

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: FEBRUARY 11 – 14, 2006

Poll Rekindles Haiti's Class War

One candidate represents the poor, others the rich. And neither side appears ready to accept anything less than victory

By KATHIE KLARREICH

Time Magazine

February 14, 2006

Analysis: Haiti Votes for Change

Haiti's pre-Carnival bands were out with their usual fanfare on Sunday night but by Monday morning the crowds were back on the street in a different mood. The news that the latest electoral results showed that frontrunner Rene Preval's lead had dipped slightly below the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff was greeted with barricades of burning tires that shut down the city, as his supporters demanded that electoral officials certify that Preval was the undisputed winner. Even members of the provisional electoral council and some independent observers questioned the tabulation procedure, fueling the anger of a disquieted population. "In terms of public calm and stability, the public perception of the credibility of the counting process is essential," said Mark Schneider of the political monitoring organization the International Crisis Group, "and right now there is enormous suspicion." Then, on Tuesday, Preval announced that he would launch a legal battle to contest the election result, believing that his true share of the vote is closer to 54 percent. And he urged his supporters to continue their demonstrations, although urged them not to impede people from going to work or school, and to refrain from destroying property. "They are defending their vote, not me," he had said earlier.

Preval critics responded to the initial protests by accusing Preval of using the same tactics as the former ally from whom he has tried to distance himself, Jean Bertrand Aristide. Two years ago, armed Aristide supporters violently shut down the capital when they felt his presidency was being threatened. "Business as usual," was how the street protests were described by lawyer Carol Chalmers, a close associate of presidential hopeful Leslie Manigat, who is running Preval a distant second at just under 12 percent. Presidential candidate Charles Henri Baker echoed the same war cry, and vowed to do whatever was necessary to make sure that Preval did not win in a second round. Thus the continuation of the opposing political agendas that have haunted this country since it became the first independent black nation in 1804: The impoverished majority will accept nothing less than Preval, regardless of the actual vote count; most of the wealthy elite will fight to retain the status quo and keep him out of power. The election that offered the potential for a fresh start appears nonetheless to have revealed that Haiti's crippling social divisions still drive its politics.

Still, Monday's spontaneous protest was markedly different from the demonstrations of 2004, because of the absence of arms and of violence. It was the second time in a week that thousands of people were out manifesting their freedom of speech — the first time was at the polls on February 7. And Monday ended quietly, with the crowds dispersing peacefully, waiting to hear from Preval, who had returned to the capital aboard a United Nations helicopter from his hometown of Marmelade, where he'd spent the last week. Preval spent several hours in the National Palace meeting with his advisors, some of whom

urged him to hold out for an independent electoral investigation before he accepts going to a second round. How he responds will be an important indication of what kind of leader he will be. His presidential-like call for a legal response to electoral discrepancies while urging his supporters to remain peaceful is an important first step. But with the election result now the focus of a court battle and an angry protest movement, Haiti's prospects remain under a cloud of uncertainty.

Protesters paralyze Haitian capital, after ecumenical service calls for calm
2/14/2006
Catholic News Service

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – Mass demonstrations erupted in Port-au-Prince as burning tire barricades paralyzed the city, and at least one person was shot dead Feb. 13 in demonstrations following Feb. 7 presidential elections.

DEMONSTRATORS DISRUPT HAITIAN CAPITAL – Angry supporters of Haitian presidential candidate Rene Preval shout slogans as they create a barricade in Port-au-Prince Feb. 13. Smoke from burning tires rose over the capital city as suspicions spread among protesting Preval supporters that the count was being manipulated to stop the one-time ally of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from winning a first-round victory. (CNS photo/Reuters)

The crowd accused U.N. peacekeepers of shooting the man, but the United Nations denied that peacekeepers opened fire on the crowd and said their soldiers fired into the air. The peacekeepers said the man was shot by someone in the crowd.

In a third day of primarily peaceful demonstrations, several hundred protesters calling for recognition of the victory of presidential candidate Rene Preval, burst into an upscale hotel that served as an election press center in the hills of the Petionville neighborhood. Protesters said electoral officials were tampering with results to prevent Preval from winning 51 percent of the vote, which is needed to prevent a second round of elections; his lead had dropped from 60 percent to 48 percent.

The protesters' hotel invasion caused concerns about the safety of Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was unable to leave the hotel to take a domestic flight to the northern city of Cap Haitien. The archbishop addressed the somewhat rowdy crowd, which calmed down and left.

Archbishop Tutu, a Nobel laureate and retired Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, arrived in Haiti Feb. 11 at the invitation of the Peace and Tolerance Initiative, launched by the Organization of American States Special Mission and the Haitian bishops' conference. Archbishop Tutu said he had come to "tell Haitians that they are sons and daughters of God."

At a Feb. 12 ecumenical service at the Port-au-Prince Anglican cathedral, Archbishop Tutu told Haitians that God has not forgotten them and will never forget them. He praised Haitians for their peaceful conduct throughout the elections and called on them to continue peacefully.

The ecumenical service also was attended by Archbishop Mario Giordana, papal nuncio to Haiti, who read a message of support from Pope Benedict XVI; retired Bishop Francois Gayot of Cap Haitien, president of the government's National Dialogue Commission; and Port-au-Prince Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Lafontant.

During the demonstrations, Preval supporters chanted, "We already voted, we won't vote again," referring to a runoff vote March 19, which looks increasingly likely although it has not been announced yet.

The Rev. Chavannes Jeune, an evangelical Protestant pastor and a candidate who placed fourth in the race, called on electoral authorities to examine charges that the vote count has been rigged, and if so, accept a Preval victory.

As the count continued, two international electoral workers, who requested anonymity, described manipulation of the count as "practically impossible" because of the way the election software program had been set up. However, some observers expressed questions about more than 147,000 null or blank votes, which represented nearly 7.5 percent of votes.

"Although some of the less literate may have had trouble with the ballot, it seems strange that so many people would wait in line for such a long time and then cast a blank or spoiled ballot," an international observer said.

According to Haitian electoral law, Preval needs a majority of at least 51 percent to avoid the second election. As of the evening of Feb. 13, with 90 percent of the votes counted, Preval had secured nearly 49 percent of the vote. In second place was former President Leslie Manigat with nearly 12 percent of the vote.

Preval, a 63-year-old agronomist, has widespread support among the poor, including inhabitants of the capital's dangerous slum area, Cite Soleil, which is run by armed gang leaders. Preval has pledged to promote a social rather than a military solution to the problems of Cite Soleil and the country's poor majority.

In his hometown of Marmelade, Preval has run an ambitious development program, funded by the Taiwanese government, which has made basic health care and education accessible to inhabitants of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Some have questions about his links to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is in exile in South Africa, and who, his opponents charge, originally armed the Cite Soleil gangs. Preval was handpicked by Aristide to run as the Lavalas Family party candidate in the 1996 elections, when the Haitian Constitution barred Aristide from a second term. He won in a landslide.

Today, although Preval is believed to have distanced himself from Aristide, many observers believe that if elected he could come under extreme pressure from the gang leaders who voted for him.

During the ecumenical service Feb. 12, Bishop Lafontant indicated the church would oppose amnesty for some gang leaders.

Copyright (c) 2006 Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Tutu appeals to Haitian protestors to stay calm following election

By Matthew Davies

Tuesday, February 14, 2006

Episcopal News Service

As thousands of protestors took to the streets of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, in response to the country's February 7 presidential election, a crowd of 7,000 stormed the city's Hotel Montana February 13 where former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, and Executive Council member Louie Crew were guests. Both are safe and have now been transported from the hotel to Haiti's airport. Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, appealed to the crowd to remain calm and said that he was very proud of the way that they had responded peacefully to the election.

Speaking by telephone from Port-au-Prince February 14, Crew described the last two days as very dramatic.

"The 7,000 people broke the gate down after an hour and stormed into the front of the hotel," said Crew, a member of the Diocese of Newark. "Archbishop Tutu spoke to some of them and pleaded for calm."

Crew explained that, although the experience was harrowing, everyone remained relatively calm "because we didn't sense that these people were trying to be destructive. They were just celebrating what they think is their victory."

One of the reasons the protestors targeted the hotel, officials explained, was that members of the electoral council, which does not support leading presidential candidate Rene Preval, had contracted a conference room there.

Preval said February 14 that "gross errors and probably gigantic fraud" marred last week's elections, but he urged supporters to protest peacefully, the Associated Press reported.

Tutu preached about peace and reconciliation at an ecumenical service at Sainte Trinite Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince, on Sunday, February 12, where worshippers included government officials, foreign diplomats and international electoral observers. The service marked the inauguration of Haiti's "National Day of Peace and Tolerance."

Under the leadership of Bishop Jean Zache Duracin, Eglise Episcopale D'Haiti is one of the Episcopal Church's 12 overseas dioceses.

Violence Flares as Top Candidate Slips in Haiti Count

By GINGER THOMPSON

New York Times

February 14, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 13 — Tens of thousands of people paralyzed traffic with flaming barricades here on Monday, charging fraud in the tabulation of votes from the election for president last week, and demanding that René Préval be declared Haiti's next president, even though results suggested that he had not won the required majority of votes in the first round.

Electoral authorities reported Monday afternoon that votes tabulated from more than 90 percent of the country's 9,000 polling places showed that while Mr. Préval had a strong lead over his nearest rivals, he had slipped farther from a first-round victory, with 48.7 percent of the votes.

His campaign advisers raised questions about an estimated 8 percent of the tabulation sheets that electoral authorities reported as missing or destroyed, but it was unclear whether Mr. Préval would challenge the results.

Leslie Manigat, 75, who had served four months as president in 1988 and was ousted by a military coup, was running second, with 11.8 percent.

Carolyn Cooley, a spokeswoman for the United States Embassy, said in an interview that foreign diplomats, including the American ambassador, Tim Carney, had started talks with Mr. Préval. Some said the talks were aimed at seeking a settlement that would keep this poor, broken country from descending back into anarchy.

A high-ranking official in Haiti for the Organization of American States and a Haitian political analyst close to the talks said that other foreign diplomats and leaders of the interim government had met with Mr. Manigat about the possibility of withdrawing from a second round of voting. The political analyst, who like some others spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid interfering with the negotiations, said, "Haiti cannot afford another round of elections, not only because of the monetary costs, but because of the cost in blood."

Mr. Préval had been awaiting final results in his hometown of Marmelade. But as the protest grew hostile on Monday, he was flown in a United Nations helicopter to the capital, where he met with Juan Gabriel Valdés, chief of the United Nations Stabilization Mission, which has struggled to help restore order to Haiti since an uprising forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of power and into exile two years ago.

Then he was taken by United Nations helicopter to the National Palace, where he waved triumphantly to screaming throngs. Advisers to Mr. Préval, a protégé of Mr. Aristide's, said they expected him to make statements on Haitian radio stations urging the volatile crowds roaming the streets to remain calm.

In interviews, at least two of Mr. Préval's advisers echoed the the protesters' concerns about the credibility of the results. They said Mr. Préval probably would not agree to ask his supporters to end their marches without some agreement from Mr. Manigat to support a recount or to withdraw from a second round.

"If his opponents turn over their votes to Préval so that he can win, then that will only weaken his legitimacy as president," said Fritz Jean, a former president of the Central Bank. "There must be a recount to prove that he is the clear winner."

The political analyst close to the negotiations said Mr. Manigat had also been expected at the National Palace on Monday. But he could not confirm whether Mr. Manigat had been there.

In a telephone interview Monday morning, Mr. Manigat, a historian beloved by some as a wise old grandfather of Haitian politics and dismissed by others as out of touch, said that this country's fragile democracy would be undermined if he allowed threats of violence to force him out of the race. "We cannot let violence guide the process," he said. "We must respect the Constitution. We must go to the second round. It's crystal clear."

Soon after Radio Métropole began announcing new results at 7 a.m., waves of people marched onto the city's main thoroughfares. In minutes there was a storm of protests. Some set tires on fire, and smashed the windshields of cars that tried to pass. A Haitian television station broadcast images of a man shot to death, and people being interviewed at the scene said the man had been shot in a clash with United Nations soldiers. The United Nations denied that charge.

Thousands of protesters stormed the Hotel Montana, where election results are released to the press and international election observers. Most of the protests ended without incident, though, and some protesters jumped into the hotel's pool.

"They told us to come to vote in peace and we did," said Pouchon Pierre, 23, one of several young men pounding on cars trying to get through a barricade. "Now they want to steal the election from us. But we will not let them."

The peace that had prevailed in this troubled country began to unravel Sunday, when the Provisional Electoral Council failed to release final vote counts, and incomplete results suggested that Mr. Préval would not win more than 50 percent. The results contradicted unofficial vote samples taken by the Organization of American States and the National Democratic Institute.

People on the street began asking questions about the estimated 147,000 ballots that had been voided by electoral authorities as illegible and about the estimated 85,000 blank ballots in the net total of valid votes. If those votes had not been included in the total, election observers estimate, Mr. Préval would have slightly more than 51 percent of the vote.

Even more troubling questions have been raised about the missing tabulation sheets.

A United Nations official said the election body's executive director, Jacques Bernard, was considering issuing a call to poll workers demanding the sheets or asking leading political parties, which also received copies, to share them with elections officials.

"This is a problem that I believe can be worked out with good will and cooperation, not with haggling and street protests," José Miguel Insulza, secretary general of the Organization of American States, said in a telephone interview from Washington.

The United Nations official who discussed the missing ballots said that with the threat of mounting protests, time might have run out. "I think we may need to reach a political solution to a technical problem," the official said.

Amy Bracken contributed reporting for this article.

Preval won, some rival Haiti candidates say
14 Feb 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guylor Delva and Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A growing chorus of rival candidates said on Tuesday Haitian voters had chosen ex-President Rene Preval in elections still undecided a week after the vote, while the government urged calm to allow the count to be completed.

The Haitian capital was more peaceful early Tuesday after pro-Preval demonstrators had paralyzed the city with flaming barricades and street marches on Monday demanding that he be allowed to take the presidency. Some roads were still blocked by rocks, tree branches and other debris but traffic was moving.

Haiti's interim government pleaded with Haitians to stay calm as elections officials counted the last 10 percent of ballots. The government was appointed after Aristide fled the impoverished Caribbean nation in the face of an armed rebellion and under intense international pressure to quit,

Preval, a one-time ally of deposed leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide had 48.7 percent at last report. He won the first round easily but his supporters and some elections officials said the count was being manipulated to prevent him from taking the office without a run-off. He needed 50 percent plus one vote for an outright win.

"The people elected Preval. I respect their will," Dany Toussaint, a presidential candidate who won about 7,000 of more than 2 million votes cast, said on local radio. "I recognize they did not vote for me."

Other presidential candidates also conceded Preval had won, including Chavannes Jeune, who is running fourth, former Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul, who won just over 2 percent of the vote, and ex-Prime Minister Marc Bazin, who took under 1 percent.

"A runoff ... would not solve anything," Paul said. "Let us look for balance in parliament and forget about the second round. That will be proof of political intelligence."

Preval had just under the needed 50 percent with 90 percent of the vote counted. Another ex-president, Leslie Manigat, had 11.8 and industrialist Charles Baker, seen as the candidate of the wealthy elite, had 7.9 percent.

GOVERNMENT URGES PATIENCE

Tens of thousands of Preval supporters marched in the streets on Monday, burning tires and blocking roads to demand Preval be named president immediately.

The demonstrations were largely peaceful, but witnesses said Jordanian U.N. troops -- part of a peacekeeping force providing security in Haiti -- killed two people when they opened fire at protesters in Tabarre, just north of the capital.

The United Nations denied the accusation, saying the soldiers had fired warning shots in the air.

In a nationally televised address late on Monday, interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue asked for patience and assured voters they would get an honest vote count.

"No vote will be stolen," Latortue said. "We ask everyone to go back home, to stay calm and the results will be published."

Security was strengthened at the luxury Montana hotel in the hills overlooking Port-au-Prince, where elections officials had been releasing partial vote counts and holding news conferences.

Preval supporters had burst through the hotel's steel gates and invaded the upscale resort on Monday, demanding a final vote count and chanting "Preval is president!" On Tuesday, a white U.N. armored personnel carrier was stationed at the bottom of the winding road leading to the hotel and military police guarded the entry.

Haiti's short democratic history has been plagued by violence. Aristide, a former priest who is a champion of Haiti's poor, was sent into exile in each of his two terms in office.

Brazil wants U.N. meeting on Haiti
UPI
Feb. 14, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim has suggested that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice address the U.N. Security Council on violence in Haiti.

Amorim's suggestion came amid renewed violence in Haiti as supporters of presidential hopeful Rene Preval demanded he be declared the country's new leader.

At least one person was killed Monday during clashes between Preval supporters and U.N. peacekeepers.

Ballot counting for last week's election continues, however. In the days following last Tuesday's vote it appeared Preval had garnered nearly 60 percent of the vote, but as the count continued, his lead began to slip.

It now appears that Preval, a former president from 1995-2000, did not win the necessary votes -- more than 50 percent -- needed to avoid a runoff election, and that a runoff will be scheduled for next month.

**Haitians Angry Over Election Take to Streets
Mobs Paralyze Cities, Block Major Roads
By Manuel Roig-Franzia
Washington Post
Tuesday, February 14, 2006**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 13 -- Haiti's hopes for a peaceful presidential election exploded Monday in a torrent of violence as mobs overturned cars, set piles of tires ablaze and built elaborate roadblocks across major highways, protesting delays in the vote count and alleged fraud in last Tuesday's balloting.

