

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: DECEMBER 11 – 16, 2005

Coast Guard Repatriates 311 Haitians

By VOA News

15 December 2005

The U.S. Coast Guard says it has repatriated 311 Haitians attempting to illegally enter the United States.

In a statement released Wednesday, officials said the Haitians were spotted on a freighter beached on Anguilla Cay in the Bahamas Monday. They said the Haitians were transferred to the Coast Guard cutter Valiant, where they all received food, water and any necessary medical care.

A Coast Guard official said they were sent back to Port-au-Prince Wednesday, adding that several knew they had been headed to the United States but did not know their destination.

So far this year, the Coast Guard has intercepted more than 1,700 Haitians at sea.

Haitian lives at risk in the Dominican Republic.

Charles Arthur.

Dec 1, 2005

Latinamerica Press

As anti-Haitian sentiments reach critical levels, organizations suspect that human rights violations are prevalent within Dominican deportation policy.

For decades, right-wing politicians in the Dominican Republic have periodically inflamed racial tensions between the people who inhabit the two-nation island of Hispaniola. Every few years, the Dominican Army is deployed to round up and deport thousands of Haitians who have crossed the porous border in search of a living.

Between 500,000 and 1 million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, having crossed the 243-mile (391-kilometer) border in recent decades, but an exact figure is difficult to pin down as many are undocumented, living in the Dominican Republic without residency permits. Many find work in the country's agricultural, construction, and tourism sectors.

Another deportation wave

A new round of forced deportations has been underway since May, but this time, human rights organizations are raising the alarm about a noticeable increase in anti-Haitian attitudes among some members of the public, often encouraged by official statements. Most worrying is a series of violent attacks on Haitians and Dominican-Haitians that have left many dead and injured.

It is unknown how many Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian descent have been killed in recent months. Haitian human rights organizations say the attacks that began in May are claiming scores of victims.

In late August, more than 13 Haitian and Dominican-Haitians were killed in just two weeks, including three young Haitian men who were bound, doused with flammable liquid and then set on fire. They died from their wounds a few days later.

The trigger

The current situation was triggered by the murder of a Dominican merchant, allegedly by Haitian immigrants in the town of Hatillo Palma in the northwestern department of Montecristi on May 9. In response, groups armed with machetes and sticks began attacking people believed to be Haitians. Properties were looted and set on fire in a number of localities. During this period, Dominicans attacked a group of Haitians sleeping in a small house, beheading two of them and seriously wounding two more.

In the days that followed, hundreds of Haitian immigrants fled the persecution, and crossed the border into Haiti at Dajabón-Ouanaminthe, one of the two main border crossing points. In the weeks that followed, the Dominican Army started rounding up people believed to be Haitians and forcibly deported them. Throughout May and June as many as 4,000 people were forced from the Dominican Republic to Haiti, and thousands more have been deported since then.

Officials stand by policy

Dominican authorities defend the deportations, arguing that the country is being overwhelmed by immigrants. Human rights organizations respond that the mass deportations do nothing to resolve the social or economic tensions connected to immigration and fact only make the situation worse. They also charge that the deportations involve grave human rights violations.

The attacks have raised fears about the possibility of a repeat of the notorious 1937 massacre, when the Dominican dictator, General Rafael Trujillo, ordered his troops to drive out tens of thousands of Haitians living on the Dominican side of the island. More than 25,000 people are believed to have died as a result.

Commenting on the recent deportations, the Dominican Advisory and Legal Research Center (CEDAIL) — an organization established by the Dominican Catholic Church to help protect immigrants' rights — criticized the "indiscriminate and anti-democratic" repatriations of Haitians.

In a May 27 press release, CEDAIL noted that Haitian immigrants do jobs that most Dominicans refuse to consider, stressing that while the Dominican state has every right to regulate its borders and take measures against immigration, it also owes "a great social debt to the Haitian migrant population, which makes important contributions to the Dominican economy working under conditions that citizens reject."

Activists' worry

Human rights activists say the recent wave of deportations are all the more worrying, because they have been accompanied by statements by public officials that are encouraging a climate of xenophobia.

In mid-May, José Ramón Fadul, the Dominican Secretary of State for Labor, stated that he supported "cleansing the area of foreign workers in conformity with the law." Then, in August, Armed Forces Minister, Sigfrido Pared, stated that the continual immigration of Haitians is "an attack" on the Dominican Republic's sovereignty.

In September, a Dominican organization known as the National Migrations Committee composed of a number of civil society organizations, responded by accusing some politicians and journalists of "stoking" and "inciting" racial hatred against Haitians.

In Haiti, Colette Lespinasse, the coordinator of a nongovernmental organization that supports refugees and repatriated Haitians (GARR), denounced the recent forced deportations and attacks saying the situation was one of "ethnic cleansing."

Dominican authorities deny that anything out of the ordinary is occurring, and claim that non-governmental organizations are exaggerating the situation.

In September, Dominican President Leonel Fernández told reporters that if murders were taking place, then it was an inevitable consequence of poverty in the border regions, and nothing to do with race.

911 call directs police to boatload of Haitian migrants
Boat found off Hobe Sound
By Leon Fooksman and Stephen Deere staff Writers
South Florida Sun Sentinel
December 16 2005

A boatload of Haitians was found safe off Martin County early Thursday afternoon, hours after police received a frantic 911 call from them.

The initial call for help came to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office about 10 a.m. The caller was aboard a 27-foot boat with about 20 other people, including two infants and a pregnant woman.

The caller said the Haitians had put to sea in Port-au-Prince about 10 days ago. The motor on the boat broke several days ago, and they had no food or water left, the caller said. Some people were becoming ill.

But, the caller said, they could see land at times and had decided to try their luck using a cell phone. They dialed 911 and asked for help.

"We got four little kids with us," said the caller, who identified himself as "Sean" on a 911 tape the Sheriff's Office released Thursday afternoon. "We are north of Palm Beach."

Sean could not identify any landmarks, except to say he could see the buildings in West Palm Beach.

On the tape, Sean appeared confused about the boat's whereabouts and at one point told the 911 dispatcher that he was in the Intracoastal Waterway. Sean also told the dispatcher he was about 20 kilometers from land. Then later he changed that to 300 or 400 yards.

"Do you have any kind of horn?" The dispatcher asked.

"Yeah, we have horn," Sean said. "We've been honking it for the last two days."

Sheriff's Office and Coast Guard helicopters immediately launched a search for the boat but at first could not find it.

Shortly after 1 p.m., the Haitians were found safe aboard the stranded boat, 10 to 15 miles off the coast of Hobe Sound, said Paul Miller, a spokesman for the Sheriff's Office.

The immigrants were being held aboard a Coast Guard cutter and were given food and water, said Petty Officer Ryan Doss, a Coast Guard spokesman in Miami. Doss did not know if any of them required medical attention.

Doss said he could not provide more details on the status of the Haitians until immigration officials decide their fate.

If immigrants are found to be undocumented, the Coast Guard will typically repatriate them, Petty Officer Dana Warr said.

Leon Fooksman can be reached at lfooksman@sun-sentinel.com or 561-243-6647.

Dominican diplomats withdraw from Haiti
China View
December 16, 2005

HAVANA, -- Most of Dominican's diplomatic staff in Haiti have withdrawn from the country after Dominican President Leonel Fernandez cut short a state visit amid violent protests against his immigration policies, reports from Port-au-Prince said on Thursday.

Only Ambassador Jose Serulle Ramia, his deputy Pastor Vaquez and their bodyguards now remain in the embassy.

The Dominican government withdrew its diplomatic corps on Monday, the same day when Fernandez came under attack during a public protest against him, which turned violent and left three people hospitalized.

At sunset on Monday, witnesses said, a motorcade of 10 vehicles left the Haitian capital for the border with the Dominican Republic, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti.

The protestors were demonstrating against the treatment of Haitians, who crossed the border to the more affluent Dominican Republic looking for work. The immigrants have been attacked by Dominican mobs and unfairly deported by the Dominican government, they said.

The Dominicans living in Haiti said the atmosphere there is tense because of an anti-Dominican campaign carried out by non-government organizations through the media.

Haitian Foreign Minister Frank Charles condemned the student-led protests but also said he understood their anger about Haitians being mistreated in "other countries." Enditem

Government demands apology from Haiti

Reuters

Jamaica Gleaner

December 15, 2005

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic

THE DOMINICAN Republic has demanded an apology from Haiti over violent protests that disrupted a visit to the neighbouring country earlier this week by Dominican President Leonel Fernandez.

Stone-throwing Haitians branded Fernandez a racist and criminal in a demonstration outside the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince on Monday, as they denounced what human rights groups describe as rampant abuses committed against Haitians living in the Dominican Republic.

Witnesses said several protesters were injured in clashes with riot police, including two by bullets. The Dominican president's bodyguards fired warning shots during the melee while his vehicle left the National Palace.

Fernandez himself acknowledged that Haitian immigrants have been victims of abuse on the part of people he called "extremists." He promised his government would do all it can to end the abuses.

But the Dominican Republic, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola and a long history of mutual distrust with Haiti, demanded an apology nonetheless.

"The foreign ministry, in the name of the Dominican government, is expecting a formal apology from Haitian authorities for the acts of violence and vandalism in the neighbouring country directed against President Leonel Fernandez and the Dominican people," the ministry said in a statement late on Tuesday.

Human rights groups say Haitians who cross the border to the Dominican Republic -- many illegally as they look for jobs and refuge from their homeland's dire poverty -- have been attacked and killed by Dominican mobs. They allege that Dominican authorities condone the behaviour.

Adding to tensions between the two countries, officials from the United Nations and Organisation of American States said last month that about 30,000 Haitian children are smuggled into the Dominican Republic every year to work as child prostitutes or be forced into other degrading occupations.

The Dominican government in October rejected a ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordering it to provide Haitians born in the Dominican Republic with Dominican birth certificates.

DR's embassy staff leaves under protection, Haiti formally apologizes
Dominican Today
December 15, 2005

SANTO DOMINGO.- Almost the entire Dominican embassy' staff in Haiti was sent back to this country Tuesday afternoon, in the wake of the violent incidents staged during president Leonel Fernandez's visit there last Monday, for which Port-au-prince formally apologized.

Witnesses saw a motorcade of more than 10 vehicles crossing the border, around 6:00 PM, escorted until the border by the Haitian Police, with just ambassador Jose Serulle, councilor Pastor Vásquez and the security agents staying behind in the embassy compound.

National Army sources reported that the embassy's personnel that returned to Santo Domingo went on "Christmas vacations." However, the situation described by Dominicans who returned from Haiti is that the situation there is one of tension fed by "an anti-Dominican campaign on the part of nongovernmental organizations through Haitian radio and the press media of that country."

Yesterday meanwhile, the Haitian Government formally apologized to Dominican Republic, affirming that the incidents occurring in that nation during the visit of Fernandez and several members of his cabinet will not affect the relations of brotherhood.

Dominican Republic accepted the apology and immediately informed that the Haiti's government did not bear responsibility in those incidents.

Immigration verdict could face challenge in human rights court
Dominican Today
December 16, 2005

Supposed rights violation sparks tension between both countries

SANTO DOMINGO. - The organizations which appealed before the Supreme Court against the Law Immigration on constitutional grounds contemplate charging the Dominican State before the Inter-American Human Rights Court, of which Dominican Republic accepted its litigious jurisdiction, to seek that the high court's decision is revoked.

The organizations Jesuit Refugees and Immigrants Service, Cedail, the National Commission of the Human rights, the Dominican chapters of Amnesty International and the Inter-American Institute of Human rights, Mudha, the Dominican Committee of Human Rights, the Dominican-Haitian Cultural Center, among other entities, said that they will decide on the matter today. Yesterday they were surprised with the maximum court's sentence and convened for today morning an evaluative meeting after which they will announce the decision to submit the country before the international court.

Leaders of some of the 15 organizations who appealed the Immigration Law before the Supreme Court on grounds of unconstitutionality questioned the fact that the court has given the transit category to the situation of the undocumented, because in their view they are different issues.

In fact, they affirm that the high court's sentence complicates the situation even more with respect to the immigrants, mainly the Haitians, as it contravenes the evacuee by the Inter-American Court of Human rights, which sentenced the Dominican State to grant birth certificates to two young daughters born in Dominican territory of Haitian parents.

They observed that the Supreme Court is the ultimate jurisdiction that can be resorted to in Dominican territory to solve the problem of the immigrants' children regarding the universal principles of "Jus Solis." that establishes that all the people are a national of a country who are born in that territory, reason why the competency corresponds now to the international courts.

They pointed out that in 1999 president Leonel Fernandez sent the letter of the country's acceptance of the litigious jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights -whose headquarters are in Costa Rica- and for that reason they weigh to discuss in today's meeting whether to take the case before that court.

**Heighten patrols at Haiti's border, the US agrees with birthright verdict
Military chief says the measure is to avoid weapons and drug trafficking
Dominican Today
December 16, 2005**

SANTO DOMINGO.- The Dominican Armed Forces have increase the military patrols along the border with Haiti, while in this capital the United States ambassador announced the his country agrees with the Dominican Supreme Court's verdict rejecting the nationality for children born of illegal immigrants.

Armed Forces minister Sigfrido Pared Perez announced that the reinforced military vigilance aims to prevent incidents resulting from the elections scheduled to take place in that country in the coming weeks, despite that the move comes in the wake of the incidents that Haitian citizens staged against the visit by president Leonel Fernandez to Haiti earlier this week.

Pared said that the tightened security also aims to thwart the trafficking with firearms, drugs and the transport of people illegally, and that it is normal for the military to intensify the patrols in the border.

The military chief made his statements during the graduation of the Police Institute of Higher Learning in the Central Bank.

Ambassador Hertell

Regarding the Dominican Supreme Court's verdict on the granting of Dominican birthright, United States ambassador Hans Hertell said that he agrees with the ruling handed down yesterday by the high court.

"I believe that the ruling of the Supreme Court is correct," said Hertell regarding the controversial verdict establishing the rejection of the Dominican nationality of children born from parents who are in this country illegally.

Justice chief suggests amnesty to legalize illegal aliens
Dominican Today
December 15, 2005

SANTO DOMINGO.- Justice Minister Francisco Domínguez today favored an amnesty for the legalization of Haitians and foreigners who reside in the country illegally, in reference to the Supreme Court (SCJ) sentence that establishes that the children of illegal residents are not Dominican.

Domínguez feels that a residency card, not citizenship must be issued to foreigners who have been living for a determined period of time in the country.

However, he cautioned that in the case of illegal Haitians the problem is complex, because they lack documents from their country and hence they could not apply for a Dominican residence as it would not be possible to determine who is being legalized.

The official said that it is difficult for a Haitian who has been living in the country illegally for 20 or 30 years to leave, and for that reason he feels that it is reasonable to grant them a residence card. "...I believe that that is feasible and logical, but we go again to the problem, what document are we going to request to provide him with a resident card. In all countries of the world the identity cards requested for that purpose, is the passport or a birth certificate from their country, something is requested of him, but you cannot issue a document that generates illegality if it does not have a source, but has a sustentation base that must at least be a birth certificate," he said during an interview for the Uno+Uno program on Channel 11.

Yesterday's Supreme Court's ruling, -ejected a motion of unconstitutionality submitted by pro Haitian groups- established that the children of people who are in the country in conditions of illegality are not Dominican.

The Court's Plenary session based the sentence on article 36 of the Immigration Law, that determines that foreigners admitted as nonresident are considered people in transit, for the purpose of the application of article 11 of the Constitution.

It also cited the first article of the Convention of The Hague, which stipulates that it is the responsibility of each State to determine who their nationals are. It observes that the Magna Charta does not grant the nationality to all those that have been born in the national territory, but that when consecrating jus solis, as a system to bear the Dominican nationality, in addition to jus sanguini, it establishes it with two exceptions that exclude the legitimate children of resident foreigners in the country in diplomatic representation and the children of persons who are in transit.

When analyzing this sentence, Domínguez clarified that the Supreme Court's decision does not include the cases of Dominicans that have children with foreigners, because in his view the child of a foreigner procreated with a Dominican is Dominican.

Haitians Dying in Dominican Republic
Prensa Latina
December 14, 2005

Santo Domingo, Dec 14 (Prensa Latina) Attorney General Francisco Dominguez Brito revealed on Wednesday that between 10 and 13 Haitians die violently every month in the Dominican Republic, many of which are consequences of fights among themselves.

The Public Ministry representative denied that the origin of those deaths were at the hands of Dominicans.

Brito said he regretted the attack and the violent actions in Haiti during President Leonel Fernandez' visit to Port-au-Prince, but said most homicides occur in rural areas due to alcohol and jealousy.

Violence between people of these neighbor nations is low, with only five percent of deaths registered in the Dominican Republic are of citizens from the neighboring nation, he highlighted.

Anglican Minister and Haitian ex Consul to that country, Edwin Paraisons, recent asserted that 2005 has been an ominous year for this community in the Dominican Republic due to persecution and hostility toward immigrants.

He said further that his fellow countrymen had not been through such painful times since 1937.

Paraison added that Haitians had not suffered such persecution as this year although, "the authorities have called them isolated incidents and have not taken firm steps."

More than 1,000 soldiers guarded Fernandez, discard threat reports
Special forces commander affirms that the situation never escaped their control
Dominican Today
December 14, 2005

SANTO DOMINGO.- More than 1,000 soldiers of the Armed Forces' specialized and intelligence units guaranteed president Leonel Fernandez's security during his short stay in Port au Prince, Haiti, which was affected by disturbances leaving several people wounded.

Amidst the tension caused by the incidents, the Dominican ambassador in the neighboring nation, Jose Serulle, asked the Armed Forces for greater protection for the diplomatic compound, in front of which the protests by Haitian groups against the Dominican Government have continued.

A military source quoted by the newspaper Diario Libre revealed that military intel investigates followers of the ex- head of the Haitian police, Guy Philippe, which would be implied in the incidents and that are believed to be the people responsible for the weapons fire that injured several people, to provoke chaos.

"What I want for them to tell me is at what time was the integrity of the President in danger. There was not even an extreme situation that would have made it advisable to remove the President in helicopters, because in the National Palace of Haiti there were two helicopters available," commented the official who participated in the operation.

The military source's statements would confirm the assertion from Haiti's Government, that the Dominican chief executive's life was never in danger, as local media has reported.

Fernandez's security included troops stationed in the border at Jimaní, elite response units and the specialized Fast Action Corps, supported by air battle units with leading edge technology equipment, rocket launchers, P-90 machine guns, M-60s and Uzis.

Police shoot Haitian protestors

AP

Cay Compass, Cayman Islands

Tuesday 13th December, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) – At least three protestors were wounded by gunfire Monday as demonstrators, angry over the treatment of Haitian migrants in neighboring Dominican Republic, clashed with police during a visit by the Dominican president.

