

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: AUGUST 9 - 21, 2006

Meanwhile: In Haiti, nostalgia for a dictator

By James Pringle

International Herald Tribune

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti

A pantheon is where the illustrious dead of a nation are honored. So why, one wonders, are the sinister momentos of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier on display, along with the elegant anchor of Christopher Columbus's wrecked caravel Santa Maria, in Port-au-Prince's national pantheon museum?

There is Papa Doc's black top hat, gold-handled cane and thick spectacles, all of which Duvalier affected to make himself resemble Baron Samedi, the voodoo divinity of the graveyards, and thus be more feared.

"Poor Haiti and the character of Dr. Duvalier's rule are not invented, the latter not blackened for dramatic effect," Graham Greene wrote about "The Comedians," his novel of expatriate life and love under Papa Doc's tyranny. "Impossible to deepen that night."

It's an indication of how bad things have become in Haiti that Papa Doc has now been quietly rehabilitated. In fact, the father-son dictatorship of Papa and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, from 1957 to 1986, are now viewed by many Haitians as a kind of Belle Epoque - and tubby Baby Doc's rule, especially, as a golden age.

"Papa Doc was the best president we ever had," one older Haitian recalled. "In these days, all children went to school, and poor people ate free at government-sponsored messes. Nothing happened to you if you didn't challenge Papa. At least, you knew where you stood."

I had traveled to Haiti partly to see whether the gossip columnist Aubelin Jolicoeur, the model for the character Petit Pierre in "The Comedians," had survived. I was hoping to enjoy a refreshment with him beneath the slowly turning ceiling fans on the balcony of the famed turn-of-the-century Hotel Oloffson, on which Greene based his Hotel Trianon.

But the hotel's Haitian-American proprietor, Richard Morse, told me that Jolicoeur had died last year in his late seventies - appropriately, on St. Valentine's Day; the flamboyant "Aubie" was a great ladies' man.

Today, a suite at Oloffson's is named after him - others are christened for Greene, Mick Jagger, who stayed here in the '70s, and Truman Capote.

I also stayed at Oloffson's, one of the few guests, and sampled what Morse rightly calls the hotel's infamous rum punches.

Morse, a musician and anthropology major, runs a 14-piece band that on Thursdays plays rock mixed with voodoo rhythms. He is philosophical: "If things are good, we will have tourists. If bad, we will have journalists," he says.

In 2002, Newsweek named the decrepit but characterful Oloffson's one of its five favorite grand hotels worldwide. Sadly, the hotel's mangy mutt, dubbed Papa Dog, has gone to canine heaven.

The calm that followed President René Préval's election victory in February has changed into anarchy in the three months since he took office in May, though Préval is no tyrant, locals say.

"Be careful," a Lebanese art gallery manager warned me urgently as I browsed pictures of vibrant Haitian art in Petionville, the cool, hillside town where the mulatto elite lives above Port-au-Prince. "You could be kidnapped at any moment."

Security has disappeared again. The road to the international airport is unsafe, and, according to a UN stabilization force spokesperson, under daily automatic weapons fire. When my car broke down on the uphill climb to Petionville, a houngan, or voodoo priest, stopped to pick me up before the gangs did. After two decades of political violence, Haiti is awash with guns.

It's even risky to walk around central Port-au-Prince by daylight. Small wonder I saw almost no tourists. As a "blanc" (white), as the Haitians call out to Americans or Europeans as they chivvy you for a dollar, you stand out like a sore thumb.

Life expectancy for the 8.3 million Haitians continues to fall, though it is already only 52. Illiteracy is at 80 percent. The country looks ruined, its hillsides stripped of trees for charcoal. Annual per capita income is \$390.

The magic and mystery of Haiti, and its beguiling charm, seem to have vanished. After so much horror, Haiti is no longer exotic. Even the voodoo drums I used to hear seem stilled in nights darkened by power outages. Almost no one feels optimism for the future.

For the present, at least, it is, as Greene wrote four decades ago, "impossible to deepen that night."

James Pringle previously visited Haiti as a Reuters correspondent.

Freed political prisoners speak out at BAI press conference
Haiti Action Committee
August 19, 2006

The day in court was straightforward, because for once it was honest: the prosecutors conceded that there was no evidence against Ms. Auguste (as they had conceded in March), and the judge accordingly made a finding of not guilty.

The Preval - Alexis government of Haiti takes a great step towards justice with the release of four well-known Fanmi Lavalas activists. The morning of August 17, 2006 Anette Auguste, Paul Raymond, Yvon Antoine and George Honore held a press conference at the BAI (Bureau des Avocats Internationaux) office with attorneys Mario Joseph and Brian Concannon

Through this press conference the political prisoners were calling for fundamental change in Haiti with a national reconciliation and the release of all political prisoners.

"I will always dream for the people to find relief from their conditions of misery, " stated Haitian folk-singer S6 Ann (Anette Auguste). "Their hope is that they can send their children to school. I ask President Pr6val to meet with us and bring us into the current of change in this country. We want to work with him toward the same goals."

Paul Raymond added, "we will not forget any one of our demands; among which are the return of our former President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the release of all political prisoners, especially the forgotten, the ones who are not well-known"

"I forgive all of those who presented false charges," declared the rapper ZapZap (Yvon Antioine), the ones who had me thrown into prison. I forgive them as they are my Haitian brothers even though they are of other political colors."

George Honore reminded everyone, "I am a victim of the false charges of Judicial Police Chief Michael Lucius that he needs to repair for me. My brothers who stagnate in prison need to be released, President Preval. Go into the prisons and see with your own eyes the misery of our brothers, the overwhelming majority are political prisoners. Especially those who were partisans of President Jean Betrand Aristide."

Mission in Haiti: Demonstrate the value of using synthetic fuel

By Ron Fletcher

Boston Globe

August 20, 2006

Gerthy Lahens looked out the window of Mike's Donuts to the parishioners streaming out of the Mission Church two Sundays ago. A leading activist in the city's Haitian community, Lahens, 54, credited her Christian faith in explaining her biannual trips to Haiti, where she spent her first 32 years.

``Speaking the word of God is one thing," said Lahens. ``Acting on it is better."

Lahens, MIT engineering instructor Amy Smith , and eight other volunteers are spending two weeks in Haiti, holding workshops on synthetic charcoal in Les Cayes and Cape Haitian .

``We have started something in these places, something we have to continue to build," said Lahens, of the relief effort that began three years ago. ``Unfortunately, we can't rely on the government to meet basic human needs: food, water, shelter. We have to go directly to the people."

Lahens said Haitians must move away from their traditional wood-based fuel so reforestation, a buffer against flooding, is possible. The synthetic charcoal developed in MIT labs can be made from sugarcane waste , which is plentiful on the island 600 miles off the coast of Florida.

The ongoing gang violence in the capital city of Port-au-Prince , where Lahens and company landed last week, saddened her more than scared her.

Asked if she feared for her safety, Lahens looked across Tremont Street to the church before responding.

``I'm only scared of flying," she said. ``I have no problem being on the ground."

Haitians fight for equal representation in Fla. government

By JENNIFER KAY

Associated Press Writer

The Gainesville Sun

August 19, 2006

When the Haitian man sat for a passport photo at the shop doubling as Dufirston Neree's campaign headquarters, he was handed a black suit jacket to wear over his bright blue T-shirt.

It's a perk Neree gives customers at Ben Photo. It elevates them, he says, makes them look more professional. He does it, too: He arrives for an interview in khakis, but briefly excuses himself to don a pinstriped suit.

Haitians need, he says, to be better represented - in passport photos and in person. Hoping to be the first Haitian elected to Congress, he has challenged incumbent Kendrick Meek in the Democratic primary Sept. 5 in Florida's 17th District.

Neree worked at Ben Photo, his uncle's Little Haiti storefront, as a teenager, filling out immigration forms printed in English for customers who spoke only Creole and could read neither language.

If elected, the community development banking specialist born in Cap-Haitien, Haiti, says he would represent those in his largely Haitian district who would benefit the most from a change in U.S. immigration policy. They want to make it easier for Haitians to stay in this country and become citizens, like Cubans.

"I'm sitting here in the heart of the city of Miami and I'm looking for votes and no one around here can help me because they're all a bunch of illegals," says Neree, 32. "There's a lot of immigration help that's needed - the mayor can't do anything about immigration policy, but the U.S. House can. Because of that, I'm running."

Though a federal issue, immigration is a major talking point in the campaigns of other Haitians running for state and local office in South Florida. The candidates say they're fighting for equal representation in a government that has neglected to address the needs of Haitians among other black voters.

"I hear the fear amongst the parents for their kids. If they're Haitian, if they get in trouble, they get deported. In other communities, it's 'I'm worried about my windstorm insurance,'" says Hans Laurenceau, a prosecutor in Broward County juvenile court. Laurenceau, 27, is one of two Democrats with Haitian roots campaigning to represent the 108th district in the Florida House, a district that elected the first Haitian American lawmaker to the Florida Legislature, Phillip Brutus, in 2000.

Either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, these Haitian candidates say they can relate to potential voters who express having difficulty adjusting to life in the U.S. - and they can do it in Creole, the language that separates Haitians from other black voters.

Haitian leaders advocated for Creole to be included as a protected language in the Voting Rights Act, the recently renewed civil rights law that opened polls to millions of black Americans when it was first enacted in 1965.

Including Creole would have boosted voter turnout, and helped integrate Haitians into U.S. society, advocates say. Complicated ballot questions are often lost on Haitian immigrants who were illiterate when they arrived and learned to read and write in Creole before learning English, says Lucie Tondreau of the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition. She is also the campaign manager for Brutus, now running for a seat on the Miami-Dade County Commission.

"It is very difficult for them to follow instructions in English. They have it in Spanish, I don't know why they can't have it in Creole. I think this is discrimination," she said.

The candidates say Haitian voters have other concerns exacerbated by their isolation - the lack of health care and affordable housing, low wages and poor education.

"That is not so different from the African-American community, but the difference is many of the Haitian-Americans aren't fully aware of everything the system has for them. There has to be somebody who can really advocate on their behalf," says Ronald Brise, a native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, who is challenging Laurenceau and three other Democrats to represent the 108th.

More than 109,160 Haitians live in Miami-Dade County, and 90,000 live in Broward, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But most political candidates rarely reach out to Haitian voters, who generally lack the economic standing to be significant campaign contributors, says Robert Watson, a political science professor at Florida Atlantic University.

Non-Haitian candidates who do make the effort risk losing votes from other communities because so many Haitian issues are tied up in their immigration status, he said.

"If you're perceived as being pro-Haitian, it could actually drive away potential voters. You might lose the anti-immigrant, nativist vote," Watson says. Another voting group that could react badly might be Florida's Cubans, who benefit from the U.S. wet-foot/dry-foot policy that Haitians seek to change, he said.

In their quest to achieve the political clout of Florida's Cuban and Jewish communities, Haitians are competing with Jamaicans and Bahamians, who also feel they have unique community needs, and from other black voters who have lost political ground to Hispanic voters, Watson says.

Brise, a Miami telecommunications executive seeking what has become known as the "Haitian-American seat" in the Florida House since Brutus' election in 2000, says there's pressure to keep that seat for the community. Any good candidate, Haitian or not, can represent the community, but if Haitians lose their voice in politics now, future redistricting may make it hard to get it back, he says.

"Twenty years from now, my 6-month-old son may not feel he needs to run as a Haitian because certain issues might be resolved, or we might be so integrated into society that our issues would be exactly on par so we wouldn't need special representation to address our needs," says Brise, 32. "But

for right now, we need to maintain a line or establish a system where we can establish seats as has been done in other communities."

Growth of Haiti's forests is a miracle of nature
The Dominican Today
August 18, 2006

ARCAHIE, Haiti. - In this voodoo Mecca and the most sacred altar of the superstition, the forest has miraculously begun growing and the swelled gorges come down from the mountains as seen only many years ago.

Rains, the winds and the planting of acacias and other fast growing varieties have changed to the vegetation of Haiti's north in the last five years. The dry and transition forests have blossomed, with yellow-green fields of acacias and eucalyptus.

But the northern Haitian has also become aware desisting from taking an axe to the forest –or at least to cut down less – to save the trees from becoming firewood and charcoal. By sea other fuels arrive.

The expression that rain pays for its damage finds a good finds justification here.