Demonstrators paralyzed cities across the country, from Cap-Haitien in the north to this impoverished seaside capital, where tens of thousands of people took to the streets to demand that Rene Preval -- a former president and favorite of this city's poor -- be named president.

Haiti's distinctive "tap-taps," the colorfully painted trucks that ferry hundreds of thousands of passengers a day, were effectively stilled by roadblocks, set up by armed thugs demanding bribes, on the major arteries connecting cities.

In Port-au-Prince, at least one protester was killed, a luxury hotel was occupied by demonstrators and the international airport was closed. There were reports that U.N. peacekeeping forces had shot into the crowds, but U.N. officials here said they had fired only into the air.

U.N. troops did not intervene when a boisterous crowd burst into the Montana Hotel, where election results were being prepared, and ran through the halls and jumped into the pool.

Hoping to quell the unrest, Preval -- who is far ahead of all rivals with 90 percent of votes counted -- flew to the capital late Monday on a U.N. helicopter from his home town in a remote mountain village. Preval had urged calm in recent days, but he had also stoked emotions among followers by accusing Haiti's electoral commission of lowering his vote total to force him into a runoff and by mockingly singing, "They're stealing our votes," on his porch.

"We have questions about the electoral process," Preval told reporters late Monday after meeting with the top U.N. official in Haiti and ambassadors from the United States, France, Canada and Brazil. "We want to see how we can save the process."

Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue also appealed for calm, saying in a nationally broadcast address: "People, don't stay in the streets. I'm asking you to go home. . . . The transitional government is not stealing your vote."

Transportation between cities almost completely stopped with more than 100 roadblocks on main roads between Cap-Haitien and Port-au-Prince. Thousands of Haitians walked for hours along this nation's pitted highways. Others idled at roadblocks, arguing politics and trying vainly to squeeze their pickup trucks or cars past the barriers. Some of the roadblocks were marvels of rapid-fire construction, with stacked stones and looping chains. In other places, protesters dragged the rusted frames of buses and trucks into the roadways, piled logs or set fire to old tires.

The chaos flourished in the almost total absence of law enforcement, except for selected areas of the capital. Political protest gave way to economic opportunism in many rural areas, as young men with pistols stuffed into their belts collected tolls at roadblocks and set up byzantine systems for ushering those who were willing to pay from one checkpoint to the next.

"That's Haiti," Melais Dieujuste, 40, said dejectedly at a roadblock in St. Marc, a small town west of Port-au-Prince. "Everybody does anything they want. They kill people, block the road, anything."

Smoke was already rising above the mountains before dawn Monday near Preval's home in Marmelade, where he had been monitoring the vote count for almost a week. At a crossroads less than an hour's drive from Preval's home, a lanky teenager named Pierre Jacky thrust his fist into the air as another pile of tires went up in flames.

"They are plotting to keep Preval from being president," Jacky said of Haiti's electoral commission. "We are going to show the world that we are behind our president."

Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001 and came out of quiet retirement to run for his old job, has an overwhelming lead in the presidential race. But his advantage has shrunk each day since partial results were first announced on Thursday, dipping from 61 percent to 48 percent.

Backers of Rene Preval shout as they stoke a fire blocking a road in Haiti's capital. So far, Preval has a wide lead but not enough votes to avoid a runoff. (By Eduardo Munoz -- Reuters)

HAITI'S STRUGGLE

If that last figure holds, Preval will be forced into a risky runoff, in which he could face a coalition of opposition groups. Violence is also feared because of the increasingly tense mood since the election in Port-au-Prince's huge slums, where Preval is popular.

A member of Haiti's electoral commission said this week that he suspected the commission of manipulating the vote totals to prevent a first-round victory for Preval. Suspicions have been raised because of a huge number of invalidated votes, topping 7 percent of all votes cast, according to partial results.

Word also has been spreading about a "quick count" conducted by international observers, which used sampling methods applied in elections in Latin America and the Caribbean. It gave Preval 54 percent of the vote.

A successful election has been viewed as crucial to returning Haiti to some semblance of political and economic order. The election was held two years after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a charismatic former priest turned politician, was forced from power and fled into exile in South Africa.

Preval is not considered nearly as flamboyant, but the depth of his popularity was on display more than ever on Monday.

At a roadblock outside Gonaives, the thugs weren't budging, but a Haitian driver displayed a photo on his cell phone of him next to Preval. A cheer went up. And the roadblock disappeared.

Elites Try to Block Democracy in Haiti, Again
by Ben Terrall
San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia
Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2006

More elite machinations to block will of the poor majority are both more of the same and a blatant provocation to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, that is "ungovernable" masses.

Executive Director of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) Jacques Bernard, an appointee of the unconstitutional coup regime's 'interim' Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, indicated Saturday evening that the percentage of votes for Presidential candidate Rene Prével in the February 7 presidential elections was actually lower than originally estimated. This was due to the addition of 72,000 blank ballots.

A spokesman for the electoral council said blank votes had not been counted in past elections, but these ballots were added to vote totals used to calculate each candidate's tally, effectively lowering each candidate's percentage of the overall vote and dropping the vote for Prével to less than 50 percent. If this is allowed to stand, there will be a runoff vote, presumably pitting Prével, the only candidate with wide credibility and respect among the country's poor majority, against elite-backed Leslie Manigat, who has no popular base and only received around 12 percent of the vote.

Electoral council member Pierre Richard Duchemin said he was being denied his rightful access to information about the tabulation process and called for an investigation.

Pointing to "a certain level of manipulation," Duchemin told The Associated Press, "there is an effort to stop people from asking questions."

Dr. Frantz Large, a Senate candidate for Lespwa, Prével's party, observed: "The first objective of the provisional authority is to force René Prével to a 2nd round, and run a coalition of candidates against him.

"The second objective is to push the popular masses who have a legitimate beef, into the streets, inciting them to vent blind rage onto the « bord de mer » (dockside) in Port-au-Prince which houses stores and offices of all kinds, small businesses, fine victims making up the country's working middle class. This would certainly lead to creating hate and resentment against President Prével, and a desire to find refuge in stifling policies that border on fascism."

Further fanning the flames of discontent amongst hundreds of thousands who have been subjected to unrelenting repression involving rape, extrajudicial execution and illegal imprisonment of dissidents since the February 2004 U.S.-backed ouster of the democratically-elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the UN today again opened fire on demonstrators in Port-au-Prince. An anonymous UN official told a reporter that "several dozen" were injured.

Meanwhile, more than 800 U.S. troops will soon be stationed in the Dominican Republic's capital Santo Domingo (200 miles from Port-au-Prince), along with stockpiles of "war materials." A member of the progressive Dominican coalition People's Unity, which is protesting this development, noted,

"Dominicans remember that in 1915, under the so-called Monroe Doctrine America for the Americans, US forces invaded Haiti and a year later our soil."

Frantz Large observed of the latest anti-democratic maneuvers of Haiti's U.S.-backed elites, "The Haitian people continue to be treated in the same paternalistic and colonialist manner which consists of believing them to be complete idiots, and expressing disbelief when this noble people demonstrates its notable intelligence."

Not surprisingly, that treatment is nowhere clearer than in most mainstream press coverage of the election. Much was made of whether or not Preval would allow President Aristide, still a bete noir of the Bush Administration, to allow to return to Haiti, but questions about plans for the hundreds of violent criminals freed by the coup regime were notably absent. And in discussing UN troops with a journalist this week, Mark Schneider of the International Crisis Group said:

"Even with all the problems, nobody here is saying they want them to leave -- on the left, right, or center. They are needed here not for one year, or two years, but for the next 10 years." But there are people that want the UN to leave -- they just aren't French or English speakers, the only people that U.S. reporters tend to interview. They are among those people Ginger Thompson of the New York Times referred to when she wrote that electoral irregularities "have sent crowds of menacing people out of the slums," a construction that the Times surely never used when describing State Department-supported white demonstrators contesting election results in the Ukraine.

As usual, the San Francisco Bay View was one of the few U.S. outlets offering an alternative perspective to the conventional wisdom. In an article by Haiti-based journalist Lynn Duff, a 70 year-old gardner explained, "At my age, you aren't fooled by the charlatans anymore. I knew this would happen, that the people holding the puppet strings would not allow a just and fair vote. The question is, since there are so many people who are voting for Lespwa, will the masterminds of this situation be able to prevent him from winning? We will see.

"Our enemy thinks so poorly of us that he underestimates us. He thinks we are uneducated and ignorant, but his misunderstanding of the Haitian people will be his undoing."

To act in solidarity with the poor majority of Haiti as they struggle to hold on to their hard-won democratic rights, see IJDH.org. An action alert should also be up shortly at HaitiAction.net.

Haiti Frontrunner Alleges Vote-Rigging

By STEVENSON JACOBS

ABC News

Feb. 14, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti Feb 14, 2006 (AP)— Leading presidential candidate Rene Preval said Tuesday that "gross errors and probably gigantic fraud" marred last week's elections but he urged supporters to protest peacefully, a day after at least one person was killed in violent demonstrations.

Preval, who had just under 49 percent of the vote with most ballots counted, made the comments hours after a U.N. helicopter brought him to the capital from his rural home Monday as supporters accusing election officials of manipulating results stormed a luxury hotel in Port-au-Prince.

"We want the will of the Haiti people to be respected," Preval said at a news conference. "I ask the Haitian people ... to be mature, to be responsible, to be nonviolent."

"We are not the party of violence," Preval said. "On the contrary we are victims of violence by others," adding that his supporters have been attacked in the cities of Gonaives and St. Marc.

Sitting on a lawn chair on the grass at his gated home in the Petionville neighborhood, he urged followers to "respect people's belongings" and to be on guard against those who try to foment violence.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst has said there has been no evidence of fraud in the elections.

"If he believes there have been irregularities, he has the right to request an investigation," Wimhurst told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The U.N. Security Council also strongly urged all Haitians to respect election results and refrain from violence Tuesday as it extended the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti for six months, until Aug. 15.

Preval, a former protege of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, enjoys wide support among Haiti's poor majority. It was uncertain, however, whether he would get the 50 percent total needed to win outright and avoid a second round of voting and no new results have been posted for more than 20 hours.

"We have observed there have been gross errors and probably gigantic fraud," Preval told reporters, adding the official results released so far "do not correspond with reality."

He met late Monday with the top U.N. official in Haiti and ambassadors from the United States, France, Canada and Brazil. "We want to see how we can save the process," he said after that meeting.

A popularly elected government with a clear mandate from the voters is seen as crucial to avoiding a political and economic meltdown in the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation. In the two years since Aristide's ouster, gangs have gone on kidnapping sprees and factories have closed for lack of security.

Monday's violence in Port-au-Prince left at least one protester dead as barricades of blazing tires sent plumes of black smoke into the sky.

White U.N. armored vehicles set about clearing the roadblocks Tuesday, pushing junked cars, old refrigerators and other debris aside though some barricades were still in place.

In the middle-class Tabarre neighborhood, Associated Press journalists saw a man lying in the street, blood soaking the picture of Preval on his T-shirt. Dozens of witnesses said Jordanian U.N. peacekeepers opened fire from a jeep, killing two people and wounding four.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst first denied that peacekeepers fired any rounds, then later said they had fired in the air and that someone else fired shots afterward in the same area.

Also Monday, thousands of screaming protesters poured into the Montana Hotel in Petionville, where election officials had been announcing results. Blue-helmeted U.N. peacekeepers armed with assault rifles looked on from the grounds and the roof. No violence was reported.

Protesters waving Preval campaign posters and tree branches jumped up and down in unison, chanting: "Now is the time! Now is the time!" Dozens somersaulted fully clothed into the pool a rare treat in a country where most people lack running water.

Protesters stretched out on chaise lounges and ran up and down the hotel stairs past rooms costing \$200 and up a night.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, who is visiting Haiti, came out of his suite to appeal for calm. One of his security agents said the South African archbishop had refused to be evacuated by the helicopter plucking guests from the roof.

Communist Cuba accused Washington Tuesday of helping manipulate the results in Haiti's presidential elections.

"What is happening in Haiti shouldn't be surprising," the Communist Party daily Granma said in a front-page editorial. "It isn't the first time that the United States has intervened on a whim over the destiny of this nation, nor is it the first time it has shameless manipulated another country's electoral results to its benefit."

The editorial also praised Preval, calling him a "a man of great prestige who painstaking served the people" and saying Washington doesn't like him because of his previous ties to Aristide, who was deposed in a rebellion two years ago.

With about 90 percent of the vote counted from the Feb. 7 vote, Preval, a former president, was leading with 48.7 percent of the vote, Haiti's electoral council said on its Web site. His nearest opponent was Leslie Manigat, another former president, who had 11.8 percent.

Manigat's wife, Myrlande, declined to say whether anyone had approached her husband about withdrawing.

"We are not negotiating," she told The Associated Press Tuesday in a telephone interview. "Our position is to wait until the (electoral council) releases the results."

Of the 2.2 million ballots cast, about 125,000 ballots have been declared invalid because of irregularities, raising suspicion among Preval supporters that polling officials were rigging the election.

Another 4 percent of the ballots were blank but were still added into the total, making it harder for Preval to obtain the majority needed to win outright.

Jacques Bernard, director-general of the nine-member electoral council, denied accusations that the council voided many votes for Preval.

Associated Press writers Andrew Selsky in Port-au-Prince and Anita Snow in Havana, Cuba, contributed to this report.

Demonstrations mar Haiti vote count
Patrick Moser
Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Mail and Guardian Online
14 February 2006

René Prével (63) was expected to appeal for calm in Haiti on Tuesday following protests over a vote count that put him short of the 50% he needs to be elected president in the first round.

Tension remained high as Prével's supporters insisted the frontrunner be declared president, despite the partial results.

Discontent was further fuelled by the long wait for the official outcome, which was yet to be announced one week after the election.

On Monday, a Prével supporter was shot dead as protesters took over the streets of the capital, barricading roads, storming a luxury hotel and setting tyres alight.

Protesters blamed United Nations peacekeepers for the death, but a spokesperson for the UN Stabilisation Mission (Minustah) insisted the troops only fired two shots in the air and never shot at demonstrators.

Prével, a former president who enjoys strong support among the millions of impoverished Haitians, was expected to issue an appeal for calm among his supporters.

His arrival in the Haitian capital on Monday already helped ease the tension. Prével met with UN and Haitian officials as well as diplomats after flying in from his hometown of Marmelade.

"He came to calm people. It is very important he should do that," said Brazil's ambassador to Haiti, Jose Paolo de Andrade Pinto.

Brazil, which leads Minustah, asked the United States to organise a UN Security Council meeting on the new tensions in Haiti. The United States is council president for February.

Washington, for its part urged Haitians to respect the outcome of the elections.

Former South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu on Monday also urged the demonstrators to remain calm.

"You must show the world that you abhor fighting," the Nobel peace laureate said, speaking from the terrace of the luxury Montana hotel, where protesters briefly took over the garden, swimming pool and tennis court.

Demonstrations were also reported in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second largest city, and in other parts of the impoverished Caribbean country.

Similar protests two years ago turned into a popular uprising that forced Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's last elected president, to flee. Haiti has been rocked by turmoil since, but the violence eased shortly before the February 7 elections.

Monday's demonstrations started after authorities announced the latest partial results, showing Preval had 48,76% of the vote with 90% of the ballots tallied.

Préval (63) had a huge lead over his 31 rivals, several of whom have said they would support him in a second round.

A runoff would be held on March 19, with Préval competing against runner-up Leslie Manigat (75) also a former president who had 11,8% in the partial results.

Préval was president from 1996 to 2001. A former ally of Aristide, he served as prime minister in his government in 1991, but his aides say the two men are no longer in contact. - Sapa-AFP

Related articles

Woman with Vodou skull released from detention

By JERRY BERRIOS

Miami Herald

February 14, 2006

The Miramar woman charged with intentionally smuggling a human head into the United States last week has been released from a federal detention center, her attorney Kenneth Hassert said today.

On Monday, Myrlene Severe posted the \$10,000 needed for her \$100,000 bond but was not released from jail until 10 a.m. today, Hassert said.

Severe, 30, also was charged with not having the proper paperwork for the skull, as well as bringing hazardous material on an airplane.

Severe was returning from a trip to Cap Haitien, Haiti, when a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport spotted the skull. It was inside a rice bag with dirt, a rusted nail and a banana leaf.

Severe told officials that she got the "package" from a Haitian man and planned to use it to ward off evil spirits as part of her Vodou beliefs, according to an Immigration & Customs Enforcement affidavit.

Her arraignment is set for March 2 before U.S. Magistrate Barry S. Seltzer.

Many in Norwich watch Haiti chaos closely
Norwich Bulletin
February 14, 2006

Norwich orthodontist Jeremiah Lowney Jr., president of the local Haitian Health Foundation, said Monday he was disappointed with the chaos in the capital city.

Lowney returned Wednesday from a 10-day trip to Haiti, where he helps run a health clinic that has treated 200,000 people in the last 25 years.

"The elections in the area I was in were run very peacefully and very openly. It didn't look to me, and I don't believe, there was any chicanery going on," he said.

