 years. "A band of seven people, armed with the latest machine guns, they circled the people with me. If they knew I was from the US, they would have kidnapped me, but I was wearing dirty jeans and a T-shirt. Maybe that saved my life."

Mary Cantave, a room attendant at a Boston hotel, is too afraid to go to Haiti, though she had planned to spend a two-week vacation visiting her sick sister there this summer. "I need to go," she said, tears rolling down her cheeks as she stood outside the Haitian Consulate on Boylston Street on a recent

sweltering afternoon. "She is in [the] hospital; she has collapsed because of the pressure. People tell me, 'Don't go, the country is too hot.' I want to go, but I'm scared."Continued...

Most families of people who have been kidnapped do not bother to go to the police: Instead, they immediately accede to the gangs' demands. A United Nations peacekeeping force of 7,600 is stretched thin, barely able to contain myriad outbreaks of violence in the nation. A police force of 3,000 is vastly inadequate to address the country's crime problems, say those who have visited recently.

Unemployment in Haiti has hit 70 percent. Some families are so poor that they eat cakes made from soil, butter, and water.

Haitians in Boston often express frustration that the international community has done little to alleviate the nation's problems. They have held rallies outside Haitian consulates and prayer meetings like the one attended by several hundred at Roxbury Community College on Thursday night. So far, they say, their attempts to shine a light on Haiti's problems have failed to bring more of a commitment from developed countries.

"This is a lawless society and a failed state," said US Representative William D. Delahunt, who visited Haiti in April. "This is not about ideology. It's about survival in the worst of all possible circumstances. There is no rule of law, no police force as we know it: They are obviously overwhelmed and understaffed, and there is considerable corruption."

Without anywhere else to turn, those who want to save captive relatives appeal to Haitians in the United States.

After she got the call saying her relatives had been kidnapped, Roberthe and 10 family members gathered in her mother's living room in Boston. They managed to come up with \$80,000 between them. They knew the kidnappers would accept that amount. But even so, they worried that their relatives could be killed anyway, "because when they take some member of your family, sometimes you give the money, and they are still killing them," Roberthe said.

But as Roberthe and her family were preparing to transfer the money, a police raid in Haiti killed seven of the captors and liberated her relatives. Roberthe said she knows how lucky her family is, but she said her relatives are even more vulnerable now.

Roberthe declined to say where her mother lives, and which of her relatives were kidnapped, because she said she is afraid kidnappers will be able to identify them and go after them again.

"I am afraid for them," she said. "They are hiding now. For myself, for all my family, life will never be the same again. Those kidnappers, I call them terrorists. I want President Bush and [UN Secretary General] Kofi Annan and everybody in power to do something immediately."

Three weeks ago, Gerthy Lahens was contacted by relatives of a 19-year-old man kidnapped at a bus station in Port-Au-Prince. The community activist helped coordinate the family's response, spending hours every day on the phone with the man's frenzied grandmother and cousin. She urged them to

borrow the \$10,000 ransom from whomever they could. She would help them repay the loans by raising money from her contacts here, she told them.

"I was crying everywhere," Lahens said. "I couldn't sleep. I have a 20-year-old son. Everybody seemed not to know what to do."

The man's cousin, who lives in Boston, feared retaliation, and refused to be interviewed for this story.

The money was raised and sent to the man's mother in northern Haiti. She traveled hours to deliver his ransom. When the kidnapers did not meet her, she was terrified they had killed him. A couple of days later, she discovered that the police had raided their hideout, killed some of the kidnapers, and were holding her son for her.

"I know of many, many other cases," Lahens said. "My son's godfather, they killed four members of his family. They had no choice but to pay the ransom, thank God they did not harm them. Just imagine those poor people who have no choice but to live there. People here talk about it every day. They say, 'Please, God, don't let me go there.' "

But Lahens continues to visit Haiti, to do relief work. In the past, the violence in Haiti was mostly political, she said, as loyalists to former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted in February 2004, battled his opponents. But as chaos has descended upon Haiti, poverty has surpassed politics among kidnapers' motivations, and made their crimes more frequent and random.

Yvonne Abraham can be reached at abraham@globe.com.

Haiti tense as key election approaches

BY GARY MARX

Chicago Tribune

Kansas City Star

August 9, 2005

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He was afraid, and he told me he was going to stop doing the television program," said Roche's 24-year-old fiance, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal. "He felt his life was in danger."

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

"Everyone contributed money, even the person who worked in the (newspaper's) kitchen," said Quesnel Durosier, a 31-year-old Le Matin reporter.

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

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

"There was no more hope," Durosier recalled.

Lucius said a gang leader known as Tou Tou, who remains at large, ordered the execution.

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

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

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

**2 soldiers of peacekeeping
force in Haiti hunted in US**

By Anthony Vargas

The Manila Times

August 11, 2005

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines is tracking two members of its Haiti peacekeeping force who failed to report back to their unit after going on a rest and recreation trip to the United States.

A two-man investigating team is searching for Navy Lt. Senior Grade Valintin Memphin and Marine Sgt. Geoffry Geslani in two US east coast states.

Military documents said the two officers failed to return to their station in Haiti after finishing their mission and pleasure trip to the United States.

Col. Daniel Lucero, head of the Haiti peacekeeping unit, said Memphin and Geslani could have turned into illegal economic migrants in the United States.

“They have given an awful name to our UN mission in Haiti. They have breached the trust of their commander,” Lucero told reporters in Camp Aguinaldo.