Haitian police fired automatic weapons in the air as hundreds of demonstrators threw rocks and burned tires outside the presidential palace, seeking to block the motorcade of Dominican President Leonel Fernandez as he left a meeting with Haiti's interim prime minister and president.

The protestors chanted "Fernandez, racist, stop murdering Haitians," as they hurled rocks at police and U.N. peacekeeping forces.

Later, three university students who said they were part of the protest came to the General Hospital next to the presidential palace with gunshot wounds. One man had a bullet wound to the head, another was shot in the thigh and the third had a bullet wound to the lower leg.

It could not be confirmed who shot the three, who were accompanied by dozens of others students who said they took part in the protest and confirmed their accounts.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said United Nations riot police were at the demonstration but that only Haitian forces and the bodyguards of the Dominican president opened fire.

"No U.N. personal, whether military or police, fired during the incidents," Wimhurst said.

Protesters said they were angry over the treatment of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic – a focus of talks between Fernandez, Haitian interim President Boniface Alexandre and interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue.

The visit follows months of increased tensions between the two nations that share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola and was intended to improve relations.

Earlier this month, Dominican villagers burned about 20 shacks occupied by Haitian migrants in reprisal for their alleged involvement in the killing of a businessman.

In May, the Dominican government deported at least 2,000 Haitians after the killing of a Dominican woman. No one was arrested for the murder, but Dominicans went on a retaliatory rampage, beheading two Haitians.

Fernandez told a gathering of Haitian and Dominican officials that his government would take steps to prevent the mob violence.

"We deplore any act of violence between Dominicans and Haitians," he said.

Alexandre told the gathering that the one-day visit was a sign of "more serene, more stable, and more frank relations," between two neighbors that have long been in conflict.

Fernandez was scheduled to attend a summit in Cancun, Mexico after leaving Haiti.

About a million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, which has a population of 8.8 million. Many Haitians are illegal residents. Others, who have papers or who have acquired Dominican citizenship, are discriminated against and sometimes deported.

Fleeing the violence and economic hardship that followed the February 2004 ouster of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haitians in increasing numbers have crossed the porous 243-mile (391-kilometer) border with the Dominican Republic.

Violent protests strain Haiti-Dominican Republic relations

by Clarens Renois

Caribbean Net News

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): The Haitian government on Tuesday condemned violent protests that forced the president of the Dominican Republic to cut short his visit to Haiti amid tensions between the two countries over the treatment of Haitian immigrants.

In Santo Domingo meanwhile, the Dominican government demanded a formal apology from Haiti over the incident, in which a violent student-led protest on Monday forced Dominican President Leonel Fernandez to cancel meetings during his official visit.

The protests erupted while president Fernandez was meeting his Haitian counterpart, Boniface Alexandre in the presidential palace.

Demonstrators burned tires, erected barricades and threw stones and bottles at the Dominican delegation's motorcade, damaging one of the official cars, according to Radio Kiskeya.

The protests, against the Dominican Republic's alleged mistreatment of Haitian immigrants, forced Fernandez to cancel a scheduled meeting with Haitian presidential candidates running in the January elections.

The Haitian government said it had ordered an investigation to punish those responsible for the violence that injured at least two people.

"These violent acts in which numerous stones were thrown at the car of the Dominican president are intolerable and inexcusable and instead will hold back the normalization of relations between the two countries," the government said in a statement Tuesday.

In Santo Domingo, Rosario Graciano, a senior foreign affairs ministry official, said the government demanded "a formal apology by the Haitian authorities in regards to the violent incidents and vandalism."

Earlier, however, the Haitian government also expressed sympathy for the sentiments that gave rise to the protests, the Dominican Republic's decision to deport thousands of Haitian immigrants and reports of a series of assaults on immigrants.

On Monday, President Alexandre said: "The rumors that reach us of the treatment inflicted on our compatriots in the neighboring republic leave us with a bitter taste."

Immigration has fueled a long-running dispute between the two countries, which share a long border on the island of Hispaniola.

Some one million Haitians live in the more prosperous Dominican Republic, mostly working on sugar plantations and in construction jobs.

Fernandez has defended his country's immigration policies, saying the government was merely ensuring the Dominican Republic's sovereignty by deporting illegal immigrants.

Haitian human rights activists at the protests called the Dominican deportations a "racist" policy, and alleged that Dominican authorities have failed to intervene against mob violence directed at Haitians.

"We condemn the presence of Mr Fernandez, whose government is committing abuses against our brothers," a young student had said in a group of protesters burning a Dominican flag.

Haitian police and United Nations peacekeepers struggled to contain protests in districts near the presidential palace. Police fired tear gas grenades to disperse the crowd, and Brazilian UN soldiers in armoured vehicles were seen firing into the air.

Several political party leaders refused invitations to meet Fernandez during his visit and the hostile reception on the streets of Port-au-Prince was likely to aggravate difficult relations between the two governments.

But the Dominican Republic's ambassador to Haiti, Jose Serulle Ramia, downplayed the violence and said that the visit had been productive.

"Our president left fully confident that relations between our two countries have been reinforced, harmonized and consolidated," Ramia told AFP.

Haiti apologises to Dominican Republic for violence
Caribbean Net News
Friday, December 16, 2005

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AFP): The Dominican Republic said Wednesday that Haiti had apologized through diplomatic channels for street protests that had forced Dominican President Leonel Fernandez to cut short his visit to the neighboring country.

"The Dominican Republic has accepted the apologies from the government of Haiti for incidents that took place in front of the government house last Monday, when President Leonel Fernandez was visiting the country," said Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso.

The foreign ministry pointed out that the incidents will not affect what it described as "brotherly" relations between the two countries.

The protests erupted while Fernandez was meeting his Haitian counterpart, Boniface Alexandre, in the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince.

Demonstrators burned tires, erected barricades and threw stones and bottles at the Dominican delegation's motorcade, damaging one of the official cars, according to Radio Kiskeya.

The protests, against the Dominican Republic's alleged mistreatment of Haitian immigrants, forced Fernandez to cancel a scheduled meeting with Haitian presidential candidates running in the January elections.

Haitian priest said to need U.S. doctor
By ALFRED DE MONTESQUIOU
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER
Seattle Post Intelligencer
December 15, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- A jailed Catholic priest who had been considered a potential candidate for Haiti's presidency may have cancer and should be released to seek medical treatment in the United States, his lawyer said Thursday.

The Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a supporter of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has declined an examination by government doctors because he doesn't trust them, attorney Bill Quigley told reporters outside the jailed priest's church in the capital.

Dr. John Carroll, a supporter who examined Jean-Juste in jail, said the priest has swelling in his neck and under his arms and an abnormal white blood cell count, which are possible indications of cancer or an infection.

"Every day that goes by, we are wasting time," Carroll said. "If this is indeed cancer, his life is in danger."

Michel Brunache, chief of staff for interim President Boniface Alexandre, said government doctors had examined the priest and said there was no indication that he had cancer.

Jean-Juste has been jailed since July, when Haitian authorities accused him of suspected involvement in the abduction and slaying of a well-known local journalist. Authorities later expanded the investigation to include alleged weapons violations. The priest denies the allegations.

The investigating judge, Jean Perez-Paul, has declined to reveal his findings but said he will soon forward his recommendations to a government prosecutor.

Jean-Juste, who has been compared to Aristide, a former priest, has emerged as a prominent figure in the ousted president's Lavalas Family party.

Lavalas activists had attempted to register Jean-Juste as a presidential candidate in elections, but Haitian authorities ruled he was ineligible because he is in prison and could not appear in person to register his candidacy.

Haiti's national elections are scheduled for Jan. 8.

Haiti's Achievements Under Aristide and Lavalas Now lost since the US led coup ousting him
Stephen Lendman
PeaceJournalism.com
December 15, 2005

The long-suffering people of Haiti suffered a catastrophic blow in February, 2004 when U.S. Marines kidnapped and deposed democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The U.S., supported by Canada and France, forced him into exile, forbade him from even returning to the hemisphere, and reestablished a despotic interim puppet government backed and enforced by so-called UN peacekeepers and a brutal Haitian National Police. U.S. officials also threatened Aristide with a second abduction followed by a trial and imprisonment in the U.S. [on totally fraudulent charges of looting the Haitian treasury, money laundering and taking payoffs from drug traffickers] if he dared act or speak out forcefully against his ousting, forced exile and the deplorable situation now in Haiti. These charges are currently included in a baseless lawsuit the so-called Interim Government of Haiti has filed against President Aristide even as they carry out a reign of terror against the Haitian people. And as they do it, conditions in the country continue to deteriorate as the occupying forces clamp down on the people ahead of so-called Presidential and legislative elections in January. With Haiti an occupied country, the freedom and democracy they had is now lost and along with it a decade of impressive social, economic and political gains they never had before.

Why did the U.S. plan and carry out this act of savage banditry against a leader beloved by his people and last reelected in 2000 with 92% of the vote? It was because he cared about the 80% or more desperately poor and disadvantaged Haitians and was committed to improving their lives. He was determined to serve their interests rather than those of his dominant northern neighbor. That policy of any nation, especially less developed ones, is always unacceptable to the predatory neoliberal agenda of all U.S. administrations, the giant transnational corporations whose interests they serve, and in Haiti, their elite junior business partners. The Bush administration, in league with these dominant business interests, intends to return this nation of 8.5 million people, the poorest in the Americas, to its pre-Aristide status of virtual serfdom. To do it they destroyed Haiti's freedom and first ever democracy in its history and turned the country into a killing field. And to justify what they did, they conducted a shameless disinformation campaign, aided by a complicit and corrupted corporate media, falsely claiming the Aristide government was rife with corruption, trafficked drugs and violated human rights. They also claimed Haiti was poorly governed by inherently inept people [shameless racism]. They called it a failed state needing "reform" and "humanitarian intervention."

For U.S. corporations and the Haitian business elite, Haiti has always been a paradise for some of the cheapest labor on the planet. It's also had a long-term endemic problem of men, women and children being victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, debt bondage and chattel labor. No one leader or party, no matter how well-intentioned, could solve all these problems easily or quickly. But Aristide tried. He wanted something better and for ten years accomplished impressive achievements with little outside financial support and against great odds. What Lavalas administrations accomplished is explained below.

SOCIAL GAINS UNDER LAVALAS

1. HEALTH CARE

The Aristide government renovated and built health clinics, hospitals and dispensaries and added improved medical services. It greatly increased the number of health care workers including doctors. It spent a larger percentage of its budget on health care than any previous Haitian government. It began a meaningful AIDS prevention and treatment program praised by international experts that reduced the HIV prevalence rate from 6.1% to 5% and the mother to child transmission rate from 30% to 9%. In a cooperative effort with Cuba it sent hundreds of Haitian medical students to that country to study to become doctors and were aided by many more hundreds of Cuban health care workers coming to Haiti to work in rural areas. It established a new medical school in Tabarre which provided free medical education for hundreds of Haitian students and planned to open a nursing school which the 2004 coup prevented. Overall, health care availability and improvement made impressive gains from its formerly dismal state. One measure was the decline in infant mortality from 125 to 110 per 1000 and a drop in the percentage of underweight births from 28% to 19%.

2. EDUCATION

Aristide and Fanmi Lavalas implemented a Universal Schooling Program intending to include all Haitian children. 20% of Haiti's budget was devoted to education, and between 2001 - 2004 school enrollment rates rose from 68% to 72%. Under Lavalas administrations, 195 new primary schools and 104 new public high schools were built including in rural areas where no schools ever before existed. To supplement further, Fanmi Lavalas provided thousands of scholarships for children to attend private schools. It subsidized schoolbooks and uniforms and expanded school lunch programs to serve 700,000 hot meals a day to children who otherwise might have had no meal.

The Aristide government also began a national literacy campaign, printed 2 million literacy manuals, and trained thousands of students as literacy workers. It opened 20,000 adult literacy centers many of which combined a literacy center with a community kitchen to provide low cost meals to communities in need. Between 2001 - 2003 this program taught 100,000 people to read, and from 1996 - 2003 reduced the illiteracy rate from 85% to 55%.

3. JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Contrary to the demonization and disinformation campaign against Aristide and Lavalas, human rights and conflict resolution achieved significant gains under Lavalas administrations. For the first time ever in Haiti, the rights of the accused were respected. Those arrested had a formal hearing before a judge usually within 2 days. Court proceedings were conducted in Creole, the French derivative language all Haitians understand. Since the 2004 coup, Lavalas supporters have been routinely murdered or jailed for months without charge and without recourse to a fair trial in court.

In 1995 the Lavalas government opened a school for magistrates. It graduated 100 new judges and prosecutors between 1996 - 2003. Also, courthouses and police stations were constructed and refurbished throughout the country. Special courts for children were established, and a special child protection unit was created within the Haitian National Police. Laws were also passed prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment against children. And in 2003 a new law was passed repealing a labor

code provision allowing child domestic service [mostly unpaid and thus chattel labor], and additional legislation passed prohibiting all trafficking in persons [a long-term endemic abuse in Haiti affecting adults and children].

Aristide removed the main instrument of state repression and dozens of previous coups by disbanding the hated Haitian military - trained by the U.S. to be an instrument of civilian control and to use brutal and abusive tactics to do it. This allowed the Haitian people an unprecedented level of freedom of speech, assembly and personal safety unknown before. He also created the National Commission for Truth and Justice to investigate and report on the crimes committed during the 1991-1994 coup period. It made its recommendations for a measure of justice in 1996. As a result, former soldiers and paramilitaries were tried for their crimes and convicted when found guilty in fair trials.

POLITICAL GAINS UNDER LAVALAS

Until Aristide's election in 1990 Haiti had never before had a democratically elected President. Aristide took office in 1991, but his administration was short-lived because of a military coup that deposed him later in the year. But in a deal struck with the Clinton administration Aristide was restored to office in 1994 and served out the remainder of his term until 1996. Then, prohibited from succeeding himself by Haitian law, Aristide ally and Prime Minister in 1991, Rene Preval, was elected President with 88% of the vote. Aristide was then reelected in November, 2000 [representing the Fanmi Lavalas party he formed in 1996] and served until the February, 2004 coup deposing him.

Haiti's independent electoral commission oversaw the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections and 3 parliamentary and local elections. In May, 2000, 29,500 candidates ran for 7,500 posts. Four million Haitians registered for the election and 60% of them voted. Many women and peasant leaders were elected to the House of Deputies, formed a caucus and worked in Parliament to improve the lives of rural farmers. For the first time ever Haitian women held the posts of Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance and Chief of Police. Also, in 1995 President Aristide established a cabinet level Ministry of Women's Affairs to work for women's welfare. Its purpose was multifold and included help for rape victims, improving literacy and access to education, vital health services like pre-natal care and inclusion of women to benefit from increases in the minimum wage.

During this period, the Haitian people enjoyed unprecedented freedom to organize, speak out freely and assemble. The number of radio stations in Port-au-Prince expanded to 44 and another 100 outside the capitol. 16 TV stations were registered in the capitol and 35 more nationwide. Also, the Haitian Constitution of 1987 was printed in Creole and was widely distributed so Haitians were aware of their rights which, for the first time, they really had.

For nearly 10 years the Haitian people had its only democracy in its 500 year history and a government and leaders it chose who for the first time cared about the welfare of ordinary Haitians and established policies to improve their lives. All that was lost in February, 2004. The Haitian people want it restored and resistance is growing to try and achieve it.

ECONOMIC GAINS UNDER LAVALAS

Aristide raised the minimum wage in 1995 and doubled it in 2003. He instituted an extensive land reform program distributing 2.47 acres of land to each of 1500 peasant families in the Artibonite River Valley. His government provided tools, credit, technical assistance, fertilizers and heavy equipment to farmers. Irrigation systems were repaired bringing water to 7000 farmers. As a result, rice yields [from Haiti's main staple crop] rose from 2.7 tons per hectare to between 3 - 3.5 tons.

The government distributed tens of thousands of reintroduced Creole pigs to Haitian farmers. This reversed a 1980 U.S. International Development Agency [USAID] extermination policy done for fraudulent reasons to prevent Haitian farmers from competing with pig farmers in the U.S. This act cost Haitian farmers hundreds of millions of dollars for which they received no compensation.

The Aristide administration campaigned aggressively to collect unpaid tax and utility bills owed the government by wealthy and powerful elite businessmen. Through this effort they generated new revenues which were used for health care and education.

The government repaired and reopened the state owned sugar mill in Dabonne that enabled Haiti to process its own sugar. Also, 30,000 fishermen received technical aid and training to build boats, Haiti's lakes were planted with fish stocks and 50 new lakes were built.

The Lavalas administrations created hundreds of community stores and restaurants which sold food at discount prices forcing the wealthy elites' import monopolies to reduce their prices and make them more affordable to poor Haitians. As a result, by 2003 malnutrition dropped from 63% to 51%.

In 2002 and 2003 more than 1000 low cost housing units were built, and low interest loans enabled ordinary working-class Haitians to buy them.

In 1994 the Haitian government established a program to help refugees who fled the country after the 1991 coup to return. Programs included carpentry and sewing workshops and help in setting up agricultural cooperatives. This initiative helped 100,000 refugees return to their homes. The government also established an Office for Civil Protection to support the Haitian Red Cross send out early warnings of impending natural disasters and help those affected they they occurred.

All of these vital gains are now being reversed or adversely affected by the current interim U.S. installed puppet government.

OTHER NOTABLE LAVALAS ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite misinformation to the contrary, Lavalas administrations passed legislation to combat drug trafficking and money laundering and worked cooperatively with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA] to inderdict drugs and deport drug dealers wanted by U.S. authorities. In addition, the National Committee Against Money Laundering, the National Committee to Combat Drug Trafficking and Substance Abuse and a Financial Intelligence Unit were created to enforce the laws passed.

The government also campaigned against public corruption by producing public service announcements and instituting new procedures to combat this abuse. Investigations of government

officials and other employees involved in improper or illegal activities were conducted, and those found guilty were fired or prosecuted.

The Lavalas administrations made major investments in projects to help the Haitian people. They included important improvements in infrastructure, public transportation and agriculture. Thousands of miles of drainage canals were constructed, repaired or dredged. In Jacmel a new electric power plant was built, and the port and wharf were renovated. In Port-au-Prince the international airport and national stadium were renovated. Dozens of open-air markets [an important Haitian institution] were built or renovated in cities around the country.

CONDITIONS IN HAITI TODAY SINCE THE 2004 COUP

All the achievements discussed above were impressive and remarkable considering Haiti's long and tragic history as a brutally exploited state - first by Spain and France and then by the U.S. However, since the 2004 coup ousting President Aristide, all of them have been adversely affected or reversed.