Geraldson Petit-Homme, 47, of Norwich, who came to the United States from Haiti in 1989, also found the deadly protests worrying.

"I think it's upsetting. I hear people telling these stories to me, that many people are upset (in Haiti). I really don't know how to feel," said Petit-Homme.

-- Norwich Bulletin

Election Protests Mount In Haiti; Luxury Hotel Stormed

February 14, 2006

Julie Farby –

All Headline News

Port-au-prince, Haiti (AHN) - Tens of thousands of angry protesters erected flaming barricades, stormed a luxury hotel and marched through the streets of Haiti, protesting presidential election returns showing that frontrunner Rene Preval may face a runoff election.

At least one supporter of Preval was killed. News service journalists saw the body of a man, wearing a blood-soaked T-shirt bearing an image of Preval, in the street in the Tabarre neighborhood.

Witnesses say that U.N. peacekeepers opened fire on the crowd, but a U.N. spokesman denies the allegations. Witnesses say Jordanian U.N. peacekeepers opened fire, killing two and wounding four.

In a phone interview with the AP, David Wimhurst, a U.N. spokesman in Haiti, denied that peacekeepers opened fire.

"There's apparently two people killed in Tabarre, but it wasn't U.N. troops who killed them. We fired two warning shots in the air and then there was gunfire from unidentified parties - it wasn't us. We haven't shot anyone."

Thousands of protesters stormed the Hotel Montana, where the country's election council had its press center, breaking through a gate and spilling into the luxury resort's garden, lobby and hallways.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in Haiti for a previously scheduled visit, attempted to disperse the crowd from a balcony at the hotel, but many among the protesters had no idea who he was.

"If you shoot at us, we're going to burn all this down," the crowd chanted as U.N. gunships hovered overhead. Many believed that members of the country's election council were staying at the hotel and demanded to speak to the council's director general, Jacques Bernard.

Results posted Sunday showed Preval leading with 49.1 percent of the vote, with some 75 percent of the ballots counted. He was followed by former president Leslie Manigat with 11.7 percent. Preval needed a 50 percent plus one vote to avoid a runoff scheduled for March 19.

Portland-area medical team stranded by Haiti protests
Tuesday, February 14, 2006
AMY MARTINEZ STARKE
The Oregonian

Election protests in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince have stranded eight Portland-area members of a volunteer medical team, who are waiting in their clinic compound for the unrest to die down so they can see patients.

Gail Buck, a Providence Health Systems nurse, and her team left Portland on Wednesday to provide medical and rehabilitative care through Healing Hands for Haiti, a Utah-based organization.

"They really want to get back to work," said Raneë Ruble, an Oregon friend who spoke by phone to Buck.

"There are about 50 protesters at our road entrance blocking the road with cement, wheels, axles and whatever," Buck told Ruble.

The team spent the day behind the walls of the compound doing painting and construction projects and sorting supplies.

Buck and her team are scheduled to return to Portland on Feb. 19. Healing Hands for Haiti is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization without political or religious ties.

Delegation members include Buck; Nicole Canales of Portland, a physical therapist at Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital; Kathleen Daly of Portland, an occupational therapist from Veterans Hospital; Dr. Steve Janselwitz, from Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital; Angelina Stupey of Portland, a Providence Portland Medical Center nurse; Nancy Heston of Portland, a nurse at Providence Portland Medical Center; Pat Drusky of Milwaukie, a nurse at Providence Milwaukie Hospital; and Christine Buck of Sandy, a nurse at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center.

Northwest Medical Teams, based in Tigard, is planning to send a 12-member medical team Friday, arriving at Port-au-Prince under police escort, a spokeswoman said.

UN Council Appeals for Calm in Haiti as Preval Slips in Results
Bloomberg News
Feb. 14, 2006

The United Nations Security Council appealed for calm in Haiti after protests in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, about the vote total of the leading contender for president, Rene Preval.

The Security Council met after Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim asked U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for a statement on the Feb. 7 election and the protests. The U.S. holds the rotating presidency of the 15-nation panel.

Thousands of people protested in the streets of Haiti yesterday as support for Preval slipped below the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff, from an initial figure of more than 60 percent, according to tabulations posted on the Internet by the electoral commission. Demonstrators stormed the gates of a hotel where the votes are being counted, barricaded roads and burned tires.

Preval, a prime minister in the government of deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, said today that "massive fraud or gross errors" occurred in the election, according to Agence France-Presse. At the same time, he urged his supporters to refrain from violence. Preval, who also served as president, has almost 49 percent of the vote in incomplete results.

"The situation is tense, but calmer than yesterday," Hedi Anabi, UN assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping, told reporters in New York after briefing the Security Council. "No one has been able to bring any proof of fraud that would call the process into question."

Anabi said that while groups of protesters burned tires near the Port-au-Prince airport today, there were no reports of violence or large gatherings on the streets. He said units from the 9,000 UN soldiers and civilian police in Haiti are patrolling the capital's streets in a show of force.

'High Expectations'

The Security Council called on Haitian political leaders to "live up to the high expectations of their people at this critical juncture by demonstrating statesmanship and moderation."

Ambassador Ronaldo Sardenberg of Brazil, which is leading the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, said the interim government might have made a mistake by announcing partial results from Port-au-Prince that showed Preval with more than 60 percent of the vote. His total slipped as results from rural areas were tabulated.

Damian Onses-Cardona, spokesman for the UN mission to Haiti, said the world body has joined with officials from the interim government and leading political parties to form a commission that is reviewing the election and fraud allegations. The commission is to announce the final results in about four days, he said.

Ninety-two percent of the ballots have been brought to the capital for counting so far. In second place is another former president, Leslie Manigat, who got 11.8 percent of votes counted so far.

Mission Extended

The Security Council also voted to extend the mandate of the peacekeeping mission in Haiti until Aug. 15 and asked Secretary-General Kofi Annan to make recommendations on possible restructuring of the force in light of the results of the election.

A runoff is set for March 19 if no candidate gets more than half of the votes. The new government is scheduled to take office on March 29, and local elections are set to be held on April 13.

Impoverished Haiti has depended on UN, U.S. and other foreign troops for security since Aristide left the country during a rebellion in April 2004.

To contact the reporter on this story:

Bill Varner at the United Nations at wvarner@bloomberg.net

UN Security Council Appeals for Calm in Haiti

By Peter Heinlein

United Nations

14 February 2006

The U.N. Security Council has issued an appeal for calm in Haiti while results of last week's elections are finalized.

A statement unanimously approved by the Security Council commends Haitians for the commitment to democracy shown in the high voter turnout in last Tuesday's elections. But the statement, read by U.S. Ambassador John Bolton in his capacity as Security Council president for February, encouraged all parties to be calm as the votes are counted.

"The members of the council express their expectation that the counting of ballots and the remaining steps in the electoral process mandated by Haitian law will continue to be transparent and meet international standards," he said. "They strongly urge all parties to respect the results of the election and refrain from violence."

A supporter of Rene Preval holds up a poster of him at roadblock of flaming tires just outside Cite Soleil slum in Port-au-Prince

Ambassador Bolton said the council issued the appeal for calm after reports post-election unrest had led to at least one death in Port-au-Prince.

"I think the reason we took the step of issuing this press statement was because of the events of yesterday and because of our desire to maintain order and calm as the electoral process continues to unfold," he said. "That is why we have called on Haiti's political leaders to help in that effort, and we think the interim government and the international authorities are working hard to get the results made final, and we urge calm until that can take place."

In a related development Tuesday, the Security Council extended the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti for six months.

The extension came a day after U.N. troops clashed with demonstrators in Port-au-Prince. Witnesses were quoted as saying the peacekeepers opened fire, killing a protester. But U.N. spokesmen denied the accusation, saying the blue-helmeted peacekeepers fired only warning shots in the air.

Some rival Haiti candidates say Preval won

Tue Feb 14, 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva and Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A growing chorus of rival candidates said on Tuesday Haitian voters had chosen ex-President Rene Preval in elections still undecided a week after the vote, while the government urged calm to allow the count to be completed.

The Haitian capital was more peaceful early Tuesday after pro-Preval demonstrators had paralysed the city with flaming barricades and street marches on Monday demanding that he be allowed to take the presidency. Some roads were still blocked by rocks, tree branches and other debris but traffic was moving.

Haiti's interim government pleaded with Haitians to stay calm as elections officials counted the last 10 percent of ballots. The government was appointed after Aristide fled the impoverished Caribbean nation in the face of an armed rebellion and under intense international pressure to quit,

Preval, a one-time ally of deposed leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide had 48.7 percent at last report. He won the first round easily but his supporters and some elections officials said the count was being manipulated to prevent him from taking the office without a run-off. He needed 50 percent plus one vote for an outright win.

"The people elected Preval. I respect their will," Dany Toussaint, a presidential candidate who won about 7,000 of more than 2 million votes cast, said on local radio. "I recognise they did not vote for me."

Other presidential candidates also conceded Preval had won, including Chavannes Jeune, who is running fourth, former Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul, who won just over 2 percent of the vote, and ex-Prime Minister Marc Bazin, who took under 1 percent.

"A runoff ... would not solve anything," Paul said. "Let us look for balance in parliament and forget about the second round. That will be proof of political intelligence."

Preval had just under the needed 50 percent with 90 percent of the vote counted. Another ex-president, Leslie Manigat, had 11.8 and industrialist Charles Baker, seen as the candidate of the wealthy elite, had 7.9 percent.

GOVERNMENT URGES PATIENCE

Tens of thousands of Preval supporters marched in the streets on Monday, burning tires and blocking roads to demand Preval be named president immediately.

The demonstrations were largely peaceful, but witnesses said Jordanian U.N. troops -- part of a peacekeeping force providing security in Haiti -- killed two people when they opened fire at protesters in Tabarre, just north of the capital.

The United Nations denied the accusation, saying the soldiers had fired warning shots in the air.

In a nationally televised address late on Monday, interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue asked for patience and assured voters they would get an honest vote count.

"No vote will be stolen," Latortue said. "We ask everyone to go back home, to stay calm and the results will be published."

Security was strengthened at the luxury Montana hotel in the hills overlooking Port-au-Prince, where elections officials had been releasing partial vote counts and holding news conferences.

Preval supporters had burst through the hotel's steel gates and invaded the upscale resort on Monday, demanding a final vote count and chanting "Preval is president!" On Tuesday, a white U.N. armoured personnel carrier was stationed at the bottom of the winding road leading to the hotel and military police guarded the entry.

Haiti's short democratic history has been plagued by violence. Aristide, a former priest who is a champion of Haiti's poor, was sent into exile in each of his two terms in office.

Haiti's unanswered questions

By Nick Caistor

BBC regional analyst

February 14, 2006

There were many things to celebrate after the first round of Haiti's presidential and parliamentary elections held last week.

Supporters of Mr Preval say he was robbed of an outright victory

After initial confusion around some polling stations, there was little violence on the day of voting.

Haitians turned out in record numbers. Some 63% of the 3.5 million registered voters cast ballots, far more than in any other election held since the Duvalier clan was ousted from power in 1986.

The voters showed a clear preference: Rene Preval, the man who was president from 1996 to 2000 and this time headed the L'Espwa (The Hope) movement.

The candidate in second place, with around 12% of the vote, was another former president, the Christian Democrat leader Leslie Manigat.

But Mr Preval has failed by a small margin to win the presidential contest outright and that leaves Haiti in a dangerous situation, with many unanswered questions.

Supporters of Mr Preval have taken to the streets, protesting that he was robbed of an outright victory.

They say the "international community" - principally the United States and France - does not want to see him back in power because in the past he has been a loyal supporter of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Mr Aristide's supporters claim that the United States and France kidnapped the president at the end of February 2004 and forced him into exile. Both countries have denied the allegations.

The supporters are now protesting that it was similar pressure which prevented Mr Preval winning an outright victory in the first round this time.

Any sign that the US is worried about his return to power could lead to further violence.

Pressure

Behind this is the biggest unanswered question of the Haitian elections. How many people voted for Mr Preval in the hope that he would bring back Mr Aristide?

When Mr Preval was president from 1996 to 2000, he acted as Mr Aristide's lieutenant, filling in for him because Mr Aristide could not be immediately re-elected.

He was duly replaced by Mr Aristide in 2001, after which there was a rapid breakdown of political stability.

But President Preval's four years in office were a period of relative calm, with some improvements in the Haitian economy, a more or less functioning parliament and efforts to revive local government.

Mr Preval kept out of the political violence of 2003-2004, and in the run-up to these elections has stressed that he is now his own man.

The problem he will have if he emerges triumphant from the second round is if those who voted for him press for an immediate return of Mr Aristide. They could make it impossible for him to govern effectively.

At the same time, if Mr Aristide does return, that would also make things difficult for a Preval government. The opposition would probably boycott parliament again, as it did in 2001-2004, and the political situation could once more quickly descend into chaos.

Another danger is that the opposition will choose to withdraw from the second round and from further voting for the 129 parliamentary seats also being contested.

Even before the first round, some opposition groups had threatened to pull out, claiming that a vote for Mr Preval was simply a vote for Mr Aristide.

If they now seek to undermine Mr Preval before the second round of voting, due in March, they could plunge Haiti back into the widespread violence that led to Mr Aristide's downfall in 2004.

Signs of strain

This danger makes the role of the 8,000-strong UN force (known as Minustah) even more crucial in holding the peace over the coming weeks.

Haiti's army was abolished in 1994 and its 5,000-strong police force has repeatedly shown itself incapable of keeping order, especially in country areas and the slums of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

UN peacekeepers were sent in after Mr Aristide was forced out

There are signs of strain among the countries that have previously backed Minustah.

The Socialist government in Spain has said that it wishes to withdraw its 500-strong contingent from Haiti "in the next few weeks", unless more effort is made to fulfil pledges of aid made by donor countries.

Faced with the confusion after the first round of voting, there have been calls for the United States, which is currently chairman of the UN Security Council, to convene an emergency debate to discuss Haiti.

Any such debate would need urgently to re-affirm the international community's support for the electoral process and for Minustah, and to stress that the international donors who have pledged more than \$1 billion (£570m) in aid for Haiti will meet their commitments.

By voting in such massive numbers, the Haitian people have shown that they support the political process supervised by the United Nations.

Their hope of a fresh start with properly elected leaders should not be defrauded as it has so often been in the past.

Haitian protesters allege election fraud
Electoral body says leading candidate's tally fading away from first-round victory
Ginger Thompson,
New York Times
Tuesday, February 14, 2006

Port-au-Prince, Haiti -- Tens of thousands of people paralyzed traffic with flaming barricades here on Monday, charging fraud in the tabulation of votes from last week's national elections and demanding that the leading candidate be declared Haiti's next president.

Electoral authorities reported Monday morning that votes tabulated from more than 90 percent of the country's 9,000 polling places showed that while Rene Preval had a strong lead over his nearest rivals, he had slipped far away from a first-round victory, with 48.7 percent of the votes. His campaign advisers raised questions about an estimated 8 percent of the tabulation sheets that electoral authorities reported as missing or destroyed, but it was unclear whether Preval would challenge the results.

Leslie Francois Manigat, 75, who had served four months as president in 1988 and was ousted by a military coup, was running second, with 11.8 percent.

Carolyn Cooley, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Embassy, said in an interview that foreign diplomats, including U.S. Ambassador Tim Carney, had started talks with Preval. Some said the talks were aimed at seeking a settlement that would keep this poor, broken country from descending back into anarchy.

A high-ranking official in Haiti for the Organization of American States and a Haitian political analyst close to the talks said that other foreign diplomats and leaders of the interim government had met with Manigat about the possibility of withdrawing from a second round of voting.

Preval had been awaiting final results in his father's native town of Marmelade. But as the protest grew hostile on Monday, he was rushed by a U.N. helicopter back to the capital, where he met with Juan Gabriel Valdes, chief of the U.N. Stabilization Mission, which has struggled to help restore order to Haiti since an armed uprising forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of power and into exile two years ago.

Then Preval was transported by U.N. helicopter to the National Palace, where he waved triumphantly to screaming throngs. U.N. officials did not explain why.

Advisers to Preval, a protege to Aristide, said they expected him to make statements on Haitian radio stations urging the volatile crowds roaming the streets to remain calm.

In interviews, at least two of Preval's advisers echoed the same concerns as the protesters about the credibility of the results. They said Preval probably would not agree to ask his supporters to end their marches without some agreement from Manigat to support a recount or to withdraw from a second round.

"If his opponents turn over their votes to Preval so that he can win, then that will only weaken his legitimacy as president," said Fritz Jean, a former president of Haiti's Central Bank. "There must be a recount to prove that he is the clear winner."

In a telephone interview Monday morning, Manigat, a historian beloved by some as a wise old grandfather of Haitian politics and dismissed by others as out of touch, said that this country's fragile democracy would be undermined if he allowed threats of violence to force him out of the race.

"We cannot let violence guide the process," he said. "We must respect the Constitution. We must go to the second round. It's crystal clear."

Soon after Radio Metropole began announcing the latest results at 7 a.m., waves of people marched onto the city's main thoroughfares. In minutes, there was a storm of protests. Some set tires on fire and smashed the windshields of cars that tried to pass.

In the middle-class Tabarre neighborhood, Associated Press journalists saw the body of a man on a street, blood soaking Preval's image emblazoned on his T-shirt. Dozens of witnesses said Jordanian U.N. peacekeepers in a jeep opened fire, killing two people and wounding four. The body of the second victim was not seen.