Lucero said the Armed Forces had taken steps to have the two soldiers brought back to the Philippines with the help of its unit’s counterpart in the United States.

“Coordination has been made with our UN Permanent Mission in New York and with the Department of Foreign Affairs for the cancellation of their passports,” Lucero said.

The peacekeeping contingent returned to the Philippines last month following a yearlong duty on the Caribbean island which had been racked by a civil war.

In April the contingent lost a member when a Haitian gangster went on a shooting rampage. Killed was Army Staff Sgt. Antonio Batomalaque, who was manning his post in Port Au Prince.

USTDA PROMOTES DEVELOPMENT IN HAITI THROUGH STUDY OF PRIORITY ELECTRICITY PROJEC

Aug. 9 2005

**Press Release - U.S. Trade and Development Agency
Harold Doan and Associates Ltd.**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) Director Thelma J. Askey announced the award of a \$350,000 technical assistance grant to Electricité d’Haiti (EDH), Haiti’s national electric utility, to address the country’s urgent need for accessible and reliable electric power. In particular, the grant will support EDH’s planning process for the development of electricity generation, transmission, and distribution projects.

The grant represents USTDA’s largest investment in Haiti to date and reflects the agency’s commitment to support that country’s economic growth. To confer the grant, Director Askey and EDH Director General Jean Errol Morose signed an agreement on behalf of the U.S. government and EDH, respectively.

Currently, only 11 percent of Haiti’s population is connected to electric lines and less than one-third of Haiti’s installed generation capacity actually reaches end users. To address these issues, the USTDA-funded technical assistance will assess the current state of Haiti’s electricity sector; recommend priority electricity generation, transmission, and distribution projects for action; and assist EDH in developing a strategy for financing technically and economically viable projects.

The opportunity to provide the technical assistance will be competed on the Federal Business Opportunities website (www.fedbizopps.gov). Interested U.S. firms should submit proposals according to the instructions contained in the Federal Business Opportunities announcement. EDH will select the U.S. contractor that will provide the technical assistance.

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency advances economic development and U.S. commercial interests in developing and middle-income countries. The agency funds various forms of technical assistance, feasibility studies, training, orientation visits, and business workshops that support the development of a modern infrastructure and a fair and open trading environment. USTDA’s strategic use of foreign assistance funds to support sound investment policy and decision-making in host countries creates an enabling environment for trade, investment, and sustainable economic development. In carrying out its mission, USTDA gives emphasis to economic sectors that may benefit from U.S. exports of goods and services.

Aristide party faction to run in Haiti elections

Staff and agencies

09 August, 2005

By Joseph Guylor Delva

Leading the Charge, Australia

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A moderate faction of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party has registered for general elections later this year, but it was unclear whether its radical members would participate.

The country's electoral officials also said on Tuesday that local government elections, due to be held on Oct. 9, would be postponed -- a sign of the troubles that Haiti faces organizing a vote amid political and gang violence that has killed some 900 people since September.

But officials refused to delay legislative and presidential elections in November, which are seen by the United Nations as key to restoring democracy.

Aristide, a former priest credited with helping to end the Duvalier dictatorship, was ousted in February 2004 by an armed revolt, facing growing accusations of corruption and despotism and pressure from the United States and France to quit.

But many of Haiti's poor masses still support him and the country has been riven by violence since he fled, despite the presence of around 7,500 U.N. peacekeepers and police.

A win by his Lavalas Family party could be embarrassing for Washington, which spearheaded international opposition to Aristide. A victory would open the way for Aristide to return to Haiti.

"We registered to participate in the election, which we will win, in order to end the political persecutions, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the summary executions our members and sympathizers have been subject to," Rudy Herivaux, a spokesman for the Lavalas faction, said.

"It would have been totally absurd of us to refuse to participate in an election we can win," Herivaux told Reuters, saying victory would allow for the return of all political exiles, including Aristide, who is in South Africa.

Members of the moderate faction within Lavalas, led by former senator Yvon Feuille and others, said the decision to run in the election was not unanimous. But they are in discussion with more radical factions of Lavalas that have refused to participate unless Aristide is allowed to return.

Leaders of the radical group within Lavalas said they would meet on Wednesday to decide their position.

U.N. representative Juan Gabriel Valdes welcomed the decision for the Lavalas to run, and warned that any attempt to prevent anyone from participating in the elections would not be tolerated.

The legislative and presidential elections are set for Nov. 13, with a runoff on Dec. 18.

According to the latest figures released by the Electoral Council, 1.7 million out of Haiti's 4.5 million eligible voters have registered for the elections.

UN peacekeepers in Haiti release sixth kidnap victim
UN News Centre
9 August 2005

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti, conducting a security search in the Caribbean country's capital, has released a kidnap victim, bringing the total freed to six persons in about seven weeks.

A unit of the Brazilian battalion conducting a cordon-and-search exercise in the Bel Air district of Port-au-Prince yesterday morning found a 41-year-old man who had been in captivity for a fortnight, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) said.

The operation also led to the arrest of 11 members of an armed group, including one woman, it said. They were turned over to the Haitian National Police.

CARICOM losing credibility over Haiti
Caribbean Net News
by Clarence Pilgrim
Tuesday, August 9, 2005

Once again, the leadership of CARICOM missed another opportunity to give tangible and realistic support to the people of Haiti, a CARICOM member since the 2nd of July 2002.