Hundreds of people have died in the last ten years, as nature retaliates with landslides during hurricanes and tropical storms.

The coastline here is full of small seaside villas, mostly private, which constitute an enchantment despite the deterioration of the country's major highway, the only route linking with Cape Haitian, the country's second largest city. Northern Haiti's beaches are wild, mainly between Arcahie and Saint Marc, and the tonalities of their sea are infinite.

The incantation to the voodoo spirits and the conversation with the deceased in cemetery tombs, frequent in this sanctuary, also have contributed, according to the neighbors, to nature's generosity.

The semi-desert zone which begins in Arcahie, and ends in Saint Marc has been transforming little by little into a strip with thick forests. Fields planted with melons, watermelons, mango, squash, chick peas, maize and bananas edge one side of the highway, with the sea on the other.

Dozens of fruit vendors have suddenly appeared, propping up their small lean-tos and makeshift small businesses along the way.

Dominican ambassador Jose Serrulle, an environmentalist and organizer of ecotourism fairs, was surprised how the vegetation within these meadows from a short ago has turned green again.

Serrulle and his companions stopped several times to observe how "the hair" surrounding the mountains and hills grew on them. The birds loosen pollen and the seeds that the wind takes and makes bloom with rains and sun. The nests of the "madame Sagá" –yellow, playful songbirds with black dots-are everywhere, and much more than before.

Twenty years ago, in the regime of Jean Claude Duvalier, this zone was almost a total desert whose only enchantment was the highway along the lapping sea. The birds were scarce, even marine species.

Nowadays the farms have plenty of shady fruit trees and others which cover or are entangled with the palm thatch roofs.

The villagers and visitors feel that the climate, normally hot and humid, has improved with the vegetation's growth. Of course, it's warm.

Also improving, although slowly, is tourism. Almost ready to open is the Club Mediterranee, an hour and a half from Port-au-Prince, and with 450 rooms.

The farmers who live along the way, who have seen small springs flow once again, have planted the seeds and have been germinating into fruit with the help from rains. Today they all celebrate the miracle of nature.

A rural child, 11, finds hope with powerful AIDS drugs

By Jacob Goldstein

Miami Herald

August 18, 2006

OUTSIDE LES CAYES, Haiti - The 11-year-old boy lives out on a long dirt road and across a creek in southwest Haiti. Small enough to pass for 8, he was born with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. His mother is already dead from the condition.

After his last blood test at the AIDS treatment center at the hospital in Les Cayes, 40 minutes away, doctors saw that his immune system was crashing. On his next visit, they planned to make him one of the first children in his province to be put on powerful AIDS drugs.

But he missed his appointment - his father did not have \$3 for bus fare to the hospital. The next day, the treatment center's staff sent Marcus Sainte Rose to find the boy.

Sainte Rose is a field worker on the AIDS treatment team whose own life was saved when he found AIDS care in 2004 at Gheskio, the Port-au-Prince clinic that oversees the Les Cayes treatment center.

With a driver from the center, he heads for the boy's village. There are no street names there, much less house numbers, so he asks some men by the side of the road where he can find the boy's house, posing without much conviction as a "friend in the neighborhood, coming to say hi" so as not to reveal the boy's health status.

Eventually, Sainte Rose finds the boy at his aunt's home. He asks the boy how he feels. The answer is an inaudible whisper.

Sainte Rose says the boy needs to go see the doctor. His aunt combs his hair and takes him to another room to change his shirt.

"I want you to look good," the aunt says.

"That shirt looks ugly," the boy says.

"Just wear it," the aunt says.

The boy emerges, wearing a T-shirt that says "Wilson."

The boy sits wide-eyed and silent on the ride to the hospital.

Sainte Rose takes him to see the pediatrician, who is not part of the AIDS team. The pediatrician is misinformed; he tells the boy that he cannot go on the AIDS drugs yet. The boy is nearly sent home empty-handed, but a doctor on the AIDS team learns of the confusion and intervenes.

Forms are filled out. A doctor discusses the drug regimen with the boy's father.

The father is given the medicine and money for the bus. He takes the boy home.

Note: The boy's father and the hospital staff agreed to let The Miami Herald photograph him and tell his story on the condition that his name not be used.

Haitian gangs agree to give up their weapons

17 Aug 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Aug 17 (Reuters) - Armed gangs in Haiti's largest slum pledged on Thursday to hand over their weapons to the government next week, heeding President Rene Preval's call for a peaceful disarmament.

The move came a week after Preval and Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis demanded that the gangs surrender their weapons or risk being killed.

William Baptiste, a gang leader known as Ti Blan, said the gangs in Cite Soleil, a teeming seaside slum outside the capital, would give up their weapons at a ceremony next week.

"We are going to hand over our weapons to the constitutional government on Monday because we want peace," Ti Blan, a spokesman for the gangs in Cite Soleil, told Reuters.

"The use of those weapons only leads to violence and that's not what the society needs," said Ti Blan.

He urged the government to disarm all armed groups, including those linked to Haiti's small but wealthy elite and to political foes of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The gangs in Cite Soleil, which is home to thousands of Aristide supporters, were mostly responsible for violence aimed at destabilizing the U.S.-backed interim government installed after Aristide was ousted from power on Feb. 29, 2004.

The gangs said they took up arms against the interim government to protect themselves and slum residents against repeated attacks by the Haitian police and U.N. peacekeepers.

Past attempts to disarm the gangs have failed or have produced only a few weapons.

Preval, a former Aristide protege, won elections in February and took office in May.

"We held those weapons to protect ourselves and our communities from the interim government which was our enemy," Ti Blan said. "Now, since we don't consider Preval's administration an enemy, there is no more justification for us to keep those weapons."

The U.N. sent its peacekeeping force -- now numbering about 8,000 soldiers and police -- to restore order shortly after Aristide was pushed from office by an armed rebellion.

The U.N. Security Council on Tuesday renewed the mission for another six months.

The gangs said they had invited media and diplomats to witness the weapons handover to Haitian authorities and representatives of the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reinsertion program, run by the United Nations.

Several other gangs are expected to make the same move in the coming days, said a government official, who did not want to be named.

Prominent Aristide backer freed from Haitian jail
Wednesday, August 16, 2006
by Joseph Guyler Delva
Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters): A well-known singer and supporter of ousted former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has been freed from prison where she was held on what she decried on Tuesday as politically motivated charges.

Criminal court magistrate Fritzner Fils-Aime issued the release order late on Monday for Annette Auguste, known as So Ann and jailed for more than two years, and three other prisoners, after deciding there was no proof they were linked to violence.

Auguste, 62, and the three others were militants of the Lavalas Family party of Aristide, a priest turned politician who fled his impoverished Caribbean nation in 2004 in the face of an armed rebellion.

They were arrested over an outbreak of violence at a university and the wounding of its dean but no evidence was produced, as in the cases of many other former Aristide allies jailed during the U.S.-backed interim administration of prime minister Gerard Latortue.

"There has been no evidence linking those people to these incidents," said Judge Fils-Aime.

About a dozen prominent Aristide allies -- including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert -- have been freed since President Rene Preval took over from the interim government in May.

"The interim government and its allies had locked me up because they were aware of my capacity to mobilize the masses," Auguste told Reuters.

"They wanted to make sure I did not play any political role that could benefit Aristide. As a brave woman, I confronted that injustice with courage, but it feels good to be free again," she said.

The three other Aristide militants released along with Auguste were Paul Raymond Jr., Yvon Antoine and George Honore.

Preval, a former Aristide ally, said recently that about 100 Aristide allies had been released since he took office.

But Auguste said hundreds more were still being held.

**EXCLUSIVE: Haitian Political Prisoner So Anne Released After Over 2 Years in Haitian Jail
Democracy Now!
August 15, 2006**

Popular Haitian-American folk singer and political activist Annette Auguste, has been released after spending over two years in a Haitian jail. Auguste, commonly known as So Anne, was jailed shortly after the 2004 coup that ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. So Anne was one of the most prominent Aristide supporters to be jailed under the U.S.-backed Haitian government. She lived in Brooklyn, New York for 20 years before returning in 1994 when Aristide returned to power after the first coup against him.

In May 2004, US Marines raided her home in the middle of the night, used explosives to break down her front door, killed her two pet dogs, handcuffed her 5-year-old grandson and arrested her. She has been in prison ever since. According to the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network, the Haitian judge in charge of her case ruled this week that there was no evidence to hold her in prison. She was released last night.

So Anne joins us on the line from Haiti. We also speak with independent journalist Kim Ives, the former editor of the Haitian newspaper, Haiti Progres.

So Anne, Haitian folk singer. She speaks to us from Haiti.

Kim Ives, independent journalist and former editor of the Haitian newspaper, Haiti Progres.

AMY GOODMAN: So Anne joins us now on the line from Haiti. We welcome you to Democracy Now!, So Anne Auguste.

SO ANNE: Hello. I say good morning to everyone.

AMY GOODMAN: It's very good to have you with us. How are you feeling?

SO ANNE: I feel good. I feel good, because, you know, since two years I was [inaudible] in jail, but now I'm released, and I feel well.

AMY GOODMAN: You were arrested by U.S. Marines?

SO ANNE: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: On what grounds?

SO ANNE: The Marines came into my house with grenades, [inaudible] my house, you know? Even my dogs were killed. [inaudible] Suddenly, [inaudible] that means 15 people was arrested in my house that day. They broke everything. They threw grenades in my house, you know? That means -- hello?

AMY GOODMAN: Yes, we can hear you. Can you talk about --

SO ANNE: Can you hear me?

AMY GOODMAN: Yes. So they arrested you --

SO ANNE: The Marines arrested me that day. Until now, I have been released yesterday, only yesterday, since two years and three months in jail. But, you know, there's no tie, no evidence to condemn me. That's why yesterday I'm released, I'm free.

AMY GOODMAN: And your time in prison, the two years, what were the prison conditions like, So Anne?

SO ANNE: The condition in prison [inaudible] were very bad for everyone, for everybody. Even, you know, the mouse comes in your room. [inaudible] That's very bad. No [inaudible] food. Nothing is good in the prison. That means everybody's suffering. Everyone is suffering in the prison. I mean, it was not only me, okay? There are so many people they arrested, you know, for reaction [inaudible] they call these people rats. So many people [inaudible] Aristide, yes? No. [inaudible] all these people, who don't have no names, who don't have nobody, no relatives, you know, to [inaudible] for them, but, you know, you knew of them because. [inaudible], because I got a name. They know me. You have no choice if they didn't know.

AMY GOODMAN: Why do you think they wanted you to remain in prison?

SO ANNE: Because of Aristide. Because I was friend of Aristide. You know, they think that -- that [inaudible] to help, you know, you knew somebody that considers him [inaudible] somebody, they don't want you, you know, to have [inaudible] honor or freedom. That's why I became in jail, because of Aristide, because I didn't do nothing bad, you know? I didn't do nothing bad. I was helping people. They arrest me. For what? For Aristide. They overthrew Aristide. They sent Aristide to South Africa. And I was in jail. That's it.

AMY GOODMAN: What will you do now?

SO ANNE: From now, only I don't know what I'm going to do, because I am in this country. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know [inaudible], Preval is in power now. We are waiting [inaudible] for Haiti, because, you know, we struggled and we reached [inaudible] then, for all those people who don't have no food to eat and that [inaudible] water, don't have water. There are so many people in the village who [inaudible] change, because, you know, the people, they're very, very, very, very bad. [inaudible] I know a lot of them, [inaudible] lack food, they don't have no school. [inaudible]

AMY GOODMAN: Well, So Anne, I want to thank you very much for joining us. So Anne Auguste has been freed after more than two years in prison. She was arrested by U.S. Marines, taken from her home. No charges were brought against her. Finally, we're also joined by Kim Ives, independent journalist, former editor of the Haitian newspaper, Haiti Progres. The significance of So Anne's release, Kim Ives, coming on the heels of the release of the former prime minister of Haiti, Yvon Neptune?

KIM IVES: Yes, Amy, I think it's showing the importance of the popular pressure, which has mobilized now to primarily get the political prisoners out. It must be said that a number of other political prisoners were also released yesterday. There was Zap Zap, who's Yvon Antoine, a musician who was also in jail; Paul Raymond, an activist who also had been in jail for over a year; as well as Georges Honore, another activist from Bel Air. So this is showing the power of the movement, despite the foot dragging of the Preval administration. There has been just an upsurge, an uprising of people in the streets every day, demanding for the prisoners to be released, and there still are hundreds still in jail.