"We were peacefully protesting when the U.N. started shooting," said Walrick Michel, 22.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst first denied that peacekeepers fired any rounds, then later said they had fired in the air.

"We fired two warning shots into the air, and we didn't injure anyone," he said.

Thousands of protesters stormed the Hotel Montana, where election results are released to the press and international election observers. Most of the protests ended without incident, though, and some protesters even felt celebratory, jumping into the pool at the Montana.

The peace that had prevailed in this troubled country began to unravel Sunday, when Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council failed to release final vote counts and incomplete results indicated that Preval would not win more than 50 percent of the vote. The results contradicted unofficial vote samples taken by the Organization of American States and the National Democratic Institute.

People on the street began asking questions about the estimated 147,000 ballots that had been voided by electoral authorities as illegible and about the estimated 85,000 blank ballots in the net total of valid votes. If those votes had not been included in the total, election observers estimate, Preval would have slightly more than 51 percent of the vote.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

UN urged to address Haiti unrest
BBC News
February 14, 2006

Haiti clashes

Brazil's foreign minister has urged the UN Security Council to address the growing unrest in Haiti, following last Tuesday's presidential elections.

Celso Amorim is said to have made the request during a phone call with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

At least one person has been killed and several injured in clashes in Haiti.

Supporters of front-runner Rene Preval have set up roadblocks in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and occupied a hotel, demanding he be declared the winner.

Witnesses said UN peacekeepers had opened fire on protesters, but the UN said its troops had fired in the air.

Mr Preval returned to Port-au-Prince on Monday as his share of the vote fell further, raising the prospect of a run-off, according to electoral officials.

With nearly 90% of the ballots counted, the former president has 48.7% of the vote - just short of the 50% required to win outright.

Mr Preval used to be an ally of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was forced out of power in 2004. He has inherited Mr Aristide's strong support among the poor.

Another ex-leader, Leslie Manigat, has 11.8%, while industrialist Charles Henri Baker has 7.9%, officials say.

Burning tyres

After making his request for a UN Security Council meeting, Mr Amorim described the situation in Haiti as worrying.

Mr Amorim, whose country heads a contingent of 9,500 UN troops in Haiti, said the international community needs to act with firmness and prudence.

The US is presiding in the UN Security Council in February and so sets its agenda.

On Monday, thousands marched in Port-au-Prince for a second day as it became increasingly apparent that Mr Preval might face a run-off on 19 March.

Angry protesters say electoral officials have tampered with the vote count to keep him from a first-round victory.

Final results had initially been scheduled for Sunday evening - but as it stands now they may not be known for a few days.

Burning tyres and roadblocks paralysed the capital's streets.

Witnesses told local media that UN peacekeepers had fired into crowds of demonstrators massing in the middle class Tabarre district, killing at least one.

But UN spokesman David Wimhurst insisted troops had only fired two shots in the air. "No individuals were wounded by UN peacekeepers," he said.

'Free and fair'

In the Petionville neighbourhood, thousands of screaming Preval supporters poured into the luxury Montana Hotel, where election officials have been tallying results.

UN peacekeepers barred access to the election centre and - after hours spent chanting pro-Preval slogans and frolicking in the hotel pool - the crowd finally dispersed.

Mr Preval, who is leading more than 30 presidential candidates, held a 61% lead when the first results were released late last week, but his share of the vote has since dropped.

There have been accusations of ballot mishandling - but the head of Haiti's electoral council has denied the allegations.

International observers have deemed the election free and fair, despite saying there were some minor procedural irregularities.

Haiti - the poorest country in the continent - is choosing a 129-member parliament as well as a new president.

HAITIAN ELECTION

Vote-counting delay creates more tension in Haiti

By JOE MOZINGO AND JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

Monday February 13, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE - Amid delays in counting ballots that were arousing deep suspicions of fraud, thousands of supporters of presidential candidate René Prével poured into the streets of Haiti's capital Sunday to demand that electoral officials announce the results of the election held five days earlier. But by 9 p.m., the electoral council had not updated the vote results since just after 9 a.m., prompting concern that the council did not want to announce that Prével won an outright majority, which would avert a runoff against the second-place finisher.

The council, in fact, did not hold its usual evening news conference to announce the latest tallies, saying only that updates would be posted on its website. Its members were not answering their cellphones and appeared to be avoiding the media.

In this deeply divided country, racked by years of violence and political turmoil, the delays in tabulating the votes from the presidential and legislative elections last Tuesday have been creating increasingly dangerous tensions.

At 9 a.m. Sunday, Prével held 49.1 percent of the 75.8 percent of voting centers counted, far ahead of former President Leslie Manigat, with 11.7 percent. Most of the ballots left to be tallied, however, come from the Port-au-Prince area, where Prével has been getting more than 60 percent of the votes counted.

Tuesday's balloting saw an unexpectedly high turnout, as voters rose before dawn and flocked to the polls in the first election since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled the country during a political opposition movement and armed rebellion in 2004.

Foreign electoral advisors said a survey of 1,340 polling stations across the country -- conducted by Haitian observers and funded by the Washington-based National Democratic Institute -- showed that Prével would receive more than 52 percent when all of the votes are counted.

DELAYS

But the official results have been beset by delays.

Of about 800 voting centers in the country, nine were ransacked by political parties fighting for control of the counting.

"In Bombardopolis, four candidates personally went to the voting center and trashed the polling stations," said David Wimhurst, a spokesman for the U.N. Mission here. "Don't ask me why they did it, but they did it."

Also, an estimated 2 percent of the results from the polling stations never arrived at the tabulation center. Wimhurst said some of the bags had been found and were on the way.

"There is a certain laxity in the system," he said.

The tally sheets from 504 other stations had various problems that required U.N. advisors to try to work out before they could be tabulated. The most common issue was that poll workers recorded the wrong station numbers atop the form.

But because the nine-member electoral council is composed of Préval's rivals, many of his supporters suspected that the group was trying to manipulate results to force a runoff in which his opponents could gang up on him.

"When we vote, we are not kidding!" a crowd of several hundred people chanted in front of the Hotel Montana, an upscale hotel where the electoral council has been announcing the results.

"Give him to us! Give him to us!" one visibly enraged woman screamed.

Some international observers feared that this rising anger could provoke the council to declare a Préval victory even if he doesn't obtain the 50 percent he needs.

Préval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, went into politics on the same wave of populism that ended the Duvalier family dictatorship and later brought Aristide to power in 1991. While Préval is clearly more moderate than Aristide, a fiery former priest, part of Haiti's business elite is loath to see him back in the presidential palace.

"For the good of the country, I cannot let this guy get into power," said Charles Henri Baker, an apparel manufacturer and opposition candidate, who ran a distant third with about 9 percent of the votes. "He's an incompetent fool, and he is the worst thing that could happen to Haiti if he gets into power." Such zeal is why many of Port-au-Prince's dispossessed believe that the business and political elite are working to steal the election from Préval.

"The business sector doesn't want him," said Milka Jeanty, shining shoes downtown. "They're the ones doing all this scheming. We know he won."

The mood of the demonstrators Sunday was mostly festive, as they seemed confident that Préval would win. They danced and sang and played the homemade trumpets they will use later this month in Carnival. Later, several hundred used a side road to bypass a phalanx of police and U.N. peacekeepers to demonstrate at the front gate of the Hotel Montana.

The group's songs kept the same merry tune, but the lyrics kept changing. "Bring us Jacques Bernard! Bring us Jacques Bernard!" they sang to soldiers holding them back. Bernard is the director general of the electoral council and the man who had been announcing the results.

Customs officials not amused by voodoo find
The Independent Online
February 13, 2006

Miami - A woman airline passenger was arrested after landing at a Florida airport with a human head in her luggage, United States immigration officials said.

"It was not like a skeleton and bones-type of skull; it had teeth, hair and skin, and quite a lot of dirt," said Barbara Gonzalez, a spokesperson for the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in Miami.

The woman, identified as Myrlene Severe, a 30-year-old Haitian resident of the US, arrived at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport north of Miami at the weekend on a flight that originated in the northern Haitian city of Cap Haitien.

She was placed under arrest and charged with "failing to declare the human head on the customs declaration form" and transporting dangerous material on an aircraft, the Miami attorney-general's office said in a statement.

"The purpose of the package was to ward off evil spirits'

"Severe stated she had obtained the package, which contained the human head, from a male in Haiti for use as a part of her voodoo beliefs and that the purpose of the package was to ward off evil spirits," it added.

Severe, who appeared before a federal court in Fort Lauderdale, could face 15 years in prison if convicted of the crimes. - Sapa-AFP

A false picture of Aristide
By Lorne W. Craner
The Washington Times
February 13, 2006

"Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos," claimed a recent New York Times headline. The three-page article charged that rogue Bush administration officials connived with the International Republican Institute to undermine democracy in Haiti.

I sent a 189-word response to the Times. They refused to print it without substantive edits, in part, they said, because "the News Department disputes the accuracy of" a sentence in my letter. The Times contends that IRI "undercut the official United States policy and the Ambassador [Dean Curran] assigned to carry it out." IRI allegedly did so in collusion with rogue administration officials who differed with Secretary of State Colin Powell's Haiti policy. "As a result the United States spoke with two sometimes contradictory voices," which, says Mr. Curran, "made efforts to foster political peace 'immeasurably more difficult.' "

The article charges that IRI consorted with rebels who overthrew President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Mr. Aristide is depicted as a man who "wanted to raise the minimum wage and force businesses to pay taxes" but "did not know much about the games that politicians play."

The article's problems start with its title. Haiti did not tilt toward chaos in 2004. Sadly, it has been chaotic for most of the last two centuries. Second, the article's underpinning, that a rogue group under Colin Powell opposed his Haiti policy, was contradicted by Mr. Powell himself before the article was published. Asked in an e-mail from the Times if there was a policy difference between him and the officials, Mr. Powell responded: "I don't accept that view." The Times neglected to mention Mr. Powell's response, maintaining the article's false foundation.

Third, former Ambassador Curran's complaints about IRI are echoed by neither his predecessors nor his successors (indeed, the Times cropped Mr. Curran's predecessor, who praised IRI, from a photo of IRI officials). Furthermore, both the Clinton and Bush administrations granted every IRI request for Agency for International Development Haiti funding.

Mr. Curran's charges are backed by three Haitians, all of whom are onetime Aristide allies and have obvious motivations to criticize IRI. More to the point, IRI did not "undercut" Mr. Curran by urging Haiti's opposition to forego negotiations with Mr. Aristide. In fact, IRI's vice president (at the request of one of the rogue officials) phoned opposition leaders to urge them to reach an accommodation with Mr. Aristide. If Mr. Curran did feel "undercut" by rogue officials or IRI, why did he fail to raise the issue directly with Mr. Powell or through the State Department's "dissent channel"? Used more than 200 times since 1971, it enables any foreign service officer to send policy dissents straight to the secretary.

A fourth problem is the charge that IRI consorted with the rebels who overthrew Mr. Aristide. The source, an accused death-squad leader, is hardly the quality one once expected of the Times. As the article notes, the charge was investigated and found false by AID's inspector-general.

A fifth problem is the depiction of Mr. Aristide, whose tendencies are gently implied ("Aristide... had little experience with the give and take of democracy"). The article's author, Walt Bogdanich, said recently "Haiti doesn't have a democracy and hasn't had one in two years" since Mr. Aristide's 2004 departure. Past Times editorials were more honest. The November 2000 Times editorial "Haiti's Disappearing Democracy," said Mr. Aristide's "almost certain return to power in Sunday's elections was achieved by trampling on democratic procedures. The weeks before the voting were marred by bombings and other politically motivated violence." A February 2004 editorial, "Haiti's Descent," said "Aristide was once hailed as Haiti's democratic champion. Now, his second presidency is declining into despotism." For the reasons those editorials detailed, IRI did, as charged, work solely with Haiti's democrats from 2001-2004.

President Reagan did not help create IRI to work with those practicing "despotism." Doing so would also contravene longstanding AID policy. Career AID officials approved IRI's approach to helping level Haiti's political playing field, and knew who IRI was training because they attended every session.

Last but not least, in stringing together disparate rumors while omitting contradictory facts, the Times merely echoed 2004 Mother Jones and Salon.com articles. The author of the latter says the Times "story was remarkably similar to a story I wrote nearly two years ago. On Jan. 3, 2005 a New York Times staffer named Ursula Andrews e-mailed me, asking for help with research. I was excited that the newspaper of record was finally picking up on the story and complied with their request. When the Times published its story, it contained no citation of my work."

IRI is not the reason for Haiti's chaos, or the reason Mr. Aristide had to flee. No one would have been happier than IRI if democracy had advanced under Mr. Aristide. Instead, as Mr. Powell states, Mr. Aristide was "a man who was democratically elected, but did not govern democratically, or govern well." And he has to bear a large burden, if not the major burden, for what has happened.

President of the International Republican Institute, Lorne W. Craner is a former assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor.

OAS: UN peacekeepers should stay in Haiti
China View
Feb. 13, 2006

SANTIAGO, Feb. 12 (Xinhuanet) -- The head of the Organization of American States (OAS) said on Sunday that the UN peacekeeping mission must stay in Haiti for a reasonable time to maintain the stability of the Caribbean nation.

OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza told the online newspaper El Mostrador that a troop presence "is essential if the government is not to have problems with instability."

The OAS chief made the comments against the backdrop of last Tuesday's elections in Haiti. The Hope Party candidate, Rene Preval, may have to face a runoff as unfinished ballot counting on Saturday showed his support as being below 50 percent.

The election was the first since February 2004, when then-president Jean Bertrand Aristide was deposed in political turmoil. The United Nations then responded by sending the Minustah mission to stabilize the country.

"We do not have to be there forever, but we cannot just run as soon as the new government is in place," Insulza said.

But he added that if the new president did not want the troops, they would of course leave. "In my opinion that would be a mistake. If a new president wants them there it is because he understands they are indispensable for his stability," said the OAS chief.

Minustah, which arrived in Haiti in May 2004, has 9,000 staff including police officers, soldiers, international administrators, volunteers and Haitian officials. The UN Security Council is due to meet this week to decide how long Minustah would stay. At present it only has permission for a six-month extension. Enditem

US urges Haitians to accept election results
China View News
Feb. 14., 2006

WASHINGTON -- The United States on Monday called on Haitians to respect the results of the presidential election to which protestors have alleged fraud in the polls.

"Any time there is a hard, contested election ... it's important that once the election results are announced and finalized, that all parties come together and work together, regardless of their political differences, for the better of the country," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said at a news briefing.

"We underscore at this point ... that all respect the results of the election, and that there will be no resort to violence and people respect other's political differences."

With around 90 percent of the vote counted, Haiti's elections commission said on Sunday that leading vote-getter, former Haitian President, Rene Preval, was just shy of the 50 percent of the vote necessary to avoid a runoff.

At least one man reportedly died and several others were wounded by gunfire on Monday as demonstrators took to the streets over the election results. Enditem

Tracy Kidder to Talk on Health Efforts in Haiti
Keene State College
February 13, 2006

KEENE, N.H. 2/13/06 - Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder will speak in the Mabel Brown Room of Keene State College's L. P. Young Student Center at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 23. This event is free and open to the public.

In his remarks - entitled "Tout Moun Se Moun," (Haitian creole for "we're all human beings") - Kidder will share some images of Haiti and reflect on his coming to know and write about the work of Dr. Paul Farmer of the international organization Partners in Health. *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, which is about Farmer's humanitarian work, was Keene State College's summer reading title for incoming students last fall.

Paul Farmer is a doctor, Harvard professor, renowned infectious-disease specialist, anthropologist, recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, and founder of Partners in Health. He first visited Haiti as a medical student and was appalled at the widespread incidence of tuberculosis and typhoid - rarely seen in the West - and the lack of health services for the poor. He returned to Haiti determined to offer health care to the poorest people - at first simply by making house calls to remote villages in the mountains.

In 1983, he helped establish a community-based health project in the village of Cange. Four years later, Farmer, Thomas J. White, and Todd McCormack founded Partners Health to develop clinics, a training program for health outreach workers, and a mobile unit to screen residents of area villages for preventable diseases.

Kidder met Farmer in 1994, when Kidder was in Haiti to report on American soldiers working to reinstate Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government. Five years later, they met again, to write a profile about Farmer for *The New Yorker* ("The Good Doctor," July 2000). Among Kidder's books are *The Soul of a New Machine* (1982), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award, *House* (1985), *Among Schoolchildren* (1989), *Old Friends* (1993), and *Home Town* (1999). He is a frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine.

Please contact the Summer Reading Program coordinator, William Stroup of the KSC English department, at wstroup@keene.edu or 603-358-2692 for more information.

Haitians Protest to Demand Election Results

By Amelia Shaw

Port-au-Prince

VOA News

13 February 2006

In Haiti, protesters filled the streets of Port-au-Prince Monday, demanding the results from last week's national elections, the first since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide went into exile in 2004.

Helicopters circled overhead, as thousands of demonstrators demanded election officials declare front-runner Rene Preval president. Protesters dragged the carcasses of cars into the road, and burned tires, blocking all the major arteries of the city.

Junior Masse, a resident of Petionville, a slightly upscale neighborhood of the city, said he is protesting what he thinks is a fraudulent election.