In what some have described as nothing more than “lip service”, the communiqué issued by the recently held meeting by the Heads of Government in St. Lucia, noted with great concern the continuing deterioration of the situation in Haiti in all respects.

In more carefully worded diplomatic language they said that the “widespread abuse of due process and fundamental rights, spiraling crime, in particular kidnapping, lawlessness and acts of violence, along with a lack of improvement in the social and economic situation had made life even more unbearable, especially in the capital”.

With the utmost respect to our CARICOM leaders, this situation has been evident for some time now, and while the CARICOM secretariat do the paper work, this does not hide the fact that very little is being done.

There is no CARICOM initiated recovery or reconstruction assistance plan in place, and there does not even seem to be a complete unity of purpose among the CARICOM leadership! All of this is happening while lives continue to be devastated in a country crying out for our help!

The Heads of Government in what seems like a “token show of assistance,” said it would be ready to support the upcoming elections with technical assistance under the umbrella of MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission In Haiti).

Why hasn't the CARICOM leadership with its collective procrastination over this issue, got serious and devised a workable plan to rescue this nation from it's continued downward spiral into the abyss of social and economic chaos?

When Jean Jacques Dessalines proclaimed Haiti's independence on the 1st January 1804, it marked the beginning of what has become a symbolic moment in the overall advancement of humanity towards freedom.

As one of the oldest independent republics in the hemisphere it is of historic importance as well as economic necessity that CARICOM should consider it as a moral obligation to play a more serious role in ensuring its survival and preparing that nation to receive the full benefits of the CSME and other institutions within the region.

It is my opinion that the root of most of the country's evil stems from poverty and unemployment. This obviously causes social and economic instability.

Caribbean leaders should understand why their shores are being invaded by desperate Haitians. They perilously cross the seas seeking a better way of life and freedom from political prosecution, economic disadvantage or social strife.

Instead of condemning and deporting this exodus like common criminals or animals, there should be a humanitarian understanding of the situation and a measured and well-thought out plan to re-integrate them back into a reasonable environment. Sending back wholesale these suffering souls will be the equivalent in some cases, of giving a death sentence.

With the coming elections it is questionable weather this will really have the desired outcome. With approximately 4.25 million voters, creating a credible voters list in a country that is in need of major infrastructural development in the form of roads, electricity and other utilities and media services, will indeed be a major challenge.

There are some who believe there may be as many as 90 political parties contesting the elections! Progress towards this elections have been slow. Preparing for an election in an unstable political & social environment where even members of MINUSTAH lose their lives, clearly highlights the many obstacles to a timely and well-run elections.

Only what is seen as a free, fair and inclusive elections will satisfy those of us who believe in democracy.

There are individuals that reportedly encourage violent actions by supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Members of the former military and armed gangs with ties to criminal elements such as drug traffickers and illegal arms dealers roam the country.

Also, the continued political demonstrations make the situation even more difficult because they are seemingly manipulated to suit some agendas. Added to this mix of political strife is the reality of serious health related issues including AIDS.

The United Nations estimates that nearly 6% of Haitians are infected with HIV or have Aids. An estimated thousands of people die of Aids every year. The exact figures are not known. It is understood that many people are terrified of revealing their illnesses because they might be discriminated against by their friends, family or employers.

Our Caribbean Heads say with a presumably “straight face” that they reiterate the importance they attach to improvement in the human rights, political, security and economic domains without which there could be neither stability nor the possibility of socio-economic and institutional development, which were so vitally required.

But when our leaders make such statements what do they really mean? Let us be realistic, without meaningful and tangible support for all members of our Caribbean family, then such words will simply be, “blowing in the wind.”

One thing is absolutely clear, there must be full recognition of the fact that there should be constructive engagement with any form of government that exist, civil society and just about any entity which

carries influence. This may be the time to “dance with the devil” to achieve the following specific objectives which includes but is not limited to the following:-

Restoration of a freely and fairly elected government

An end to human rights abuses

Economic Aid

Prosecution of Criminals

Controlling health-threatening epidemics

Two things are clear, if the CARICOM leadership does not stop waffling on the issue of Haiti, then the real danger is that the whole meaning, purpose and spirit of signing the treaty of Chaguaramas will be lost and the human suffering will continue and get worse.

I urge the new CARICOM Chairman Dr Kenny Anthony, to be truly proactive and make the issue of Haiti a top item on the agenda of CARICOM. Failing to do this may have repercussions far and wide.

UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti continues fight to eliminate abductions

UN News Centre

Juan Gabriel Valdés

10 August 2005

The United Nations peacekeepers patrolling the Bel Air shanty town have continued their fight against kidnapping in the district by finding a man who had been seized the day before and they said abduction has decreased significantly since the middle of last month.

A unit of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti's (MINUSTAH) Brazilian battalion approached a suspicious-looking group yesterday and the members fled, leaving behind the kidnap victim, a man in his 30s, the mission said. He was the second person found and released in just 24 hours and the seventh in about seven weeks.

At a later news conference, MINUSTAH chief Juan Gabriel Valdés, saying that violence would lead only to defeat, appealed to armed groups to disarm and restore their legal status. MINUSTAH was prepared to talk with those implicated in violence and offer them the chance to join the disarmament, demobilization and re-integration programme, he said.

The Security Council voted to establish MINUSTAH in April of last year after armed rebels threatened to march on the capital, Port-au-Prince, in February and elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left the country.