Most serious has been the destruction of real democracy and freedom in Haiti and the tragic and horrific fallout from it. To serve the interests of U.S. corporations and the elite Haitian rich, the Haitian National Police [PNH] and so-called UN peacekeepers [MINUSTAH] have unleashed a reign of terror against the Haitian people. President Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party has been destroyed and its officials jailed, murdered or forced to flee to avoid either fate. In addition, thousands of Lavalas supporters [the great majority of Haitians] and community and labor activists have been killed, jailed, disappeared or forced into hiding. Also, thousands of small businesses have been burned and destroyed as have the homes of large numbers of the poor. Jobs have been lost as well, including those of 4000 public sector workers hired under President Aristide immediately eliminated after the coup. As a result, the already very high level of unemployment has risen further.

The brutal and hated former Haitian military has also been reinstated and now controls large areas of the country in an environment of martial law. In the cities the PNH operates as a de facto paramilitary force with a license to terrorize and kill with impunity. Along with MINUSTAH [led by contingents from Brazil and Chile, with a long history of repressing their home populations], the PNH conducts frequent violent sweeps through poor communities and neighborhoods, like Cite Soleil and Bel Air, attacking, arresting and murdering community leaders, activists and other Lavalas supporters.

In rural areas, absentee landlords along with armed paramilitaries have seized peasant farmer land given them as part of the Land Reform projects by Lavalas administrations. The new interim U.S. installed government headed by Prime Minister Gerard Latortue [imported from Florida for the job] ended subsidies on fertilizer vital to peasant rice farmers. As a result, the cost of fertilizer has more than doubled, and the price of rice [Haiti's main staple crop] has risen sharply, adversely affecting the poor majority [80% or more of the population]. The interim government also cancelled school subsidies for children and textbooks and stopped funding literacy programs. Many poor families have thus been unable to keep their children in school.

U.S. agencies like the U.S. International Development Agency [USAID] and the Washington based and nominally independent Haiti Democracy Project are also deeply involved in making Haiti policy. The latter is funded by the wealthy right-wing Haitian Boulos family, USAID funded Radio Vision

2000 and other Haitian business interests. Its board of directors includes former U.S. ambassadors to Haiti, others close to the U.S. State Department and Haitian business leaders. This organization [or independent think tank as they call themselves] along with U.S. acting ambassador Timothy Carney are likely making day-to-day policy decisions in Haiti while USAID is serving overall U.S. Haiti policy objectives by attempting to "pacify" the country. It's doing it through a sham and grossly inadequate fig leaf program of establishing a few nongovernmental organization [NGO] type operations to provide some essential services like "primary care" and "child survival services," in place of Lavalas, while at the same time administering with an iron fist. It started the first prison for children with others for children and adults likely to follow. The overall aim is to turn Haiti into a tranquil combined open air and enclosed "prison colony" to create a favorable climate for business.

In addition, the predatory international lending agencies, including the IMF and World Bank, are demanding their pound of flesh that will further deepen Haiti's already overwhelming and crushing poverty. In their business as usual fashion they have actively implemented their exploitative and destructive structural adjustment policies of forced privatizations and downsizings of state owned industries and elimination of Lavalas instituted social programs in return for financial aid, adding to Haiti's already onerous debt burden [most of it "odious" debt].

The dominant U.S. corporate media and international community overall have largely ignored the ongoing tragedy and horror in Haiti since the coup. With no pun intended, Haiti today is literally a black hole, out of sight and out of mind. The U.S. now calls the shots while their complicit and subservient in-country proxies have turned back the clock to its ugly despotic past of brutal repression and even more extreme poverty, depravation and human suffering.

SCHEDULED PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

The so-called Interim Government of Haiti [IGH] has scheduled a first round of Presidential and legislative elections on January 8 with a runoff to follow on February 15 and local elections finally on March 5. This is the fourth reset of elections dates in the last 5 months. That's because the planning and preparation handled by the Provisional Electoral Commission [CEP] has been as flawed as the notion of a free and democratic process in a nation now led by a U.S. appointed Prime Minister in charge of a de facto military junta answerable to the Bush administration. Although reportedly 3.5 million of the estimated 4.2 million eligible to vote have registered, the list of candidates running excludes nearly all former Lavalas members. At present and subject to change, 32 candidates are running for President including Rene Preval who served a full term as Lavalas' democratically elected President from 1996 - 2000. With Lavalas a destroyed party and out of the political process, the fact that Preval has been allowed to run means it's likely he's been co-opted and has deserted his former democratic allies and accepted or joined with those now in power.

The most beloved and popular man still in Haiti, Father Gerard Jean-Juste, will not be allowed to run and has been imprisoned without charge to prevent his inclusion in the election. He currently has been diagnosed with a serious medical condition requiring his release to be able to be treated properly.

Without a strong outcry and intervention for him it's doubtful he'll get it, and that may jeopardize his life. Most other candidates are those the Bush administration finds "acceptable" including Dumarsais Simeus, a Haitian born Texas millionaire, Guy Philippe [a former police chief and paramilitary thug

who led the armed coup against President Aristide in 2004] and Dany Toussaint [a suspected murderer]. In addition, over 1100 candidates are running for parliament. Whenever these so-called elections are finally completed, the result will not represent the will of the Haitian people. With Lavalas [the overwhelming choice of the Haitian majority] mostly destroyed as a political entity, the country under a repressive foreign military occupation, and the entire electoral process deeply flawed and effectively rigged, the hope for a democratic election is nil. In addition, the likelihood of electoral fraud is very great, and the Elections Canada Monitoring Mission there to detect it is unlikely to do so because of Canada's support for the U.S. led coup and its participation in MINUSTAH. There is also no way of knowing how many Haitians will actually vote despite the reported number registered. Those wanting to do so will be greatly hampered or unable to as the number of polling stations have been reduced from 12,000 in 2000 to 600 now, mostly in urban areas. The majority poor who supported Aristide/Lavalas are in the rural areas, hours away from where they could vote. Distance and the threat of electoral violence may stop them.

For now the dream of most Haitians remains unfulfilled and unlikely to improve any time soon. Still, in spite of their desperation and without outside support, the Haitian people remain resolute and courageous. Since the coup, they have rallied repeatedly and protested in the streets en masse for the release of political prisoners, the return of President Aristide and a restoration of their brief democracy. And despite the daily terror and violence against them, they have continued their resistance bravely. Their story needs to be told, and they deserve the full support of caring people everywhere.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net

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Coast Guard Repatriates 311 Haitians
By VOA News
15 December 2005

The U.S. Coast Guard says it has repatriated 311 Haitians attempting to illegally enter the United States.

In a statement released Wednesday, officials said the Haitians were spotted on a freighter beached on Anguilla Cay in the Bahamas Monday. They said the Haitians were transferred to the Coast Guard cutter Valiant, where they all received food, water and any necessary medical care.

A Coast Guard official said they were sent back to Port-au-Prince Wednesday, adding that several knew they had been headed to the United States but did not know their destination.

So far this year, the Coast Guard has intercepted more than 1,700 Haitians at sea.

Misery in the Name of Democracy: The US Works Elections in Iraq, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Haiti

by Yifat Susskind

Common Dreams News Center

December 16, 2005

The Bush Administration is touting Iraq's December 15 election as a giant leap forward for freedom guaranteed to ignite fervor for democracy across the entire Middle East. But closer to home, the Administration has discovered that democracy has created a monster and that the monster is democracy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, popular movements are demanding that the United States' "gift to the world" make good on its promise of majority rule. That would likely disrupt a system-otherwise known as "free-market democracy"-that has benefited a small elite and worsened poverty for most people. The possibility has so alarmed CIA Director Porter Goss that he recently labeled the spate of upcoming elections in Latin America as a "potential area of instability."

The Bush Administration is fighting back, stepping up USAID's "democracy promotion" program to ensure that those who have long had a monopoly on wealth continue to exercise a monopoly on government. The program's main targets in this hemisphere are Venezuela, Bolivia, and Haiti. National elections in these countries-all occurring within just one month of the Iraqi ballot-provide a flashpoint for how hard the Bush Administration is working to keep democracy out of the wrong hands, both in this hemisphere and in Iraq.

Venezuela

On December 4, Venezuela's main opposition parties chose to boycott congressional elections rather than face certain defeat at the polls. In 2002, these same pro-business parties-financed directly by the US National Endowment for Democracy to the tune of about six million dollars a year-resorted to a military coup to oust Hugo Chavez from the presidency. The coup failed in less than two days because millions of Venezuelans (including the lower ranks of the army) rallied to Chavez's defense. Most Venezuelans continue to defend-and vote for-Chavez and his brand of participatory, bottom-up democracy, which has mobilized millions of citizens in national dialogues on governance, produced the region's most democratic constitution (written in gender-inclusive language recognizing women's unpaid work and guaranteeing a pension to housewives), launched an ambitious land-reform program, and improved rates of illiteracy, hunger, and infant mortality.

At last month's Summit of the Americas in Argentina, Chavez was a lightning rod for widespread opposition to US-driven economic policies that have further impoverished most Latin Americans. Afterwards, Bush accused him of trying to "roll back democratic progress." Yet, most of the world seems quite impressed with Venezuela's democratic progress, even by the rather narrow standard of elections. Indeed, all eight elections held in Venezuela under Chavez have been declared free and fair by independent observers, including Jimmy Carter.

This is precisely the problem: despite the opposition's extensive US backing, it can't beat Chavez at the polls. Democracy just isn't working (says the only US president to be appointed by the Supreme Court after losing the popular vote). For decades, Venezuela was controlled by two alternating elite parties,

both allied with US business interests (sound familiar?). Most of the population was effectively disenfranchised and elections could be counted on to confer legitimacy on a compliant leadership. Now, Venezuela's poor majority has seized on the rhetoric and procedures of democracy to win control of the state. This is what the Bush Administration calls a crisis of democracy.

Bolivia

Bolivia is suffering from a similar crisis. When Bolivians go to the polls on December 18, they are likely to elect Evo Morales to be their first Indigenous President. Morales is a social democrat whom the Bush Administration vilifies as a radical leftist and the US Ambassador compared to Osama bin Laden. But Morales' platform is extreme only if you consider policies that guarantee mass poverty and vast inequality to be moderate. His platform reflects the Bolivian social movements' demand for increased government regulation of natural resources and the formation of a popular Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution that would make government more inclusive.

Apparently incredulous that Indigenous peasants could be strategic and organized enough to overthrow two presidents in two years (Gonzalo Sanchez in 2003 and Carlos Mesa in 2005), Donald Rumsfeld says that Hugo Chavez must be pulling the strings in Bolivia. Yet, it is the Bush Administration that has meddled openly in Bolivian politics since the Indigenous movement rose to prominence in 2002. That year, the Administration publicly threatened to cut off economic aid if Bolivians elected Morales. Since then, the US has steadily expanded its "democracy promotion" efforts in Bolivia, pouring millions of tax dollars into building a parallel, pro-US Indigenous movement and turning out public relations campaigns for a series of doomed, US-friendly governments.

As in Venezuela, US "democracy promotion" in Bolivia supports a limited notion of representative government enacted by pro-business elites over more direct participation in government by the poor majority. The big headache for the Administration is that Bolivia's Indigenous-based social movement is playing by the rules, working within the system to gain more legitimate representation within government.

Haiti

Two weeks ago, Haiti postponed its presidential election for the fourth time in five months. With the vote now set for January 8, the Interim Government (installed by the US after it helped overthrow Haiti's democratically-elected President, Jean Bertrand Aristide, in February 2004) will hold on to power past its February 2006 deadline (just imagine if Hugo Chavez tried that). Regardless of when elections are held, conditions in Haiti make a mockery of democratic process. Yet the Bush Administration has demanded that elections go forth.

Secretary of State Rice has hailed Haiti's election as "a precious step on the road to democracy." But look closely. Haitians are being denied the right to vote: only a few hundred registration and polling sites have been created to serve eight million people (compared with 10,000 provided by the deposed Aristide government) and some large, poor neighborhoods-with few government supporters-have no registration sites at all. Haitians are being denied the right to campaign: the government's potential challengers have been jailed on false charges or no charges. And Haitians are being denied the right to organize: in September, the government outlawed political demonstrations in violation of Haiti's

constitution; and anti-government protesters have been repeatedly attacked by the Haitian National Police. The Bush Administration fueled this repression by sending \$1.9 million worth of guns and police equipment to Haiti just in time for election season.

In fact, repression is the Haitian government's primary campaign strategy. Since 1990, every internationally-validated election in Haiti has produced a landslide victory for the Lavalas Party. Once the standard-bearer of Haiti's pro-democracy movement, Lavalas-like its exiled leader, Aristide-is a casualty of US "democracy promotion." After US-backed forces ousted Aristide, the party splintered into factions, including unaccountable and violent groups. Despite its flawed human rights record, Lavalas would no doubt win again in January if its candidates were allowed to run. The reason is simple: Lavalas is the party of the poor and most Haitians are poor.

Far from supporting constitutional democracy in Haiti, the US has twice helped to overthrow Aristide, who resisted Washington's prescriptions for Haiti's economy by insisting on social spending for the poor. The first time, back in 1991, "regime change" was still a covert business. The US had to deny that it was sponsoring the military thugs that took over Haiti and killed thousands of Aristide supporters (and poor people in general, just for good measure). By last year, when Aristide was ousted for the second time, things had changed. A Pentagon plane flew him into exile. The US warmly welcomed the "new" government, including remnants of the 1991 coup who are poised to win next month's sham election.

Democracy in Iraq: The Freedom to Do What We Tell You

The first fact of Iraq's election is that it will take place under the distorting influence of military occupation, precluding a free and fair vote from the start. Iraq's "march toward liberty" has been marred by US intervention at every step, starting with Paul Bremmer's 2003 decision to appoint reactionary clerics to the Iraqi Governing Council. That move has helped Islamists dominate Iraq's interim government and roll back the democratic rights of Iraqi women-a majority of the population.

In fact, the Bush Administration has no intention of allowing a majority of Iraqis to determine key policies. The Administration has tried to avoid holding direct (one person, one vote) elections in Iraq, giving in only because of pressure from Ayatollah Ali Sistani, a Shiite cleric who wants Iraq to be an Islamic state. And Bush's two most important objectives in Iraq-creating an extreme free-market state and maintaining a long-term military presence-have been placed well beyond the reach of Iraqi voters.

As in Haiti, democracy in Iraq is to be mainly a procedural matter, demonstrated by periodic elections regardless of political chaos and widespread violence against candidates and voters alike. And as in Venezuela and Bolivia, the government that is produced by the elections will be entitled to the label "democracy" only as long as it follows a US policy script.

In 1819 Simon Bolivar observed that, "The USA appears destined by fate to plague America with misery in the name of democracy." The Bush Administration is intent on extending this destiny to Iraq and the whole Middle East. Iraqis may be having an election this week, but the Bush Administration is no more interested in genuine democracy in Iraq than it is in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Yifat Susskind is the Communications Director of MADRE, an international women's human rights organization based in New York. She can be reached at madre@madre.org.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

JACKSON Cites the golden rule MARTES Helping in Haiti

The Oregonian

Thursday, December 15, 2005

For volunteer driver, 80, job is heaven on wheels Bill Jackson, 80, says as long as he has a valid driver's license he will continue driving disabled and elderly people as a volunteer for American Red Cross in Washington County.

Jackson, a retired salesman who spent much of his career driving, has been driving as a volunteer since 1987. Jackson works seven hours a week driving vans with 10 to 15 people in them to and from senior centers, therapeutic swim classes and the grocery store.

"I believe in the golden rule," Jackson said. "Maybe one day I'll be the customer being driven."

Ride Connection, a nonprofit community service organization that supplies transportation to elderly and disabled people and works in tandem with the Red Cross, recently honored Jackson at its 2005 luncheon with a special acknowledgment award for being a faithful volunteer who has helped immobile people participate in community life.

Ride Connection can be reached at 503-528-1720.

To pay for her mission trip to Haiti last February, JoEtta Martes of Beaverton put a tip box near her work space and decided that if she was meant to go, God would make sure the box was filled. Six weeks later, she had \$1,200 and was on a plane to Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

For the next trip, she's gone to her family and friends for money to join the Lifeline Christian Mission Women's Work Crusade again. She will fly to Haiti next month.

Martes' mother, Etta Howard, who's been on four Haiti missions, will join her daughter. They're also part of an organization at their church called Sewing on Saturdays, which brings women together to sew dresses for needy Haitian women and children.

"I just fell in love with the people there," said JoEtta Martes, 51, a manicurist and pedicurist. "They're so friendly and welcoming."

While in Haiti, Martes will spend most of her time in the town of Grand Goave with a group of more than 50 women from various church organizations throughout the United States. She will hand out belated Christmas gifts to Haitian children, spend time with woman from local churches and visit the child she sponsors, Emilia, 10.

If interested in supporting Lifeline Christian Mission, go to www.lifeline.org. -- Mark Graves

Do you know someone who is making a difference? If so, please contact us by phone at 503-294-5962, by e-mail at markgraves@news.oregonian.com or write to 1675 S.W. Marlow Ave., Suite 325, Portland, OR 97225

Taking us to democracy like cattle to a killing house
by Patrick Elie
ZNet
December 14, 2005

Interviewed by Anthony Fenton, Justin Podur, and Andréa Schmidt

Patrick Elie is a Haitian activist, based in Port-au-Prince, with a long history of involvement in the Lavalas movement. He served as Haiti's drug czar and Minister of Defense during Aristide's first presidency. On September 26, 2005, as Haiti entered its first electoral race since a US- and Canadian-backed coup d'état cut short Aristide's second term as president, we spent an afternoon with Elie. Our conversation covered a wide range of topics: elections under occupation, the war on drugs, the repression and disintegration of the Lavalas movement, Canada's intervention in Haiti, his critique of Fanmi Lavalas and vision and strategy for popular Haitian resistance to come. Here are some excerpts from that interview.

QUESTION: Do you think these elections stand any chance of resolving the fundamental problems or disparity between the majority of the poor and the wealth of the elite in Haiti today?

ELIE: There's no chance that these elections will do anything but deepen the crisis. Of that I'm pretty sure. This is a system that has hit a wall, and we keep hitting our head against that wall. That system is dead. As it is dying, it is inflicting immense suffering on the Haitian people. But it has no chance to renew itself.

And more and more, I tend to compare it to the system they had in South Africa, where a minority had not only the economic power, but also held the political power. And what we are seeing now is an attempt by these economic so-called elite, after the Lavalas movement, after the emergence of the masses on the political scene, to try and win back the monopoly not only on economic power but also on political power.

And I don't think this is going to succeed. It's not. It's only going to prolong the agony of this system. And we have, as a people, to build the replacement to that system. We have not only to destroy it, help bring it down, but we also have to have a project. And this is what is most important at the moment.

QUESTION: Let's go back a little bit. You are in a unique position because you were the drug czar and you created the national police. How did both institutions evolve, through the second coup up to the present.

ELIE: Let's talk about the drug situation first. When I was put in charge of the fight against drug trafficking by President Aristide back in 1991, I was a bit naïve in the sense that I really thought that we had to buy into this war against drugs that the US has been pushing. Because it so happens that the drug traffickers in Haiti are not interested in democracy, and they do hamper democracy.