"Something strange is happening here," he said. "We won't negotiate at all, unless Preval is president. Everyone here voted, and now we want the results. They don't give them, so, we had to take the streets."

Many city residents who voted for Preval say they suspect that election officials and the international community have tampered with the vote, to prevent Preval from becoming president. Preval was president in Haiti from 1996-2001. He is widely popular among Haiti's urban poor, and is seen as a close ally of exiled former President Aristide.

One day following last Tuesday's elections, officials released partial results showing Preval in the lead with 61 percent of the vote. But, as more ballots arrived from rural areas, Preval's lead slipped to 49 percent, with over 90 percent of the ballots counted. He needs a simple majority of just over 50 percent to avoid a runoff election next month, with second place candidate Leslie Manigat.

Preval and two electoral officials say they want to launch an investigation for voter fraud.

But David Wimhurst, spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti, says allegations of fraud are unfounded.

"We have not heard of any official complaints of fraud or manipulation of the system," he said. "It is really important that people who say that to the media, is that the only way to proceed with voter fraud - if there are any - is to write it down, and make a proper complaint to the CEP, for the procedures can be undertaken. It doesn't serve anybody's purpose to make broad general claims through the media, there's no proof. The allegations are unfounded."

Wimhurst says he hopes Haitians can remain calm, wait for the election results to be released, probably by Tuesday, and accept the final results peacefully.

Preval supporters protest Haitian vote results

Mon Feb 13, 2006

By Joseph Guylor Delva and Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Angry supporters of ex-President Rene Preval paralysed the Haitian capital with burning tires and roadblocks on Monday as Preval fell further below the 50 percent needed to win the presidency and allegations of election manipulations mounted.

Radio reports said a young man was killed and several people were wounded in gunfire at a demonstration in Tabarre, north of the capital, where protesters were confronted by members of the 9,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti.

On a street in the capital, a U.N. armoured personnel carrier ploughed through a barricade of rocks and debris as protesters hurled curses.

The peaceful atmosphere following last Tuesday's vote began to unravel amid charges that election officials were tampering with results to prevent a first-round victory by Preval, a one-time ally of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in a bloody revolt two years ago.

Like Aristide, Preval is viewed as a champion of the Caribbean country's poor masses, most of whom live on \$1 (57 pence) a day, but he is distrusted by the small and wealthy elite.

"We are going to put one million people in the streets in the coming hours," said John Joel Joseph, a community leader in the Port-au-Prince slums. "The people won't take this," he added, referring to the latest vote count.

Traffic ground to a halt, schools shut down and the United Nations told its employees to stay home as demonstrators piled wrecked cars and tree branches in the streets of Port-au-Prince after the latest results. With 90 percent of the vote counted, the Provisional Electoral Council reported Preval had 48.7 percent.

At midday, thousands of protesters, dancing and chanting "Preval is President!" smashed through the gates of the Montana Hotel and swarmed through the complex where election officials have been briefing journalists on the disputed vote count.

When initial results were announced several days ago, Preval held 61 percent of the vote, comfortably over the 50 percent plus one vote needed to avoid a runoff on March 19.

Another ex-president, Leslie Manigat, had 11.84 percent percent and the main candidate for the business elite, industrialist Charles Baker, was at 7.9 percent.

"WILL OF THE PEOPLE"

Protesters poured out of the slums and marched near the National Palace, the upscale Petionville suburb and the vote tabulation centre near the airport, beating drums and chanting support for Preval. They demanded the unassuming, 63-year-old agronomist be declared the winner without delay.

Smoke from burning tires rose near the seaport, the airport and a half dozen other locations around the sprawling city. The humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders cancelled a convoy to its clinic in the Cite Soleil slum.

"Nobody can block Preval. The will of the people is the will of God," said Marjorie St.-Fleur. "The people will prevail."

Hundreds of heavily armed riot police formed a protective cordon outside the headquarters of the Provisional Electoral Council. Along the street in front, people wearing yellow Preval T-shirts chanted and carried branches with three leaves, the symbol of Preval's political coalition Lespwa, "The Hope."

"You have seen nothing yet," said a man who identified himself as Maurice. "We are going to show what the people are capable of."

Preval himself complained on Sunday that a computer-generated graphic on the electoral council's Web site had him at 52 percent of the vote at the time the director-general of the council was telling the media that Preval only had 49 percent.

Two of the nine electoral council members, Pierre Richard Duchemin and Patrick Fequiere, also remarked on the discrepancy and said the vote tabulation was being manipulated.

Haiti's short history of democracy since it flung off the dictatorship of the Duvalier family has been turbulent. Aristide was ousted by an armed revolt in February 2004 and Washington has urged Preval, if elected, not to allow the former Roman Catholic priest to return from exile.

(Additional reporting by Oliver Ellrodt in Marmelade)

U.N. Peacekeepers Fire on Protesters
Monday February 13, 2006
By STEVENSON JACOBS
Associated Press Writer
The Guardian Unlimited, UK

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - U.N. peacekeepers opened fire Monday on Haitians protesting election results, killing at least one and wounding four, witnesses said, as flaming roadblocks paralyzed this city.

Associated Press journalists saw the body of a man in the street in the Tabarre neighborhood, a T-shirt bearing the image of popular candidate Rene Preval soaked in blood. Witnesses said Jordanian U.N. peacekeepers opened fire on them, killing two and wounding four. The body of the second victim was not at the scene.

Huge pro-Preval protests
13/02/2006 (SA)
News24, South Africa

Port-Au-Prince - More than 10 000 people demonstrated in the Haitian capital on Sunday demanding Rene Preval be declared president, despite partial results that put him just shy of the 50% needed to win the election outright.

Results announced earlier in the day and based on 75% of the ballots showed that Preval, a former president, had 49.1% of the vote, short of the majority he needs to avoid a runoff election.

Several hours before the final outcome of the February 7 election was to be announced, residents of dirt-poor shantytowns poured into the streets of Port-au-Prince for a second consecutive day, chanting "Preval president."

The demonstrators marched and danced in a carnival atmosphere, and had no doubt the victory went to Preval, who enjoys widespread support among the millions of impoverished Haitians.

Tension mounted as the protesters stopped in front of the electoral council's offices, where only a few Haitian police, armed with automatic weapons, were in evidence.

Pro-Preval marches were also staged in other parts of the country, according to radio stations.

Members of the 9 500-strong United Nations military and police force took position in key parts of the capital amid concern of a renewed explosion of violence if Preval fails to be declared victorious.

Should the balloting go to a runoff, scheduled for March 19, Preval, 63, would likely compete against Leslie Manigat, 75, also a former president, who had 11.7% in the partial results.

Authorities urged Haitians to await and respect the outcome of the presidential and legislative elections when it is eventually announced.

Preval is a one-time ally of Jean Bertrand Aristide, the former president who resigned and fled Haiti in February 2004 amid popular discontent and diplomatic pressure from Washington and Paris.

Preval supporters protest Haiti election results

14 Feb 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guylor Delva and Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb 13 - Protesters paralyzed the capital with burning barricades on Monday and stormed a luxury hotel to demand results from Haiti's nearly week-old election as ex-President Rene Preval fell further below the 50 percent needed to win the presidency.

Witnesses said U.N. peacekeepers fired into a crowd of protesters in Tabarre, just north of Port-au-Prince, killing at least two people, but a U.N. spokesman said the troops only shot into the air.

The peaceful atmosphere that surrounded last Tuesday's balloting, the first since Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by an armed revolt two years ago, began to unravel six days later amid charges that election officials were tampering with results to prevent Preval from taking a first-round victory.

"No vote will be stolen," interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue told Haitians in a television address following a day of unrest. "We ask everyone to go back home, to stay calm and the results will be published."

Like Aristide, Preval is viewed as a champion of the Caribbean country's poor masses, most of whom live on \$1 a day, but he is distrusted by the small and wealthy elite that helped push Aristide from office on Feb. 29, 2004.

In Tabarre, Jordanian troops started shooting after protesters refused to let them pass a barricade, according to eyewitnesses. "They got angry. They opened fire at the crowd and two people were killed," said Carl Gregoire.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said peacekeepers fired two warning rounds into the air. "They did not injure anybody. Later, shots were fired by unidentified individuals in the same area," he said. "I can assure you no individuals were wounded by U.N. peacekeepers."

CHAOS IN CAPITAL

Across the chaotic capital, traffic ground to a halt, schools shut down and the U.N. told its civilian employees to stay home. Demonstrators piled wrecked cars and tree branches in the streets after the latest results.

With 90 percent of the vote counted, the Provisional Electoral Council said Preval had 48.7 percent.

Flaming barricades of old tires blocked streets and black smoke rose from the area of the airport, the seaport and a half dozen other locations in the sprawling city.

Hundreds of protesters, dancing and chanting "Preval is President!" smashed through the steel gates of the luxury Montana Hotel and swarmed through the complex. Most of the foreign press and some election observers are staying at the hotel.

"We have voted. We will not vote again. Preval is president," said Michael Jean, accusing election officials of manipulating the vote count. "Give us the results."

Facing grim U.N. police in blue helmets, the protesters shouted "if you shoot, we will burn the hotel."

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel peace laureate, appeared on a balcony, gesturing to the crowd to calm down.

Waving tree branches and twigs with three leaves representing Preval's political coalition, known as "Lespwa," or "The Hope," protesters stormed through the hotel lobby and along corridors, banging on doors. Hundreds gathered on the pool deck and dozens jumped into the pool.

When initial results were announced several days ago, Preval held 61 percent of the vote, comfortably over the majority needed to avoid a runoff on March 19.

The results on Monday had another ex-president, Leslie Manigat, at 11.8 percent and the main candidate for the business elite, industrialist Charles Baker, third at 7.9 percent.

At least four of the 33 candidates who ran for president said on Monday that Preval had won -- Evans Paul, Turneb Delpé, Dany Toussaint and Marc Bazin.

"I know Preval has won the election with 54.9 percent," Bazin said in a radio interview. "We don't have the right to ignore the choice of the people."

Preval flew to the capital in a U.N. helicopter from his mountain hometown of Marmelade. He met with officials in the city but did not immediately address his supporters. Preval complained on Sunday that election officials had released conflicting results. Two members of the nine-member electoral council have said the vote was being manipulated. (Additional reporting by Oliver Ellrodt in Marmelade)

Preval could face Haiti run-off

Thousands marched in support of Mr Preval this weekend
The prospect of a run-off vote in Haiti has grown, as the front-runner's share of the vote fell further. With nearly 90% of the ballots counted, former President Rene Preval has 48.7% of the vote - just short of the 50% required to win outright.

Another ex-leader, Leslie Manigat, has 11.8%, while industrialist Charles Henri Baker has 7.9%, officials say.

Mr Preval used to be an ally of ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was forced out of power in 2004.

He has inherited Mr Aristide's strong support among the poor.

Final results are expected to be announced later on Monday - they had initially been scheduled for Sunday evening.

Meanwhile, there have been accusations of ballot mishandling. On Sunday, two members of Haiti's electoral council questioned vote counting procedures.

But the head of the board, Jacques Bernard, denied the allegations.

March

Mr Preval is leading more than 30 presidential candidates.

He held a 61% lead when the first results were released late last week, but his share of the vote has since dropped.

This weekend, thousands of people marched in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, to demand that Mr Preval be declared president without having to face a run-off on 19 March.

International observers have deemed the election free and fair, despite saying they were some minor procedural irregularities.

Candidate Charles Henri Baker insisted some people were allowed to vote more than once because voter lists were not followed.

Haiti - the poorest country in the continent - is choosing a 129-member parliament as well as a new president.

While the election process has been considered peaceful, correspondents say there are fears that a possible second round may bring fresh instability.

Haitians Protest Over Slow Vote Count

By Amelia Shaw

Port-au-Prince

VOA News

13 February 2006

Haitian voters begin to grow impatient at delays in the release of election results from Haiti's elections earlier this week. For the second day, demonstrators have taken to the streets. Tuesday's vote was the first democratic elections in Haiti since former president Jean Bertrand Aristide fled the country two years ago.

Supporters of Haitian presidential favorite Rene Preval demonstrate outside the electoral commission in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Sunday, Feb. 12, 2006

Demonstrators mobbed the entrance to the hotel where election officials are tabulating final vote count, demanding the results be released. Many demonstrators were wearing T-shirts and carrying posters of front-runner presidential candidate Rene Preval, who is in first place with a little over 49 percent of the vote after three quarters of the ballots have been counted. That is short of the majority he would need to avoid run-offs.

As truckloads of U.N. troops arrived to provide reinforcements at the results center, the crowd waved tree branches and shouted "We are not afraid."

Many people, like Chantalle Bourdon, say they feel robbed if Mr. Preval does not win the presidency in the first round.

"They tell us they are giving the results tomorrow. We aren't here to destroy anything," she said. "But we are going to close the schools and block the roads until they tell us that Rene Preval is president."

Preval was president from 1996 to 2001, and is seen as a close ally to exiled president Aristide. He holds widespread support among the urban poor, but as votes come in from the rural areas, his lead in the race has dropped from more than 60 percent to just below the majority he needs to win the race. Trailing him in second place is former president Leslie Manigat, who holds nearly 12 percent of the vote.

Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu visited Haiti Sunday, and in a sermon at St. Trinity Cathedral in downtown Port-au-Prince praised Haitians for their commitment to peace during the elections.

But a growing number of public figures, including Preval himself, are questioning the integrity of the electoral council.

On Sunday, Preval said from his rural hometown of Marmelade that electoral officials had given two different vote counts, showing he was both under and over a 50 percent majority at the same time. And two election officials questioned whether there had been manipulation in counting the results at

the tabulation center.

International election observers praised the high turnout of the vote, but criticized the lack of preparation that led to the polls opening hours late. They gave no indication however that this will affect the outcome of the vote.

Election officials, meanwhile, say they will announce election results over the Internet for fear of having the official announcement disrupted by demonstrators.

Supporters say fraud may cost Haitian candidate outright win
February 13, 2006
BY ANDREW SELSKY
The Chicago Sun Times

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- A member of Haiti's electoral council said results of the presidential elections were being manipulated, echoing complaints by throngs of supporters of Rene Preval, who poured into the streets on Sunday with angry allegations of fraud.

With 75 percent of votes counted, Preval was falling short of winning Tuesday's elections outright by less than a percentage point.

"According to me, there's a certain level of manipulation," Pierre Richard Duchemin, an electoral council member, said, adding that "there is an effort to stop people from asking questions" about the counting process.

Duchemin said Sunday he needed access to tallies of vote counts in hopes of learning who was behind the alleged manipulation.

Preval's supporters poured out of different neighborhoods of the capital and converged on the electoral council headquarters. Blowing horns and pounding drums, they denounced Jacques Bernard, director-general of the electoral council.

"Jacques Bernard is a thief. He doesn't know how to count!" they chanted. AP

Crowds demand Preval be named Haiti president

13 Feb 2006

Source: Reuters

By Joseph Guylor Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb 12 - Shouting "Preval is president," thousands of protesters marched in the Haitian capital on Sunday demanding election results five days after the troubled Caribbean nation's first vote since Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted two years ago.

The large demonstrations came as concerns grew that the election results, which showed former president Preval romping ahead of his rivals in the first round but just short of a majority needed to avoid a runoff, were being manipulated.

Preval, a former Aristide ally opposed by the wealthy elite in the poor Caribbean nation, complained there was a "problem" with the counting, and two members of a nine-member council that oversees elections decried "manipulation" of the count.

The electoral council had said final results would be made public on Sunday but they had not been released by early evening, as thousands rallied outside the hilltop hotel where the tally was to be announced.

Preval supporters filled a 10-block stretch of one of the teeming capital's main streets from sidewalk to sidewalk, singing and waving tree branches and chanting, "We voted already, Preval is president, We're not going to vote again!"

"I am begging the government, the election council, to make peace," Joanne Malebranche, 27, shouted as she knelt in the street and flung her arms in the air. "Let's make peace. Give us Preval."

Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001 between Aristide's two terms, had 49.1 percent of the votes, according to the latest incomplete results on the Provisional Electoral Council's (CEP) Web site.

He needs more than 50 percent to avoid a March 19 run-off against the second-place candidate, currently ex-president Leslie Manigat, who had 11.7 percent.

The controversy over the results centered on a discrepancy between a graphic on the council's Web site and the results issued by the council's director-general, Jacques Bernard.

Bernard said that Preval had about 49 percent but the graphic generated by computer had him at 52 percent. The graphic was later changed to match the 49 percent figure.

"I went to school and the CEP has given two figures, 52 percent and 49 percent. Now there is a problem," Preval told reporters while sitting on a bench in the village square in his mountain hometown of Marmelade. "Forty-nine percent, I don't pass. Fifty percent, I pass."

Aristide was ousted by an armed revolt in February 2004 and Washington has urged Preval, if elected, not to allow the former Roman Catholic priest to return from exile.

Observers have said a second-round of voting could change the dynamic of the election because some of the candidates who oppose Preval, seen as the champion of Haiti's poor masses, have agreed to rally behind the second-place candidate.

Pierre Richard Duchemin and Patrick Fequiere, two of the nine members of the elections council, said the vote tabulation was being manipulated and blamed Bernard.

"The percent which is given by the graphic is done by the computer according to figures entered by a data operator and the computer can't lie," said Duchemin, who was in charge of the voting tabulation center. He said he had been excluded from viewing data.