Mr. Valdés visited two voter registration centres yesterday and expressed satisfaction at seeing the large number of people waiting to register. "Haiti's hope lies first of all in the hands of its inhabitants," he said.

He welcomed the Government's decision to extend the voter registration period by six weeks until 15 September, saying the extension would increase participation in the November and December polls.

He also met with women who would be candidates in the upcoming elections and said the women would be given a larger framework to express their views, including taking part in educational broadcasts and contributing to brochures aimed at women across the Caribbean country.

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Prensa Latina
Juan Gabriel Valdés
10 August 2005

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Port-au-Prince mayor visits Spring Valley
The JournalNews.com
August 10, 2005

The mayor of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, requested continued local support of her nation yesterday during an appearance in Spring Valley to inaugurate the new offices of Haitian-American Voters and Entrepreneurs National.

Mayor Carline Simon thanked about 30 people — including Haitian Consul General Felix Augustin and Ramapo Supervisor Christopher St. Lawrence — who had gathered at the new HAVEN headquarters at the 83 S. Main St. offices of village attorney Alan Simon.

In her remarks, the visiting mayor expressed her full support of the Better Community Coalition ticket of Bettie Brown, a Spring Valley trustee running for village mayor with Dantes Jeantel for trustee and Alan Simon for village justice.

The three were ardent supporters of the Haitian community, she said.

"We are asking for Haitians to support these people," the mayor said in Creole through an English interpreter.

Besides Brown, others challenging Spring Valley Mayor George Darden are Demeza DelHomme, Vilair Fonvil, Allan A. Thompson Sr. and Yitzchock Ullman.

Challengers to Trustees Philip M. Rosenthal and Noramie F. Jasmin are, in addition to Jeantel, Floyd Morse, Oristil O. Orisca, Darlene Roc and Constance Williams.

Alan Simon, Jerrold W. Miles and Lincy M. Thomas are opposing Village Justices Mary L. Nicolas-Brewster and Susan M. Smith.

HAVEN's president, the Rev. Jacques Michel, thanked Carline Simon for helping cut the ribbon at HAVEN's new home and Alan Simon for donating the space.

HAVEN has been processing applications for Haitian passports for one year. The service has helped about 25 people per week with passport requests and power-of-attorney matters, Augustin said, declaring the service a success.

Augustin also thanked Michel for spearheading a local effort to get passport services in Rockland, acknowledged the generous efforts of local leaders in support of Haiti and praised Carline Simon for her strong leadership.

"I just want to baptize her as the Iron Lady of Port-au-Prince," he said. "She is so good. She is loved by the people of Port-au-Prince."

The city, Haiti's capital, has about 2 million residents.

Alan Simon said he would provide HAVEN with indefinite free use of office space and that he was proud to offer his assistance to the community.

St. Lawrence, who established a Haitian Relief Task Force in town last July to coordinate efforts for hurricane-ravaged Haiti, pledged his continued support to the impoverished Caribbean island nation.

The task force sent four shipping containers of goods to Haiti, he said. The supervisor also said he planned to visit the mayor in September, at which time he would donate a surplus town garbage truck to Port-au-Prince.

While he admitted one truck would not make a great deal of difference to Haiti's need for proper garbage collection, he said the mayor had requested one. The gift, he said, was another step in Ramapo's outreach efforts to Haiti, which he said would include environmental and recycling education.

As the news conference ended, a group of six men, walking back and forth in front of the offices, roundly condemned the event. In particular, several appeared incensed at Carline Simon's presence in Spring Valley.

"Carline Simon, terrorist!" bellowed Jacques Charlot, a Spring Valley resident and native of Haiti. "Jacques Michel, puppet!"

"Carline Simon, stop killing Haitians!" Charlot said, joined by Phillippe Chatelain, another village resident from Haiti.

Officials decried the protest, denied the allegations and dismissed the six as supporters of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the ousted Haitian president.

The protesters, waving Haitian flags and clutching fliers describing atrocities in Haiti, said they were motivated solely by the desire to expose the Port-au-Prince mayor, whom they accused of being on a fundraising visit.

Carline Simon said she was in the county to visit the Haitian community and seek support for Port-au-Prince.

Two Spring Valley police officers repeatedly cautioned the protesters against creating a public disturbance.

Dantes Jeantel spoke with the protesters, some of whom he described as friends.

"I told them, this is not a political event," Jeantel said. "This is passport services, which HAVEN provides, and people need passports, no matter what, if they want to go to Haiti."

In June, HAVEN lost its old office because of a dramatic rent increase. Jeantel said yesterday was "a good day for the Haitian community."

Nanuet resident Jean Nicolas praised yesterday's opening.

"I think it's a good opportunity for Haitians to have an office here for their passports and whatever they need," said Nicolas, who is from Haiti.

World Council of Churches Calls on Haitians to Build New Nation

Haitians have been told they should work together to build a new and alternative nation by general secretary Kobia of the World Council of Churches.

Wednesday, August 10 , 2005, 15:05 (UK)

Christian Today, UK and World News Every Day

WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia with Haiti's interim president Boniface Alexandre (right) at the presidential palace on 5 August 2005. (wcc-coe.org)

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Rev Dr Samuel Kobia told church leaders and members during an ecumenical service at the Methodist Church of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Sunday that Haitians should work together to build a new and alternative nation.

Rev Kobia said the challenge facing Haiti was one of building reconciliation and dignity from “dislocated communities” and fear. “We are called to work to transform Haiti ... from a violent to a peaceful state,” he said.