AMY GOODMAN: Kim Ives, thanks for joining us, speaking to us from here in New York. So Anne speaking to us from Haiti. Finally, Kim Ives, how unusual was it that So Anne was arrested by U.S. Marines in Haiti?

KIM IVES: It was extremely unusual. They did this in complete violation of the Constitution, which doesn't allow people to be arrested between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., and the fact that they did the arresting and it wasn't the police. They thought she was involved with Muslims at a local mosque and that she was going to launch some kind of attack against them, which is so preposterous. She had just come out of the hospital. She had just finished a record. She was 60 years old at that time. It was just absurd, and it was extremely irregular for them to go and arrest her and kill her dogs and attack her house military-style.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think that the former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, will be returning to Haiti any time soon from South Africa, where he is in exile with his family? Kim Ives? Kim, do you think that Aristide would be released?

KIM IVES: Oh, I think I hear So Anne maybe saying a word about that, but I think he --

AMY GOODMAN: Go ahead, Kim.

KIM IVES: Okay, I do believe --

AMY GOODMAN: So Anne? So Anne, did you hear my question? Will President Aristide return to Haiti?

SO ANNE: We want them to return, because the Constitution said that. We do not exile people. It's not just Aristide. All the people in exile, you know, to have become back [inaudible], because we don't want that. The Constitution said that. No exiled people. That's why we want Aristide to come back in the country. [inaudible] organization.

AMY GOODMAN: And Kim Ives?

KIM IVES: Yes, I think I don't expect him back in the short term, but I do think that this mobilization has such momentum and such determination that I think it's inevitable he must come back in the next few months. He is the symbol that the people still hold of their struggle, of their demands, and I think

there's no way, despite the U.S. government's hostility to that project, that he cannot come back in the next few months.

AMY GOODMAN: Kim Ives, I want to thank you for being with us. And, So Anne, thank you for being with us on this first day of your freedom in Haiti.

Food a basic need in HIV fight, U.N. agency says

16 Aug 2006

Reuters

TORONTO, Aug 16 (Reuters) - Drugs are no good without food in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the essential role of proper nutrition has been forgotten, the United Nations World Food Program said on Wednesday.

Organizers of the 16th International AIDS Conference marked a small victory with the announcement that more than 1.6 million people globally now receive lifesaving HIV drugs.

But without proper food, victims of the disease have little will to live, the World Food Program said.

"In a study we did in rural Haiti, we found most of our patients with HIV disease spent more than half of all their time and other resources looking for food," said Dr. Paul Farmer, a professor at Harvard Medical School who has worked in Haiti since the AIDS epidemic started 25 years ago.

Living proof: 28-year-old Joseph Jeune was skeletal before being placed on a food program that included rice, beans, iodized salt and at one point, meat. His family had already purchased his coffin.

"I wouldn't be alive," Jeune, a shoe-shiner from Lascahobas, Haiti, told Reuters through a translator.

"It's the guts that hold up the body. If the gut is empty, how can you stand up?"

Farmer, who has treated Jeune, said he has gained 45 pounds (20 kg) since he was put on the food program, more than half of it in the first two months of therapy.

Now Jeune, who traveled from Haiti to Toronto for the conference, looks slim and healthy.

"If you don't have anything to eat and you have HIV/AIDS you've got two diseases, HIV and hunger," said Jeune.

"I was washed out, I was weak, weak, weak. But since I've had food assistance, I feel strong."

Jeune said being hungry also makes having the disease eat away at you psychologically.

"These medicines, when you start taking them, they whisper in your ear 'you need to eat, you need to eat,' they make you hungry," he said.

"When you wake up in the morning, you take your medicines and you haven't eaten, it makes your stomach bite you."

Farmer, who is also co-founder of Partners in Health, a nonprofit organization, said, "We don't know how to treat this advanced disease without food." Some drugs also need to be taken on a full stomach, or be soon followed by food, he added.

The World Food Program, which provides food assistance to 21 of 25 nations with the highest HIV prevalence rates, and the United Nations AIDS agency UNAIDS say that between 3.8 million and 6.4 million people need nutritional support from 2006 to 2008, at a cost of \$1.1 billion.

It costs 66 cents a day to provide nutritious food to an AIDS patient and his or her family, the groups said. (For more stories related to the Toronto international AIDS Conference, please go to http://today.reuters.com/news/globalcoverage.aspx?type=aids&src=GLOBALCOVERAGE_wire)

AIDS is meal ticket in hunger-plagued Haiti

Friday, August 18, 2006

by Clarens Renois

AFP

Caribbean Net News

LASCAHOBAS, Haiti (AFP): Outside the UN World Food Program warehouse, hungry Haitians form a line and wait for the rations coming to them as victims of tuberculosis or AIDS.

Of the 400 people who every day visit the hospital at Lascahobas, in central Haiti, 60 or 70 make the sick list, which entitles them to receive 1,500 kilocalories in WFP food supplements.

"This UN donation worth a monthly subsidy of 30 to 40 dollars from a US NGO (non-government organization) is what entices the people of Lascahobas, 57 kilometers (35 miles) east of Port-Au-Prince, to take an AIDS test," said nurse Fricelyne Chelot.

No fewer than 300 families with five to seven members each benefit from the program launched several years ago by the Partners in Health organization and its Haitian subsidiary "Zanmi lasante" (Friends of Health, in Creole).

"It's necessary to tackle the AIDS problem within the context of poverty," said Wesler Lambert, chief medical officer at the Lascahobas hospital.

"If we want to address the health issue in its totality, we must rely on other factors such as the socio-economic factors," he added.

At the same time, poverty pushes people to despair. In this region of Haiti, when you lack the advantage of a daily food ration, you fall into hopelessness.

Lambert is witness to the gut-wrenching scenes made by Haitians who have to leave the hospital after failing to qualify for food assistance.

He tries to convey the sense of total desolation of these Haitians who often say: "Better to die tomorrow from AIDS than today from hunger."

There is a direct link in Haiti between poverty and abject poverty, and public health, said the doctor who has been urging the government to take stock of the situation and do something about it.

With a population of eight million, Haiti is the poorest of all countries in the Americas. Seventy-six percent of Haitians live on less than two dollars per day and 40 percent of families are malnourished.

The food and health program of the WFP and the US group benefits widows, men and even children.

Around 200 children and teenagers, as well as AIDS orphans are taken under the program's wing, which provides care, nourishment and pays for their education.

"There's a significant health improvement since the arrival of Partners in Health in this part of the country," said nurse Chelot.

But more and more people seek out the center as the poorest become increasingly aware that besides free medical attention, they might also get free meals.

WFP director James Morris believes that any health program worth its salt should provide nutritional support. "Financing an anti-retrovirus campaign without addressing nutrition is a little like spending a fortune to fix a car when you have no money for gas."

"If this program were to fold, tens of thousands of lives would be at risk throughout this region of Haiti," Lambert said.

**U.S. accused of blocking loans to Haiti in bid to oust Aristide
"Department of Treasury has stonewalled for three years"
Haiti Action Committee
August 15, 2006**

"If the U.S. blocked life-saving loans to influence Haiti's internal politics, it would be an unconscionable act to which no American would want to attach their nation's good name..." said Monika Kalra Varma, Acting Director at the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights in regards to their lawsuit against the US Treasury Department filed today at the USA District Court in Washington DC.

"The American public has a right to know what role its government is playing behind closed doors... . The denial of these loans directly violates Haitians' human rights, leaving them to suffer significant human casualties."

The Center has partnered with organizations that are striving for social justice throughout the world. In 2002 Haitian healthworker Loune Viaud was a RFK Human Rights Laureate. Since then the Center has been working with Partners in Health to focus on Haiti's basic health care needs. Early on the Center was faced with unprecedented "stonewalling" by IDB and Treasury Department officials in response to the Center's FOIA request in 2003.

Monika Kalra Varma feels that the time is critical and the release of these loans would have an immediate impact on the basic health needs - a human right - for many Haitians.

Today's Press Release by the RFK Center:

RFK Memorial Takes Treasury Department to Court to Determine US Role in Denying Loans Vital to Haiti's Perilous Public Health

Department of Treasury Has Stonewalled for Three Years

WASHINGTON (Aug 15, 2006) -- The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights asked a federal court today to order the U.S. Treasury Department to reveal records of its role in suspending loans destined for vital public health projects in Haiti. The RFK Center filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request almost three years ago seeking correspondence and documents related to Treasury's intervention with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on infrastructure loans to Haiti. After Treasury's intervention, the IDB made an unprecedented about-face, and refused to disburse loans previously approved for Haiti in 2001.

Despite repeated requests and modifications of RFK Center's FOIA request, the Treasury Department has not provided a single document in three years.

In July 1998, the IDB approved \$145.9 million in loans to Haiti. The money was intended to improve water, sanitation, health, rural roads, and education in Haiti with payment to begin in 2001. However, on April 6, 2001, US Executive Director to the IDB Lawrence Harrington sent a letter to IDB President

Enrique V. Iglesias requesting that the loans not be disbursed, leading to the loans' halt. The U.S. Executive Director reports directly to the Treasury Department.

Due to the IDB's unprecedented actions, all too many Haitians have died or become ill due to the lack of potable water and inadequate healthcare. In particular, women and children have suffered high incidences of death and illness from waterborne diseases.

Today's motion was filed at the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. "The American public has a right to know what role its government is playing behind closed doors," said Monika Kalra Varma, Acting Director at the RFK Center. "The denial of these loans directly violates Haitians' human rights, leaving them to suffer significant human casualties. If the U.S. blocked life-saving loans to influence Haiti's internal politics, it would be an unconscionable act to which no American would want to attach their nation's good name."

Varma continued to insist, "As international financial institutions and donor nations begin publicizing plans to reinvest in Haiti, this information must be made public so that such a destructive and perverse reversal does not happen again."

The Freedom of Information Act celebrated its 40th anniversary this past July 4th. Many critics, including former President Jimmy Carter, have begun expressing concerns about the Bush Administration's neglect to fulfill FOIA requests in a timely manner and its increased tendency to withhold information. The watchdog coalition OpenTheGovernment.org credited the Bush Administration with creating 81% more "secrets", defined as unclassified materials withheld from the public, in 2005 than in 2000.

FOIA states that federal agencies should share documents within 20 working days. According to the National Security Archives 2003 report, many agencies during the Bush Administration have been in violation of the law with average response times as long as 1,113 working days.

RFK is a non-profit non-governmental organization that engages in long-term partnerships with activists who win the RFK Human Rights Award, advocating for the social justice goals they champion. RFK's Haitian laureate, Loune Viaud, Director of Strategic Planning and Operations of Zanmi Lasante, the largest socio-medical complex in the Central Plateau of Haiti, advocates for the realization of the right to health for all Haitians.

The RFK Center is represented in this case by the Washington, D.C. law firm of Garvey Schubert Bare

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[View the Complaint against the Treasury Department 755K PDF](#)

RFK Center takes Treasury Department to court over denial of loans to Haiti
Caribbean Net News
Wednesday, August 16, 2006

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Group Sues for Info on Haiti Loans

**By MATT APUZZO,
Associated Press Writer
Los Angeles Times
August 15, 2006**

WASHINGTON -- A human rights group asked a federal judge Tuesday to force the Treasury Department to release information about whether it blocked millions of dollars in development loans to Haiti.

The dispute dates back to 2001, when international lenders suspended more than \$500 million in loans and grants to the impoverished country after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party swept to victory in legislative elections that opponents said were rigged.

The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights says the U.S. government wrongly told the Inter-American Development Bank to withhold \$146 million in loans approved for public health and education in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

Aristide called the move "genocidal." Eighty percent of the country's 8 million residents lives in abject poverty.

The center filed a Freedom of Information Act request in 2003 seeking documents about the U.S. government's role in blocking the loans. The lending process is not supposed to be political, the center said.

Though international aid to Haiti has since been restored and a new government is in place, the center says it needs to know the motives behind the process.

"There's a precedent for intervention that can stop these loans at a critical point and there's no guarantee this isn't going to happen again," said Monika Kalra Varma, the center's acting director. "We don't think we can effectively battle that today if we don't understand how it happened."