But I came to realize with time that even though this fight has to be waged at the national level, by identifying the top barons of drug trafficking and neutralizing them, if we don't have also a diplomatic

action, if we don't try to get together with the countries of the region so that we can denounce the fact that the US is not only the engine pulling the whole drug trafficking train along... I compare it to what they did with alcohol: prohibition was not at all about the health of the population. All [the war on drugs] is, is a power gain, it's a tool of social control, it's a tool of foreign policy, a new tool of foreign policy after the disappearance of the Soviet Union. Now you are not a communist, you're a narco-state. And it's also, within the US itself, the way the state is reinforcing itself, building a police state and able to pass laws that are incompatible with freedom and a number of amendments of the US constitution. But using that war against drugs scheme, they're able to force these things on the American people as they are forcing them on the Colombian people and the Haitian people. So it's a more complex issue than I saw at the origin. I was only seeing that my job was to eradicate drug trafficking, but it's much more complex than I saw it.

And of course, given the economic situation in Haiti, which as you can very well see is dire, drug trafficking is always going to be a huge problem for us and we'll draw a lot of our resources to eradicate this traffic if the US keeps on with the policy it has with the issue of drugs. So this is a problem which no government is going to come and solve by snapping their fingers.

As for the Haitian police, one has to remind oneself when we look at what it has become over the years, that this police was created when Haiti was for all intents and purposes under occupation – under military occupation by the US. [And it was created] at a time when our economic resources, which were already very small, had been completely wiped out by the coup d'état and the following embargo years. So, we did not have complete control of the process of setting up the police.

And what happened is – the way I describe it is that the police turned out to be a kind of bastard child that came out of our own will to create a democratic police, and the US's will to create a police that would replace the army as a tool to secure US interests and eventually act as an arbiter of political life in Haiti.

I've seen this police go more and more toward behaving like the old army. The corruption seeped in slowly and now, especially after February 29 2004, what we see is the militarization of the police. If you've been around the city, you see that most police that you meet are armed with war-type weapons: assault rifles, battle rifles, and this sort of thing. It is truly a police that has its own people as the enemy. You've heard, I suppose, about the number of raids these police have waged on poor neighborhoods, killing dozens of people.

So we do have a serious problem with this police. If we do succeed in having a truly democratic government, it is a problem it is going to have to address as a priority. And we are running the risk, as the political process has been confiscated by the so-called international community and by the traditional economic elite, that they will rebuild the army.

I was listening the other day to Charles Baker, who is one of the leaders of the 184 [Group 184: the coalition of "civil society" led by Haiti's business elite that served as the domestic political force behind the February 2004 coup d'état] now is running for president. He wants to increase the police size to 40,000 members and create an army of 20,000. So he's going to double the size of the Haitian public service simply by putting it into repression. Right there, you can see the project. There's going to be no money left for education, no money left for health care, and of course, no money left to help

the Haitian peasant produce the food that we need. Consequently, the misery is going to deepen, and you're going to need those killers to keep the poor people in check.

QUESTION: The head of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion for the UNDP talks about July 6th, when they killed Dred Wilmé in Cite Soleil, as a victory for Haitian National Police and MINUSTAH. Can you put that into context?

ELIE: Well, you see, DDR programs are based on the assumption that there was some kind of an internal conflict – semi-civil war. And it's made to bring about a more serene environment. So it MUST be extended to both sides of the divide.

And yet what we've seen is that on the one hand, the so-called rebels, ex-FaDH, ex-FRAPH, have been given immunity, many of them have been able to keep their weapons and are now participating as a political party, an armed political party, in this campaign. And others have been, after handing in a couple of rusty rifles, been incorporated into the police, been given jobs.

On the other hand, the other so-called army has been given nothing but [the] bullets [that have been shot at it]. People who had jobs were fired, and people who are being described as combatants, people who know the terrain, people who know how to use fire-arms—which is the same rationality they had taken to incorporate these ex-FaDH into the police—nothing like that has been extended to the guys in Cité Soleil and Bel Air. And obviously they know the terrain, [so] they would have been the best kind of guys to bring some order in these areas.

And as I mentioned, for them, not only has there been no reinsertion, but thousands of poor people who had found jobs in the Haitian public or para-public sector during President Aristide's and President Préval's tenure were summarily fired when this government came to power. It was the first thing they did. And now it's wondering why there is no social appeasement. All this government and the UN is offering the poor people of Cité Soleil is total acceptance and submissions of the poor conditions they are living in and which have gotten only worse since February 29, 2004. So there is no DDR, it's a mostly—it's what I'd say is a reward process for the one who helped overthrow the democratic, freely-elected President of Haiti.

QUESTION: The head of DDR basically acknowledge that the FaDH are still organized, but that the UN can't actually do anything about it until they rear their heads. But he wouldn't be explicit about what party they are backing and whose armed militia they are.

ELIE: There is something ominous about this particular election. You have four candidates for the presidency and political parties who are ex-FaDH. You have Colonel Himmler Rébu, Guy Philippe, Major Dany Toussaint, and Frank Romain, who everybody should know because he's been doing his killing since Papa Doc Duvalier late-50s. Also, there's a political party called MUP. Even though the candidate himself is not an ex-FaDH, the power behind this party is also General Prosper Avril [who from 1988-1990 headed the military dictatorship that ruled Haiti after Baby Doc's departure]. So I would tend to think that the ex-Duvalierist network and the FaDH network would back up these parties.

And to the ex-military, you also have to add the ex-death squad members of FRAPH, because Jodel Chamblain, who's been judged and sentenced twice for his involvement in countless murders, is running for candidate in the party of Guy Philippe. Because they completely erased his trial for Izméry's murder, and they've sprung him loose on the Raboteau massacre. So now he's running for office. This is the kind of situation we're in and they tell us that they are taking us to democracy, just like they're taking cattle to the killing house.

QUESTION: We're interested in your critique of Lavalas.

ELIE: Well, we have to have a bit of historical background to understand my position on Fanmi Lavalas. Fanmi Lavalas does not have a monopoly on Lavalas. Lavalas is a large movement of the Haitian people. Fanmi Lavalas is a political organization that was built to go after political power.

Now, to understand what happened, how the movement sort of slid away from its original objective, one has to take account of first that it is a movement that had no prior experience. We had been under dictatorship for thirty years, so it was new movement, very dynamic, but also completely inexperienced. And by going after power in the election of 1990, the movement exposed itself to the repression that would follow. And that repression exerted terrible casualties on this movement, either by killing the grassroots leaders or forcing—or enticing—they into exile. So when President Aristide came back, that movement had been weakened. He came under occupation, and the movement was only a shadow of itself in terms of grassroots organization. And also the conditions were different.

Then, also, we know about Préval's presidency. What we can say about it that is positive is that Préval kind of opened the Lavalas movement and his presidency toward the peasants, because Lavalas was really first based in the cities. It carried along the peasants because the peasants and the poor in the cities are related, but it didn't have an organic tie with the peasants. Under Préval that was opened as a possibility that offered new blood and an anchor for the movement.

Unfortunately, in the meantime, Fanmi Lavalas was created as a political organization. But a lot of the people who came to it, especially the cadres, did not come as they did in the first wave of Lavalas, out of political conviction. They came and joined because they knew that this machine was going to win. They came for the personal advantage that running for office and being part of a political power structure brings to you. And it is this mentality that slipped into Fanmi Lavalas, and became hegemonic—even though there are very good militants, very honest people in Fanmi Lavalas, the tone was being given by these opportunists. Unfortunately, President Aristide was never able to rein them in.

During the three years of President Aristide's power, I must say that I could see in the people themselves, especially in the poor people, resentment toward Fanmi Lavalas, resentment against these guys who were running around in these huge cars, building houses, getting rich. This resentment tended, generally, to spare President Aristide himself. But the policy that was being followed and the head-honchos of Fanmi Lavalas—the senators, the deputies, the mayors—were being resented by the population because they were nothing but traditional Haitian politicians under a new disguise.

So many of these people actually participated in sabotaging the presidency of President Aristide. One thing that happened that for me was terrible was the fact that the policy of opening toward peasants

that had been undertaken by Préval was ditched by President Aristide. And we started losing the power base in the countryside, which made it easy for the likes of Guy Philippe and Chamblain to come in and do their military-type raids. If the Haitian peasant had felt at the time a unity with the regime, these guys would not have walked 200 yards into Haitian territory. The peasants would have run them out. But that did not happen. The peasants were more or less indifferent to the power struggle that was going on because they didn't feel that it was about them.

Again, my critiques toward Fanmi Lavalas, as a party or a political organization, is that it relied too much on President Aristide's personal charisma and popularity, and never actually built a real network and a real structure to direct the party or the political fight. So when the enemy hit on February 29 and was able to kidnap the leader, the leadership either ran or didn't have a clue of what to do, how to adapt to the new situation, and how to serve as cadre to the popular resistance to this new situation. The result is that you had an army with soldiers that were very determined, especially in the poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince or of Cap. But the generals were either outside of the country or fending for themselves.

And the other thing is that there was no strategy put forward by Fanmi Lavalas. They only had a slogan; "Bring President Aristide back." And I'd like to compare it to the situation back in the war of independence when the French came in and snatched away Toussaint Louverture. The masses then did not say "Bring Louverture back," they developed an alternative toward independence which had become indispensable because it was the only way to secure the abolishment of slavery. But they developed new tools. And this was what was [on the agenda] in this occupation: to develop new tools, new strategy. And that has not been done.

For example, the total confusion that you have today regarding the participation or non-participation in the election is a result of that lack of vision, that lack of an ability to think strategically. If you're not going to an election, you have to be able to mobilize people for beyond the election.

Given the fact that what the so-called electoral council has created is not an electoral card but a national identity card, which makes you a Haitian and if you don't have it, you do not exist, I was of the opinion that we should have mobilized for every Haitian to have this card and separate that from the decision to go and vote in a rigged election. First of all, it would have allowed us to remobilize, and second, it would have shown the world and ourselves that it's not because we're not interested in politics that we do not go in vote in these rigged elections—because look, we went and got this national identity card. But we're not voting in this election because it's rigged, it's not about us, it's not about our problem.

Yet Fanmi Lavalas leadership did not take this strategy. They kept with a slogan. And now a month before this process is over, they run into this election in a balkanized way. Which is exactly what Langley wanted. If there was still going to be a Lavalas movement, it had to be broken into little rivulets. And so far, I'd say, they've been able to do it.

QUESTION: This leads us to another question about vision and programs for the future. Under conditions of long-term occupation it makes it hard to plan for a country. What sort of vision must a popular movement develop in order to be able to move forward?

ELIE: The crisis we're facing, it's so deep that there cannot be a ready-made answer to that challenge. When President Mbeki was the only head of state to come to the celebration of Haiti's bi-centennial, and when South Africa was the country that extended its hand to President Aristide in exile, this got me thinking. South Africans had been kept out of the electoral process altogether for tens of years. And yet they were able to have a significant political impact, a significant diplomacy nevertheless, even though they didn't have a single mayor, a single deputy, a single senator. So I said, this is somewhere we can learn from: build grassroots organizations, network them, and evolve a political agenda from these grassroots organizations. It's going to take more time than simply organizing an electoral campaign. But it's going to have the ability to resist the reaction that we're going to meet, the opposition we're going to meet from the powers that be locally and internationally. Because it's going to become the property of the people themselves. They're not going to be simply relying on a Messiah who turns out to be powerless without the people behind him.

I think we have to build for at least the mid-term, so that when we regain our sovereignty it will be for a long time. We've lost it twice in ten years, so obviously something is wrong. And since I don't believe that we can regain our sovereignty with military action, the only way we're going to do it is by mobilizing, organizing, and by being able, also to wage a diplomatic campaign, an action on public opinion, networking with countries like Venezuela where you have a strong grassroots movement aside from Mr. Chavez himself, who is a charismatic leader, but you do also have a grassroots movement that is the best guarantee against the kind of operation that we've seen performed here on February 29th. They couldn't do it in Venezuela. And why is that? Because you had this ability to mobilize and resist.

QUESTION: What is your perception of the role the Canadian government has been playing throughout this process?

ELIE: I must tell you that having lived in Canada for many years, I was a bit taken aback by Canada's attitude in this crisis.

Canada was never truly a champion of the peoples' right to self-determination: they tolerated the Duvalier dictatorship with no problems. I remember even being arrested in Canada for demonstrating against Duvalier. Yet I had never seen Canada acting really as a neo-colonial power in Haiti. For example, during the first coup against President Aristide, Canada had a more supportive attitude toward those who were fighting for the return of constitutional order.

This time, really, Canada has been acting a bit like the busboy of the US. It's like Haiti was used as a making up gift to the US after Canada's position on the Iraq war. But maybe there's also the possibility that Canada, who had never had colonies, if I remember well, might decide to try its hand at nation-building in Haiti. It's a project the size of which Canada thinks it can handle.

Now there's also the question that has been raised of some special Canadian economic interests in Haiti, most notably the gold mine. And I think that this would be a catastrophe in Haiti. We don't need people coming here with cyanide like they've done in Guyana, and adding to our environmental problems. The greatest wealth that we have in Haiti is the Haitian people, and they should be put at the top of the list of priorities, not the gold that is in the ground and should remain there. Our wealth is above our land. It is our people, what they can plant, what they can produce, what they can create.

Don't talk to me about iridium or gold, then come here with cyanide, waste the countryside, and take your money and leave. This is a project that I'm going to denounce and oppose as much as I can. And I know that Haitians, especially in the area where the Sainte-Genève company want to dig a gold mine, are opposed to this project.

I can tell the Canadian public that the Haitian people have a PhD in resistance. They're going to resist. They have a strong culture. And they're not going to become a toy or modeling clay in the hands of some Canadian politicians.

Slow Growth Tags LatAm Economies
The Jamaica Gleaner
December 16, 2005

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP): Latin America posted solid economic growth in 2005 for the third straight year, but its economies lagged behind other nations struggling with poverty, a United Nations agency reported yesterday.

Regional economic growth was 4.3 per cent in 2005 and is expected to be 4.1 per cent next year, aided by favourable international conditions and strong internal demand, according to the Santiago-based Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean.

Unemployment and poverty decreased in Latin America, and growth is expected to continue at a similar rate through 2006, the commission said in an annual report.

"While this is a positive fact, one must note that the region is still growing at a lower pace than the rest of the developing countries, which are expected to post a growth of 5.7 per cent during the 2003-2006 period," the report said.

Venezuela reported nine per cent growth, Argentina had 8.6 per cent and the Dominican Republic had seven per cent. The economies of Chile, Panama and Peru all grew by about six per cent.

LOWEST COUNTRY GROWTH RATES

The lowest country growth rates were in Haiti with 1.5 per cent, Brazil and El Salvador with 2.5 per cent, and Paraguay and Mexico with three per cent.

Cuba declared 11.8 per cent growth, in spite of heavy hurricane damage, said Jose Luis Machinea, executive secretary of the commission and former Argentine Economy Minister.

But the data for Cuba were not included because the communist-run island was late in presenting them to the U.N. agency, Machinea said at a news conference.

Most countries registered good current accounts figures, with remittances sent home by nationals living abroad helping balance imports and exports.

300 Haitians stranded on Bahamas island returned to their homeland
South Florida Sun Sentinel
December 14 2005

The U.S. Coast Guard on Wednesday said it has rescued more than 300 Haitians who were stranded on an island in the Bahamas and sent them back to their homeland.

The 311 Haitian migrants were rescued on Monday after the migrants beached their vessel on Anguilla Cay, Bahamas.

After the crew of the cutter Valiant safely transferred the migrants to the cutter the migrants were repatriated to Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, on Wednesday.

In a prepared release, the Coast Guard said a Haitian sail freighter was spotted Sunday by a patrolling Coast Guard helicopter. Shortly afterward the Valiant was diverted to intercept the 45-foot vessel. With the permission of the Bahamian government, the 210-foot cutter entered Bahamian waters launched its two small boats and crews to go ashore on Anguilla Cay to rescue the stranded migrants.

Several of the migrants who spoke fluent English stated that they did not pay for the voyage and did not know their destination, but it was somewhere in the United States.

This year the Coast Guard said it has rescued 1,716 Haitian migrants.

Préval could be president again, poll says
BY JOE MOZINGO AND JACQUELINE CHARLES
Miami Herald
December 14, 2005

A new poll of Haitian voters shows former President René Préval leading the race for the Jan. 8 presidential elections -- but behind a wealthy businessman who has been ruled ineligible to run.

Of the 35 presidential candidates on the ballot, Préval, president from 1996 to 2001 and a one-time ally of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, led the list with 30 percent, according to the poll by the Democracy Group, a Maryland-based political consultancy.

But Texas-based businessman Dumarsais Siméus notched 34 percent even though he has been disqualified from running because he allegedly gave up his Haitian citizenship when he became a U.S. citizen. The poll, which will be released today, suggested that his rags-to-riches story resonates with many voters in the poor Caribbean nation.

The poll of 703 Haitian voters across Haiti has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

It was conducted by the Democracy Group on behalf of the National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians, a Maryland-based group of more than 5,000 Haitian professionals, including Siméus.

Shawnta Watson Walcott, a partner with the polling firm, and NOAH founder Joseph Baptiste insist that Siméus had nothing to do with the poll or its findings.

The poll put Charles Henri Baker, a wealthy businessman, in a distant third place with only 7 percent, even though 41 percent of those polled also said he is the "best qualified" candidate to improve their quality of life.

The survey also showed that while 51 percent of those questioned believe Aristide should be allowed to return home from his exile in South Africa -- where he fled amid an armed rebellion last year -- 65 percent also said they would not vote for him if he were on the ballot today.

The results of the Democracy Group poll differed from those of another survey taken by the Gallup company, with U.S. financing, and made public Friday.

That poll showed Préval with 32 percent and Siméus with 21 percent. The Gallup poll surveyed 1,200 likely voters during the first week of November, about the same time as the latest poll. Its margin of error is 2.8 percentage points.

Analysts say Préval's popularity may well be a sign that Haitians believe he delivered a measure of stability and progress when he was president.

"Part of the problem is this [current] interim government has not delivered much in the last two years" said Joceyln McCalla, executive director of the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Rights. "Préval, to some extent, delivered a little bit of that."

But others noted that polls in Haiti can be unreliable. "I don't think we can put faith into any poll at this point," said Jean-Germain Gros, a Haitian who teaches political science at the University of Missouri. "We have to wait for the election . . . and see what happens."

**Release Fr. Jean-Juste immediately to save his life
by Congresswoman Maxine Waters
San Francisco Bay View
December 14, 2005**

Over a thousand people marched in Miami Saturday to free Fr. Jean-Juste, who is beloved around the world.

I call for the immediate and unconditional release of Fr. Gérard Jean-Juste from prison in Haiti, and I urge President Bush to take action at once to secure his release.