Haiti’s interim president Boniface Alexandre was promised by Kobia in a meeting last week that Haiti’s “serious problems” would be on the agenda of the Council’s forthcoming assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006.

Also present at the meeting was the Protestant Federation of Haiti (FPH) general secretary Mr Édouard Paultre, among others. The FPH is an associate council of the WCC.

Kobia also said that WCC member churches would be consulted on how best they and the Council can support Haiti’s transition to democracy and bring an end to the country’s long history of violence and poverty.

Kobia responded to the president’s invitation to the WCC to help monitor the presidential elections scheduled for 7 February 2006 saying, “We are aware of your efforts and are ready to offer our assistance.”

As part of his visit to Haiti, General Secretary Kobia has also met with representatives of Haiti’s churches and non-governmental organisations to discuss the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence 2001–2010: Churches seeking reconciliation and peace.

Kobia also visited a church-related social project in Port-au-Prince, as well as meeting with church leaders and civil society representatives to discuss the WCC, the 9th Assembly, and ecumenical solidarity with Haiti.

"My land, my voice, my future"

In lawless, violent Haiti, a petite powerhouse named Aricia Fleurimond is giving women a secure foothold on their own land.

**By Rachel Wallace-Oberle, produced with the support of The Government of Canada through The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
Homemakers.com**

Aricia Fleurimond is famous. In the mountains of Cooperative Kounol near the village of Djot, Haiti, where she tends her crops, she is a hero -- a woman who led a coup d'état that ousted a corrupt cooperative president, a man. Wearing a pair of men's dusty loafers, Aricia stands four feet, five inches, hardly what I had expected. Her blue skirt and red blouse have been laundered to an almost translucent thinness; her white purse is child-size. Aricia doesn't look like a revolutionary, but her language is passionate and beneath her calm exterior, a fire burns.

It's unseasonably cool; Aricia and I and our translator shiver in the mountain air. Typical of Haitian hospitality, co-op members have enthusiastically dragged rickety wooden chairs behind their silo for us. The small rectangular building constructed of cement blocks and roofed with tin provides shelter from the wind. Just beyond our feet, the narrow lip of land where we sit drops away sharply.

I am here as a representative of the Foundation for International Development Assistance (FIDA), a nongovernmental body that is Canada's working arm of Productive Cooperatives Haiti (PCH). It receives funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to help to establish and support agricultural co-ops in rural Haiti.

"I stayed short"

I begin by asking Aricia when she was born. French is the official language of Haiti's urban educated but is not spoken or understood in rural villages; she replies in Creole. Our translator explains that it was in June 1958.

At the age of six or seven, Aricia went to work in the gardens and fields with her father. Often the whole family went; Aricia, her three sisters and brother would labour until nightfall in the fields, and their mother would cook meals there. "I didn't grow up well," she says. "I stayed short. I didn't eat well as a child; sometimes I ate just once a day. Sometimes I ate cornmeal twice a day." Attending school was not an option for Aricia. "I always wanted to go to school and get an education. I looked at other girls who went away and got to leave the area, but my parents never had the means to let that happen." She felt tied down, restricted. And ashamed. At the age of 14 or 15, she resigned herself to working in the fields.

Little has changed since Aricia's hardscrabble childhood. Women still slash weeds with machetes and gather them so the men can turn the soil. Then they plant seeds and two weeks after the crop has sprouted, they weed the fields. It takes about 20 women two days to plant a hectare. The challenges in these remote mountainous areas are formidable; electricity is not available and tractors cannot negotiate the terrain. Implements are picks and hoes. The few books that exist are written in French, not Creole. Learning occurs by oral repetition, and education usually ends after Grade 5.

"She works all of that"

Aricia works as part of a konbit, a team of workers who hire themselves out to prepare, till and plant one another's land. She also owns farmland, which is a requirement in order to be part of a cooperative. I inquire about the size of the field Aricia works. She points. I don't understand -- we are surrounded by mountains; terraced down their steep sides are crops spreading out in every direction for miles. She points again and then makes a broad sweeping motion with her arm. "Where is it?" I ask, puzzled.

"She works all of that," our translator replies.

And this is when I weep. The garden plot I'd imagined Aricia tilling has suddenly been replaced with countless hectares of back-breaking labour. We are overlooking an endless expanse of pigeon peas, beans and corn; a clear picture of Aricia's existence emerges. She gazes into the distance and waits as I try to compose myself.

This is a nation still living a turbulent history. Under slavery and colonial rule -- first Spanish, then French -- resources were pillaged and natives and slaves alike perished. Within this environment of abuse and hatred, a race of mulattoes emerged, creating a class system that remains in Haiti today -- a minority of light-skinned, French-speaking Haitians consider themselves superior to their dark-skinned, Creole-speaking counterparts.

Haiti's successful slave revolt of 1804 resulted in independence, yet the country's problems continued. American occupation and military rule in the early 1900s brought some improvements, such as paved roads and hospitals, but once again those in power were white, exacerbating the distinction between light- and dark-skinned Haitians.

In 2004 corrupt regimes and political unrest culminated in bloody uprisings and an exiled president. Haiti has never been free of anarchy or violence; such instability continues to contribute to corruption, poverty and illiteracy.