"There is an unwholesome manipulation of the data."

Bernard denied the result was being manipulated. He said someone forgot to update the graphic.

"They accuse me of manipulation," he said. "They say I received several million dollars to manipulate the election. None of it is true."

Adding to the controversy was the issue of 72,000 blank ballots, on which no vote was cast. They were being added to totals used to calculate each candidate's percentage and that helped drop Preval under 50 percent.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Laureate, said Sunday Mass at St. Trinity Cathedral in downtown Port-au-Prince and praised Haitians for a peaceful election.

Spain says not to abandon Haiti despite troop pullout

China View News

Feb. 14, 2006

MONTEVIDEO, Feb. 13 (Xinhuanet) -- Spain will not abandon Haiti, even though the country has announced plans to withdraw its troops from the Caribbean island, Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos told Uruguayan media on Monday.

Moratinos made the remarks during his brief stay in Montevideo on a Latin American trip, which would also take him to Paraguay and Argentina.

Spain has announced that it will withdraw its armed forces beginning in April, but this does not mean the country is abandoning Haiti, he said.

Haiti now most needs help to reestablish the rule of law, as well as political and social institutions, and this means Spain will increase its humanitarian aid, he added.

Haiti held its long awaited elections last Tuesday in a step toward ending the country's political turmoil. The elections commission has announced that leading vote-getter, former Haitian President Rene Preval, was just shy of the 50 percent vote margin necessary to avoid a runoff.

On Wednesday, Spanish Defense Minister Jose Bono ordered Spanish troops to leave Haiti, where they had acted as part of the UN peacekeeping force.

UN spokesman Robert Sullivan has said the United Nations still hopes the Spanish government will reconsider its decision as Haiti has not yet fully completed its electoral process.

In November 2004, Spanish soldiers joined the UN mission in Haiti after then-president Jean Bertrand Aristide had been ousted in February.

Currently there are 200 Spanish marines involved in the UN Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti.

UN Spokesman Says Haiti Peacekeepers Have Not Harmed Anyone
Bloomberg News
Feb. 13, 2006

No one has been killed or injured in Haiti today at the hands of United Nations peacekeepers, a UN spokesman said, responding to reports that Jordanian peacekeepers opened fire on demonstrators there.

“The peacekeepers fired a couple of warning shots into the air. No one was injured,” UN spokesman Ari Gaitanis said. “Later, there were some shots by unknown persons in the same area, but as far as these claims that the peacekeepers shot at protesters, that's not true at all.”

Witnesses told the Associated Press that two people were killed and four were wounded when peacekeepers shot at crowds protesting election results in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital. Any deaths that have taken place may be attributable to the shots by the “unknown persons,” Gaitanis said in a telephone interview from New York.

Results from last week's elections show Rene Preval, a former president, slipping further below the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff, with about 90 percent of the vote counted. If the results hold, Preval must compete in a run-off election.

Haiti is trying to establish a government that can help restore the country's security and improve an economy battered by joblessness, poverty and shortcomings in health care and education.

Demonstrators who stormed the gates of a hotel in the capital were behaving peacefully, Jean Junior Raymond, a spokesman for interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, said from Port-au-Prince.

“The people there are very calm,” Raymond said in a telephone interview. “They are just singing and chanting for Preval.”

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel peace prize winner for anti-apartheid work, urged the crowd from a terrace to “show the world you are peaceful,” Agence France- Presse reported. Tutu is on a four-day visit to Haiti.

To contact the reporter on this story:
Judy Mathewson in Washington at jmathewson@bloomberg.net.

Brazil suggests UNSC meeting on Haiti
China View News
Feb. 14, 2006

BRASILIA, Feb. 13 (Xinhuanet) -- Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim on Monday suggested to his U.S. counterpart Condoleezza Rice that Washington hold a UN Security Council meeting on Haiti's post-election tensions, local media reported.

The United States acts as the chairman of the UN security Council for the month of February and has the power to set its agenda. Brazil is leading the UN mission in Haiti with 1,200 troops, trying to restore stability to the Caribbean country.

Amorim also asked Brazilian Ambassador to the United Nations Ronaldo Sardenberg to press for such a meeting at UN headquarters in New York.

Tensions in Haiti is mounting due to allegations of fraud in last Tuesday's elections.

The protests erupted when the election results indicated candidate Rene Preval has not got 50 percent of the vote needed to secure victory in the first round. At least one person died during demonstrations supporting Preval in Port-au-Prince, and several others were injured in clashes with UN troops.

Allegations Cloud Haitian Vote Count

By Manuel Roig-Franzia

Washington Post

Monday, February 13, 2006

MARMELADE, Haiti, Feb. 12 -- Hundreds of people marched through the streets of this remote mountain town Sunday, waving leafy bamboo shoots, banging drums and cheering to celebrate Rene Preval's lead in the Haitian presidential election.

But allegations by a member of Haiti's electoral commission about vote-tampering roiled the capital of Port-au-Prince, where thousands protested outside the hotel where commission members have been releasing partial results since Thursday. Electoral commissioner Pierre Richard Duchemin, whose comments were broadcast widely on radio, accused the commission of manipulating the count and refusing to tell the public that Preval had 52 percent of the vote, enough to avert a runoff and take the presidency.

"According to me, there's a certain level of manipulation," Duchemin told the Associated Press, adding that "there is an effort to stop people from asking questions" about the tabulation process.

The slow pace of counting ballots has tipped what was seen as Haiti's most successful election ever -- a huge, peaceful turnout of voters despite a chaotic start to balloting -- into another volatile crisis. On Sunday, the crowd in the capital blocked streets leading to the Hotel Montana, making it nearly impossible for commission members to attend a news briefing.

Preval, who lives in a small white stucco house on the town square here, a six-hour drive from the turmoil of the capital, remained confident that he was about to complete a remarkable political comeback after five years of retirement. But he was suspicious of the electoral commission. At one point, he stepped onto his porch, dancing across the tile floor and singing, " Yo vole vot nuo " -- in lyric Creole, "They're stealing our votes."

Marmelade pulsed with a joyous clamor throughout the day. In the town, Preval has conducted experiments in cooperative farming that he hopes to expand throughout this desperately poor nation. On Sunday, small boys blew homemade horns, women dressed in white sang spirituals and processions of gangly children followed a "baron" -- a voodoo lord of the dead dressed in a burlap mask and flouncy skirt -- through the streets.

"The spirits told me, 'They're not going to run anymore,' " the baron said. "They've found a place to stay now. They're going to be amazed when they see Preval."

Steps away, dozens of Marmelade residents, most of them poor farmers whom Preval has promised to help, jumped up and down on the town's cobblestone streets. "Don't touch Preval," they sang over and over. "If you touch Preval, you'll get burned."

Preval, a reserved 63-year-old with a dry wit, slipped out of his house periodically, chatting reluctantly with journalists on his porch and talking on his cell phone with a finger against one ear to block the

din. Accompanied by Jackito, a popular singer of the traditional Haitian music compas , he paused in the square to listen to a children's band perform the Cuban standard "Guantanamera."

Preval has tried to develop links with Cuba, sending hundreds of young Haitians to Havana to study medicine when he was president. He hopes to expand this program, too. Preval's campaign was aimed primarily at the nation's poor: Eighty percent of Haitians live below the poverty level, making it the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Many of his plans -- universal education in a nation where tens of thousands of children do not attend school, improved health care and daily school lunches -- depend on support from international donors. He said Sunday he would try to attract more foreign investment and strive to improve the dangerous security climate in this nation, where kidnappings and street killings have discouraged tourism and private investment.

Preval and his supporters had grown increasingly agitated with the slow pace of vote-counting after Tuesday's election. On Sunday morning, the candidate's attention was on a discrepancy on the Haitian electoral commission's Web site that showed him with 49 percent of the vote in a ledger, but 52 percent in a pie graph.

"Jacques Bernard is lowering my figures," Preval scoffed during an interview, referring to the head of the electoral commission. "There is a problem now."

Preval's frustration was reflected in Port-au-Prince, where his supporters have held protests over the past two days demanding that the electoral commission declare him president.

Preval is a protege of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a fiery former Roman Catholic priest who was ousted as president two years ago following a three-week revolt and flown into exile by U.S. officials. But no one was taking about Aristide in the raucous parades that ran through Marmelade on Sunday.

This was a day when all around Preval's home, the peasants, who adore him, were turning their eyes to the heavens and saying, "Lespwa." It is the name of Preval's political party, and it means hope.

A Reluctant Candidate Rises in Haiti

Rene Preval has both feet firmly planted in reality as he considers his nation's challenges.

By Carol J. Williams and Chantal Regnault

Los Angeles Times

February 12, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — With one presidential term behind him and his campaign for a return to power undertaken with reluctance, Rene Preval has made clear he has no illusions about the daunting challenges that lie ahead for the next leader of Haiti.

Torchbearer for the unfulfilled aims of his predecessor and ally, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Preval may be uniquely positioned to re-energize the exiled president's followers in the thwarted mission of empowering the poor and steering this most backward of Western nations out of its historical rut of violence, illiteracy and injustice.

Four days into counting the vote intended to restore elected leadership to chaotic Haiti, Preval appeared likely to win a slight majority in the first-round voting, setting the stage for him to take the reins of this troubled country late next month.

Preval, the son of a well-to-do agrarian family who would appear on the surface to have more in common with the business class that was Aristide's archenemy, was dragged into the race by rural peasants who argued he was their sole hope for economic and political salvation. That has separated the 63-year-old agronomist from more than 30 other willing contenders and cast him as the candidate motivated by aspirations for a more equitable Haiti rather than the mere trappings of power.

As with his first stint as president from 1996 to 2001, a tenure that may have been most notable for the fact he was able to complete it, Preval promised voters little more than an honest effort.

The theme of his low-profile campaign was the tamping down of expectations once raised by Aristide, who served as president before and after Preval's first term.

"I don't want burning tires in the streets. I don't want barricades. I don't want insecurity," he said in an interview before Tuesday's election. "But we will have all that unless we are honest with the people. They have to trust you and know that you respect them enough to tell them the truth. The worst thing a leader can do is lie."

Preval said he agreed to come out of self-imposed retirement from politics in his northern homestead after supporters said he was needed "because I'm not a politician."

What Haiti needs instead of traditional power-hungry and fractious figures, he said, is a dispassionate manager who will recruit the necessary expertise in institution-building to give Haitians faith that they can end a legacy of desperation, which has sent waves of illegal immigrants to U.S. shores and transformed teeming slums into criminal havens.

Trying to achieve social peace, judicial reform, economic growth and efficient use of foreign aid will require technical expertise that Preval said he would seek irrespective of past political affiliations.

With his Lespwa movement unlikely to win a majority in the two-house legislature, Preval, whether he wins outright or after a March 19 runoff, would have to include other political forces in his government to make any progress toward breaking Haiti's centuries-old standoff between rich and poor.

"I have friends in both the bourgeoisie and in Cite Soleil," he said, referring to the long-divided business elite of which he has been a part and the impoverished slum-dwellers who supported Aristide.

Preval has declined to specify political parties or individuals he hopes to bring into his Cabinet, should he win the presidency. But a senior aide who spoke on condition he not be identified said Preval was committed to national reconciliation and would reach out to those among his challengers who have skills vital to rebuilding Haiti.

Preval galvanized the masses by example of his own entrepreneurial success and by declining to disabuse Aristide supporters of their belief that his triumph would pave the way for the exiled populist to return to Haiti.

Preval is the only elected Haitian head of state ever to have served his full term and peacefully left office. He retreated to his family's estate in the northern town of Marmalade, where he organized agrarian cooperatives producing coffee and orange juice, built a school and Internet center and bankrolled a bamboo furniture factory and a 50-piece orchestra.

"When 1,000 peasants came to me on July 27, 2005, and told me I would be a traitor if I didn't agree to be their candidate for president, I had to go along," he said.

Preval said he saw a hunger for change among his fellow Haitians and broad desire to carry out the kind of rural development that transformed his own town of 12,000, but he conceded such success would be difficult to achieve on a national level.

"We won't have success on the magnitude we have in Marmalade," he said. "But it's important to note that the most important ingredient isn't money, it's will, and we have that in abundance."

Although not a member of Aristide's Lavalas Family party, Preval nevertheless appealed to the exiled president's supporters as their best hope in a country where a few hundred wealthy families have wielded power since a slave rebellion overthrew French colonialism 202 years ago. Half of Haiti's 8.5 million people are illiterate, at least 70% are unemployed and most families scrape by on incomes from farming or street vending of less than a dollar a day.

Preval was allied with Aristide during the heady days that followed 30 years of the father-son Duvalier dictatorship, backing the ex-priest in this country's first democratic elections in 1990. Preval joined Aristide in exile after a 1991 military coup and returned to Haiti with the 1994 U.S. military invasion that restored Aristide to power. Backed by Aristide and Lavalas, he won the presidency for the five-year term during which Aristide was constitutionally ineligible.

By retaining Lavalas officials and seldom deviating from Aristide's populist programs, Preval gave many the impression that Aristide was the real power behind his office. His last two years as president saw assassinations and a corruption-tainted election, leaving a stain on an otherwise unremarkable record.

Preval has been vague about his attitude toward Aristide's possible return from exile in South Africa, saying only that Haiti's constitution makes no provisions for a citizen's exile. He has also been cryptic about his plans for resolving the fate of several jailed figures from Aristide's political orbit. Former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune has been in the penitentiary since June 2004, accused by the interim government of complicity in a massacre of Aristide opponents during the February 2004 rebellion in which Aristide left the country under U.S. escort.

The one promise Preval has made is to work for a constitutional amendment to allow Haitians with dual nationality to run for office here. Two Haitian emigres with U.S. citizenship and success in business, Texas food-processing tycoon Dumarsais Simeus and Florida investment banker Samir Mourra, were barred from this election because the 1987 constitution prohibits dual nationals from high office. Haiti needs all the expertise it can get from Haitians both here and abroad, Preval said.

Mild-mannered and less prone to the fiery oratory employed by Aristide, Preval is expected to maintain better relations with Washington than did his deposed ally. He pointed out that his administration had collaborated well with the Clinton White House and said he had no reason to expect difficulties with the Bush administration.

Although Preval and Aristide share a leftist political orientation, Preval has distanced himself from his mentor's liberation theology that fanned the embers of a long-smoldering class war by targeting the rich.

"We don't want to go to the villas of the bourgeoisie," Preval said. "We want to improve our own conditions, little by little."

Tutu on Haiti peace mission
February 12, 2006
News24, South Africa

Port-au-Prince - Former South African Anglican archbishop and Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu arrived in volatile Haiti on Saturday to preach a message of peace and reconciliation.

Tutu, who was to celebrate an ecumenical service on Sunday, was all smiles as he arrived at the Port-au-Prince airport, joking with officials, shaking hands with police officers and even dancing a little jig.

He was then whisked to his hotel under UN police escort, and was to meet interim president Boniface Alexandre later in the day.

Tutu's visit will likely coincide with the announcement of the outcome of the February 7 presidential election which many hope will set Haiti on a democratic track and end the turmoil that has wracked the impoverished Caribbean nation.

Tutu, who will be in Haiti until Tuesday, is scheduled to participate in a gathering aimed at promoting dialogue and national reconciliation.

The former archbishop of Cape Town was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his non-violent struggle against apartheid in his native South Africa.

HAITIAN ELECTION

How Preval might change Haiti

On the cusp of winning Haiti's presidency without a runoff, René Preval now must step out of the shadow of his mentor, former leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

BY JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

Sunday February 12, 2006

MARMELADE, Haiti - The man Haitians overwhelmingly picked to lead their country out of turmoil is a quiet agronomist of modest means, average human frailties and a hint of mischief -- a notable contrast to the hubris and burning rhetoric that has defined Haiti's bloody history.

René Préval, 63, entered the race long after the other well-known candidates. The man who was president from 1996 to 2001 made no campaign promises. He did not attack his opponents. And he only recently began speaking publicly.

On Saturday, the official tally gave him 49.6 percent of the votes, with 72 percent of the stations counted. But foreign electoral officials said an independent survey showed Préval received 54 percent of the vote, although the survey has yet to be adjusted for blank ballots, which could reduce each candidate's percentage points slightly.

Préval supporters marched past the National Palace to proclaim his victory. The second-place candidate, former President Leslie Manigat, had a mere 11.58 percent. But with 32 contenders in the race, electoral officials couldn't say whether Préval got the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff.

The slow pace of the counting for the presidential and legislative elections Tuesday has been creating tension among Préval supporters, particularly given that the electoral council is controlled by rival parties.

An outright Préval win would be a stunning defeat for a political elite that hoped to gain power after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide -- a fiery former slum priest and Préval's political godfather -- fled the country in 2004 as armed rebels moved toward the capital.

REBUILDING AT HAND

As president, Préval would face the task of rebuilding a country whose institutions have been decimated, whose political culture is fractured along class lines and whose people are exhausted by years of violence and hunger.

To do so, many observers say, he must come out of his mentor's shadow. Specifically, Préval would have to move quickly to disarm the slum gangs that Aristide armed as virtual militias -- and which have since set off a devastating wave of kidnapping and bloodshed.

"People fear that if he cannot free himself from the Aristide base, he might become a prisoner of the very violent methods of that base," said Claude Moise, chief editorialist of the newspaper Le Matin.