Father Jean-Juste is a widely-respected Catholic priest and a courageous advocate for peace and justice. The injustice of his imprisonment is all the more severe as a result of his failing health.

On Dec. 1, Fr. Jean-Juste received a medical exam by Dr. John Carroll, who reported that he has swollen lymph nodes in his neck and armpits and an elevated white blood count. This could indicate any of several serious conditions, including a blood cancer or an infectious disease.

Many blood cancers have a good prognosis if they are treated early by specialists. It is therefore imperative that Fr. Jean-Juste be immediately released from prison so that he can receive medical treatment for his condition.

Father Jean-Juste's arrest is another example of the systematic repression of Haitians who are suspected of supporting the Lavalas Party. Father Jean-Juste joins numerous Lavalas leaders in Haiti's overcrowded prisons, including Former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert and Haitian singer Anne Auguste.

There are an estimated 700 political prisoners in Haiti, and many of them are Lavalas members who have been detained for months without formal charges. All of these political prisoners should be set free.

It is critical that President Bush take action without delay to obtain Fr. Jean-Juste's release from prison so that he can receive the medical care he so desperately needs. Our government's action could save the life of this gentle priest.

How you can help

Bill Quigley, a professor at Loyola University New Orleans School of Law who works with Haitian attorney Mario Joseph in representing Fr. Jean-Juste, says: "Pere Jean-Juste, in jail and out, always urges everyone to fight for human rights, real democracy and release of political prisoners. He advises us to 'keep up the struggle, freedom is coming for Haiti.'

"It is time once again for the international community to join in solidarity with the people of Haiti and to demand without ceasing the release of Fr. Jean-Juste. U.S. citizens are urged to contact the U.S. Embassy in Haiti and demand that they do everything possible to secure the immediate release of Fr. Jean-Juste.

“The switchboard number is 011-509-222-0200. Faxes can be sent to 011-509-223-9038. Emails can be sent to the human rights officers in the embassy: Ms. Dana Banks, banksd@state.gov, or Kevan Higgins, higginskp@state.gov.

“The message can be simple: ‘Fr. Jean-Juste must be released immediately. Haiti does not need another martyr for human rights.’”

Aristide the Film
by Justin Podur
ZNet
December 13, 2005

Review: *Aristide and the Endless Revolution*. 2005. Baraka Productions. 83 min. Movie site: www.aristidethefilm.com Available from www.firstrunfeatures.com

Each fact is disputed. Haiti's President, Jean Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown in a coup and kidnapped by the United States on February 29, 2004, says Aristide himself. Aristide left voluntarily, say US officials Colin Powell and Roger Noriega.

Despite the cliché that journalists seek 'balance', to get 'both sides of the story', the voices of Aristide and his Lavalas political party and movement, whose leaders have been exiled or jailed or massacred since his ouster, have been left out of most coverage of Haiti since that 2004 coup.

The world is expected to understand the events unfolding in Haiti since 2004 without hearing from the victims. Aside from skewing global opinion, the disinformation campaign in Haiti has prevented supporters of Lavalas inside Haiti from being able to talk openly about the issues. Outside of the country, supporters of democracy are left to talk on listerves and Web sites, where their words can be ignored.

For these reason, Nicolas Rossier's film, 'Aristide and the Endless Revolution', is a real journalistic service to the community. The interviews that make up the feature-length (83 minute) film are weighted towards American pro-democracy activists and friends of Haiti: Paul Farmer, physician and author of 'The Uses of Haiti', Brian Concannon Jr. of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, Ira Kurzban, legal counsel to Aristide, Professor Noam Chomsky, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, actor Danny Glover, writer Kim Ives, researcher Tom Griffin, all appear. So too does the voice of another important American Haiti filmmaker, Kevin Pina, who narrates from the streets of Haiti as the coup is unfolding. Haitians and Haitian-Americans are interviewed as well, among them unionist Ray Laforest, who discusses the historical background of Aristide's rise to power, and radio journalist Ricot Dupuis who argues that Aristide made tactical errors.

But Rossier's film adds credibility to the analysis presented in these interviews by adding footage of the denials of US Ambassador Foley, US President George Bush, and by featuring an interview with US envoy Roger Noriega, who was instrumental in Aristide's overthrow. He also interviews anti-Aristide Haitians like Fr. Poulard who says Aristide promoted class struggle, sociologist Lennok Rubin who says Aristide failed to control gangs and corruption, and journalist Claude Moise, who was an important figure in the local opposition to Aristide. Finally, he includes liberal figures like John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State under Clinton, who admits Aristide gave a voice to the poor, and Ambassador Marville of Barbados, who describes the 'negotiations' that took place before Aristide's removal.

In this way, 'Aristide and the Endless Revolution' does what so few pieces have done since 2004: it provides a genuine opportunity for viewers to evaluate the claims of the ousted democratic government

and the coupsters. The film's weighting towards pro-democracy and pro-Lavalas interviewees only increases its value as a corrective to the repetition of false claims and insinuations in the media.

While it contains some powerful footage, including speeches from Aristide's Port au Prince parish, St. John Bosco's, in the 1980s, and tense scenes from the Congressional hearings on Haiti, the film is mainly a collection of unrushed interviews, carefully spliced to enable them to explain several complex issues. The film explains first the background to the coup, followed by the unfolding of the coup and the pretext used to attack Aristide's legitimacy: the May 2000 legislative elections in which 7 Lavalas senators took their seats without winning an absolute majority and without holding runoff elections. After explaining how these elections were conflated with the November 2000 elections, which Aristide won in a landslide, the film goes on to explain the US embargo that was immediately imposed, and the effects of starving the government over four years. "Does everyone understand", Maxine Waters asks in the Congressional hearings, "how this embargo meant the government had no money to pay for roads, no money to pay for schools, no money to pay for hospitals, no money to pay the police, no money for the fire department?" Economist Jeffrey Sachs replies to her, explaining that the embargo was even worse – the United States had blocked the Interamerican Development Bank from disbursing \$650 million in loans to the Haitian government, but Haiti was still forced to pay interest on the loans.

With avenues for aid cut off, Aristide began agitating for justice, in the form of the 150 million franc-indemnity that France had charged the newly independent Haitian state in exchange for taking away France's 'property' – the slaves who had freed themselves. The indemnity Haiti was forced to pay France over more than a century has a current value of some \$22 billion USD. Aristide had all of the documentation necessary for a solid legal case – there was no murky problem of how to quantify the suffering of slavery, because these weren't reparations. They were simply the return of money that had been extorted. After allowing various subjects to explain this, Rossier turns to a French official, explaining how Aristide's claims were "living in the past" and being "unrealistic". Haitian activist Ricot Dupuis said Aristide's agitation for the return of the indemnity was a huge error, angering France and the US at the same time. Was it a tactical error? "Evidently," Farmer replies. "Was Haiti too poor to ask for help? That is what you are saying, if you don't have the power to back it up, don't bother to ask for help."

The film then compares the human rights records of the post-coup regime with the democratic government. On these issues, the film could be supplemented with Kevin Pina's recent 'Haiti: the UNTold Story', which takes on a later period and chronicles human rights abuses in the poor neighbourhoods of Port au Prince under the period of UN stewardship. 'Aristide and the Endless Revolution' brings clarity to the deliberately muddied waters surrounding the 2004 coup. It is a very watchable, introductory piece that explains complex issues. Because it really does provide journalistic 'balance', it will be valuable in convincing people about what actually happened, and is happening in Haiti.

The film ends with footage of Aristide at a rally of his supporters, just weeks before the coup. In an interview, Aristide says he doesn't know how people will be able to look in the mirror once they realize what they have done. "You can try very hard to kill the truth", he says, "but you cannot kill it."

Justin Podur is a Toronto-based writer. He visited Haiti in September-October 2005.

There's Hope in Berkeley for Haiti, Womyn, Racial Equality, Katrina Immigrants
PR Newswire
December 16, 2005

Berkeley City Council adopted a "Resolution in Solidarity With the People of Haiti". Additional hopeful items on the agenda included restricting alcohol marketing to teens and support for locally produced newspapers, the Violence Against Women Act, the Pledge for Racial Equality, and the Immigration Relief for Hurricane Katrina Victims Act.

Berkeley, CA (PRWEB) December 16, 2005 -- On the eve of the one thousandth day of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the night of California's twelfth execution in 27 years, a Berkeley Councilmember moved to adjourn early to honor "Tookie" Williams. The mood was somber but, as Nelson Mandela said, "The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." The City Council adopted hopeful measures.

During public comment, Haiti Action Committee members spoke for the "Resolution in Solidarity With the People of Haiti" including David Welsh, in Haiti recently on a human rights delegation; Sister Maureen Duignan, working with Haitian immigrants for decades; and Especianise Loresca, a political refugee. Elections loom. The most popular leaders are imprisoned or exiled. Father Jean-Juste, designated Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience, needs medical care urgently. Human rights abuses escalate, even by U.N. troops.

The City Council adopted the Resolution by unanimous consent. It came via Berkeley's Peace and Justice Commission, whose first and longtime chair, Ann Fagan Ginger, wrote, "...the authorities in question are the illegitimate government established by the coup d'etat against Jean-Bertrand Aristide backed by the U.S.... This coup government -- called the transitional government -- has been using the Haitian National Police (HNP) to carry on constant low intensity warfare....U.N. Peacekeeping forces cannot carry out their proper functions when required by the Security Council to 'support' the transitional government and 'coordinate' with the lawless HNP." She said that representatives of the U.N. Security Council are "not free to follow the law because their governmental and economic systems are dependent on the U.S. governmental, economic, and military systems."

The Resolution quotes the U.N. Charter: "The U.S. is committed not to use 'threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state,...' and is committed to 'settle international disputes by peaceful means.'" Representative Barbara Lee re-introduced "The Haiti Truth Act" to investigate the role of the U.S. government in the coup. She stated, "The people of Haiti remain targets of political violence, torture and in some cases murder, and too often the perpetrators of this violence are the HNP, armed with U.S. weapons free of charge." The Resolution requests Senators Boxer and Feinstein to introduce such legislation. It supports prohibiting arms sales to Haiti, freeing political prisoners, halting killings, and returning the democratically elected President Aristide.

Councilmembers Dona Spring and Kriss Worthington put additional hopeful items on the agenda: to restrict alcohol marketing to teens and support locally produced newspapers, the Violence Against Women Act, the Pledge for Racial Equality, and the Immigration Relief for Hurricane Katrina Victims Act. There were also practical agenda items like sidewalk vending, homeless transitional housing, the EcoPass program, a sewer project, lead abatement and zoning.

Contact information:

Diana Bohn

510-525-5497

Protestors prevent swearing-in of new judges in Haiti
Friday, December 16, 2005
Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): For the second day running, protesters on Thursday prevented the swearing-in of new members of Haiti's highest court who were named to replace five judges dismissed by the government last week.

Two of the prematurely retired judges took part in the small protest in downtown Port-au-Prince, during which rocks were hurled, a door smashed in and several windows broken.

A similar protest on Wednesday had already prevented the swearing in of the new judges.

"We were named for 10 years in 2001. We can not be made to retire without our consent," said Michel Donatien, one of the judges dismissed last week.

The government dismissed the judges one day after they ruled that Haitian-American industrialist Dumarsais Simeus may run in the January 8 presidential election, even though he holds a US passport.

The court had already ordered the electoral council in October to accept Simeus' candidacy, but the council, with the backing of the government, removed his name from the list of about three dozen candidates, pointing to the constitution, which bans foreign nationals from running for president.

Haiti 'elections' Update: Seeing the Forest and the Trees
By Brian Concannon Jr., Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti
Political Affairs Magazine
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Related stories: Democracy matters 12-16-05,10:05am

Haiti's election dates have now been reset for the fourth time in the last five months. The Interim Government of Haiti (IGH) will now miss the February 7, 2005, deadline for transferring power that it had promised to meet for 21 months. These delays, and the logistical problems underlying them, are a cause for concern. But the logistical defects should not obscure the more fundamental problems that will prevent the elections, whenever held, from helping Haiti to break from its brutal history of political instability.

The delays show a disturbing lack of organizational competence on behalf of both the IGH and the Provisional Electoral Commission (CEP), which has the responsibility to run the voting. Every step of the process has been completed late, because of a failure to prepare for obvious obstacles. Voting registration stretched past the August deadline into October, because registration facilities were not installed in poor urban and rural areas. An international outcry pushed the CEP to expand the opportunities to register, and eventually about 3.5 million people reportedly registered, out of an estimated pool of 4.2 million eligible citizens.

The latest schedule calls for a first round of Presidential and legislative elections on January 8, a runoff election on February 15, and local elections on March 5. Several remaining hurdles make reaching this goal unlikely, including distributing electoral cards, printing the ballots, recruiting and training electoral officials and establishing enough voting centers. The electoral cards pose a particular challenge. Although the CEP held a ceremony to introduce a "pilot" distribution in September, the Counsel announced on November 30 that voters should listen carefully to announcements on how they should pick their cards up.

The distribution of the electoral cards is complicated, involving alphabetical order and date of registration, and the urban and rural poor who had so much difficulty registering often lack access to radio, television or other means of hearing the announcements. The schedule leaves five weeks before the first round to distribute the cards (and hire and train officials and find facilities for voting centers, which the CEP announced it was starting to do on November 30), when registration alone took over five months. Those particular five weeks may be the hardest of the year to get things done. They include Christmas, Haiti's Independence Day on January 1 and the beginning of Carnival season on January 8, and much of that is school vacation.

The Interim government may eventually overcome these hurdles and hold technically acceptable elections. But logistical smoothness does not in itself ensure that the elections will make a sustainable improvement in Haiti's political stability.

Stability in Haiti requires a respect for the basic rules of democracy, as written in the Constitution and international human rights instruments. Voters must know that when they vote they have the right to elect the candidates of their choosing for a specified period of time. They must know they will have the opportunity to renew officials' mandates if they keep their promises, and vote them out of office if they do not. Those who seek political power must know that their only path to power is through the ballot box; those who attain power must know that they can stay as long as their term allows, and no longer.

The IGH's current course is establishing (or reviving) several dangerous precedents that undermine the basic democratic rules. First, it is demonstrating that a mandate can be extended by simply not holding elections for a replacement. The current best-case scenario has the country missing the Constitution's February 7 deadline for handing over power by a couple of weeks. Missing this deadline is serious, and will be more so as the two weeks stretches into many more (imagine the uproar in the International Community if President Aristide were in the National Palace and failed to hand over the Presidential sash on February 7). But the IGH missed an equally important deadline eighteen months ago. Article 149 of the Constitution gives provisional governments 90 days to organize elections, and that period expired on June 1, 2004, without any attempt to hold elections.

The IGH will claim that it is trying to hand over power as soon as it can, and that a lack of resources combined with logistical and security problems kept generating delays. But in October 1994, when Haiti's elected government was restored after a three-year dictatorship, it had less financial support but managed to organize full legislative and local elections in eight months, and the regularly scheduled Presidential elections six months after that. The IGH's claim of trying its best would have been more convincing had it not diverted so much time and money to projects that were unnecessary for an interim government: granting generous concessions for foreign companies to exploit shipwrecks that had sat off Haiti's coast for 300 years already, backpay for soldiers for not doing work after the army was disbanded in 1994, and most recently pursuing lawsuits against the elected governments in US (and not Haitian) courts.

A second dangerous precedent is the government deciding who the people can vote for, and who can organize electoral activities. One of the most popular potential Presidential candidates, and the IGH's most prominent critic, Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste, is four months into his second stay in prison, despite no evidence of criminal wrongdoing. Haiti's last Constitutional Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune, has spent seventeen months in prison. Even the US Ambassador called his detention a "violation of human rights, injustice and abuse of power." Dozens of grassroots activists, including well-known people like "So An," but also many more known only to friends and family in Haiti, are held illegally. On November 27, Louis Joinet, the UN Human Rights Commission's Independent Expert on Haiti, called a press conference to denounce the IGH's illegal jailing of political opponents.

A third dangerous precedent is the use of political terror as a campaign strategy. Over and over again over the last six months, Haitian police, and even troops from MINUSTAH, the UN mission in Haiti, have gone into neighborhoods known as strongholds of government opponents, killing, maiming and arresting people and destroying houses. In October, MINUSTAH's top human rights official called the human rights situation in Haiti "catastrophic," citing summary executions, torture and illegal arrests. Keeping the poor neighborhoods under siege and imprisoning activists keeps government opponents from organizing and campaigning. It also keeps voters indoors, now and on election day.

On August 20, police accompanied by civilians called the "Little Machete Army" attacked a crowd at a soccer game in the neighborhood of Grande Ravine, killing at least ten people. The police initially denied involvement, but after an outcry the force conducted a partial investigation. Police leadership made the report public, and disciplined eighteen officers, both positive signs. But no members of the Little Machete Army have been arrested, even though victims of the massacre report that they continue to operate openly. One MINUSTAH patrol did arrest a member of the victims' association, illegally (without a warrant), while he was working with another MINUSTAH unit to bring victims to the hospital. After another outcry the police released the leader.

The IGH cannot claim logistical or financial obstacles to stopping the political repression. Releasing political prisoners will actually save the money spent to incarcerate them; not shooting political opponents saves money spent on bullets. Many political prisoners have never seen a judge, and can be released by an order of the police or prosecutor. Most of the rest are held by judges hand-picked by the government, who would dismiss the case or at least let the person out on bail if prosecutors asked.

The "official" watchdogs for this election are maintaining their focus, and will not let the organizational chaos or widespread persecution dim their enthusiasm. Last July, Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza provided a glowing report, claiming the elections were "moving ahead," and predicted that a one-month extension of registration would solve the problems. Registration was eventually extended over two months, during which time the police arrested Fr. Jean-Juste and the death squads massacred the Grande Ravine soccer fans. When the latest dates were announced, Mr. Insulza conceded in retrospect that "the electoral process was slow to get off the ground," but trumpeted that now "considerable progress has been made, which allows us to be cautiously optimistic about having organized, orderly and credible elections early in the new year."

MINUSTAH reacted to the fourth postponement of the elections with an equally glowing report - it even predicted the new President would be inaugurated a week earlier than the electoral decree did. MINUSTAH's press release did not even mention the "catastrophic" human rights situation that its own human rights department denounced in October, or the political prisoners that Mr. Joinet discussed just three days before. MINUSTAH Chief Juan Gabriel Valdes did warn of "dark interests in Haitian society" that could disrupt the elections, but could find no fault with the IGH's lack of preparation or persecution of opponents.

Haitian voters may decide that the best thing they can do in the face of a deeply flawed process rubber-stamped by the International Community is to participate anyway. They may find a candidate they can support enthusiastically, and be happy with the end result. But this will not mean Haiti is any closer to escaping its centuries-old cycles of violence. The shortcomings of the process will inevitably detract from the victor's legitimacy, making a tough job even harder. The precedents of extending a Presidential mandate, keeping opponents off the ballot, and deploying electoral terror will soon enough return to once again deprive the Haitian people of the stability and democracy they deserve.