Life expectancy is little more than 56 years

Approximately 65 per cent of all Haitians are illiterate; however, this figure escalates to 95 per cent in rural areas, such as those where Aricia lives. For Haitian women, life expectancy is little more than 56 years. Seventy per cent of these women experience gender-based violence, including sexual assault, in their lives, an accepted means for men to maintain authority and exercise their frustrations; 15 per cent of these crimes occur before women reach 15 years of age and three per cent occur before 10 years of age. As a result, AIDS is increasing rapidly, especially among vulnerable young women.

The women of Haiti live daily with the reality of abuse and vulnerability, yet some of the stories that emerge from this land of contradictions are ones of resilience, faith, creativity and pride. They are stories such as Aricia's that paint shining pictures of hope upon dark pages.

When Aricia heard about PCH, she was intrigued. Three years ago she invested 25 gourdes, about five Haitian dollars, or 75 cents Canadian, the amount required to become a member of her cooperative.

"I'm the kind of person who likes to ask questions," she says coyly. At a general assembly meeting, she dared to question the president of Cooperative Victorieuse about the mismanagement of funds. It was a

bold move, especially for a woman; in a lawless country such as Haiti, to challenge someone in a position of authority can mean risking one's life.

"He squirmed. I wouldn't give up."

The president was the co-op's most educated and important individual; because of his powerful position he gave unfair advantage to his family members, buying only their seeds and crops at the exclusion of other members. Those in Aricia's co-op did as they were told; however, Aricia is not a typical member. When the president did not provide her with satisfactory answers, she continued to challenge him over the weeks and months, refusing to back down. "He squirmed. I wouldn't give up. And then, no one voted him in again," she says with a hint of triumph in her voice.

Before joining the cooperative, Aricia could recognize simple numbers and write her name, but now she can write a letter to her brother who lives in the village of Cabaret and she can read. As a member, Aricia participated in literacy classes, learning mathematics and how to read and write by using books created by PCH staff. These materials are written in Creole and use phrases, language, scenarios and role-playing relevant to everyday life. Through other educational courses offered in her co-op, Aricia learned about reforestation, agricultural techniques, conflict resolution and how to compost, increase crop yields and take inventory of a silo. She continues her studies, nurturing the expectation that her eight children will graduate from school; her eldest is about to finish high school.

Betsy Wall, FIDA's executive director in Waterloo, Ont., knows firsthand how hope can be passed from one generation to another. Betsy's parents, Jack and Anne Wall, moved to Haiti in 1984 after nearly 20 years of occasional visits. They retired and returned to Canada in 2000, where they continue to be passionate advocates for the work of the organization. Central to the Wall family's personal beliefs is the ideal that a more peaceful and balanced world can only be achieved when we provide resources to equip people with knowledge and education that affirm self-worth.

The cooperative structure teaches that all life is valuable

Betsy and her parents know this cannot be accomplished if one gender is unequal to the other. In Haiti women are generally regarded as chattel; their purpose is to work and produce children. The cooperative structure teaches that all life is valuable and worthy and provides a forum for men and women to come together as equals on many levels: the equal opportunity of one vote, of expressing opinion, assuming leadership, having access to resources, and investing and receiving dividends. For Haitians this is a new way of thinking, of trusting, of working together.

The mission of PCH is to enable people to help themselves by working in active partnership within the cooperatives. Members are provided with training to generate more income by pooling their resources. They have access to credit at reasonable rates, good-quality seeds and facilities in which to store their seeds. As a result, crop yields improve and produce can be sold when prices are high, enabling members to send their children to school and purchase medicines when required.

In its 20-year history, PCH has provided its services to 37 agricultural cooperatives. Currently its sphere of involvement focuses on 14 existing co-ops in three areas. The mountainous area of Fond Baptiste has a population of approximately 30,000 and successfully cultivates black beans, corn, cabbage, broccoli, potatoes and coffee. The coastal region of Haute St. Marc lies within the Artibonite Valley and produces rice, beans, peanuts, sugarcane and corn. Dessables/Brely, an inhospitable area of

desert plains, is currently experimenting with watermelons and sorghum. Four other cooperatives are in the embryonic stage.

No choice but to trust verbal agreements

To succeed, the cooperatives require trust as well as equal participation by members. This can be difficult to achieve because low levels of literacy and mathematics skills are major barriers. Those who cannot read or write have no choice but to trust verbal agreements. This requires a tremendous effort that desperately poor people cannot afford to make. Subsistence farming means living hand to mouth; trusting someone can mean the difference between eating and starving. Survival in this context is the social problem, and betrayal has been the history.

PCH practises an integrated approach of health, agriculture and cooperative development; it's this philosophy that has produced change. FIDA provides funding in partnership with the Canadian government agency CIDA to all cooperative activities, including the innovative literacy component for adults introduced in 2000. This successful literacy program uses a curriculum based on co-op and community themes and reaches a high number of both men and women, who must be co-op members in order to participate; overall the percentage of female involvement is approximately 64 per cent, a major achievement because women are usually denied access to education. When an impoverished illiterate peasant can sign his or her name and no longer needs to use an X, a reality for the vast majority of rural Haitians, transformation begins. Newfound dignity and confidence emerge.

At Cooperative Bab, in the area of Gwayavye, several hours drive from Port-au-Prince, Saintana Racine and Maguerite Metelus can't stop smiling. The two friends are members of the co-op's Alpha class, which is called Kris Kapable, or Christ is able. Since the class began a year ago, they've been learning to read and write. Saintana, who is a member of the cooperative, enjoys mathematics most; Maguerite loves every subject. They have never missed a class and believe that if you really want to do something, you'll find the time to do it. Maguerite's parents encouraged her to join the literacy classes. "This is the first time we've had the opportunity to read and write as adults," she explains. "In a very distant community there was a class, but it was too far away. We're so happy this class came here."