The lawsuit, filed in a Washington federal court, seeks an order forcing treasury officials to comply with the information request.

Neither the Treasury Department nor the Inter-American Development Bank had an immediate comment Tuesday morning.

Big ganja bust

Police, soldiers seize compressed marijuana in Cockpit, Old Harbour Bay

The Jamaica Observer

Wednesday, August 16, 2006

COMPRESSED ganja weighing almost 3,000 pounds, which the police believe was destined for Haiti, was seized during joint police/military operations in Clarendon and St Catherine.

Three men arrested in connection with the seizures were yesterday interrogated by narcotics agents. However, their names were withheld by investigators, pending charges.

The police said recently that they had uncovered a drugs for guns operation between Jamaica and neighbouring Haiti.

In the Clarendon operation, 1,062 pounds of the weed was seized Sunday when more than 100 officers from the Jamaica Constabulary Force and Jamaica Defence Force carried out an operation at Cockpit in Salt River, where they allegedly found the drugs stacked in an abandoned building in the rural district. One man was arrested in that operation.

The larger find of 1,868 pounds of ganja was seized by the police and soldiers who continued their operation between Monday night and 1:00 yesterday morning in the St Catherine fishing village of Old Harbour Bay.

Yesterday, Inspector Steve Brown, spokesman for Operation Kingfish - the police task force that tracks down gangsters and drug traffickers - said between Monday night and yesterday morning, the police, assisted by the Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard, seized 44 bags of compressed ganja, weighing about 1,868 pounds, that was found on an abandoned boat in a swampy area.

The drug was taken to shore by the Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard.

"Two persons, including the driver of the truck, which reportedly transported the drug from Clarendon to Old Harbour Bay, have been taken into custody. The truck has been seized by the police," the police said in a statement yesterday.

"Those arrested have not yet been charged. They are being interrogated, so we will not release their names because our aim is to nab the mastermind behind all this," Brown told the Observer earlier in the day yesterday.

In addition to the Operation Kingfish and the army, the operation also included officers from the Special Anti Crime Task Force and Narcotics Division.

Stressing crime prevention, Security Council extends UN mission in Haiti by 6 months
Spokesman for Secretary-General
UN News Centre
18 August 2006

15 August 2006

Calling on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to step up its efforts to prevent crime and reduce violence in the impoverished Caribbean country, the Security Council today extended the mission's mandate by another six months.

At a meeting at UN Headquarters in New York, the Council voted unanimously to extend the mandate through 15 February next year, six months earlier than the date requested by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a recent report.

The resolution passed by the Council calls for MINUSTAH to be comprised of up to 7,200 peacekeeping troops and as many as 1,951 police officers, as well as 16 corrections officers seconded from other UN Member States. As of mid-July, there were some 6,200 troops and 1,687 police.

Violent crime remains a problem of enormous magnitude in Haiti, especially in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where the number of kidnappings by armed groups has started to surge again after declining at the beginning of the year.

The Council asked MINUSTAH to reorient its programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants "towards a comprehensive community violence reduction programme adapted to local conditions," including the provision of job opportunities for gang members and other at-risk youths.

The mission was also asked to work closely with Haitian authorities to combat cross-border drugs and arms trafficking, train police officers and help reform the justice sector, which is plagued by problems ranging from prison overcrowding to impunity for many violent crimes.

Council members also asked Haiti to complete run-off legislative and municipal elections as soon as feasible, and for MINUSTAH to help in the organization of those polls.

In his most recent report on the mission, Mr. Annan said that Haiti is posed for a fresh start after the successful staging of elections earlier this year and the subsequent formation of a broad-based government, which has representatives from seven different political parties in the 18-member cabinet.

Aristide is 'still welcome in SA'
Independent Online, South Africa
August 16 2006

Former Haitian president Jean-Bertrande Aristide is welcome to continue his exile in South Africa as long as necessary, according to Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

In a written reply to a parliamentary question released Wednesday, Dlamini Zuma said that the open invitation was part of the international process to create "peace and stability in Haiti".

Aristide fled Haiti in February 2004 amid violent unrest. President Rene Preval, who was elected this February, has said he is free to return despite the tenuous security situation which has seen dozens of foreigners and Haitians kidnapped and hundreds forced to flee their homes by gang fighting since May.

The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously Tuesday to extend the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti for six months.

"The South African Government continues to accord President Jean-Bertrand Aristide the status of a former head of state and will treat him as a guest of the South African government for as long as is necessary, although neither the South African government nor President Aristide believes he is here on a permanent basis," Dlamini-Zuma said.

The opposition Democratic Alliance, which asked the question, accused the government of wasting taxpayers' money to host Aristide and said he should return to his homeland and answer questions about human rights abuses.

"How fortunate Mr Aristide is to have friends such as the ANC government. He, his wife, his children, his staff and his entourage live the kind of luxury afforded to a head of state at the expense of the taxpayer with no end in sight, while the people of Haiti continue to live in poverty as they struggle to rebuild their country," the opposition party said.

The government has refused to give details about the cost - reported by local media to be up to R200 000 a month.

"The monthly costs of his accommodation, transport, office support staff and security are similar to the cost normally incurred for a South African cabinet minister," said Dlamini-Zuma in her reply. - Sapa-AP

The cost of hosting Aristide
The Sunday Times, South Africa
Thursday August 17, 2006

The costs of hosting former Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide in South Africa is in line with the costs of a South African cabinet minister, South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said.

In a written reply to Democratic Alliance chief whip Douglas Gibson, the minister confirmed that the South African Government continued to cover the costs of the stay "of (former) President Aristide, his family, staff and entourage in South Africa - in compliance with the original request received from the Caricom via the African Union".

The minister said: "The monthly costs of his accommodation, transport, office support staff and security are similar to the cost normally incurred for a South African cabinet minister."

"It is important for the South African Government to keep analysing the situation in Haiti, following the recently concluded presidential elections."

President Aristide has the intention to return to Haiti when the situation is conducive for him to do so.

"The conditions that must be in place for President Aristide to return to Haiti are inter alia stability and the assurance of his safety; in other words that he will be a free citizen able to lead a normal life."

The minister noted that President Thabo Mbeki - on February 18 this year - joined world leaders in commending the people of Haiti on the successful outcome of their presidential election.

The minister said: "We believe South Africa's national interest will be best served if Haiti's endeavour to nation building, reconciliation, peace, justice and stability succeeds to the extent to which the international community, working in consultation with Caricom and the Organisation of American States (OAS), will provide its support and make resources available to the Haitian people.

"President Aristide's continued stay in South Africa must be seen as part of this international process to create peace and stability in Haiti."

South Africa: Aristide Welcome to Stay
By MICHAEL WINES
New York Times
August 17, 2006

The deposed Haitian president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is welcome to remain in exile in South Africa for as long as he likes, but neither he nor the South African government anticipates that he will stay forever, the foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, told Parliament. Mr. Aristide, left, who left Haiti in 2004, lives outside Pretoria in circumstances akin to those of a cabinet minister, she said. Critics have accused President Thabo Mbeki of according luxury accommodations to Mr. Aristide, who was widely accused of corruption and misrule. Ms. Dlamini-Zuma said, however, that Mr. Aristide's exile fit an international mandate to create peace and stability in Haiti.

Rudi Stern, Artist Whose Medium Was Light, Dies at 69

By MARGALIT FOX

New York Times

August 18, 2006

Rudi Stern, a multimedia artist who spent decades bending light to his will in the service of both art and commerce — from the psychedelic shows he created for Timothy Leary to the vibrant neon in Studio 54 — died on Tuesday in Cadiz, Spain. He was 69 and had made his home in Cadiz in recent years.

The cause was complications of lung cancer, said Jeff Friedman, the owner of Let There Be Neon, the Manhattan studio and gallery that Mr. Stern founded in 1972.

Mr. Stern was a modern-day illuminator, his chosen medium light itself. In the 1960's, he was known for his avant-garde light shows and was also an early advocate of video art. In the 1970's, he was widely credited with reviving the dying craft of neon. Over the years, he designed lighting for theater and opera, for television and films, and for rock groups like the Byrds and the Doors.

Most recently, Mr. Stern was known for the multimedia installation "Theater of Light," which was shown at various locations in New York and New Jersey between 1999 and 2001. Involving multiple screens, thousands of painted glass slides and more than 30 projectors, "Theater of Light" surrounded audience members with densely layered, constantly changing images, intricately choreographed to music.

Writing in The New York Times in 2001, Anita Gates reviewed a performance at the Flamboyán Theater in Lower Manhattan.

"What you see on 2,000 or so slides hand-painted by Mr. Stern is probably as subjective as a Rorschach test," she wrote. "There are, among other things, geometric patterns, faces on tabloid covers, windowpanes that turn into a skyline, an egg that turns into a street map, a red spider web that weaves itself into batik, lush foliage in jungle colors, royal purple fabric with gorgeous gold thread and the surface of Jupiter as Keir Dullea saw it in '2001.' Or at least that's what I saw."

But it was for his work in neon that Mr. Stern was most widely known. He designed signs for Broadway shows, including "Kiss of the Spider Woman," and installations for performance artists like Laurie Anderson and Nam June Paik. There was also Mr. Stern's bread and butter, the innumerable renditions of PIZZA, BEER and EAT AT JOE'S that hung in ordinary establishments across the country.

He dreamed of setting the world ablaze. "I have plans for neon pavements, neon highways, neon tunnels; neon on bridges, under water, outlining trees in parks," Mr. Stern told Omni magazine in 1981.

Rudolph George Stern was born in New Haven on Nov. 30, 1936. As a young man, he trained as a painter, studying with the noted artists Hans Hoffman and Oskar Kokoschka. He earned a bachelor's degree in studio arts from Bard College in 1958 and a master's from the University of Iowa in 1960.

After settling in Manhattan in the mid-60's, Mr. Stern met Jackie Cassen, an artist who worked in light. For the next several years, they collaborated on luminous kinetic installations, including "psychedelic celebrations" for Timothy Leary, the noted evangelist for LSD.

In 1969, Mr. Stern and several colleagues founded Global Village, an experimental video center and performance space in Manhattan. Around this time, he developed a passion for old neon signs, and soon his loft was abuzz with sputtering tubes.

At the time, neon was moribund. First used commercially in France in the early 20th century, neon came to the United States in 1923. It swept the country in the 1930's, after the repeal of Prohibition, when garish signs advertising cocktails seemed like a magnificent idea. But after World War II, as neon signs were replaced increasingly by fluorescent-lighted plastic, the art of bending colored tubes into sinuous, gas-filled forms began to wane.

At Let There Be Neon, originally in SoHo and today on White Street in TriBeCa, artisans have produced everything from architectural installations to outdoor sculpture to fanciful neon castles that can be dropped, apparently without incident, into fish tanks. ("Neon's good for fish," Mr. Stern told The Times in 1979. "It makes them grow.")

In recent years, Mr. Stern concentrated primarily on documentary filmmaking. His films include "Haiti: Killing the Dream" (1992), which he directed with Katharine Kean. He wrote several books, among them "Let There Be Neon" (Abrams, 1979) and its sequel, "The New Let There Be Neon" (Abrams, 1988).

Mr. Stern's first marriage, to Moira North, ended in divorce. He is survived by his wife, Raffaella Trivi, and their daughter, Stella, both of Cadiz. He is also survived by a daughter from an early relationship, who declined to give her last name or hometown, Mr. Friedman said. Her given name is Lumiere, the French word for light.

'Heading South': The Job Of Sex in the Third World
By Stephen Hunter
Washington Post
Friday, August 18, 2006

You see it all over the Third World, anywhere poverty and beauty converge under balmy skies, and the liquor is sweet and hits hard. A Westerner, north of 45, with fallen arches, hair, belly and spirit, clearly no longer sexually competitive in the meat markets of the big city, shows up, hunting an arrangement.

The arrangement will be with a younger, suppler body, owned by a younger, duller, more beautiful person. The two will share not an hour of anonymous sex, a la the streetwalker and her beau, but something tangentially more dignified: a kind of ersatz relationship, with life narratives exchanged, laughs and drinks sampled to lubricate the awkwardness, day trips to the mountains or the monuments to eat up the afternoon hours, and then discreet nights of sweat and bliss. Finally, certain monies will be quietly exchanged, "gifts," not payments, addresses passed between the two for the letters that will never get written, the photos that will never be sent, and . . . that's it. Hello, Monday morning, back in the office. Hmm, you look so refreshed . Have a good time down south? That glow in your face? You must have gotten good weather. Meanwhile, you are thinking, Good Lord, I didn't even notice the weather.