Brian Concannon Jr., Esq. directs the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti and is a former OAS Elections Observer and UN Human Rights Observer in Haiti. This article was originally published on www.truthout.org.

Michigan man's Haiti mission raises broader questions

The Toledo Blade

By Jack Lessenberry

December 16, 2005

ZEELAND, Mich.- Phil Snyder has spent most of his life going back and forth from his home near Grand Rapids to do missionary work in Haiti, and he has known a few rough days.

Dec. 1, however, was rougher than most. He was shot several times, robbed, kidnapped, and held for ransom in one of the world's worst slums. Finally, he was released, and made it back home to his wife and nine kids. So what are his immediate plans?

Why, to go back to Haiti as soon as possible, where he runs something called Glow Ministries International, which helps feed and clothe several thousand Haitian schoolchildren.

Glow stands for God Loves Orphans and Widows, and there is no shortage of either among the 8 million terribly poor Haitians.

"Haiti defines me," the 48-year-old Mr. Snyder said simply.

What happened to him two weeks ago was, he indicated, at least partly his fault. He was on his way to the American embassy in Port-au-Prince, to try and get a visa for a 6-year-old boy who needed eye surgery.

"It was a beautiful day. There were [United Nations] vehicles everywhere, and I felt safe and secure."

So he took a short cut. Suddenly, a child threw a large rock at his windshield, and he ducked. "That saved my life," he said.

Instantly, armed men began shooting at his truck. He took some buckshot in his neck and chest, and a bullet passed through his arm. He drove on for a few hundred yards before his truck gave out. He got out dazed, and a crowd ripped his shirt off and stole his wallet.

At length he was led away. "Some Haitian Red Cross nurses appeared and bandaged my wounds, and at some point I was told I was now a hostage. The Haitians presume all Americans are rich," Mr. Snyder said, "and compared to them we are. We are all kings."

He didn't know what would happen or if he would survive. Fortunately, his oldest son, Chad, was also in Haiti. Somehow, the kidnappers got word to him, and he negotiated with his father's captors.

They wanted \$300,000. In the end, they settled for \$2,000 and \$10,000 in Haitian currency, he said. The money was put up by an anonymous donor.

Shelton, the little boy who needed eye surgery, remained with Mr. Snyder throughout the ordeal. He was rescued, too, and has since had his surgery. But while the story had a happy ending, it raised some eyebrows and broader questions about missionary work itself.

Ruth Tucker, a professor of missions at the Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, thinks there may be more missionaries now than ever. "The nature of mission work is different," she said. "Before, people made it their life's work. Now, most people go out for a short period of time."

Virtually every devout young Mormon male, for example, spends some time working as a missionary abroad. Tens of thousands of idealistic young Americans go forth every year.

Increasingly, however, U.S. missionaries are being resented by people who don't appreciate outsiders showing up and telling them that their religion and culture are wrong. Then, too, the war in Iraq has taken a toll.

"The war is terribly unpopular in much of the world, and that hasn't made life easier for our missionaries," she said.

"I'd have to agree with that," Mr. Snyder said thoughtfully. "But it is a little different in Haiti, since the people see that the church is about the only ones who do anything for the people."

Mr. Snyder is devoutly religious. His father was a missionary to Haiti before him, and he believes his work in Haiti is directed by God.

But if people come to his Glow ministry sites only for something to eat, that's just fine with him, too. "There is terrible economic necessity," he says, agreeing that this, not a lack of religions, is Haiti's biggest problem.

Ruth Tucker, who has written a book on the history of missions, said many denominations are now sending missionaries from other countries, particularly Korea, because there is such hostility in many quarters to anything having to do with Americans, especially abroad.

And in an ironic twist, she added that some Korean and African missionaries are coming to preach in a new country that has seen few missionaries before, but which is widely believed to have given itself over to the worship of materialism and the consumer culture.

Those missionaries are coming to ... America.

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Correction: Last week I reported that Detroit Edison plans to decommission the Fermi II nuclear plant near Monroe when its license expires in 2025. An Edison spokesman says the company has not made a final decision on whether to apply for a renewal.

Jack Lessenberry, a member of the journalism faculty at Wayne State University in Detroit and The Blade's ombudsman, writes on issues and people in Michigan.

Assault on a Man of God
OSWALD BROWN
The Freeport News, Grand Bahama
December 16, 2005

The recent attack on Roman Catholic Priest Alain Laverne in the Pinedale, Eight Mile Rock area of Grand Bahama appears to be a by-product of the growing xenophobia that has been fomenting for decades in The Bahamas over the influx of Haitian immigrants into The Bahamas.

Father Laverne is a native of Haiti, who earlier this year was assigned by Roman Catholic Arch-bishop Patrick Pinder to the Mary, Star of The Sea Parish in Grand Bahama, with specific responsibility for St. Michael's Church in West End. He was returning from West End on Friday, December 2, after presiding over evening Mass, when he got into a minor accident.

According to reports, a lady was reversing on to the main road and despite evasive measures taken by Father Laverne with his automobile, the two cars collided. Some men in the area, who witnessed the accident, gathered at the scene and one of them — hearing from Father Laverne's accent that he is a native of Haiti — reportedly referred to him as (expletive deleted) Haitian. One of the men subsequently hit him with a large stone, causing serious damage to his kneecap.

Father Laverne is a towering figure — standing about six feet, four inches tall — with the well-conditioned physique of a wrestler. Were he not a mild-mannered man of God and had decided to retaliate, the individual responsible would have gotten the good beating that he justly deserved, if Father Laverne had gotten his hands on him.

The matter has been under investigation by Grand Bahama police ever since the incident occurred, but so far the police apparently have been unable to identify the person responsible for this despicable act. Given the fact that Pinedale is a closely knit community, it certainly would not be unreasonable to conclude that residents of that community who may know who was responsible for the assault on Father Laverne have closed ranks around him. They should all be ashamed of themselves for condoning this attack on a Man of God, but more likely than not they are among those Bahamians who "look down" on Haitians as being inferior to them.

This is a mindset fertilized, nourished and cultivated by astonishing ignorance of the rich cultural and political history of Haiti and the Haitian people. What's more, it is ironic that some black Bahamians have conditioned themselves to regard Haitians in this manner, given the fact that negritude is indelibly etched in the psyche of black Bahamians in general.

Every black Bahamian who considers Haitians to be inferior should take some time to peruse, if only cursorily, the history of Haiti on the Internet. What they will discover is that black slaves in Haiti, then a colony of France, staged a massive revolt on August 22, 1791 because they yearned to be free. Haitian heroes like Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe were the leaders of that revolution that successfully challenged the mighty army of Napoleon Bonaparte and subsequently declared Haiti an independent republic in 1803.

As the second-oldest republic in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States, and the world's oldest Black republic, Haiti's history unfortunately has been marked by turbulent periods of oppressive rule by power-hungry leaders, which is still very much the case today.

Probably the most oppressive of all the Haitian leaders was Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who was elected president in 1957 and ruled the country with an iron fist until his death in 1971. The emergence of Papa Doc led to a "repressive and corrupt regime, combining violence against political opponents with the exploitation of the traditional religious practice commonly known as voodoo," according to information on the history of Haiti gleaned from the Internet.

"Duvalier had a personal paramilitary group, the Ton-ton Macoutes — so named after a voodoo monster said to kidnap children — that carried out political murders, beatings, and intimidation," the historical document notes. "Duvalier's repressive policies lead to a massive brain drain during the late 1950s, during which thousands of educated elite sought refuge in France, the United States and other Caribbean islands."

The document adds: "The loss of an educated class had negative repercussions for the civic and economic potentials of Haiti. Duvalier appealed to the educated black middle class, of which he was a member, by introducing public works into middle class neighbourhoods which previously had been unable to have paved roads, running water, or modern sewage system."

Following his death in April 1971, Papa Doc was succeeded by his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who continued the oppressive policies of his father until he was forced out of office in 1986.

In the post-Duvalier era, there were high hopes for a sustained period of democracy in Haiti, especially after Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a charismatic Roman Catholic priest, was elected president in December of 1990. However, Aristide was ousted in a coup, engineered by the Ton-ton Macoutes, in September of 1991.

"Following the coup, Aristide began what became a three-year period of exile," the Internet document states. "An estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Haitians were killed during the period of military rule. The coup created a large-scale exodus of boat people. The U.S. Coast Guard rescued a total of 41,342 Haitians during 1991 and 1992, more than the number of rescued refugees from the previous 10 years combined."

Aristide was restored to power in Haiti in 1994, with the assistance of the United States, but he was again ousted in February of 2004.

It was against this backdrop that The Bahamas became a popular destination for illegal Haitian immigrants. The problem has developed into a very serious one, with current estimates suggesting that there are more than 60,000 Haitians in The Bahamas, the majority of whom are here illegally.

Some who were born here fully consider themselves to be Bahamians, and indeed they are. Because they are in general a hard-working people with a very good work ethic, they accept whatever jobs are available, which has generated a great deal of animosity among some Bahamians.

It is this growing animosity that manifested itself in the attack on Father Laverne, and it would behoove our law enforcement officials to take seriously the likelihood that the anti-Haitian "movement" in this country has reached the point where similar incidents could become commonplace and place a high priority on bringing the culprit who attacked Father Laverne to justice.

Certainly, if the relationship between Bahamians and Haitians continues to deteriorate, the peaceful atmosphere in which Bahamians and Haitians currently co-exist would likewise deteriorate.

The implications of what this portends are too frightening to not take positive steps to find solutions to the problems that are fuelling the anti-Haitian hysteria in this country. To be sure, there are far more things that Bahamians and Haitians have in common than with some other foreign nationals who consider The Bahamas to be "home sweet home."

Oswald T. Brown is editor and general manager of The Freeport News. Comments on this column can be sent to androsboy@hotmail.com

Cat Island Immigration Ring Cracked

Tameka Lundy

Bahama Journal

December 15, 2006

Police arrested three persons on suspicion that they were aiding the illegal entry of immigrants from Haiti after 30 refugees were discovered on Cat Island and arrested in separate instances.

Searches were still being conducted yesterday on the island.

Authorities cracked what appeared to be an illegal immigration ring that was operating through the island after nabbing four Haitians in a vehicle in Old Bight on Tuesday morning, according to Police Inspector Walter Evans.

The arrests were made soon after Defence Force officials reported that U.S. Coast Guard officials apprehended a group of 311 Haitian immigrants on Anguilla Cay this week.

Inspector Evans explained that a police patrol unit made the first arrest, determining that three of the four Haitians who were in the vehicle that roused their suspicions around 4a.m. Tuesday had just sailed into Cat Island.

Soon afterwards police searched the New Bight settlement where 14 males and two females were found hiding in bushes.

"A secondary search was carried out and police netted 12 men and two women who were caught in bushes in the settlement of Old Bight around 2a.m. [Wednesday] morning.

"Police have also taken three Haitian nationals – two men and one woman – who are very familiar with the layout of Cat Island. It is believed that these persons were assisting illegal immigrants with transportation and food."

Officials have long disclosed that the illegal immigrants from Haiti who enter The Bahamas are being given refuge by former compatriots in some instances.

The arrests made in Cat Island was one of very few instances where police were exclusively involved in the apprehension of illegal migrants. Typically members of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force or the Immigration Department make the arrests.

Inspector Evans sought to give an explanation.

"When it comes to operations like those that deal with immigration, there is really a team approach...however when you look at an island like Cat Island which does not have the presence of a permanent immigration officer, the police will then take a leading role and then these persons would be handed over to immigration authorities for processing," he said.

The archipelagic make-up of The Bahamas leaves it vulnerable to the transit of illegal migrants.

The Defence Force reported that a total of 369 Haitian immigrants had been apprehended in Bahamian waters over a three-day period.

These apprehensions came as Haiti prepares for internationally watched elections next month.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Fred Mitchell recently pointed to the importance of those elections being successful.

"If the elections are successful you have a government that you can deal with in Haiti which has the respect of its people and that can reach out from Port-au-Prince to the borders where the problem of illegal migration [exists]," Minister Mitchell told the Journal.

"And that's our hope and expectation."

Prime Minister Perry Christie had classified illegal immigration and crime as issues which The Bahamas must get its arms around and tackle to the ground.

Plans were being made for the Haitians arrested in Cat Island to be turned over to immigration authorities.

US honors Filipino savior of American colonel

By Nikko Dizon

Inquirer

The Global Nation, Philippines

December 15, 2006

IN AN APRIL afternoon in a Haiti slum, a Filipino soldier gave up his life to save an American colonel who was a fellow member of a United Nations peacekeeping force.

On Thursday, the US government formally recognized the heroism of Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque of the Philippine Army with a posthumous Soldier's Medal Award for making the "ultimate sacrifice" to save another's life.

Batomalaque, a 39-year-old father of three boys, "distinguished himself by making the ultimate sacrifice while protecting an American officer and fellow soldiers during actions in Port-au-Prince, Haiti," the citation read.

Batomalaque's sons, Steven, Jerome and Mark, were with their mother at the simple and brief awarding ceremony held Thursday afternoon at the US embassy in Manila.

Also in attendance were ranking US embassy officials led by Charge d'Affaires Paul Jones, US Army officers, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff, General Generoso Senga.

Brigadier General Kenneth Dowd, director for logistics, engineering and security assistance of the US Pacific Command, presented the Soldier's Medal to the Batomalaque family.

Also present was US Army Lieutenant Colonel Robert Casias, deputy operations officer of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah).

Casias was the American officer Batomalaque shielded when they came under heavy attack from armed gangs in Cite Soleil in the afternoon of April 14, 2005.

Batomalaque was assigned to provide security to Casias, who was supervising road projects in what was described as a violent neighborhood, a stronghold of armed gangs in the Haitian capital.

The citation contained a detailed account of Batomalaque's heroism, recalling how the Filipino soldier exposed himself twice to enemy fire coming from various directions to allow Casias to move to a covered position.

Still no resolution for Haitian judiciary
Radio Jamaica
December 15, 2005

In Haiti the standoff between judges and the interim government has been continuing. The government dismissed five judges after they had ruled that a Haitian-American businessman could run for president in elections on January 8.

The judges and their aides held demonstrations to prevent replacements being sworn in.

Bryan CanCanon is an American Lawyer who had taken up the case of Haitians killed in suspicious circumstances.

He tells the BBC Caribbean Service what he thinks of the massive protest mounted by major players in Haiti's justice system. "It's also an issue of the Supreme Court acting unconstitutionally.

"One of the hallmark[s] I guess of how far Haiti has fallen from constitutional rule is that both sides in this dispute are flagrantly vioalt[ing] the constitution.

"It's clear under the constitution that Mr. [Dumarsais] Simeus does not have the right to run for president of Haiti.

"But it's also just as clear that the Prime Minister can not simply fire the Supreme Court of Haiti."

We Cannot Abandon Haiti Again
By BARBARA MCDOUGALL
The Globe and Mail, Canada
Thursday, December 15, 2005

Haiti, the running sore of the Western Hemisphere, is once again struggling to put together a functioning democracy. Voters will choose a new government early in the new year. This time, if the international community remains sufficiently committed, the outcome could be different.

The island nation faces so many challenges, it is hard to know where to begin. Haiti was descending into chaos under Jean-Bertrand Aristide before his ouster in early 2004; it has since been governed by an interim prime minister, Gerard Latortue. But life remains chaotic and dangerous. On recent visits, my colleagues and I were treated to security arrangements worthy of Baghdad: We travelled in armoured vehicles with private guards from the moment we stepped off the plane until we departed.

"We" are the Haiti International Assessment Committee, a non-partisan multinational group of four established by the International Republican Institute in Washington. Our purpose is not only to assess the election process, reporting to international agencies and interested governments, but to define the country's needs after the election and to press the international community to stay on until Haiti has achieved at least a minimum level of stability.

The process for managing the election has been a nightmare. Voter registration cards failed to arrive, or arrived with the wrong photograph, or didn't get into the hands of actual voters. As a result, the election date has been postponed several times. The most recent target for the first round is Jan. 8. And it may actually happen. The recently appointed head of the country's Provisional Electoral Council seems to have brought the logistics under control, and some 3.5 million voters are now said to have their voter registration cards.

As well, the candidates' list is being purged of drug dealers and other criminals. On my most recent visit, I heard a story about one candidate who gave motorcycles to new supporters. Some of the original 56 presidential candidates have been barred by the council, but it is hard to tell whether all the criminal elements have been eliminated. In any case, there are so many candidates -- for congress and local office as well as for president -- that the electorate has every right to feel confused.

There's also a strong international presence: The United Nations, the Organization of American States, the European Union and the United States are all working to ensure that the election takes place and that it is free and fair. Canada is prominent among those nations funding the vote, and has also contributed advice and support through Elections Canada. Its presence in the UN peacekeeping unit is minimal, but it is strongly represented in the UN police contingent, with 80 officers, largely from Quebec.

Assuming the election lurches to a conclusion on the specified dates, with the new government scheduled to take office on Feb. 24, what happens next? Haiti's challenges go well beyond elections. The sound of gunfire is normal in Port-au-Prince; violence is the usual dispute-settlement mechanism for all forms of disagreements.

Since the end of the Duvalier days in the late 1980s, Haiti has held four elections, of which only one (1990) could be described as free and fair. In every case, international agencies and non-profit organizations offered pre-electoral assistance and acted as monitors. This is essential as far as it goes, but the real problems start the day after the election, when the helpful outsiders pack up and go home.

Each time, Haiti, a country with virtually no institutional structures, a dysfunctional economy, and the highest rate of illiteracy in the Western Hemisphere, has been left to struggle forward on its own. Every passing year has brought further urban decay, increased poverty and corruption. There's almost no foreign investment, little reliable electrical power, few jobs, and minimal education. The streets are full of potholes that rip tires to shreds in weeks, and piles of garbage that reek of decay and breed diseases.

This cannot be allowed to continue in the heart of our hemisphere. The Haitian people deserve the continuing support of outsiders such as Canada, no matter who wins our own election.

Barbara McDougall, an adviser with Aird & Berlis LLP, was Canada's secretary of state for external affairs from 1991 to 1993.

Upper St. Clair couples organize gift drive for Haiti
Thursday, December 15, 2005
By Dave Zuchowski
The Pittsburgh Post Gazette, PA

This always-busy holiday season is really hectic for Sandy and Paul Conley and Roberta and Tom Hartman.

As volunteers coordinating the Haiti Gift Box Project sponsored by the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Upper St. Clair, the foursome is in charge of collecting and preparing the shipment of items for poor children on the impoverished island of Haiti.

"While a small box of school supplies, toiletries and hard candy may not seem like much, to a child in Haiti it will likely be the only gift they receive all year," said Mrs. Conley, of McMurray.