The two women don't know how old they are, but Maguerite, who appears to be in her 30s or early 40s, jokes she is 27 because that's what her husband tells her. Saintana has two children, one of whom sidles up to her shyly as we talk and tries to hide in her skirt. She says that she didn't go to school when she was young, and now she is taking the opportunity to learn everything she can. "I want to learn to read and write because if you can't do that, you're nothing," she says. "I already know the letters of the alphabet and can read and write my name. I'm not very good at it yet, but at least I can do that much. I'm so happy to hold a pen in my hand and put it to paper! My heart is fresh!" Maguerite agrees. "It's a beautiful feeling to go somewhere and sign your name. It's a pleasure to read and write, and it's opening a lot of doors and providing opportunities for the future because people who are looking for a worker won't hire someone who can't read and write."

In the four years that she has worked with PCH, Janet Bauman, a Canadian aid worker and PCH country manager based in Port-au-Prince has seen many lives dramatically altered. She has more than 16 years of experience living in both Sudan and Haiti. Janet is inspired that Saintana and Maguerite are reaching for their dreams and says: "We feel we have achieved our goal when we succeed in helping a woman realize that she has the ability and resources within herself to transform her life.

"This small act enables her to face her husband with self-worth instead of shame."

"The woman who has just learned to read and write can sign her name on her marriage certificate instead of stamping her thumb on the ink pad. This small act enables her to face her husband with self-worth instead of shame. Her comportment will change and she will not submit to beatings from her husband."

Saintana is certain others are encouraged when they discover she has learned to read and write. "It inspires them to do the same things," she says earnestly. "My husband can recognize numbers and he told me to go. He is happy that I go and that is why I'm allowed to go. If he didn't want me to do this, I wouldn't be able to." She thinks for a few moments and then, unable to contain herself, adds fervently, "I want this so badly that if my husband didn't want me to go, I would get up really early and prepare all the food for the day so he wouldn't have any complaints and then he would have to let me go!"

Saintana and Maguerite know that learning to read and write has changed their future. They know they will get fair prices when they buy or sell their produce in the market. They will be able to read prescriptions and help their children with homework. As well as becoming familiar with how a cooperative is structured and what their rights are as women in a co-op, Maguerite and Saintana are being taught how to compost, how to stay healthy through nutritional seminars, how to be strong women in their homes and how to solve problems within their families. Saintana and Maguerite are, in essence, learning to find their voice.

"We are learning very slowly," says Saintana. I haven't learned enough to help the co-op yet, but when I do, I'm going to use it to help others." Janet is proud to be part of the process in which students such as Saintana and Maguerite, and hundreds of other women like them, have the opportunity to learn to read. For the first time in their lives, there is a literacy program designed for them in their community.

"...They become proud to reply."

She says their courage inspires her. "I am encouraged to work harder, to push ahead even in difficult conditions when I watch their progress. At first they are so timid in their class that it's hard for them to speak out an answer when called on. They turn their faces away or cover their mouths with their hands. But as they gain self-confidence in letter and word recognition, they become proud to reply. "This newfound self-confidence is carried over into all areas of their lives and it brings new health. For the first time they feel like real citizens. They don't agree to being beaten by their husbands, and they discover together new ways of problem-solving. Hard work is part of the reality of Haitian women's lives, but I am buoyed by the privilege of making it easier for them, one word at a time."

Linda Gershuny is a Canadian education specialist and executive director of Centre D'Apprentissage et de Formation pour la Transformation in Haiti. In 2004 she provided an evaluation of PCH's programs at Fond Baptiste. The report lists numerous positive outcomes in gender equality: 12 per cent of elected leadership posts in the co-op are now filled by women, and progress has been made in reducing domestic violence. "In rural areas, women are solely responsible for housework; they work from dawn

to dusk," says Linda. "It's not acceptable for men to help women with their work. But in Fond Baptiste, we have seen men starting to help their wives with work. That's revolutionary."

Alfred is a vivid illustration of this transformation. The night before a weeklong PCH training session in Fond Baptiste, he had beaten his wife in front of his children. The topic was Women are the Pillar of Society; it was explained to Alfred that when his children see their mother being beaten, they become fearful that they will also be abused and frustrated that they cannot protect her. This fear and frustration can impair their ability to learn in school. They may become violent or withdrawn. When Alfred understood that what he saw as his right to abuse his wife was having a lasting negative impact on his entire family, he became remorseful. He stood up in front of the group and vowed to change.

Women have to be tough to survive

Linda describes Haitian women as "the post that holds up the building" in society and states that it's a paradox; women have to be tough to survive in Haiti, and although they may seem self-confident and assertive, they allow men to take the dominant role.

Martine Fourcand studied sociology and communications at University of Quebec and is employed by Le centre de gestion des fonds locaux Canadiens in Petion-Ville, Haiti, as an expert on gender and development. She is concerned that most activities devised by organizations to help women direct them into buying and selling raw items at a subsistence level rather than into activities that are economically sustainable such as the manufacturing of goods. She cites examples, such as making fruits into juices and jams, or manioc into flour, and manufacturing soap and flour. It's her belief that the cooperative structure nurtured by CIDA-funded projects provides the chance for men and women to benefit equally from such new opportunities.