Eyes wide shut: Charlotte Rampling and Ménothy Cesar in "Heading South." (Shadow Distribution)

That casually sexual-emotional bit of business -- so institutionalized in Cuba, the young women have a name, *jineteras* -- is at the heart of Laurent Cantet's new film "Heading South," but it has a slight twist. All is as I have described, except the genders are reversed. The old bodies happen to be female and the new bodies male.

Given the director, a movie on gigolo politics seems a surprise. Cantet has quietly achieved a world reputation, but his specialty is the workplace film. He understands the dynamics of that hideous human institution known as "the office" as well as anyone except Ricky Gervais. But you have to understand that, in a strange way, "Heading South" is a workplace film, and it chronicles the same pathologies as "Time Out" or "Human Relations": annoyance, ennui, resentment, foolishness, losing control, being late, having a bad attitude, cliques, conspiracies, pointless plots, counterproductive energy. It's just that for Legba, the workplace is between the thighs of Ellen, Brenda and Sue.

Legba (Ménothy Cesar) is black and beautiful, perhaps 18, with one of those bodies full of knobs and planes. He's thin where he should be thin and broad where he should be broad. When he smiles, you think of diamonds, and that gleam is reflected in his bright eyes. The place is a sultry beach resort in Baby Doc's brutal Haiti in the late '70s, before that portly brigand flew to wherever. It's a land of fear, ruled by thugs called the Ton-Tons Macoutes, and in certain alleyways, if you are black, the wrong word or the wrong glance or the wrong place at the wrong time will get you dead fast -- so in a sense, Legba is a refuge from the slaughters outside the gate. He knows he's safe amid the turistas .

Ellen (the great Charlotte Rampling), Brenda (TV pro Karen Young) and Sue (Louise Portal) realize all this, very much in the way most Westerners realize the truths of the Third World. That is, the earnest, political, concerned 1 percent of their brains says, Oh, it's so awful, it's so cruel, it should be

changed, or something. Then the other 99 percent chimes in: Par-tay, par-tay, par-tay, and the revolution is canceled.

The story essentially takes off from Brenda's inability to play by the rules. And there are rules and if you disobey them, hell must be paid. The rule is: Enjoy the body, the smile, the bright eyes, the intimate exchange of emotions; laugh, drink, dance the night away, but . . . don't get involved. He must stay in his world and you must return to yours and if you pretend you have fallen in love, you just destroy things for everybody.

Brenda, who had visited three years earlier, returns, convinced that what she feels in her loins is love, not want. She races across the sand to find the boy sleeping and stares at him as if Botticelli just painted him or Hugh Hefner just put him in a magazine spread. She awakens the young prince, and it's possible that he even remembers her; but soon she learns that he's also involved with Ellen.

Cantet has a wonderful sense of each of these women. Brenda, product of a divorce and a great deal of family disappointment, could easily mistake lust for the other L-word, and Young's ability to mix doughty and damaged in the same stroke is superb. Ellen, shrewd and tart of tongue, is an intellectual (she teaches French lit at Smith) and she knows exactly what's going on. With her Queen Bee wit and sense of entitlement and those haughty Lauren Bacall eyes (were Bacall and Rampling separated at birth or is the younger a secret issue of the older?), she expects to rule, and generally does. Except she cannot really, though she believes she can, rule her own emotional life. Finally, Sue is a good bloke, a French Canadian, probably the healthiest of the three; she knows the score and has adjusted her expectations appropriately.

So for a while, the film is a kind of game of boy, boy, who's got the boy? Each of the three tries to capture the heart of the fellow, with poor Brenda the most blubbery and self-pitying. Money, clothes, time, attention, she can't stop giving the kid stuff. Clever, beautiful Ellen knows that all comes to they who wait and plot; and Sue keeps on smiling.

But the horror outside leaks inside. For, unknown to the women, Legba does have a Haitian life. He has a mother, he had friends, and he has enemies. A former neighbor appears to be the mistress of someone, and is bodyguarded by a brute who must have connections with the Ton-Tons Macoutes; he has a license to kill and no responsibilities. Soon he is stalking the boy, and maybe even being seen about Port-au-Prince with a 50-year-old white woman and bags from all the fine French stores won't buy Legba the dispensation he hopes.

The movie doesn't make the mistake that so many Westerners-in-World-3 make, where they concentrate so fully on the horror of the posh observers, they pass on the horror of the exploited. What happens is horrible, and perhaps its biggest horror is how helpful it is to Westerners. It's a metaphor for the ways we look but don't feel a whole lot about what happens in the world's gutters.

One of the women returns home, embittered; one takes the events as a sexual liberation, and is last seen heading even farther south, on the hunt for yet more young, smooth-skinned men of color. Here's what she's learned from the tragedy: She's gotta have it.

In its way, "Heading South" is a piercing indictment, though it makes its point without much screaming, hectoring or preening. It's quietly terrific.

Heading South (108 minutes, at the Avalon with subtitles for French and native patois) is rated R for scenes of violence and intense sexual content.

Death of Haitian migrant pushed out of boat investigated as a homicide

Associated Press

South Florida Sun Sentinel

August 17 2006

JUPITER ISLAND -- Authorities are investigating the death of a Haitian migrant as a homicide after witnesses said she was pushed from the smugglers' boat about 25 to 50 yards offshore.

The woman, in her late teens or early 20s, was discovered early Wednesday morning a half-mile north of the Jupiter Inlet, the Coast Guard said. She was not identified, but an autopsy was set for later Thursday.

Petty Officer Dana Warr said Thursday that authorities initially received word that 12 migrants had been forced into the water. A search was called off Wednesday afternoon after authorities had eight people in custody, Border Patrol agent Robert Swathwood said.

It was not known exactly how many people were on the boat because of conflicting accounts from the migrants, Swathwood said.

Crew members of the smuggling boat ordered the migrants into the water before reaching shore, Palm Beach County sheriff's spokesman Pete Palenzuela said.

Citing witness accounts, Palenzuela said most migrants jumped but others were apprehensive, including the woman who died. She was pushed, he said.

Warr said it is not unusual for smugglers to force migrants from the boat before reaching shore.

``It's typical to see that, where the smuggler will just tell them to get out of the boat anywhere from 50 feet to a quarter-mile from shore and tell them to swim," Warr said. ``They dump them off, and if they can swim, great. If not, that's not their problem. It's a blatant disregard for life."

At least one person was being investigated on possible smuggling and drug charges after more than 12 pounds of cocaine was found in bag carried by a man discovered hiding in the woods, said Jupiter Police Chief William Mason.

Haitians who come ashore illegally are usually returned home. Cubans who reach U.S. soil illegally, however, are generally allowed to stay. Illegal migrants of all nationalities are typically sent back to their homelands when caught at sea.

UN extends Haiti mission, adding police, cutting troops

AFP

Caribbean Net News

Thursday, August 17, 2006

UNITED NATIONS, (AFP): The Security Council on Tuesday extended a UN mission to Haiti by six months, with additional police and fewer soldiers.

A resolution adopted unanimously prolongs until February 15, 2007 the UN Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH).

The number of UN troops deployed in Haiti will drop to 7,200 from 7,500, while the number of police will grow to 1,951 from 1,897, a rise of 54.

The council also authorized the addition of 16 prison guards "in support of the government of Haiti to address the shortcomings of the prison system."

In his most recent report on Haiti to the Security Council, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sought a greater police presence in the mission -- specifically 54 criminal experts to grapple with an upsurge in violence that has rocked Haiti.

Haiti has suffered an upsurge of kidnappings and armed attacks, which had begun to trail off after the election of President Rene Preval on February 7.

Some 8,700 soldiers and police from several countries have been in Haiti for two years attempting to restore order unleashed after the ouster of former president Jean Bertrand Aristide on February 29, 2004.

The UN mission has come under heavy criticism from some Haitians as lax and ineffective against crime and violence.

U.S.-Backed Haiti Stabilization Mission Extended to February 2007
U.N. Security Council votes unanimously for six-month extension
By Eric Green
US State Department
August 16, 2006

Washington -- A U.S.-backed international stabilization mission in Haiti has been extended for another six months, until February 15, 2007, and most likely will be renewed past that date for further periods.

The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously August 15 to extend the mission, which had been set to expire that day. The mission, known by the acronym MINUSTAH, was created by a Security Council resolution on April 30, 2004.

Some 37 countries, including the United States, are providing personnel to MINUSTAH. The United States also made a new pledge July 25 of almost \$210 million over the next year to help in Haiti's economic recovery. The pledge was made at an international donors' conference for Haiti, held in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince. It follows previous U.S. funding assistance for Haiti. (See related article.)

The new Security Council resolution says MINUSTAH should consist of a military component of up to 7,200 troops and a police component of up to 1,951 officers. As of mid-July, there were some 6,200 troops and 1,687 police. The resolution further urged the U.N. member states to provide MINUSTAH with well-qualified French-speaking police candidates with specific expertise in, among other things, anti-gang operations.

The resolution also called on MINUSTAH to "reorient its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts" in Haiti toward a community violence-reduction program. The United Nations said those efforts would help Haiti's government and the international donor community on initiatives to provide employment opportunities to former gang members and at-risk youth.

In addition, the resolution urged Haitian authorities to complete run-off elections as soon as possible in those areas where the "electoral process was disrupted or appeals were upheld." MINUSTAH was asked to provide "all appropriate assistance" for staging those elections.

The United Nations quoted from the organization's secretary-general, Kofi Annan, who said that with the successful completion of national elections in Haiti earlier in 2006 "a new page" in the country's history had been turned.

René Préal was elected democratically as Haiti's new president February 7 and sworn into office May 14 in Port-au-Prince at a ceremony attended by a U.S. delegation headed by Florida Governor Jeb Bush. According to a U.S. State Department fact sheet released May 25, the United States spent more than \$340 million in fiscal years 2004 and 2005 to improve governance, security, the rule of law and economic recovery, as well as to meet critical humanitarian needs in Haiti. (See fact sheet.)

Annan said in a report on the U.N. mission in Haiti that the citizens of that nation "have a unique opportunity to break the cycle of violence and poverty and move towards a future of stable and

peaceful development. In this, they will be guided by a new leadership which emerged from a free, fair and inclusive electoral process, conducted in safety and dignity."

Préval has shown a "commendable determination to reach out to all political and social forces in Haiti in a spirit of reconciliation and dialogue, leaving behind decades of tension and exclusion," said Annan.

The United Nations says violent crime remains a problem of enormous magnitude in Haiti, especially in Port-au-Prince, where the number of kidnappings by armed groups has started to surge again after declining at the beginning of 2006.

Annan said illicit trafficking in weapons and drugs remains an "obstacle to successfully fighting crime, impunity and corruption" in Haiti. Annan's report (PDF, 23 pages) and the text of the Security Council resolution are available on the U.N. Web site.

Amid unrest, Haiti gains in fight on AIDS

BY JACOB GOLDSTEIN

Miami Herald

August 14, 2006

The outlook for people with AIDS in Haiti is improving, even as the fate of many Haitians sick with other diseases remains bleak.

PORT-AU-PRINCE - Even as an unstable government, warring gangs and frequent kidnappings have brought despair to many in Haiti, the fate of AIDS patients has begun to improve.

Haiti has long had the highest AIDS rate outside of Africa, and for years the impoverished country lacked the money to buy AIDS drugs, leaving thousands to die. But since 2003, when a massive influx of foreign support for treatment began, the number of people receiving AIDS drugs has climbed from a few hundred to nearly 8,000.

Testing for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and care for patients who have HIV but do not yet need drugs are also increasing across the country, with funding to bring care to nearly all who need it by 2008.

"The prospects for controlling the AIDS epidemic in Haiti look very good," said Dr. Jean William Pape, one of several Haitian AIDS doctors discussing Haiti's progress at this year's International AIDS Conference, which opened Sunday in Toronto.

Progress has been so dramatic that a story now making the rounds in Haiti describes patients who become distraught when they learn they don't have AIDS -- because they know that AIDS patients receive free medicine, treatment and sometimes food, all of which are often unavailable to those with other illnesses.