Moise said he hopes Préval finds the fortitude to do what he couldn't do earlier.

HOBBLED TERM

During his term in office, Préval was hobbled from the start. Aristide, who had won the presidency in 1990 but was ousted by a military coup nine months later, felt he should get an extra three years to make up for his time in exile before 20,000 U.S. troops helped restore him to power. While he reluctantly endorsed Préval on the last day of campaigning, Aristide placed his own loyalists in the government and the police.

Préval found himself at the mercy of his old friend. Even the bodyguards at the presidential National Palace were more loyal to Aristide -- a point underscored when his wife found her dog bleeding from a machete slash.

"Aristide created, inside the public administration, forces that were faithful to him," Moise said. "So Préval was accused of being weak. . . . I think he was fearful of Aristide."

How much Préval has changed since is a mystery.

He has vigilantly avoided discussing how he would handle the explosive issue of whether Aristide will return. While the militant wing of his base is demanding the return of the ousted president from exile in South Africa, most observers agree that such a move would cause political chaos.

Préval has said only that Haiti's Constitution does not allow exile. Yet he notably refused to run on the ticket of Aristide's Lavalas Family party and has accused it of corruption. He formed his own party, Lespwa, or hope in Creole. And he picked as his campaign manager Bob Manuel, a former minister in Préval's Cabinet who fled the country under threats from Aristide thugs.

If he wins the next presidential term, Préval will also have the support of the 9,500-member U.N. peacekeeping force, which arrived in 2004 to stabilize Haiti, and hundreds of millions of dollars pledged by international donors.

But Préval's caginess on the subject of Aristide concerns his critics.

"Maybe he does want to rehabilitate himself, but he does not speak, so we do not know," Moise said.

A SECLUDED LIFE

Since the election, Préval has secluded himself in this northern mountain village five hours by road from Port-au-Prince, where he lives in a small tin-roofed home on the central square. It is his life here in Marmelade, his grandparents' hometown, that he likes to talk about.

For five years, he completely disappeared from public view and began a project to help about 900 local peasants grow coffee, citrus and bamboo, with a \$5 million grant from the Taiwanese government. For an ex-president, his apparent lack of wealth is striking. Where Aristide lived in a luxurious estate with lush gardens and a swimming pool, Préval's home is 800 square feet, maximum. His bedroom barely fits the bed. Toiletries rest on the windowsill.

"I didn't have a house in Port-au-Prince," he told The Miami Herald. "And the pension of the president is only \$200 a month."

Down the road, the cooperative now boasts a coffee and orange juice processing plant and a small factory to make bamboo furniture.

"In five years, we multiplied the peasants' income by four," Préval said Saturday. He says it is this success that brought him back to politics. On July 27, more than 1,000 peasants camped out at the cooperative and urged him to run for president, Préval said.

"What they say about Préval is he speaks very little, he listens a lot," said François Severin, Préval's longtime friend and partner in the Federation of Associations of Native Coffee Growers. "This is his advantage."

LOYAL FRIENDSHIPS

Préval is most comfortable, not in speaking to crowds, but in loyal relationships with those he cares for, say his friends. He is funny and a bit sly -- and hopelessly flirtatious with women. When he was being treated for prostate cancer in Cuba after he left office, his ex-wife, Geri, spent her own money to stay with him.

And rather than making grand ideological proclamations, he seeks small solutions, friends say. As president, he built roads and schools, lowered the price of fertilizer for peasants and began to resolve land disputes that had rural towns in bloody feuds.

"He was the one who tried to fix the place," said Venithe Saint Cyr, 42, who grew up in the countryside but had to move to the Cité Soleil slum of Port-au-Prince to find work. "Where I came from, the countryside, Préval built a road so my family could transport their goods and he kept the fertilizer down."

But the progress Préval made was severely limited. He did not have a majority in the Parliament. By 1997, his government was paralyzed.

Préval largely retreated into the National Palace. His public appearances seemed awkward. When he arrived at the gruesome scene of a 1997 ferry accident in which more than 170 people died, one of the first things he did was ask for a cold beer.

"It was a sterile presidency," Moïse said.

SEEKING STATURE

The legendary radio journalist and fellow agronomist Jean Dominique tried to inspire Préval, an intimate friend, to break with Aristide and grab the reins of government.

"He wanted René to become autonomous," said Michele Pierre-Louis, a long-time friend of Préval. ``Jean would say: `He has to have the stature of head of state. That's what I'm working on.'"

Pierre-Louis met Préval when he was studying agronomy in Belgium and she was studying in France. When they met again in Haiti during the 1970s, they became fast friends. Wondering what to do with their lives, they scrounged financing from their parents and started a downtown bakery -- the Boulangerie du Centre.

The bakery donated bread to the St. Jean Bosco church in the slum of La Saline, where Aristide was a priest. He and Préval became friends and allies in the fight against the dictatorship of Jean Claude

"Baby Doc" Duvalier.

"Anyone who wasn't for revolution at the time didn't have his heart in the right place," said Pierre-Louis.

FEELING PRESSURED

After Duvalier fled the country and Aristide won the country's first totally free and democratic presidential elections, he appointed Préval as prime minister. But by the time Préval became president himself, he seemed tortured by the pressures pushing from every angle.

When friend Jean Dominique was shot to death outside his radio station in 2000, after programs highly critical of Aristide's party, Préval met Pierre-Louis at the hospital.

Her brother-in-law, Father Jean Pierre-Louis, had been assassinated two years before, and police never found the assailants. She looked into Préval's eyes.

"This happened during your presidency," she said. ``I hope this time there will be an investigation." She sighs at his response that day.

"I hope so," Préval said.

The murder was never solved.

Another Canadian connection in Haiti: Clothes to die for
February 12, 2006
David Evans
Seven Oaks Magazine

Canada is the fourth largest exporter of clothes to the United States (1). Our trade with the U.S. in clothes is calculated at over ten billion dollars a year (2). Over the past two decades Canadian sales to the U.S. have increased steadily (3,4). However, the number of people employed in the trade has decreased (5). How can this be?

The answer is simple: Someone else does the work! Through the processes known to economists as “transshipments” and “re-exports” all the difficult labor is done for as little as 11 cents an hour. Then it is given a “Made in Canada” label and sold to the U.S. markets for a handsome profit (6). This also has the added advantage to our business community of limiting a section of the Canadian workforce that has historically been very effective in promoting human rights, the labour movement and the political left in Canada (7).

Through various trade deals such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative and NAFTA, Canadian business can re-export the clothes largely manufactured by Haitian labour (8). Haitians and others under these same trade deals have to open up their markets to our agricultural products (9). Being a developed industrial nation our food products are much cheaper than Haitian products, as they largely have only subsistence farming capability (10-12). While we have tractors and bio-engineering, they mostly have manual labour farm implements.

Over a third of our apparel and textile export is “re-export”, meaning it is not made by Canadian labour, even though it may bear a “Made in Canada” label (13-16). The process has been described as “Neo-Imperialism” and studies have shown that this arrangement restricts the ability of a society to develop their industry. It can even lead to the de-industrialization (17) and a negative rate of development such as in Haiti (18,19).

This de-industrialization process is neither unique to Haiti nor historically new (20-24). Haiti of course is unique in two aspects: the degree of the devastation and the fact that it is Canada business interests that have a deep responsibility in its creation.

Those who support this system and profit from it include all our major clothing retailers and manufacturers (25,26). Outsourcing the part of production where only labour is necessary is so widespread that it has become the standard practice for the industry (27,28). The process where the worker is reduced to nothing but the exchange value of his unskilled labour has largely been exported (29).

Units of production such as cloth (textiles) are manufactured and developed through a highly complex industrialized process. In this process educated and semi-educated workers controlling the process enjoy some human rights protections. They may even have the possibility of bargaining for better wages in a trade union (30). Although far from a humane production environment, it is imaginable that a person could survive under such conditions.

In Canada, the textile industry is the tenth largest employer and its workers are 75% women who receive low rates of pay and little if any job security (31). Under our present system of production this, however, is markedly better than the other sections of the industry where the semi-manufactured goods are transported. These places are called assembly or subassembly factories, although we most commonly and justly refer to them as sweatshops.

Units of production at this stage require some assembly before they can then be sold. Perhaps intricate sewing work has to be done that is both labour intensive and prone to debilitating injuries. The workers at this stage are essentially de-skilled. It is not considered necessary by the business interests that the worker is either educated or skilled. Often the learning takes place on the job where the worker observes others in the process before they themselves do any paid labour (32).

The high capital investments of automated production stay in the home country. Here in Canada they and their precious machines do not have to endure the risk of workers impoverished by the 11 cents an hour pay, brutalized by inhuman conditions, rising up in revolution. It is the oppression of labour that is exported, while both Capital and capitalist remain where they are well protected, far from danger. Here in perfect anonymity they can sip their lattes, read the newspaper, collect their dividends and never see the misery they inflict upon others for profit.

The main problem for Canadian business interests is how to continue their profitable way of life at the expense of the Haitian people. The Haitian people do not appear, by and large, to have any desire of continuing this situation, having twice elected by an overwhelming majority the government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the party of which he was a leader, Fanmi Lavalas.

Haiti's first democratically elected president had modest aims, such as increasing the minimum wage to approximately 20¢ an hour (33). He believed that the democratic institutions of Haiti should be allowed to vote upon policy decisions such as privatization of government controlled resources like the water supply (34). These aims were commendable, although extremely modest.

The Haitian people had problems that ranged from a child mortality rate under the age of 5 of over 12%, unemployment that rose as high as 70%, and approximately 50% of the population not having access to safe drinking water (35). This situation had only gotten worse over the past two decades, thanks largely to the "re-export" industry.

The corrupt dictatorships of the Duvalier family and the equally corrupt military rule of Cedras helped foreign interests turn Haiti into a sweat shop "re-export" economy during the 1970s, 80s and early 90s (36). The promise of the Fanmi Lavalas was at least some hope for a better life than Haitians had known.

To provide for a better life and build its own industrial structure, Haiti would have to do as those who have industrialized before have done. They would have to protect key industries such as agriculture and infrastructure such as water (37,38). They would have to build a social system that would allow advanced industrial processes to develop and be maintained. Fundamental to this are healthcare and education.

The process in Haiti until now has been opposite to this development model. The loans needed to buy the capital-intensive (39) machines essential to industrialization came with strings attached. The loans that were given by organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF -- which are majority funded by Capital based in the U.S. -- came with the condition that key industries not be protected and that essential services and infrastructure be taken out of the democratic control of the government.

Of course countries such as Canada did not need IMF and World Bank loans to develop their industry. Western European and North American societies were able to buy their capital-intensive machines and industrialize from the methods, now traditional to our societies, of imperialism and enslavement (40).

British, French, American and Canadian business interests were able to accumulate massive profits created by over 300 years of enslaving Africans and forcing them and their descendents to work in the Caribbean's plantation economies. Those profits went directly to the industrialization that gives such industrial societies as ours its competitive advantage over societies such as Haiti (41,42).

The virtues displayed in Aristide's care for the orphans and poor of Haiti in his former career as a priest would, it was hoped by many Haitians, promote a society that cared for its people (43). The Fanmi Lavalas was essentially a coalition of groups that represented socially progressive political and religious elements of Haitian society.

The actions of a government in Haiti, such as the reform measures carried out by the Aristide government, do not often make front-page news in Canada. But to Canadian business interests, the issue of who governs Haiti and how Haiti is governed does not go un-noticed.

When the Canadian government declared that the dictatorship in Haiti of the military leader Cedras was intolerable, presumably because it allowed a rather profitable drug trade to continue, its navy joined in enforcing an economic embargo. Canadian business interests had the opposite reaction and increased their imports from Haiti (44). Whatever the Canadian Navy was blockading from 1994 to 1995, it appears not to have been an economic embargo on Canadian business interests, as imports increased between these years. It is estimated that 60 multinational corporations continued business in Haiti during this time regardless of the embargo (45).

When the popularly elected government of Aristide was overthrown in 2004 Canadian business interests increased their imports from Haiti. It became twice what it was before North American and European governments agitated against Aristide's government in 2002 (46). The Canadian government declared its support for democracy and human rights, even as its troops helped the success of a coup against Aristide. The effect has been the increased involvement of Canadian business interests in a country where human rights atrocities have increased (47).

The pattern is clear. When workers' rights in Haiti are promoted, even timidly, Canadian businesses avoid Haiti. Two of the greatest Canadian political proponents of the coup that overthrew Aristide, Aileen Carroll and Pierre Pettigrew, also happened to be politicians elected in areas (South Central Ontario and Montreal) where business interests have highly benefited from the "re-export" trade (48-52).

Pierre Pettigrew gave bold endorsements of the coup leaders. The Canadian financial support for the coup government by CIDA under Carroll's leadership helped bolster the government established by the coup leaders (53). This was a government against the democratic rights of the Haitian people that directly benefited Canadian business interests. In Calgary, Carroll even received an award given to her by a representative of SNC-Lavalin for her efforts in helping to privatize the water supply in impoverished societies (54).

Pierre Pettigrew tried to maximize his previous support of "Trade Liberalization" such as in Haiti to be made the head of the Organization of American States (OAS). The OAS has been vocal in its support of the Gérard Latortue government established by the coup (55). Even this body once described by Che Guevara as a "suitable mask" (56) for U.S. imperialism found Pettigrew a less than suitable candidate, choosing instead a more politically moderate politician for the top position (57).

With the help of Canadian political activists campaigning on behalf of the Haitian people, these two politicians were defeated during the last election (58). The present government has stated that it wishes to continue the work that these two promoted in Haiti. This is consistent with past history. Canadian Conservative governments have previously acted towards Haiti with no discernable difference from Liberal governments.

It was under the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney that the present shape of Canadian business interests in Haiti developed. In the mid-eighties Canadian manufacturing declined, partly thanks to the commitment of the Conservatives to the type of hemispheric free trade promoted by the United States government (59). Haitian society was forced to comply with similar trade agreements due to pressure from the World Bank and the IMF (60).

Unable to refuse the cheaper agricultural products such as Canada's, and unable to compete in other industries, Haiti as an agricultural economy was left few choices but to accept the sweatshop employment provided by Canadian business interests. As activists, we have no choice but to continue the work that has been started by the Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN).

This network has, within a short period of time, built up groups dedicated to exposing Canada's imperialist ambitions in Haiti. Jail time for some leading activists has not weakened the movement but rather made it bold. With recent victories over two most notable servants to Canadian business interests, Aileen Carroll and Pierre Pettigrew, we can hopefully expect that the movement will seek to establish itself as a permanent thorn in the side of Canadian corporations exploiting the peoples of the Caribbean.

Only through the efforts of people involved in groups like CHAN can we overcome the grotesque delusions about Canada's political economy from which the majority of Canadians and many outside of Canada suffer (61). In survey after survey, Canada is perceived, by Canadians, as being a refuge of internationalism, where our foreign policy is full of the values of humanity expressing in our every sentiment solidarity with the poor of the world (62). Nothing could be further from the truth: We are the very mirror image of our ideals. In Haiti, we see the true nature of Canada's engagement with the world outside. No longer merely the servile agents of capital (63), no longer the master's lackey in the Caribbean (64), Canada's business interests have now advanced to become the owners of the plantations.

Haiti is a society that produces some of the best handicrafts in the world and has become the strength of the Canadian garment industry. It is the home of a society that prides itself on liberty and independence. Haiti, perhaps more than any other society, has fought and paid dearly to attain the liberty and affluence we have taken for granted. Yet Haiti is listed on the United Nations Human Development Index as one of the most devastated societies (65).

How can this be? We can find the answer to that question in the pursuit of the interests of Capital in Canada. With our collective political action, we may seek to redress the gross injustice perpetrated in our name.

For more on Canada's relations with Haiti, past and present, read Part I and II of David Evans' three-part series.

If elections pass muster, Haiti can reenter Caribbean fold
15-member Caricom kicked out Haiti after President Aristide ousted
Saturday, February 11, 2006
CNN.com

PORT-OF-SPAIN, Trinidad (AP) -- Haiti will be allowed to rejoin the 15-member Caribbean Community if the recent presidential and parliamentary elections are deemed free and fair, the group said.

Haiti's membership in the group, known as Caricom, was suspended after former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in February 2004. The group had refused to recognize Haiti's interim government and Caribbean leaders accused the United States and France of being accomplices in Aristide's ouster.

Election workers in Haiti were still tallying the vote on Saturday, but early results showed former President Rene Preval in the lead.

"If it is certified that the elections have indeed been free and fair, then Caricom stands ready to readmit Haiti into the institutions of the regional integration movement," Patrick Manning, Caricom chairman and Trinidad's prime minister, said late Friday.

Foreign leaders generally praised the elections, although the U.S. State Department said the Organization of American States needed to work with Haitian authorities to quickly correct problems, such as voters' names not appearing on registration lists.

Manning said that Haiti would likely rejoin the group at its summit in July in St. Kitts, and that he would attend the inauguration of Haiti's new president.

His comments came after Caricom ended a two-day meeting in Trinidad.

The group also agreed to set up a US\$120 million (euro100 million) regional development fund following last month's launch of the Caribbean Single Market. Less developed Caribbean countries will tap the fund to help their economies compete in the market -- which allows for the free flow of goods and professionals between member states.