With this, Aricia strongly concurs. As a co-op member, she is allowed to borrow money at reasonable rates and won't be forced to pay usury fees as high as 600 per cent, which would doom her to a life of poverty. The improved quality of seed ensures her a harvest that she can sell to her cooperative rather than carrying it for hours down the mountainside to sell. She can provide for herself and her family. Aricia acknowledges the role of women is extremely difficult, yet she no longer accepts the view that all men are "chiefs"; with education and training, she believes the future for the women of Haiti will change.

"I've heard people preaching in church that men have authority over women and can beat them, but in the cooperative meetings we begin to understand that this is not so," she says. Aricia's hands are folded neatly on her purse; they are rough with dirty, broken nails. She sits across from me, a tiny figure on a battered wooden chair at the edge of a mountain. Tendrils corkscrew from beneath a kerchief tied over her head. My insides are still trembling; in these surreal hours among the clouds, a sister has laid bare her soul to me with generosity and honesty. Mèsi anpil, Aricia. Anpil, anpil. Thank you so very, very much.

I ask her what she would like to say to the women of Haiti. She takes her time answering. If we don't leave now, we'll be descending treacherous roads at nightfall, but I don't rush her. I want to hear every word of her hard-earned insight.

"Be courageous"

"I would tell women that they are people like all people and I would wish them to be courageous," she finally replies, looking out over the fields.

"I would tell them that they deserve the same wages as men to do the same work."

She gets up as I gather my things and prepare to go. I'm unable to articulate how moved I am by her story, how honoured I am to have witnessed her fiercely beautiful spirit and how proud I feel of her accomplishments. Despite all that separates us, we share a breathtaking victory.

"Bon couraj, Aricia," I say.

She grins impishly and then quips, Bye-bye." Everyone standing around us suddenly bursts into laughter.

I watch her as we leave. The sky has already begun to draw sheer smoky drapes across the mountains. Dwarfed by this vast background, Aricia stands beside the silo and waves.

A cold wind snaps her skirt around thin legs and tugs at her blouse. And then I realize something grand. In 1803, while Haiti was still under French rule, the rebel slave, Jean Jacques Dessalines, took the blue, white and red flag of France, ripped out the white, and stitched together the red and blue. Aricia is wearing the colours of Haiti's flag.

Yo pa bay libète. Se pran pou ou pran l. Liberty is not given to you. Take, you must take it.

Haiti shanty seeks respite from Aristide gangs

by Clarens Renois

Monday, August 15, 2005

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): The Bel Air district of the Haitian capital has a grand name that belies its reputation as one of the world's danger spots for UN peacekeepers.

The giant shanty town of 300,000 people is dominated by armed gangs who support the deposed president Jean Bertrand Aristide and do not hesitate to use their weapons to back their campaign.

UN forces in their familiar blue helmets and Haitian police are trying to establish order in the maze of alleyways and broken down buildings that make up Bel Air. But it is hard work.

Peacekeepers with rifles sit on the roofs of the ruined homes, down onto guard posts surrounded by barbed wire and packed with sand bags.

The roads are empty, and there is no access into many that are littered with concrete blocks, burned out cars and other debris.

It is like a town under curfew. Children have not played in the streets since the gangs turned Bel Air into a no mans land. The Church of God which once drew hundreds of faithful is now a wreck with only a few walls standing.

Bel Air has become a battleground since Aristide fled the country in February, 2004 in the face of a popular rebellion. Hundreds of people have died in the Haitian capital in the past year, many of them in Bel Air, in criminal and political killings blamed on the gangs known as 'chimeres'.

The insecurity has added to the burden of the transitional government in the impoverished Caribbean nation, that aims to hold municipal and national elections from October.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) estimates that there are about 20,000 illegal weapons in Port-au-Prince. But the peacekeepers insist they are striking decisive blows against their armed opponents in Bel Air.

"A lot of gangs have been broken up. I can assure you that they have suffered serious losses," said Colonel El Ouafi Boulbars, a MINUSTAH spokesman.

"They are in a phase of complete disintegration. Today activities can start here again," added the Moroccan officer.

The colonel praised the Brazilian troops who make up the backbone of the UN force of about 7,600 troops and international police and are dominant in the Bel Air force. "They are not afraid of danger, these are men of duty," said the spokesman.

MINUSTAH announced Wednesday that seven people who had been kidnapped had been found and freed in the Bel Air shanty over the previous two weeks by Brazilian forces carrying out special operations. Eleven accused abductors were detained.

But the inhabitants who remain in Bel Air are not convinced.

Steve, who has a hairdresser's salon, said he spends whole days without a client. "It has been like that for quite some time," he said, while acknowledging that security has improved.

Jordanian police are on guard in the street and Sri Lankans are on duty further down. But even that does not bring the people out.

People from outside Bel Air dare not walk in the street at all, especially journalists who are particularly disliked by activists of the Lavalas party that supported Aristide.

Inhabitants say tensions rise when the Haitian national police (PNH) are on patrol.

"When they (the UN forces) are there it is calm," said Daniel, a 23-year-old resident of Bel Air. "But when a PNH patrol goes by they leave at least one body behind."

In another sign of the impact of the insecurity, the authorities have decided to extend the deadline for voters to register for the election from August 9 to September 15. More than 1.5 million people have registered for the cards which carry biometric details. But 4.5 million are estimated to be eligible to vote.