The implication: The infusion of more than \$100 million in foreign aid has in many parts of the country boosted the level of support for AIDS patients far above the care given people with other illnesses in the fragmentary national healthcare system.

"We are putting a diamond into mud," said Dr. Georges Dubuche, of Management Sciences for Health, a nonprofit group that runs several healthcare projects in Haiti.

Doctors are not suggesting that there is too much money for AIDS care in Haiti. The funding -- most of it targeted directly to a handful of nonprofit healthcare groups, largely bypassing government agencies -- has begun to address the acute inequality that emerged in the 1990s, when expensive new drug cocktails transformed AIDS into a manageable disease in rich countries, while patients in poor nations continued to die because they couldn't afford the drugs.

"I felt dead. My mother had to carry me in," said a 37-year-old woman who came to Gheskio, Pape's clinic, three years ago. The clinic, a bustling research center set behind concertina wire and across the street from a crumbling slum where U.N. soldiers clash with armed gangs, now sees thousands of patients.

"Since I came here, everything changed," the woman said. "I couldn't walk; I walk now. I couldn't eat; I eat now. No more vomiting. No more diarrhea. It's like I'm back to the world."

But as the acute inequality of access to AIDS drugs has eased, broader, chronic inequalities have returned to the fore. Life expectancy in Haiti is 53 years for men, 56 for women. One child in eight dies before age 5 -- and only 20 percent of those children have HIV, reports one recent study.

Nationwide, 2 percent to 3 percent of Haitians are infected with HIV -- down from 6 percent a decade ago.

"There are 97 percent of people with other diseases and other issues," said Dubuche, who cites care for pregnant mothers as an example. "We are putting prevention of mother-to-child transmission [of HIV] into maternity wards that are not proper. Many things are not there -- drugs, IVs. There is no operating room. Most of them can't do blood transfusions."

The disparity between AIDS patients and others is apparent at the Immaculate Conception Hospital in Les Cayes, one of several provincial public hospitals with new AIDS treatment teams.

Gheskio oversees the project in conjunction with the Ministry of Health. International funding pays for drugs, laboratory equipment, local staff members and mobile teams -- comprising a doctor, nurse, social worker, pharmacist and lab technician -- that make regular training and monitoring visits to each site.

HUNDREDS GET DRUGS

About 200 patients now receive AIDS drugs at the hospital. The staff is treating hundreds more who are HIV-positive but don't yet need drugs, and dozens of new patients are tested for HIV every day.

Some of the money flowing in to the AIDS project has benefited the hospital as a whole. For the first time in years, for example, the hospital can consistently pay its water and electricity bills every month, although power outages are still frequent, said Dr. Reynold Grand'Pierre, the Gheskio physician who manages the national expansion program.

But because people with ailments other than AIDS must pay for care, the hospital's main wards -- large, concrete rooms with open windows and rows of metal beds -- remain half-empty.

"Some patients don't come because they don't have enough money," said Dr. Roland Charles, an internist at the hospital. "People stay home and die sometimes."

Some of those people are dying of AIDS but either don't know that free AIDS care is available or don't know that they have the disease. Grand'Pierre hopes to address this by pushing HIV testing out to clinics nationwide.

On Haiti's rural Central Plateau, the nonprofit group Partners in Health/Zanmi Lasante is addressing the same problem by making a complete package of basic healthcare available free to indigent patients, whether or not they have HIV.

Since 2003, the group -- which has its Haitian base in Cange, on the Central Plateau, and also has offices in Boston, where its founder, Paul Farmer, is on the Harvard faculty -- has expanded outward from a single site into formerly dysfunctional public-health clinics throughout the Central Plateau.

DONATIONS HELP

The group used AIDS dollars to launch the expansion but added additional funding from foundations and individual donors to offer care to all patients. Within months, traffic at the expanded clinics skyrocketed. The holistic approach has been essential to finding HIV patients, said Dr. Joia Mukherjee, the group's medical director.

"There was this concept that if you had centers for [HIV] testing, people would come find out their status," she said. 'But in rural areas, at least, that doesn't happen, because people don't say, 'Hey, I wonder if I have HIV today.' They come into clinics because they're ill."

One of the clinics, in the tiny town of Boucan Carre, sits down a muddy track and across a river from the main dirt road that runs through the plateau. The building that formerly housed the clinic is now a staff eating area and is barely big enough to hold a stove, table and sink. Behind that building, a new two-story structure houses a small inpatient hospital, maternity ward, X-ray facilities and several consultation rooms.

The clinic, which saw about 10 patients a day before the expansion, now sees more than 200. Doctors at the clinic are following 350 HIV patients, including 150 on AIDS drugs.

And working in the remote villages that surround the clinic are 65 accompagnateurs, villagers trained by Partners in Health and paid \$40 a month to make daily visits to a half-dozen or so patients to monitor their health and make sure they take their medicine.

The program has been cited as a model for developing AIDS programs in poor, rural settings worldwide. Yet even here, the outlook is grim for many patients who lack jobs, and whose makeshift huts don't keep the rain out.

"They get soaking wet every night. They have no income," said Dr. Louise Ivers, a Partners in Health doctor who works on the Central Plateau. ``Those are things that are fundamentally associated with disease -- with tuberculosis, with diarrhea. Without a road, patients can't get to the clinic."

Throughout Haiti, poverty has remained in many ways a more intractable problem than HIV.

Gheskio and Partners in Health have paired with other organizations to provide food to patients -- but the patients often end up sharing the food with hungry family members. Many are too poor to afford even basic transportation.

One recent morning in Les Cayes, a field worker from the treatment center in Les Cayes travels to the countryside to find an 11-year-old boy who urgently needs treatment but missed his appointment because his father lacked \$3 for bus fare. (See accompanying story.)

Later that day, a woman brings in her pill bottle so the doctor can check on whether she has taken all of her AIDS medication. Strict adherence is essential, because when patients miss doses, the virus can mutate to become resistant to the medication.

Last year, Pape and his colleagues published a paper in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine, showing that, even through waves of widespread violence and civil unrest, Gheskio's patients took their drugs as faithfully as patients at U.S. clinics.

But today, there are two pills too many left in the bottle; the patient has missed a dose, she explains, because she ran out of food and did not want to take her pills on an empty stomach.

It's very important that you take your pills every day, the doctor says, even if you have no food.

Kidnapped Italian Woman Freed in Haiti
The Associated Press
The Washington Post
Friday, August 11, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- An Italian woman kidnapped in Haiti by gunmen who killed her husband was freed after three days in captivity, her family and U.N. officials said Friday.

The U.N. gave no details on how Gigliola Martino was freed. Investigators believe she was kidnapped for ransom.

Martino, 65, was released Thursday, U.N. police spokesman Fred Blaze said.

Paollo Vitiello, Martino's nephew, said he had seen her and added she was in good health.

Armed men entered the couple's villa Monday in the capital Port-au-Prince, shooting Martino's husband, 67-year-old businessman Guido Vitiello, before abducting her. Vitiello later died of his wounds in a hospital.

Martino, who has lived in Haiti for about 30 years, was also briefly kidnapped last year.

Haiti experienced relative calm after President Rene Preval's February election. Since May, however, dozens of foreigners and Haitians have been kidnapped, and gang fighting has forced hundreds to flee their homes in the capital.

China's fourth peacekeeping police team leaves for Haiti
People's Daily Online, Xinhua
August 13, 2006

Ninety-five Chinese riot police on Sunday left Beijing as China's fourth peacekeeping team to Haiti in a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

A 30-member contingent of the team arrived in Haiti on Aug.4.

The members' average age is 28 and include six women. They are expected to be stationed in Haiti for eight months, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

The team is composed by border police, most from east China's Fujian Province.

They were trained on the language, shooting, driving, and combat skills, the police authority said, adding that they had been appraised by UN officials.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said during his visit to Haiti earlier this month that he would call for a 12-month extension of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

China's third Chinese riot police team is scheduled to return on Aug. 15. Thirty members of them arrived in China on Aug. 4.

Immigration law favors Cubans over Haitians

By Tim Funk

San Jose Mercury News

August 14, 2006

WASHINGTON - It's a classic case of U.S. immigration law favoring one nationality over another: Cubans vs. Haitians.

"Both are coming by boat, both are coming to Florida," says Doris Meissner, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan think tank in Washington. "But the law is sympathetic to the Cubans and unsympathetic to the Haitians."

Immigrants from Haiti are trying to escape poverty, chaos and violence.

Cubans get a legal break partly because they are fleeing Fidel Castro's communist regime - America's enemy for nearly half a century, says Meissner, who headed the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in the 1990s.

But U.S. policy in this case, she adds, is also "a reflection of domestic politics."

Translation: The Cuban American community in Florida is a political powerhouse - especially in the Republican Party.

Cubans' special status can be traced to the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act. Passed by Congress in the midst of the Cold War, it was designed to welcome those leaving the communist island - and "to poke a finger in the eye of Castro," says Angela Kelly, deputy director of the National Immigration Forum.

Cuban Americans liken those fleeing Castro's dictatorship to East Germans who managed to scale the Berlin Wall.

A Florida-bound boatlift of more than 37,000 Cubans in 1994 caused then-President Clinton to tinker with the policy.

Called "wet foot/dry foot," it says Cubans stopped at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard can be sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for an asylum hearing. If approved, they're sent to a third country - not the United States.

But those who make it to land still get what often amounts to automatic asylum.

Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., tried to change that in 1996, calling the Cuban act a relic and including a repeal of it in his rewrite of immigration law.

Enter Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla. He persuaded the Senate to strip the measure from Simpson's bill and affirm special treatment for Cuba until a democratic government is elected there.

Haitians apprehended - on land or at sea - can still apply for asylum. But few get it.

In 1998, Congress passed the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act, which let certain Haitians living in the United States become legal residents.

But a Haitian and a Cuban who arrive in the same boat still can be treated differently under the law.

"One goes to the detention center," says federal immigration spokesman Michael Defensor. "The other goes to (Miami's) Little Havana."

IOC President to Support Haiti-DR Games
Prensa Latina
August 12, 2006

Santo Domingo, The president of the International Olympic Committee, Belgian Jacques Rogge, will support the first Haiti-Dominican Republic Sports Games for Peace.

The president of the Dominican Olympic Committee, Luis Mejias, will attend this sport event, which aims to reconcile two nations marked by a long-standing antagonism.

The games also seek to integrate young Dominican and Haitian people in sports, as an alternative to the increasing crime and drug consumption.

Haitian President René Preval signed the official agreement to organize matches in various localities of the two countries bordering zone.

According to the deal, the games will be held from November 2 to 5, including volleyball, athletics, basketball, tennis, among others.

Surrender or die, Haiti tells armed gangs
The Globe and Mail
August 11, 2006

Port-au-Prince -- Haiti's government threw down the gauntlet to the impoverished and violent Caribbean country's armed gangs yesterday, telling them to lay down their weapons or be killed.

Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis told gang members to enter the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reinsertion program run by UN peacekeepers aimed at stabilizing Haiti.

His comments, before a legislative assembly, marked the first ultimatum to gang leaders from the newly installed government of President René Préval. Reuters

New wave of violence hits Port-au-Prince, Haiti
MSF Field News
August 11, 2006

An MSF anesthetist checks a patient with several machete wounds. Photo © Sergio Cecchini/MSF
Renewed clashes in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince involving various armed groups—including United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah) forces—has brought an abrupt end to the short respite from violence in the city since elections in February.

In July 2006, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) treated more than 200 gunshot victims at three medical facilities in Port-au-Prince: St. Joseph's trauma center in the Turgeau neighborhood, St. Catherine hospital in Cité Soleil, and Jude Anne Hospital in the Delmas area. This represents a 110 percent increase from gunshot-related admissions in June.

"This level of violence is extremely high, even for a city of two million," said Yann Libessart, head of mission for the MSF trauma center at St. Joseph's Hospital in the city's center. "Our medical and surgical teams treated 37 gunshot victims in the 48-hour period after clashes on July 20 and 21." Since December 2004, more than 5,000 people were admitted to MSF hospitals for violence-related injuries, including more than 2,500 gunshot victims and 1,500 stabbing victims.