With the help of people and nine area churches, gift boxes will be provided for all 3,503 students and 95 teachers at LaCroix New Testament Mission in the Arbonite Valley, about 80 miles north of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince.

Over the past 25 years, a network of hundreds of Pittsburghers has helped the Rev. Vaugelas Pierre, founder and director of LaCroix New Testament Mission. Since the early 1980s, the minister has built the mission from nothing to an impressive organization which provides Christian and academic education to thousands of schoolchildren.

The mission has added a medical clinic and new maternity hospital, a grain mill, numerous water wells, a fish hatchery and a new housing program called The Community of Hope.

Mr. Hartman, an architect from Peters, has visited Haiti twice and designed the concrete houses with corrugated metal roofs for the Community of Hope which are replacing the original mud and stick dwellings with stick-thatched roofs. Now, however, he's busy working on the Gift Box Project.

"Last year, we sent 2,400 shoe-box-size parcels to students in the mission," Mr. Hartman said. "This year, we hope to send more than 3,500."

When the project begins, the plastic-hinged boxes are picked up at Westminster by parishioners of the participating churches and distributed to members, along with a list of suggested items. They include hygienic aids such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, combs and soap. Some donors include highly prized baseball caps, sunglasses and small toys such as yo-yos and solar powered calculators.

"We can't send anything with batteries, which can't be replaced in the area of Haiti where they live," Mrs. Conley said.

After the gift boxes are returned to the church along with an \$8 check per box to cover shipping costs, volunteers make sure all items are appropriate, and that there is nothing that could be used as a weapon or anything related to gambling.

Around Jan. 14, after the boxes have been collected and stored at the Thomas Presbyterian Church in Eighty Four, which has a large storage area, they're transported via rental truck to Ephrata, Pa., where the Mennonite-based Christian Aid Ministries ship them to Port-au-Prince. From there, the boxes are trucked to LaCroix.

"Because of Haiti's poor roads, this last part of the journey is also the most difficult," Mrs. Conley said.

The Conleys have been to Haiti and LaCroix four times, including a visit in March, when the boxes were handed out. Mrs. Conley was impressed with the way students shared their gifts.

Some volunteers and their churches also participate in the Rev. Pierre's LaCroix Mission Child Sponsorship Program, through which a \$240 donation provides one child with an education and food for a year.

Sponsors often support the same child year after year, establishing and nurturing a relationship through letters, pictures and other correspondence. Many sponsors have been able to meet their sponsored children during mission trips to LaCroix.

"In Haiti, only 15 percent of school-age children are able to go to school because their parents cannot afford to send them," Mr. Pierre said.

"The sponsorship program provides a way for children who would otherwise be denied an education to go to school."

For more information on the LaCroix Mission Projects or to make a donation, phone Sandy Conley at 412-835-6630, ext. 207.

**Doctors battling ignorance in struggle against AIDS in Haiti
Center invests in education, counseling in addition to drugs
Wednesday, December 14, 2005
By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU
Associated Press
Dallas Morning News**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – Inside a clinic, a doctor edges past hundreds of people – some nervously awaiting results of an HIV test, others appearing emaciated and resigned as they wait for antiretroviral drugs to fight AIDS.

"The challenge isn't to just give people the drugs. It's to make sure they take them," said Dr. Rose Irene Verdier of GHESKIO, a clinic in a rundown seaside neighborhood that is Haiti's largest treatment center for sexually transmitted diseases.

Elisabeth Dumay, a 42-year-old social worker at the center, knows all too well that ignorance can increase the risk of AIDS. About 350,000 Haitians have the virus.

Ms. Dumay said she realized in the 1990s that her husband was HIV positive but continued having unprotected sex with him. He died in 1997. The next year, she tested positive for HIV.

"I thought God would protect me, but he didn't," Ms. Dumay said.

During her treatment, Ms. Dumay was hired as a social worker by GHESKIO – which in French stands for the Haitian Group for the Study of Kaposi's Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infections. Kaposi's sarcoma is a cancer associated with AIDS.

Ms. Dumay now helps patients cope with the shock of learning they are HIV positive, regularly calling them to make sure they take their drugs.

In a country with 80 percent unemployment and where only 20 percent of Haitians can read and write, educating people about the virus is crucial, she said.

"We counsel spouses, family members, even Voodoo priests or anyone that has some influence on the community," Ms. Dumay said in an interview in her small office.

Ms. Dumay said many patients initially are dubious about antiretroviral drugs or horrified by their side effects.

"It's true it can be very unpleasant at first," Ms. Dumay said, explaining that the drugs triggered nausea, hallucinations and sleeplessness for a week in her own case.

She is a role model for those with HIV, showing that you can survive and succeed with the virus.

"I tell them I have a 10-year-old daughter who's HIV negative, and even a new boyfriend who's negative also," she said.

The clinic has an elaborate system of support, offering food, phone cards and even taxi rides to advanced AIDS patients.

"It's a chain, teamwork," Dr. Verdier said. "We've adapted medical methods to succeed in the critical conditions of Haiti."

Dr. Jean William Pape, who founded GHESKIO in 1982, said 2,600 patients have received antiretroviral drugs this year. He hopes to reach up to 8,000 people next year.

The clinic has treated more than 1 million people since it opened.

The center's \$2.6 million yearly budget is paid by donations from international aid programs and foundations, Dr. Pape said, explaining that all medications are free to patients.

It costs \$1,600 per patient each year to provide the drugs.

Standing amid coughing AIDS patients, Dr. Verdier said she is convinced AIDS will be beaten within a decade or so.

In the early 1990s, the percentage of Haitians with the virus stood at more than 6 percent. Many experts predicted as many as 30 percent eventually would become infected.

"Yet we're at 3 percent. We're winning this battle," Dr. Verdier said.

Great news from the Socowa union in Haiti!

by Haiti Support Group

Thursday, Dec. 15, 2005

haitisupport@gn.apc.org

San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia

Two years of hard struggle by organized workers, supported by Batay Ouvriye, have yielded impressive results, showing once again that it is only by organizing themselves, rather than relying on governments, that working people can make real advances.

FLASH NEWS RELEASE ! - Batay Ouvriye, 15 December 2005

Collective Bargaining Contract Signed at the Ouanaminthe CODEVI Free Trade Zone

Batay Ouvriye is pleased to inform the public in general, all those who have been following the situation at the Ouanaminthe Free Trade Zone, and particularly those involved in the workers' struggle there, that, after several months of negotiations, a final agreement was signed during the afternoon of Tuesday, December 13th, between management at the Codevi Free Trade Zone (Grupo M) and the SOCOWA workers' union, affiliated with the May First Batay Ouvriye Union Federation.

The base salary of 432 gourdes weekly (US\$10.16 or US\$1.45 daily) is to be adjusted to 900 gourdes (US\$21.17 or US\$3.03 daily) with, additionally, an agreement to raise salaries by 45% over a period of three years (20% first, then 15% and 10%), all this taking into account rates of inflation and currency devaluation as specifically stipulated in the national labor legislation's Article 137.

Although the question of wages was the crux of the negotiations, many other issues relating to union recognition; labor rights; working conditions; health, hygiene and security; pregnancy and sexual harassment, were also settled.

Batay Ouvriye will be releasing more information on this important success shortly. In the meantime, we salute once again the Codevi workers' struggles, as well as all of those in solidarity who contributed to the resolution of this workplace conflict.

The Haiti Support Group adds:

The Haiti Support Group has made the struggle for workers' rights at the Ouanaminthe Free Trade Zone a special focus of our work over the last two years. This great news about the collective bargaining

agreement and the wage increases follows the victory earlier this year when over 150 workers sacked for belonging to the Socowa union were reinstated and the Socowa union won full recognition from the management.

We want to thank all of you who have responded to our calls for solidarity, whether this consisted of sending emails to the main contractor, Levi Strauss & Co., demonstrating outside the Levi's store in Regent Street, London, or contributing to our Socowa solidarity fund.

We want to send special thanks and recognition to the Battersea and Wandsworth trade union council for the important financial support it has provided to Socowa; to the No Sweat organisation for raising donations to support Batay Ouvriye; and to the LabourStart campaigning web site for the many thousands of emails sent in response to Socowa's appeals for international solidarity.

Forwarded as a service of the Haiti Support Group - solidarity with the Haitian people's struggle for human rights, participatory democracy and equitable development - since 1992.

2nd contingent of peace-keepers returns from Haiti
China View
December 14, 2005

GUANGZHOU, -- China's second riot squad contingent returned to the country Wednesday after completing its peace-keeping mission in Haiti.

The 91-member team arrived in Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province in the morning and each was awarded an "honor medal of Chinese peace-keeping police" in the afternoon by the Ministry of Public Security.

The contingent of 125 police officers was sent to Haiti to carry out a peace-keeping mission in April this year.

They were awarded a UN peace medal in August in Haiti for their excellent performance.

Currently, four other members from the contingent are still in Haiti for a mission handover. The other 30 members returned to China earlier.

On Monday, China sent its third contingent of peace-keepers to help maintain order in the Caribbean country of Haiti, the Ministry of Public Security said.

The team will be stationed in Port-au-Prince and will take charge of maintaining security during Haiti's upcoming general election.

The 125-member team underwent three months of intensive training in China before its departure. The members were trained in language and peace-keeping skills and briefed on the local political situation in Haiti, the ministry said.

Haiti clashes mar Dominican talks

BBC News

December 12, 2005

On the streets protesters vented anti-Dominican feelings

Several people have been injured in Haiti in clashes with police during a protest rally against a visit by the president of the Dominican Republic.

Hundreds of people threw rocks and burned tyres in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where Leonel Fernandez held talks with top Haitian leaders.

His visit came amid anger in Haiti that Haitians have been mistreated after crossing into the Dominican Republic.

Before leaving, Mr Fernandez pledged to act to prevent such abuses.

But he also indicated that mass deportations of Haitians - who look for work in the more affluent Dominican Republic - would continue.

Dominican police had earlier played down reports that 10 Haitian migrants were murdered in a Dominican village.

'Racist'

Protesters greeted Mr Fernandez outside the National Palace, as he was preparing for talks on immigration and border security.

The crowd chanted: "Fernandez, racist, stop murdering Haitians,"

Many were also angry at forced evictions and Mr Fernandez's recent description of Haiti as a "danger to the world".

The crowd later began throwing rocks and setting tyres alight as Mr Fernandez's motorcade was about to leave the capital.

In response, Haitian police fired automatic weapons in the air, attempting to disperse the crowd.

During the talks, Mr Fernandez said his country deplored "any act of violence between Dominicans and Haitians".

He also announced that the two countries would sign a three-way pact with Colombia in an effort to fight the drug trade.

Growing violence

Meanwhile, police in the Dominican Republic played down reports that at least 10 people were killed in the town of Villa Trina.

Violence between immigrants and locals in Villa Trina has flared in the past week after the murder of a Dominican was blamed on Haitian immigrants.

About 20 homes occupied by Haitian immigrants were burned in reprisal.

Some one million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic.

Haiti lies on the west and the Dominican Republic on the east of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, the two countries sharing a land border.

3 Shot at Haiti Protest of Dominican Leader

By Associated Press

Los Angeles Times

December 12, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Protesters angry over the treatment of Haitian migrants in neighboring Dominican Republic clashed with police during a visit by the Dominican president, and at least three people were wounded by gunshots.

Haitian police fired automatic weapons in the air as hundreds of demonstrators threw rocks and burned tires outside the presidential palace, seeking to block the motorcade of Dominican President Leonel Fernandez as he left a meeting with Haiti's interim prime minister and president.

Later, three university students who said they were part of the protest arrived at the General Hospital, next to the presidential palace, with gunshot wounds. One man had a bullet wound to the head, another was shot in the thigh and the third had a bullet wound to the lower leg.

It could not be confirmed who shot the three, who were accompanied by dozens of other students who said they took part in the protest and corroborated their account.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said U.N. riot police were at the demonstration but only Haitian forces and the bodyguards of the Dominican president fired shots.

About a million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, which has a population of 8.8 million. Many are illegal residents; others face discrimination and are sometimes deported.

Haiti students hurt in anti-Dominican protest

13 Dec 2005

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters AlertNet

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Dec 12 (Reuters) - Several people were injured on Monday when riot police in Haiti clashed with students protesting a visit by the president of neighboring Dominican Republic, witnesses said.

The demonstrators, who gathered outside the presidential palace, called Dominican President Leonel Fernandez a criminal and demanded an end to abuse of Haitian migrants.

"You are not welcome! Go back home!," chanted the crowd of students, who also burned tires.

"The Haitian people cannot welcome Fernandez when Haitians are being killed and treated like animals in the Dominican Republic because of Fernandez's racist policy," said Jean Wilson Junior, a student leader.

Human rights groups say Haitians who cross the border to the more affluent Dominican Republic looking for work have been attacked and killed by Dominican mobs and that Dominican authorities condone the behavior.

Witnesses said several protesters were injured, including two who were shot. They said police also hit the rock-throwing students with batons.

Thousands of Haitians have been arrested, detained or returned to Haiti from the Dominican Republic. The two countries share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola.

Fernandez acknowledged Haitians had been the victims of "extremists" and promised his government would do all it could to end the abuses.

"We have publicly expressed in the Dominican Republic that we deplore that situation. We have said that in a civilized country only the justice system has the authority to judge and punish crimes that are committed," said Fernandez as he stood next to Haitian President Boniface Alexandre at the palace.

U.S. HAITI POLICY

U.S. copters requested to support Haiti election U.S. helicopters and cash -- but no troops -- might be used for election duty in Haiti.

BY JOE MOZINGO AND PABLO BACHELET

pbachelet@herald.com

WASHINGTON –

Miami Herald

December 13, 2005

The Pentagon is considering an urgent United Nations request for 10 U.S. helicopters to provide crucial logistical support during Haiti's upcoming presidential and congressional elections, U.S. and U.N. officials say.

The top U.N. envoy in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdés, also has asked Washington to contribute an additional \$16 million to help finance the vote, seen as critical to Haiti's chances of breaking its cycle of political violence, poverty and chaos.

Valdés made both requests during a Dec. 1-2 visit to Washington. International donors so far have provided \$75 million for the elections, of which \$31 million was supplied by Washington, according to a State Department official.

U.S. TROOPS REMOVED

Nearly 2,000 U.S. troops were deployed to Haiti after an armed rebellion forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resign and leave the country in February of 2004. They left a few months later and were replaced by a U.N. peacekeeping force that now totals nearly 8,000.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld earlier this year quashed talk of sending back some U.S. troops as the U.N. blue helmet force, known as MINUSTAH, ran into severe problems trying to pacify gang-controlled slums.

But Valdés' request for helicopters is different because the aircraft would be used only for logistical support, said a State Department official. He said the final decision on the choppers would be made by the Pentagon.

The Miami-based U.S. Southern Command operates helicopter units out of Joint Task Force Bravo, a semi-permanent base in Honduras. They would have to be disassembled and then flown to Haiti aboard transport planes, and any such deployment would likely require U.S. combat troops to provide security for aircraft and crews.

REMOTE AREAS

Valdés wants the helicopters to help transport ballots and other materials to remote areas during the election, according to several high level U.N. and U.S. officials in Port-au-Prince.

If Washington turns them down, U.N. representatives in Port-au-Prince planned to make the same request to the neighboring Dominican Republic this week, the officials added.

The vote for a democratically elected government following last year's armed rebellion has hit countless logistical snags. Originally scheduled for November, the first round of balloting is now tentatively set for Jan. 8 although officials fear there will be further delays because the Organization of American States has been slow to distribute voting cards.

The \$16 million election deficit was largely caused by three months of unanticipated staffing brought on by delays. Valdés was asked to take a harder look at the budget to

Endangered Species' Homes ID
Health24: EnviroHealth expert
Randolph E Schmid
News24, South Africa
December 15, 2005

Washington - From the Paghham Mountain home of the Afghani brook salamander to the Nyanga Mountain lair of the Inyanga toad in Zimbabwe, about 595 sites around the world have been identified as the sole home of at least one endangered species.

Identifying these locations provides a front line list of places that need to be protected because, if the site is lost it will spell the doom of the plants or animals that make their home only there, said Mike Parr of the American Bird Conservancy.

Parr is co-author of a paper discussing these locations and the need to protect them. It's being published Monday in the online edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Many endangered species make their homes on isolated islands, where they have evolved to differ from the mainland ancestors, Parr said, and many other sites are "mountain islands", isolated pockets of forest on mountain areas that have not been logged.

"We felt it was important that the human race have a global map of where single species sites are," he said. "It is a list of irreplaceable species."

"At least this puts up a marker for sites that, if we loose them, we absolutely are going to lose the species," he said.

Concentrate of endangered species

Several of the 595 sites are home to more than one endangered species, the authors noted, with a total of 794 endangered species living at these locations.

The researchers estimated that among the five major groups they studied, 245 extinctions have occurred since the year 1500.

"We therefore risk losing three times as many species as are known to have been lost in these same (animal and plant groups) ... over the last 500 years," they reported.

Their study focused on five groups - mammals, birds, amphibians, conifers and certain reptiles.

With 63 locations, Mexico has more sites where endangered species are concentrated than any other country.

The paper notes that of the 595 sites 257 are completely unprotected and the status of another 48 could not be determined. Some 204 sites are under protection and for 86 at least part of the site is protected, the researchers said.

Financial difficulty

But with 508 the sites in developing countries degrees of protection vary and money is not always available to monitor the areas.

The United States is represented with 18 sites on the list, including the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, the only wintering site for the whooping crane, and the Torrey Pines State Reserve in California, home of the torrey pine.

Among the many sites around the world with several endangered species, none has more than Haiti's Massif de la Hotte, the only location where one can find some 13 unusual species of amphibians.

The region is also the source of several of Haiti's major rivers, a source of drinking water vital both to humans and amphibians, Parr said.

Haiti extradites two suspected kidnappers to US

Tuesday, December 13, 2005

AFP

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): Haitian authorities have extradited two suspected kidnappers to the United States for allegedly abducting more than 50 US nationals, police said on Monday.

"We have gotten the green light from the judicial and government authorities to extradite them (the suspects)," the Director-General of the Haitian police, Mario Andresol, told AFP.

Widmaille Dorvilier and Jerome Joseph are accused of carrying out more than 50 kidnappings of US citizens in Port-au-Prince, according to Michael Lucius, commissioner of Haiti's judicial police.

Kidnappings of foreigners for ransom have soared in Haiti despite the presence of a 7,500-strong multinational UN peace-keeping force.

Meanwhile, UN soldiers and Haitian police sought to contain violent protests on Monday during the visit of Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez.

Youths set tires on fire, erected barricades and torched several cars with diplomatic registration plates amid tensions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Haitian human rights activists have criticized the Dominican Republic for deporting several thousand Haitian immigrants in recent months, accusing the government of carrying out a "racist" policy.

Several political party leaders refused invitations to meet Fernandez, who held talks with Haitian President Boniface Alexandre.