In July 2006, MSF treated more than 200 patients with gunshot wounds. Photo © MSF
"Every day we can hear gunshots in the city," said Petra Reijners, head of mission for MSF's Jude Anne hospital. "Civilians from an increasing number of neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince are forced to live in a state of constant fear. They are scared of being hit by a stray bullet. Our program in Jude Anne Hospital, designed to provide free emergency obstetric care, had to admit ten patients suffering from gunshot wounds in July."

In the past weeks, MSF also visited four sites in the city where residents fled following the latest upsurge in violence. One mother of seven children in her mid-twenties, who was recently forced to leave her home, told our teams: "armed groups started shooting at a lot of people and everybody had to run. They killed my husband, they burned our house. I don't know why they are doing this. I don't know where to go," she said.

In this context of widespread violence, respect for the safety of civilians remains a major concern for all MSF medical teams. "In our facilities in Cité Soleil, we treated a majority of women and children who had been caught in the crossfire," said Loris De Filippi, head of mission for the 78-bed St. Catherine hospital in Cité Soleil. "Due to the uncertainty of the situation, we had to take the difficult decision of closing temporarily our primary health center in Chapi. However we will keep St. Catherine hospital's emergency services working within Cité Soleil 24 hours a day."

"While it's hard to predict, we are worried that the recent resumption of heavy fighting in Port-au-Prince will get worse before it gets better," said Reijners.

MSF has been working in Haiti since 1991. In Port-au-Prince, MSF now operates four medical centers. The 78-bed St. Catherine hospital in Cité Soleil provides emergency care to victims of violence, carries out a monthly average of 4,000 primary health care consultations, and admits 100 patients each month.

MSF provides emergency trauma care at the St. Joseph Hospital and runs a 48-bed physical rehabilitation center in the Pacot area. Since its opening in March 2006, the 60-bed Jude Anne hospital has assisted in nearly 2,000 deliveries and conducted more than 10,000 pre- and post-natal consultations, and set up a program of prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite, MSF supports local health structures.

Foreign policy often dominates U.S. immigration policy

By Tim Funk and Danica Coto

Kansas City Star

August 14, 2006

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - In a national debate fixated on Mexicans sneaking across the border, there's been barely a peep about how arbitrary and political U.S. immigration law can be.

Congress, the White House and U.S. immigration agencies have developed over the years a complex patchwork system that favors some groups and nationalities over others.

Did you know that:

220,000 Salvadorans - many of them illegal immigrants now living in the Carolinas - can legally stay and work because the Bush administration has offered them "temporary protected status" for the past five years?

Irish-American members of Congress - including Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. - were able to set aside thousands of "green cards," a path of eventual citizenship, for thousands of Irish immigrants?

Cubans who make it to U.S. soil can legally stay and apply a year and a day later for permanent residency? Those fleeing the communist Castro regime are probably the biggest winners in the U.S. immigration game.

Most Cubans who leave make the dangerous 100-mile trip by boat. But in October 2004, Charlotte's Jocelyn Honorate did what a growing number of Cubans do: She flew to Mexico, then headed for the U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint in Hidalgo, Texas.

"I'm Cuban," she told the guard.

A few days later, she was released, leaving behind clothing for other detainees - Haitians, Guatemalans and others - who eventually would be sent back home.

"It was hard talking with them," remembers Honorate, now 26 and a legal U.S. resident who works for a Charlotte architectural firm. "They were people without hope."

By contrast, Honorate and 40 other Cubans got this greeting by speakerphone: "Congratulations! You've all been approved. Welcome to the United States!"

That legal break dates to the Cold War.

Hoping to strike a blow against Fidel Castro, Congress passed the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act.

No such blanket welcome exists in U.S. law for those who'd like to emigrate from other Communist countries - China, North Korea, Vietnam. One reason: None of those countries have an exile community with the political clout of Cuban Americans in South Florida.

After Castro's decision to cede power, the Bush administration announced plans to speed up family visas to make it even easier for some Cubans to come.

That latest step "has more to do with a handful of political races in Florida in November than with rebuilding Cuba," charged the Federal for American Immigration Reform, a group that wants tougher immigration laws.

Angela Kelly of the National Immigration Forum, which wants more welcoming laws for immigrants, agrees: "You can't deny the high degree of influence by the Cuban lobby."

Ditto the Irish lobby, which has long had pull with powerful Irish-American politicians in Congress.

In the late 1980s, Rep. Brian Donnelly, D-Mass., added amendments that enabled more than 10,000 illegal Irish immigrants to get legal status. And in 1990, Rep. Brian Morrison, D-Conn, was able to set aside 40 percent of 40,000 so-called "diversity visas" for natives of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

One of Morrison's allies: Sen. Kennedy, whose office said his efforts were aimed at the unintended consequences of a 1965 law that made it harder for Irish to come because most no longer had immediate family here.

"He wants to help the Irish and others who don't have family connections and have no other way to emigrate," said Kennedy spokeswoman Laura Capps.

The lesson: It never hurts to have a U.S. senator on your side.

Or a U.S. president.

El Salvador became a "temporary protected status" (TPS) country in 2001, following two earthquakes that killed 1,000 people and destroyed more than 200,000 homes.

After intense lobbying by the Salvadoran government, the TPS was just extended for another 12 months. That means Salvadorans who were living in the United States in 2001 - many of them illegally - can stay and work for another year. TPS comes up for renewal or termination every 12 to 18 months.

TPS is designed to aid countries reeling from a natural disaster, civil war or other destabilizing situation. But nations that qualify have been denied.

Pakistan had 80,000 people die in an earthquake last year. It doesn't have TPS even though 50 groups and 34 members of Congress have asked for it.

The government of Colombia has also asked for TPS, to no avail, even though the South American country is plagued by guerilla conflict and narco-terrorists.

And why has Haiti's request for TPS been denied? With poverty, violence and unstable governments, "what nation has suffered more?" asks Joan Friedland of the National Immigration Law Center, which promotes the rights of low-income immigrants.

Meanwhile, some of the seven TPS-designated countries get extensions though their disasters happened long ago. Christopher Bentley of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services says "assessments" and "studies" help decide whether to extend TPS and whether holders can return safely home.

But some experts see politics in the process, saying President Bush is using TPS to boost the pro-American government in El Salvador, as other Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia flirt with anti-Americanism.

Salvadoran President Antonio Saca sent 400 troops to Iraq. And El Salvador was the first nation to implement CAFTA - Bush's trade pact with Central American countries.

Salvadorans in the United States send home \$2.5 billion every year - \$250 million of it from TPS holders. Keeping those "remittances" flowing to voting families in El Salvador is a political plus for Saca and his conservative party.

El Salvador's TPS designation "has to be political," says Charlotte immigration attorney Phillip Turteltaub, who represents some local TPS holders. "Those (earthquakes) happened years ago. Come on!"

Being pro-American and sending troops to Iraq are no guarantees of winning the immigration game, however.

Poland, which ordered troops to Iraq too, would like better immigration benefits. Polish citizens who want to visit the United States are irked that they have to get tourist visas. They want to be part of America's "visa waiver" program, along with 27 other staunch U.S. allies. Citizens of those countries need only a passport to visit the United States.

This year, the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to its immigration reform package that would exempt Poles from the visa requirement. Among the sponsors: Sen. Barbara Mikulski, the great-granddaughter of Polish immigrants.

But it's not law yet, and there's also the pesky truth that many Poles who do come to the U.S. don't return home, making them illegal immigrants.

Still, U.S. politicians who visit the ex-Soviet block country say the Poles feel like second-class friends.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., says he was peppered with the same question: "Why don't you treat us the same?"

Fairness has never been a requirement or a tradition in fashioning U.S. immigration law. Since 1875, when the Supreme Court ruled that immigration is a federal matter, Congress has felt free to discriminate.

"Immigration law is so wide open that Congress could, theoretically, pass a law saying only 6-foot-tall, blue-eyed Norwegians can come," says Dan Kowalski of Bender's Immigration Bulletin, an online guide to U.S. immigration news.

It's never gotten that wacky, but Congress did vote in 1882 to ban Chinese immigration - a law that wasn't repealed until 1943.

From the 1920s until the 1960s, immigration quotas also gave preference to white Northern Europeans.

Since then, a host of factors ranging from foreign policy to political clout have shaped laws and rules about who can come legally and who can't.

U.S. immigration officials can cite reasons," says Josh Bernstein, director of federal policy at the National Immigration Law Center.

But, he adds, "at the individual level, (the system) is unfair. Immigration policy is a hodgepodge of measures and standards that are always made in a compromise of policy and politics."

Making special cases for some nations' immigrants has its defenders.

Honorate, the Cuban woman who moved to Charlotte, says living under communism is something not even the poorest Mexicans have had to endure. She still gets angry about government policies and the suffering in Cuba. She remembers authorities removing air conditioning from a family car so everyone "could be equal."

Also grateful: Jose Romero, a 31-year-old Charlotte construction worker who now earns three times what he did in his native El Salvador.

He got TPS five years ago after living in the U.S. illegally for five years.

Romero told his fellow construction workers, most of them Mexican, about his TPS. They were happy for him, but jealous.

"They're never going to give us anything," he said the Mexicans told him.

Now Romero has peace of mind.

"You're free and you're happy," he said. "It's the freedom of having a piece of paper that everyone wants."

Daily HIV/AIDS Report
KaiserNetwork.org
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Global Challenges | HIV/AIDS Treatment, Care Improving in Haiti, Despite Political Instability, Violence

Treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS in Haiti is starting to improve despite political instability, gang violence and frequent kidnappings, the Miami Herald reports. The number of people receiving antiretroviral treatment has increased to almost 8,000 since 2003, when foreign aid started to come into the country. In addition, access to testing and care for HIV-positive people who do not yet need antiretrovirals is increasing nationwide, and the country is expected to achieve universal access to care by 2008, the Herald reports. "The prospects for controlling the AIDS epidemic in Haiti look very good," Jean William Pape, a Haitian physician attending the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, said. The provision of more than \$100 million in foreign aid for HIV/AIDS has created a disparity between HIV-positive people and people living with other diseases, the Herald reports. For example, at the Immaculate Conception Hospital in Les Cayes, Haiti, foreign aid has provided antiretroviral drugs for 200 people, increased access to care among hundreds of people who do not yet need antiretrovirals and made testing available for dozens of people daily. But people with other illnesses are required to fund their own care, and the hospital's main wards are largely empty, according to the Herald. "Some patients don't come because they don't have enough money," Roland Charles, an internist at the hospital, said, adding, "People stay home and die sometimes." Some deaths occur among people with AIDS-related illnesses who are either unaware of their status or unaware of the availability of no-cost HIV/AIDS treatment. Reynold Grand'Pierre, a physician at the hospital, said he hopes to expand HIV testing to clinics nationwide.

Partners in Health Program

Partners in Health's sister organization in Haiti, Zanmi Lasante, aims to address the issue of health care by providing a comprehensive package of care for poor people regardless of their HIV status in Haiti's rural Central Plateau, the Herald reports. The organization since 2003 has increased access to its services from one site to several clinics around the plateau. The approach has helped identify new HIV cases, according to Joia Mukherjee, the group's medical director. One of the clinics in the town of Boucan Carre sees more than 200 people daily -- an increase from 10 people daily before the expansion. The clinic's physicians also are monitoring 350 HIV-positive patients, including 150 who are receiving antiretroviral treatment. In addition, PIH has trained 65 local health workers to each visit about six patients daily to assess their health and make sure they are adhering to their treatment regimens. The workers each receive \$40 monthly. The PIH model is seen as an example for HIV/AIDS programs in poor, rural settings in other countries, according to the Herald (Goldstein, Miami Herald, 8/14).

Kaisernetwork.org is serving as the official webcaster of the conference. View the guide to coverage and all webcasts, interviews and a daily video round up of conference highlights at <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/aids2006>.

Cuba's humanitarian mission

Castro's healthcare system is an example to the rest of the world - and is being exported to places in need.

Tom Fawthrop

The Guardian Unlimited

August 16, 2006

Every major famine, flood, hurricane or earthquake triggers international appeals for aid. In most peoples' minds it is the west that provides the bulk of the aid; the mainstream media focuses on the work of well-established NGOs such as Care, Oxfam and the International Red Cross. Few, though, have heard of Cuba's role as a major player in humanitarian operations.

Cuba has consistently responded to emergency appeals for humanitarian aid by dispatching plane-loads of doctors, medicine and equipment - despite the country's own economic problems.

The Indonesian earthquake of May 27 killed over 6,000 people on Java. One hundred thousand homes were destroyed and about 650,000 people were displaced. In addition to medical teams from Italy, Japan and Spain, a 135-strong Cuban medical team were dispatched half-way around the world to operate out of two fully-equipped Cuban field hospitals.

Since the two hospitals opened in early June, 47,000 patients have visited. Nine hundred operations have been performed, 350 of them involving major surgery. The doctors have performed thousands of lab tests, x-rays and ultrasound scans, and nearly 2,000 people have been immunised against tetanus.

Cuban doctor Oscar Putol works in the Intensive Care Unit tent at the Gantiwarno field hospital, about 30 kilometres from Jogjakarta. Nearby there are ugly reminders of the 'quake - crushed houses, rubble and destruction. Most Indonesians are surprised at their first ever contact with Cubans. "About Cuba, yes, many ask why we are here," Dr Putol says. His answer is simple. "It is about humanity and saving lives. We are here to help."

About 800 patients a day visit the tents. Inside the huge consultation area patients are examined by a team of family doctors (similar to GPs in the UK). The orthopaedic specialists and surgeons are veterans of several missions - helping victims of natural disasters in Haiti, Guatemala, and beyond - and have good experience of the kinds of injuries suffered by the earthquake victims.

Most of the team had previous experience in Asia. Two Cuban teams were deployed to help victims of the 2004 tsunami - one in Aceh and the other in Sri Lanka. Many of the doctors now in Indonesia were previously deployed in Pakistan Kashmir after the massive earthquake in October 2005.

In any assessment of Fidel Castro's legacy, the achievements of the Cuban health system must be taken into account. From the early days of the 1959 revolution, Castro prioritised education and health as pillars of the new society. Now, according to the World Health Organisation, Cuba has the world's highest proportion of doctors per capita: one doctor for every 177 people. About 50% are female; this is of great benefit in countries where women are reluctant to be thoroughly examined by a male doctor.

"Most important is the relationship between doctors and patients," Dr Putol explains. "The patients trust us. People appreciate we are not just doctors; we are also human beings." Khalida Ahmad of Unicef agrees. "They treat patients like people, not just cases. Everyone I spoke to from the affected areas was so grateful. They felt they could always go to the Cuban doctors to ask a question, despite language difficulties."

Aid from a country with far less wealth than mineral-rich Indonesia is greatly appreciated by the underresourced Indonesian health authorities. Regional health coordinator Dr Ronny Rockito says that the Cuban medical team "have [a] very high medical standard. Cuban hospitals are fully complete."

Few earthquake victims either in Pakistan or Indonesia would have expected cash-strapped Cuba to come to their rescue. "We were very surprised [to see] doctors coming from a poor country - a country so far away that we know so little about," says Dr Rockito. "We can learn from the Cuban health system."

When other international medical teams packed up their tents to leave at the end of June, patients requested that the Cuban team stay for another six months, says Dr Rockito.

Havana finds that even its humanitarian aid is questioned by a Bush administration that has tightened the long-standing political and economic embargo against Cuba. US embassies reportedly lobbied the governments of Pakistan, East Timor and other countries not to accept aid from Cuban medical teams.

The Cubans insist their aid has no strings attached. "We are here purely out of humanitarian motives," says Dr Putol. "We hope that governments around the world will see that health is most important. So many people die because they don't have enough money for health services."

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Havana offered to send more than 1,000 Cuban doctors to assist the US. Among those ready to help the people of New Orleans was Dr Putol. "We are permanent members of the Henry Reeve Medical Brigade. Today a volcano, tomorrow an earthquake, the day after floods. Cuba is prepared to go to any country if the government requests us."

Spanish academic Dr Araceli Castro, who teaches Public Health at Harvard University, says Cuba is the only country with a permanent medical corps on standby. She added: "I don't know why there should be any resistance to providing healthcare to the poor. It should not be a political issue. It should be beyond politics."

That a small Caribbean nation has assumed such a role in delivering humanitarian aid has drawn accolades from Nelson Mandela and many other leaders from the developing world. The UK and the EU are more likely to focus on Cuba's domestic human rights record in detaining US-funded dissidents than on their contribution to promoting health rights far beyond Cuba's shores.

Whatever its economic failings and lack of press freedom, Castro's unique brand of Caribbean communism is far from a dinosaur regime destined to die with its architect. Many things could change in a post-Castro era, but most Cubans are likely to resist any attempt to undermine the extraordinary success of their health system.

Havana's Medics Work Around The World
Cuba Exports Health
by Hernando Calvo Ospina
ZNet Magazine
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Le Monde Diplomatique

When Hurricane Katrina ripped through the southern United States in August 2005, the authorities were overwhelmed and the governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, appealed to the international community for emergency medical aid. The Cuban government immediately offered assistance to New Orleans and to the states of Mississippi and Alabama, also affected by the storm, and promised that within 48 hours 1,600 doctors, trained to deal with such catastrophes, would arrive with all the necessary equipment plus 36 tonnes of medical supplies. This offer, and another made directly to President George Bush, went unanswered. In the catastrophe at least 1,800 people, most of them poor, died for lack of aid and treatment.

In October 2005, the Kashmir region of Pakistan experienced one of the most violent earthquakes in its history, with terrible consequences in the poorest and most isolated areas to the north. On 15 October an advance party of 200 emergency doctors arrived from Cuba with several tonnes of equipment. A few days later, Havana sent the necessary materials to erect and equip 30 field hospitals in mountain areas, most of which had never been previously visited by a doctor. Local people learned of Cuba's existence for the first time.

To avoid causing offence in this predominantly Muslim country, the women on the Cuban team, who represented 44% of some 3,000 medical staff sent to Pakistan in the next six months, dressed appropriately and wore headscarves.

Good will was quickly established; many Pakistanis even allowed their wives and daughters to be treated by male doctors.

By the end of April 2006, shortly before their departure, the Cubans had treated 1.5 million patients, mostly women, and performed 13,000 surgical operations. Only a few severely injured patients had to be flown to Havana.

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, an important ally of the US and friend of Bush, officially thanked the Cuban authorities and acknowledged that this small nation in the Caribbean had sent more disaster aid than any other country.

First medical brigade

Cuba set up its first international medical brigade in 1963 and dispatched its 58 doctors and health workers to newly independent Algeria. In 1998 the Cuban government began to create the machinery to send large-scale medical assistance to poor populations affected by natural disasters. After hurricanes George and Mitch blew through Central America and the Caribbean, it offered its medical personnel as part of an integrated health programme.

The Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti and Belize all accepted this aid.

Cuba offered massive medical assistance to Haiti, where healthcare was chronically inadequate. In 1998 Cuba even approached France, Haiti's former colonial power, with a proposal to establish a humanitarian association to help the people of Haiti. The French government did not respond (although, finally, in 2004, it sent troops). Since 1998 Cuba has sent 2,500 doctors and as much medicine as its fragile economy permits.

This free aid - the Cuban government funds the personnel - has been effective. The willingness of the new barefoot doctors (1) to intervene in areas where their local equivalents refuse to go, because of the poverty of the clientele or the danger or difficulty of access, has persuaded other countries, especially in Africa, to apply for assistance.

Between 1963 and 2005 more than 100,000 doctors and health workers intervened in 97 countries, mostly in Africa and Latin America (2) By March 2006, 25,000 Cuban professionals were working in 68 nations. This is more than even the World Health Organisation can deploy, while Médecins Sans Frontières sent only 2,040 doctors and nurses abroad in 2003, and 2,290 in 2004 (3).

The most seriously ill patients are often brought to Cuba for treatment. Over the decades these have included Vietnamese Kim Phuc, the little girl shown in the famous war photograph running naked along a road, her skin burned by US napalm. Cuba also took in some 19,000 adults and children from the three Soviet republics most affected by the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986.

In June 2001 the United Nations General Assembly met in special session to discuss Aids. Cuba, with an HIV infection rate of 0.09% compared with 0.6% in the US, made an offer of "doctors, teachers, psychologists, and other specialists needed to assess and collaborate with the campaigns to prevent Aids and other illnesses; diagnostic equipment and kits necessary for the basic prevention programmes and retrovirus treatment for 30,000 patients".

If this offer had been accepted, "all it would take is for the international community to provide the raw materials for the medicines, the equipment and material resources for these products and services. Cuba will not charge and will pay the salaries in its national currency" (4).

The offer was rejected. But eight African and six Latin American countries did benefit from an educational HIV/Aids intervention project which broadcast radio and television programmes, treated more than 200,000 patients and trained more than half a million health workers.

There are currently some 14,000 Cuban doctors working in poor areas of Venezuela. The two governments have also set up Operation Milagro (miracle) which, during the first 10 months of 2005, gave free treatment to restore the eyesight of almost 80,000 Venezuelans, transferring those suffering from cataracts and glaucoma to Cuba for operations (5). More widely, the project offers help to anyone in Latin America or the Caribbean affected by blindness or other eye problems. Venezuela provides the funding; Cuba supplies the specialists, the surgical equipment and the infrastructure to care for patients during their treatment in Cuba.

So far no other government, private body or international organisation has managed to put together a global medical programme on such a scale or to offer such a level of assistance to those in need of care. Operation Milagro's goal is to operate on the eyes of a million people every year.

A few hours before he took up office as president of Bolivia in December 2005, Evo Morales signed his first international treaty, which was with Cuba, setting up a joint unit to offer free ophthalmological treatment. As well as the national institute of ophthalmology in La Paz, recently equipped by Cuba, there will be medical centres in the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Young Bolivian graduates from the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) will take part in the programme.

ELAM was founded in 1998, just as Cuba began to send doctors to the Caribbean and Central America. It operates from a former naval base in a suburb of Havana and trains young people of poor families from throughout the Americas, including the US. There are also hundreds of African, Arab, Asian and European students. Cuba's 21 medical faculties all participate in training. In July 2005 the first 1,610 Latin American students graduated.

Each year some 2,000 young people enroll at the school, where they receive free training, food, accommodation and equipment in return for a commitment to go back home and treat their compatriots (6).

Really doctors?

Ideological considerations have inspired the medical and ophthalmologic associations of some countries to launch a campaign against this initiative. The review of the Argentine council of ophthalmology, for example, questioned whether the Cuban ophthalmologists really were doctors and announced that it was taking steps, along with humanitarian NGOs, to fund a similar programme (7).

There was the same reaction in 1998 in Nicaragua, where, despite the severity of the catastrophe caused by hurricane Mitch, President Arnoldo Alemán refused to admit Cuban doctors. Similar reactions have been seen in Venezuela since 2002 and now in Bolivia. Conservative doctors, who prefer to specialise in diseases of the credit-worthy and refuse to enter shantytowns, accuse Cuba's barefoot doctors of incompetence, illegal medical practice and unfair competition.

In April 2005 the legal authorities in the Brazilian state of Tocantins ordered out 96 Cuban doctors who had been treating the poor. The state governor disagreed, but could do no more than "recognise the professional bravery of the doctors who were welcome here and whom we wish to thank".

The medical associations are afraid that if the Cuban medics bring down prices or even offer some services free, medical treatment will cease to be a profitable, elitist service. As each new doctor graduates in Cuba, they intensify their protests and political pressure.

There is also a threat that diplomas obtained in Cuba will not be recognised elsewhere. Excessive charges in Chile have prevented many Cuban-trained doctors from validating their medical qualifications there. But, as the BBC has pointed out, if Latin America's medical associations persist in their opposition they risk losing the support of populations deprived of access to health services, for whom the project is a glimmer of light in the darkness (8). In the US, where 45 million people have no

health cover and medical studies cost about \$300,000, a blockade forbids students to study in Cuba, threatening up to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of up to \$200,000.

Sceptics see the humanitarian aid offered by Cuba as a publicity stunt, an investment to secure diplomatic support in the face of continuing US hostility. They point out that when the UN Human Rights Council was established in March 2006, Cuba was elected with the support of 96 of the 191 UN member states, whereas Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela, where political opposition is legal, as it is not in Cuba, were rejected.

But a western diplomat was prepared to recognise that Cuba's policy of exporting doctors was an initiative which benefited so many people that it should be applauded even by its political enemies (9).