A series of violent attacks on Haitian immigrants have been reported in the Dominican Republic in recent months.

Some one million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, mostly working on sugar plantations and construction jobs. The Dominican Republic shares a long border with Haiti on the island of Hispaniola.

U.S. is Still Undermining Haiti
by Marc Weisbrot
ZNet Magazine
December 13, 2005

History is repeating itself in Haiti, as democracy is being destroyed for the second time in the past 15 years.

Amazingly, the main difference seems to be that this time it is being done in broad daylight, with the support of the "international community" and the United Nations.

The first coup against Haiti's democratically elected government, in September 1991, was condemned even by the George H.W. Bush administration. This although the CIA had funded the leaders of the coup and -- according to a founder of the death squads that murdered thousands of people during the 1991-94 military dictatorship -- also sponsored the repression.

All this was covert, and the official position of the United States and most other countries was that the dictatorship was not legitimate.

But when in February 2004 Haiti's democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown for the second time by remnants of that prior dictatorship -- including convicted mass murderers and former death-squad leaders -- this was considered a legitimate "regime change."

The Caribbean Community countries, showing great courage, objected strenuously, as did some members of the U.S. Congress. But these voices were not powerful enough to influence the course of events.

The fix was in: The U.S. Agency for International Development and the International Republican Institute (the international arm of the Republican Party) had spent tens of millions of dollars to organize an opposition -- however small in numbers -- and to make Haiti under Aristide ungovernable. The whole scenario was strikingly similar to the series of events that led to the coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in April 2002. The same U.S. organizations were involved, and the opposition, as in Venezuela, controlled and used the major media as a tool for destabilization. And in both cases the coup leaders, joined by Washington, announced to the world that the elected president had "voluntarily resigned" -- which later turned out to be false.

Washington had an added weapon against the Haitian government: Taking advantage of Haiti's desperate poverty and dependence on foreign aid, it stopped international aid to the government, from the summer of 2000 until the 2004 coup. As economist Jeffrey Sachs has pointed out, the World Bank also contributed to the destabilization effort by cutting off funding.

Now the coup government, headed by unelected Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, is trying to organize an election. But it is an election that would not be seen as legitimate in any country, even Iraq. Everything is being arranged so that the country's largest political party, Fanmi Lavalas -- which at any moment before the coup would have overwhelmingly swept national elections -- cannot win. Many of

the party's leaders are in jail, generally on trumped-up or nonexistent charges, including the constitutional prime minister, Yvon Neptune, and Father Gérard Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest and likely presidential candidate if he were not jailed. Jean-Juste has been declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. Other leaders are in hiding or in exile, since the murder of political opponents is common.

In one massacre in August, witnesses described Haitian police arriving at a soccer match and pointing out people in the crowd, who were then hacked to death by civilian accomplices with machetes. U.N. troops have also been implicated in some of the violence, into which the U.N. has promised an investigation.

The coup government, with an electoral commission that has no pretense of impartiality, is also set to disenfranchise a huge number of its opponents. There have been about one-twentieth as many registration sites for this election as there were for previous elections, and it is mostly Fanmi Lavalas voters who have been excluded. According to party spokespeople, the party has not registered any candidates for president, and many of its voters will boycott the election unless their demands are met for the release of political prisoners and an end to the persecution.

The election has been postponed three times, most recently until Dec. 27. Setting the date two days after Christmas will also help minimize voter turnout.

Will the world accept this farce of an election? The Bush administration and its allies seem to be hoping that Haiti is just too poor and too black for anyone to care about whether democratic, constitutional, or even human rights are respected there. They have also cited the violence from both sides of the conflict, in order to disguise that most of that violence is directed at supporters of the ousted government, to prevent them from returning to power through a fair election.

But if this election goes forward without the release of political prisoners and the restoration of basic rights and security, it will not only be a tragedy for Haiti. It will also be a throwback to the days when the United States was able to destabilize, overthrow, and replace elected governments that it did not like. It will be a huge step backward for democracy in this hemisphere.

Mark Weisbrot, an economist, is co-director of the Center for Economic & Policy Research, in Washington (www.cepr.net). This column is being published in association with minutemanmedia.org, which originated it.

**12/22 SF Forum On Labor In Haiti And Role Of AFL-CIO Solidarity Center
by Labor Video Project
Monday, Dec. 12, 2005 at 12:38 PM**

lvpsf@labornet.org (415)282-1908 P.O. Box 720027, SF, CA 94172

Labor researcher Jeb Sprague will speak about the role of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center in Haiti and how his research on this issue has led to retaliation against him at California State University at Long Beach
San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia
December 12, 2005

Keynote Speaker: Labor Researcher Jeb Sprague
Thursday December 22, 2005
6:00 PM Potluck 7:00 PM Presentation
ILWU Local 6 255 9th St./Howard San Francisco
\$3.00 Donation Requested

Join with labor and human rights activists in a presentation on the role of the AFL-CIO in Haiti. Jeb Sprague is a researcher and graduate student in History at California State University of Long Beach. He will be reporting on the role of the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center in Haiti. The AFL-CIO receives over \$33 million dollars from the National Endowment for Democracy for the international operations of the AFL-CIO and Sprague has been researching how this money was used in Haiti. As a result of the publication of some of his research results, officials of the AFL-CIO American Center For International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) have contacted his professors at his school and sought to victimize him.

Sprague will outline why this is taking place. Also speaking will be Pierre LaBossiere of the Haiti Action Committee which is fighting to defend the human rights of the Haitian people and Dave Welsh, a retired Letter Carriers Of NALC 214 who recently went on a labor tour of Haiti.

Please bring a dish

Sponsored by
Haiti Action Committee, Labor Video Project

For information contact (415)282-1908 or lvpsf@labornet.org

Haiti Election Observers Chosen, But Will There Be An Election?

Embassy,

December 14th, 2005

By Christina Leadlay

Canada is preparing to send 130 experts to observe the elections in Haiti, slated for Jan. 8, but critics worry that Haiti is not ready, and the vote will be delayed once again.

The Canadian development agency is expected to announce this week the names of 130 Canadians selected to be election observers in Haiti, but critics wonder whether the election will go forward next month as planned.

Presidential elections in Haiti have been delayed over five times since the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was removed from office in February 2004. The interim government has blamed election delays on technical problems.

Carlo Dade, Senior Advisor at the Ottawa-based Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), says that it's impossible to tell if Haiti is ready for these elections. "Up to recently, a lot of the delays in the elections could be traced to simple incompetence at the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP)," explains Mr. Dade. He says there is widespread disrespect of the council in charge of compiling a list of candidates, setting up polling stations and distributing national identity cards.

"They missed deadlines, they had no sense of urgency about the elections, they were overly concerned with making sure that the elections had a Haitian stamp on them, as opposed to the OAS (Organization of American States) or the UN which were providing technical assistance," he says.

"We really don't know [if Haiti is ready for elections]. It's pretty much impossible to tell," says Mr. Dade, who has served for five years in the country with the U.S. government.

The most recent date set for Haitians to cast their ballots is Jan. 8, 2006. CANADEM, a non-profit agency dedicated to democracy and human rights, and Canada Corps, a program of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), are managing the Canadian contingent of observers. The group is expected to leave no later than Jan. 3 and return Jan. 11, according to Neil Burron, Director of Elections at CANADEM.

CIDA spokesperson Eleonora Karabatic confirms that the list has not yet been finalized.

Of the Canadian government's \$29.5 million commitment toward the electoral process in Haiti, "\$2 million will go to Canada Corps to fund the deployment of up to 300 Canadian short-term observers (up to 150 observers for each round). Another \$2 million will be provided to Elections Canada to oversee the short-term observers on the ground," says Ms. Karabatic.

The Haiti mission is relatively large in number, but last December's 469-strong team sent to Ukraine to observe the repeat presidential ballot has been Canada's largest deployment.

"I suppose the country dynamics are different than some other countries in the sense that Haiti is a bit unstable," says Mr. Burron, "but in terms of the criteria that we're looking for, it's very similar to any other observation mission. We're always looking for people with elections experience and country experience."

Volunteers must meet basic requirements such as holding a valid Canadian passport, agreeing to remain neutral and enjoying good health. Each deployment also has is a unique list of 'preferred criteria,' that ranges from previous election experience in a post-conflict environment, to proficiency in French or Creole, Haiti's two main languages.

While Canadians of Haitian background are considered, Mr. Burron notes that applicants are carefully screened to ensure neutrality. "We consider Haitian-Canadians, but they are not given preference and we do have to be careful about making sure there are no [political] affiliations," he says.

Mr. Dade says that CANADEM has learned to recruit from beyond the cultural diaspora, which he says they relied too heavily upon for volunteers during last year's mission to Ukraine. "They've learned from mistakes in the Ukraine observation mission, so they are looking for Canadian professionals that have served abroad to go down as opposed to going heavily after the diaspora," says Mr. Dade.

CANADEM has a roster of 7,000 experts it's able to draw from for these types of missions, explains Mr. Burron. "It's a roster of Canadian experts in different areas of international affairs, such as human rights, democratization, elections, peacebuilding, police security --a whole gamut of international activities," he says. Registrants come from a variety of backgrounds, some academic, but mostly with practical experiences such as lawyers, engineers, politicians and those with UN or international organization expertise. "It's open to any Canadian," says Mr. Burron.

"There is a lot of concern about the election being postponed," concedes Mr. Burron, who will be in Haiti for one month coordinating the mission on the ground. "A lot of people are saying that January isn't a realistic date, so there are some expectations that it might be further postponed. It has been postponed several times already. Originally it was supposed to be in November," he says. Mr. Burron explains that if the elections are indeed delayed, then the observer team has to completely reorganize itself.

"We [will] just have to go back to the drawing board and start the logistical process over again," says Mr. Burron, noting that everything from the CIDA-organized briefing session to airline tickets to official government accreditation will have to be redone in the event that the team does not head to Haiti on Jan. 3.

Both Mr. Burron and Ms. Karabatic point out that Elections Canada is working as part of the steering committee of the International Monitoring Mission to the Haitian Elections (IMMHE), which includes representatives from Chile, Panama, Brazil, Mexico and the United States. Of these countries, Canada is sending the most observers, though a contingent of 20 is expected from the CARICOM group of countries, as is an American team, says Mr. Burron.

christina@embassymag.ca

U.S. Arranges 'Pre-Deployment' Training for Haiti-Bound Private Police

By Stephen Peacock,

NarcoSphere

Tue Dec 13th, 2005

The U.S. State Dept. is reaching out to independent contractors to train other private contractors who will be deployed as “civilian police” -- hired guns for so-called peacekeeping missions taking place in Haiti and other geopolitical hotspots. The senior adviser selected for the task “must oversee pre-deployment training currently being conducted” by Dyncorp International, Civilian Police International and Pacific Architects and Engineers/Homeland Security Corporation, according a recently released procurement document.

The three companies currently work under the supervision of State’s Office of Civilian Police and Rule of Law (CIVPOL office) and the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). The INL CIVPOL contractors already have a presence in several “post-conflict locations throughout the world,” according to the document. However, Haiti appears to be a priority, evidenced by a prominently displayed notice on the PAE/HSC website currently announcing that the company is “soliciting applications specific to CIVPOL Officers fluent in French interested in a UN deployment to Haiti.”

The senior advisor also will be responsible for “establishing a ready roster of rapidly deployable CIVPOL as well as building foreign capacity” to provide such contractor services, it says. Programs are currently underway “in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Haiti, Liberia, East Timor, Serbia & Montenegro and Sudan,” but the “number and location of programs are subject to change.”

State facilitates the creation and deployment of these privately hired “police officers and law enforcement and criminal justice experts” because “the U.S. does not have a national police force from which to draw personnel.” An additional justification, according to the State document, is the CIVPOL office’s existing relationship with the above-mentioned private contractors, an arrangement which provides the U.S. government with ability to swiftly “recruit, select, train, equip, deploy and support the officers and experts” needed for such missions

This latest endeavor requires the provision of “10-day pre-deployment training” courses for CIVPOL candidates, involving subjects such as physical fitness, agility, firearms, and driving tests; psychological testing and evaluation; “history and culture of the deployment region”; defensive tactics; human rights; trafficking in persons; and “expatriate taxation issues.”

The senior advisor will be based in Washington, D.C. Training sites are located in Fredericksburg, Va. and in Leesburg, Va.

Chinese peacekeepers arrive in Haiti
cctv.com
12-13-2005

A vanguard riot team from China's third-incoming group has taken over the authority of the peacekeeping mission in Haiti. It's there to officially replace the second group of Chinese peacekeepers sent earlier this year.

Made up from members of Shandong province, the third riot team will be posted in Haiti from the middle of December through August 2006. The advance team members arrived on December 4. After arrival, they immediately began working, familiarized themselves with the environment, and tried to understand the nature of their task. Under the lead of the second batch, the new peacekeepers have begun their daily work. Haiti's situation became turbulent in February 2004, when rebels took control of a number of cities, and ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Haiti : 2006 and us
Tuesday 13 December 2005
By Ericq Pierre [1]
AlterPresse-Haiti

2006 will begin with the organization of elections at all levels. That is good news. But, because these elections have already been postponed several times, no one can predict the quality of the outcome. That news is not quite as good. Of course, like a meal whose preparation has been interrupted several times, the final product runs the risk of being insipid or even unappetizing. But, where there is hunger (and I think we are all famished), one cannot be too picky. We should therefore get ready to eat what we will be served. If not enthusiastically, at least graciously. Hoping all the while it isn't too hard to swallow.

They are, after all, crucial elections that should have been organized long ago. In any case, before the end of this year. Following Prime Minister Gérard Latortue's lead, all foreign dignitaries involved directly or indirectly gave their assurances that they would be held in 2005. As was the case in Iraq. And in Afghanistan. They repeated it so many times they ended up believing it, and convincing others it couldn't be otherwise. So it is not surprising that some Haitians have taken the newly announced dates with a grain of salt. Or that others even speak of a conspiracy to place us under their control or to block a specific candidate. Efforts should be made to counter these rumors, especially by the Provisional Election Council (CEP), the OAS, and the UN. I'll come back to this point later.

Meanwhile, despite appearances, there are a few reasons for tempered optimism and for 2006 to truly represent a fresh start. In a contest characterized thus far by a deluge of candidates and a dearth of ideas, the fact that alliances and coalitions are forming must be considered very positive. Even if they were focused against a particular candidate, it would not seem sinister to me at all, and certainly not the result of a conspiracy, as some would like to have us believe.

In 1975, after Jimmy Carter announced his candidacy for president of the United States, his opponents launched the ABC (Anyone But Carter) movement in an attempt to block his nomination. This did not prevent him from winning the election. So no one should be shocked by a potential ABP movement (Anyone But Préval). He has already been president. He has a track record that could be used against him, but it could also work in his favor. It could play out either way. In fact, the formation of a truly broad alliance against any candidate could end up giving that person more weight and, more importantly, creating a truly competitive campaign, something that Haitians under 50 have never witnessed.

And then, for political or even professional organizations to publicly warn against one candidate or another, this is simply part of political campaigning 101. And no one should find fault with it. All the more so since to date, apart from a few slips-inevitable in these kinds of situations-the candidates have proven quite civil. Let's hope this continues. It is important that the candidate elected have the legitimacy and respect necessary to initiate this fresh start. Should this lucky candidate be elected by a large coalition, other alliances or, to a large extent, by Lavalas voters. What is essential is that the outcome of this universal suffrage be respected.

But I know things are not that simple. And here, I consider it extremely promising, and even healthy for the future that several major figures and presidential candidates have signed a political commitment to accept the results of the elections announced by the CEP and confirmed by the national and international observation organizations. I believe that the other candidates, whether individually or as a group, should make similar commitments.

However, while I consider it fair that coalitions and alliances be formed against any candidate, this must not at all give the impression that the coalitions and alliances also have the goal of quashing a specific voter base, in this case the Lavalas electorate. All the more so since this could turn out to be largely counterproductive. At the risk of going against conventional wisdom, at this time I do not think anyone can accurately gauge the real weight of the Lavalas base. The November 2000 elections, which could have served as a benchmark, had a dismal voter turnout according to estimates by the opposition at the time (from 5% to 20%)-and the head of the Lavalas movement was himself a candidate. Why wasn't there a mass mobilization to ensure him an outright victory, as there was in 1990? I dare to suggest, among possible answers, that we cannot rule out the possibility that the base on which he depended was not as significant as was claimed. In other words, the Lavalas base alone cannot elect a president.

Far be it from me to consider the Lavalas electorate a tizwit (minute) minority, as another might have said. But I believe we must take care not to label as Lavalas voters those who, regardless of how well or badly off they are, live in working class neighborhoods, shantytowns, or the countryside, and are preparing to vote for one candidate over another. We must not repeat the errors of 1990 when Lavalas party members themselves hastened to qualify anyone who wasn't enthusiastically supporting a certain priest from St. Jean Bosco as a Macoute. We must close the door on all forms of exclusion.

On another matter, and in order to prevent conspiracy theories, the reasons behind the numerous blunders in determining and setting the date for the elections must be explained. Announcing new dates is a necessary step, but it is insufficient to quell rumors. And the lack of clear explanations provides fertile ground for all kinds of theories. I am sure that somewhere an evaluation of what happened exists. Why not share it with the public? This could help stop senseless rumors in their tracks. Like the one about the election date being postponed to give the large incipient multilateral coalition time to organize itself to block the candidate who seems to have a shot at winning with the support of the Lavalas voter base. Then there are those who are so convinced that Haiti will soon be a protectorate that they are already compiling data for the "chronicles of a guardianship foretold."

Many questions exist regarding the quality of the cooperation and dialogue among the CEP, the OAS, and the UN. The latter two institutions, together with the representatives of the countries involved in the elections process, control the financial resources, provide the experts, and perform countless other duties, some more important than others, some less known than others. Would the CEP have deliberately chosen, as scandalmongers say, to mount a non-violent resistance to the white (excuse me! I mean the international) community, which thinks it can control the elections, all the while repeating that the Haitians are solely responsible for the process going smoothly? Is it true that the number of voter registration centers was cut back considerably because the company selected by the OAS did not provide enough laptop computers to register and photograph voters?

There are significant suspicions that must be clearly addressed in order to quiet rumors of conspiracies. The OAS, the UN, and the CEP should each make an effort in their respective areas to improve communication. Why wouldn't they sign a joint press release addressing the public's concerns? Wouldn't it remind people that they are working together effectively in pursuit of the same goal? Moreover, the CEP would be able to put an end to the myth that it is in sole command.

Let us stop considering 2006 as a year fraught with danger. While we cannot forget that it marks the two hundredth anniversary of the assassination of Dessalines, let us also remember that it is the second anniversary of the fall of Aristide, and the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Duvalier. And let us take steps to celebrate the future with a little more confidence.

Contact : Rochasse091@yahoo.com
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