U.S. prods likely Haiti victor to shun Aristide

10 Feb 2006

Reuters

By Saul Hudson

WASHINGTON, Feb 10 (Reuters) - The United States on Friday urged Haiti's likely new leader Rene Preval to oppose any return from exile of his ally, ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The move, which avoided unconditional backing of Preval despite his apparent easy win in an election the United States promoted, could immediately undermine the incoming president in the impoverished, unstable Caribbean nation.

It will also likely maintain a fissure in U.S. policy-making, which has been polarized between administration conservatives opposed to Aristide and the congressional Black Caucus that backed his leftist leadership.

Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, appeared headed for an outright victory in the first election since Aristide was ousted two years ago in the face of an armed revolt and Bush administration pressure.

Preval, who found his strongest support in the same slums that formed Aristide's political base, has not said if he wants to bring the firebrand former Roman Catholic priest back from his exile in South Africa.

The United States sought to pre-empt such a move.

"He wasn't on the ballot. And he is in South Africa, and I would expect that he would stay there," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

"We think the Haitian government should be looking forward to their future, not to its past," he said.

Preval's win is discomfoting for the United States.

It further exposes a trend in Latin America and beyond, where voters have instinctively opted for leftist candidates opposed to U.S. policies in elections promoted by Washington.

STABILITY GOAL

With President George W. Bush vowing to spread democracy worldwide, his administration praised Haitians for holding a generally fair election and promised to work with the incoming government regardless of its political leaning.

With policy toward Haiti underpinned by a concern to maintain enough stability to avoid a repeat of the mass 1990s exodus prompted by rampaging death squads, Washington offered to continue to help the government train its police.

McCormack also used language usually reserved to warn leftist leaders in Latin America, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia, to follow U.S. policies.

"Our interest is in seeing that they govern in a democratic manner. And a democracy is not just about election day; it is about how you govern," McCormack said.

Peter Hakim, of the Washington-based think tank the Inter-American Dialogue, worried that was a code that could undercut Preval at a time when any Haiti government needs the superpower's support to help stabilize the chaotic nation.

"It's now in the interest of the United States that Preval is a success. It should unconditionally support a government that wins a democratic election," he said.

"It's probably not a good idea for Preval to bring back the divisive figure of Aristide, but it's not for the United States to decide," he added.

Before the armed revolt that forced him out, Aristide had long been accused by opponents at home and critics abroad of corruption and authoritarian tendencies.

Larry Birns, a longtime critic of what he believes is U.S. interference to impose free-market economic policies in Haiti, said the administration was signaling Preval would have to toe the American line or struggle to win aid.

"The final arbiter of Haiti's domestic policy is the U.S. ambassador because he has the ability to block international funds," said the director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs think tank.

Rep Barbara Lee, a California Democrat in the Black Caucus, urged the Bush administration against undercutting Preval.

"The United States must fully support and respect, rather than undermine, democracy in Haiti," she said. "We must provide the vital humanitarian and economic assistance the country so desperately needs."

Ballot Counting in Haiti is Going Slowly
The Miami Herald
February 11, 2006
By JOE MOZINGO and JACQUELINE CHARLES

PORT-AU-PRINCE - The counting of ballots from Tuesday's national elections proceeded slowly Wednesday amid early signs that René Préval would finish first in the presidential race, as predicted by polls.

But it was not clear whether the former president would earn the outright majority he needs to avoid a run off run-off March 19 against the second-place finisher.

The first partial results are expected to be announced at 6 P.M., but it is unlikely they contain enough votes to settle a winner for President or any of the 129 seats in Parliament.

The tally sheets from each of about 800 polling centers spread out across Haiti's mountainous and largely roadless terrain had to be transferred -- by mule, by truck convoy, by U.N. helicopters -- to Port-au-Prince to be counted.

Disorganization on Tuesday resulted in long lines and polls closing well after dark, with many voters casting their ballots by candlelight. While the results from many centers were set to be transported overnight, many were just getting picked up by late morning today.

Turnout for the first election since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled the country in 2004 was unexpectedly high in a country where many until recent weeks were dubious of the balloting. The balloting was postponed four times because of logistical problems.

The candidacy of Préval, a one-time protege of Aristide, energized much of the poor majority that once saw the populist former priest as their champion, and shook a political and business elite that helped drive Aristide from power.

Préval was the frontrunner in the polls, and a look by the Miami Herald at the results in four large polling centers in Port-au-Prince, as well as several in the port city of Gonaives, suggested Préval was far ahead of the pack of 32 candidates.

Of the 6,163 votes counted at several voting centers in Port-au-Prince -- in the well-off suburb of Petionville, the poorer neighborhoods of Lalue and Bel Air, and one near downtown that served the strongly pro-Aristide slum of Cité Soleil -- 4,718 went to Préval. That well above the 50 percent he needs for an outright victory.

One Haitian electoral official cautioned, however, that early results showed Préval had not garnered as much support in outlying provinces, where much of Haiti's 8.1 million people live.

No reliable exit polls were conducted.

Presidential candidate and businessman Charles Henri Baker said his information suggested there would be a second round but it was not clear who would wind up in second -- or or former president Leslie F. Manigat.

"We are patient," said Baker.

Haiti Democracy Project Observes in Cite Soleil!

February 12, 2006

Haiti Democracy Project

Haiti Democracy Project observers played an important role in correcting management and throughput issues that surfaced in the early hours of voting on February 7. Additionally, they played an essential role in obtaining the necessary lighting equipment and security augmentation for voters at the Cité Soleil voting center at the Industrial Park to continue voting after the formal closing hour of 4:00 p.m. Everyone contributed to this effort, but special mention must be made of the initiative taken by John Merrill, Molton Michel and Lionel Delatour.

There was no electricity in the warehouse and no way the voting could be completed before nightfall. Soon the building would be pitch-black.

The Haiti Democracy Project observer team consisting of John Merrill (chief of Western Hemisphere programs for the Defense Department), Molton Michel of New York, and Peterson LaPlante of Boston, aided by Lionel Delatour of Haiti, went into action. They soon helped election officials form up the lines better. They then went for a search in nearby factories for a power source that could be hooked up to the warehouse. They succeeded in this search, hooked up the line, and the voting went on long into the evening, until all the Cité Soleil people in line had their chance to vote.

The U.S. Haitian-American community made a big contribution to our Port-au-Prince coverage, supplying six of our eight observers:

Jean Charlet, Boston

Peterson LaPlante, Boston

Elmide Méléance, Hyattsville, Md.

Molton Michel, New York

Ulrick Ricot, New York

Garry Theodate, Boston

They were joined by

John Merrill

Shawnta Walcott

Méléance, Charlet and the others covered voting stations in Petionville, Delmas, and Carrefour.

Suggestions to ease voting in the second round

The Haiti Democracy Project hopes to get its observations and management suggestions incorporated in the planning for subsequent rounds. This input was requested by the United Nations, Organization of American States, and State Department in conversations we held with officials following the vote (including State Department officials in Washington). Since management improvements may require some lead-time to accomplish, these officials will need to move fast.

Before the vote, Haiti Democracy Project observer John Merrill (observing also for the U.S. government) was asked by Amb. Timothy M. Carney, U.S. chargé d'affaires in Haiti, to join in

addressing the status of elections preparations and Haiti's future with the principal international representatives in Haiti on election eve. The audience included OAS secretary-general Insulza, U.N. mission chief Juan Gabriel Valdez, U.N. elections director Gerardo LeChevalier, and OAS voter-registration director Elizabeth Spehar.

Whither Haiti?

Remarks by Haiti Democracy Project election observer John Merrill to U.N. and OAS officials, Port-au-Prince, February 6, 20006.

The foreign role in Haiti, whether by individual countries or international organizations, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Haitian reality. These foreign observers believe that Haitians live in an unrelenting continuum of poverty and misery that is punctuated occasionally by international intervention. Cynics note that intervention brings some degree of stability and temporary but artificial prosperity, but accompanying reforms are never sustained when foreigners leave and Haiti slips back into its previous steady state of hopelessness.

In reality, there is no steady state of poverty, to which Haitians simply adjust. Rather, conditions in Haiti are getting worse, year after year, based on a large number of objective indicators that are immune to short-lived interventions. A few examples:

Each year, Haiti possesses less arable land, making it progressively less able to feed itself. As a result, farmers "mine the soil" through improper crop rotation and overuse of pesticides, thereby accelerating this process.

Each year, Haiti's fisheries produce lower yields due to pollution, forcing fishermen to venture further and further from its shores and fish inefficiently.

Each year, Haiti produces fewer classroom teachers than the year before, making the country less able to educate its young.

Each year, Haiti becomes less able to compete in the global market place because the advantage conferred by low wages and proximity to the United States is undercut by instability, corruption, an unreliable infrastructure and a poorly-educated workforce.

The only consistent "positive" indicator in Haiti is population growth, meaning that in ten to fifteen years there will be perhaps fifteen million Haitians competing for fewer resources than are available today. The consequences of that future for stability and out-migration should be readily apparent to all, but the development challenge is so huge that no nation or group of nations appears willing to make the investment.

Against that backdrop, Haiti and its friends are preparing for elections intended to install a legitimate government. Despite numerous postponements and threats of violence, Haitian voters appear poised to participate in large numbers in a process they now believe is credible. Most agree that if the election fails, it will be due to mismanagement, not deliberate corruption or violence spawned by armed gangs. Credible elections should produce a government with legitimacy among the population, which the interim government never possessed. Although legitimacy may be squandered by whatever government is installed, that will only occur if the international community elects to disengage. Regrettably, the history of international intervention in Haiti is a record of premature disengagement and failure to learn from our own mistakes, creating an empty legacy. In the mid- to late-nineties, the United States alone invested \$3 billion in Haiti and today we have virtually nothing to show for it.

This record prompted U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan to commit to a "ten-year mission" two years ago. He argued persuasively that long-term engagement is essential to change the economic foundations and political culture of Haiti. Most troop-contributing nations and funding countries echoed his views.

That consensus is now eroding. Increasingly, Western Hemisphere governments are listening to their own domestic publics, who question the strategic value of continued engagement in Haiti. Particularly among troop-contributing countries, domestic audiences question the value of putting national troops in harm's way. The same arguments resonate in the principal funding countries, where aid budgets for Haiti are being slashed.

Although credible elections should be viewed as the starting point for serious reforms leading to sustainable development, truly successful elections will only increase the temptation to use that event or series of events as an exit excuse, if not an exit strategy.

Realistically, on the day after elections or inauguration of a new president, Haitians will be no better off than they are today. The Haitian economy will be just as broken; the number of formal-sector jobs will remain far fewer than Haiti possessed a dozen or more years ago during military rule. The job of creating a functioning police or justice sector will remain unfinished, and so forth. None of the essential prerequisites to creating a magnet for capital investment will exist.

None of this means that the U.N. mission or the OAS role should be maintained indefinitely as presently configured. In some respects, a heavy presence of foreign troops may actually lessen the urgency and imperative to Haitians to create a functioning security sector. Hence the foreign presence in Haiti must evolve; for example by increasing UNPOL while reducing military troops.

Similarly, austere budgets require that we invest in smarter ways in Haiti's long-term development. We must perform an entirely unsentimental assessment of Haiti's needs, abandoning projects that can never work, and focusing instead on capability and job creation for tomorrow's global economy. We simply cannot afford to continue reinventing, for example, "temporary" jobs programs that await foreign investment that never arrives. We cannot begin yet another nostalgic reforestation project in an effort to recreate the hardwood rainforest that existed in Haiti in the 1920s, when any competent botanist or biologist knows that once the micro-climates that sustain and are created by such forests are gone, they are gone. They cannot be recreated by the works of man.

These are just a couple of examples of the realism we must bring to the international role in Haiti. We must focus on building institutions and capabilities that can function in the absence of foreign troops. We must remember that foreign investment, and especially private foreign capital, is a coward. It will not venture into Haiti until profit opportunities are genuine and stability and security are commensurate with reasonable levels of risk. Because as we have learned, even the wealthy elements of the Haitian diaspora will not let emotional, cultural, or familial attachment to Haiti override the fundamentals of sound business decisions.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. We cannot envisage any rosy scenario for Haiti if the international community repeats the past mistake of disengaging as soon as the appearance of democratic governance has been achieved. Expecting a newly-democratic Haiti to reinvent itself economically or politically, without sustained and substantial foreign engagement, is simply unrealistic. Haiti is a failed state, which will not be changed by a democratic veneer. Countries and organizations with a long-term interest in Haiti must decide whether the requisite investments can be

sustained over time, and whether that investment is worth making. The alternative of continued cycles of intervention and neglect will only make the challenges of Haiti more difficult.

Haiti Democracy Project Fields 15 Observers; 7 More Blocked by Dominican Authorities
James R. Morrell, director of the project
February 11, 2006
Haiti Democracy Project

The Haiti Democracy Project fielded fifteen international observers accredited by the Provisional Electoral Commission to witness Haiti's historic February 7, 2006 elections. We achieved coverage in three departments: Ouest, Nord, and Nord-Est.

The Blockage by the Dominican Authorities

Although two of our Dominican observers made it across, seven others arrived at the border at Dajabon only on Monday, February 6 and were prevented from crossing by Dominican border authorities, citing ever-shifting technicalities. All seven were duly accredited by the CEP and had the same Dominican identification cards used routinely by thousands of Dominicans to cross every month. The proof of this was that three of them who remained were allowed to cross Wednesday, February 8 with exactly those documents. Unfortunately, these three observers, who swelled our total ultimately to eighteen, arrived too late to observe the process as post-electoral issues were minor.

The fundamental reason for blocking the Dominicans' participation was the thinly-disguised contempt with which Dominican officialdom views all things Haitian. Given that both nations share the same island, it is difficult to say which nation this attitude hurts most, Haiti or the Dominican Republic.

As director of the Haiti Democracy Project, I crossed the river on Monday, February 6 to remonstrate with Dominican border authorities. Members of the Haiti Democracy Project had previously met with Dominican ambassador to the United States Flavio Espinal and Dominican director of the Haiti desk at the foreign ministry in Santo Domingo Ambassador Garcia in an effort to win the support of the Dominican government for the participation of their nationals in this historic process. Despite fulsome expressions of support at these meetings, I was prevented at the border from speaking by phone to the Dominican director of immigration to appeal the blockage.

Although Dominicans express resentment of Haitian protests against Dominican mistreatment of the Haitians, such as occurred during the visit of President Lionel Fernandez and later in an incident at Ouanaminthe, the Dominican official attitudes encountered by the Haiti Democracy Project indicate that these protests are fully justified. The Dominican official attitudes toward Haiti can only be characterized as primitive.

The self-defeating Dominican approach to Haiti should form an important part of the U.S. diplomatic dialogue with the Dominican Republic because major international objectives for Haiti cannot be achieved with the continuation of this attitude.

The Haiti Democracy Project is glad to report that the two Dominican nationals, Jaime Blondin Martinez and Uclenia Pena Pena, who did participate performed excellently as observers, ranged widely over the Nord-Est Department, and met no hostility of any kind by any Haitian throughout their entire stay.

The Haiti Democracy Project's mission:

Nord

Dr. Gerald Gracia, Washington, D.C.

Paul A. Pumphrey, Brothers and Sisters International, Washington, D.C.

Nord-Est

Gerald Gourdain, Beltsville, Md.

Jaime Blondin Martinez, Cabarete, Dominican Republic

James R. Morrell, Haiti Democracy Project, Washington, D.C.

Uclenia PeZa PeZa, Santo Domingo

Kathie Scarrah, Washington, D.C.

Accredited but prevented from crossing the border by Dominican authorities:

Felipe Cabrera

Ysrael Reyes Duarte

Jose Gil*

Tedis Rosario Hernandez*

Arely Enanacion Montero*

Franklin Santos

Roberto Ventura

*Crossed on February 8.

Port-au-Prince

Chief of Port-au-Prince mission: Vicki Carney

Voting centers covered in Cité Soleil, Delmas, Petionville, and Carrefour

Jean Charlet, Boston

Peterson LaPlante, Boston

Elmide Méléance, Hyattsville, Md.

John Merrill, Alexandria, Va.

Molton Michel, New York

Ulrick Ricot, New York

Rev. Garry Theodate, Boston

Shawnta R. Walcott, Bethesda, Md.

Haitian support staff:

Johnson François

Sermy Gabriel

Also providing essential assistance:

Lionel Delatour, founding member, Haiti Democracy Project

Overview of the voting

The overwhelming impression was of a population determined not to be counted out, a population coming long distances and waiting in long, slow-moving lines, all pushed up against each other, in order to cast their vote for an improving Haiti. The occasional person who broke in line or shouted was outnumbered a hundred to one by those waiting silently and patiently, some starting at 5:00 a.m. and others staying beyond nightfall, in the infinitely slow-moving lines. The overall orderliness and earnestness of the voters and polling officials can now confer on the resulting government the precious gift of legitimacy, on which all else depends: security, development, job-creation, environment.

For those who had observed the same sort of dignified voting day on May 21, 2000, the differences were two, both owing to the greater foreign presence:

1. The polling stations were needlessly clustered in "Voting Centers" rather than spread out in the communities close to where the voters live, as in 2000 and all previous elections. That the turnout this time nevertheless appears to have equaled the 2000 level is further testament to the Haitian masses' patience. Not a single voter interviewed by this observer in the Nord-Est department expressed fears over security of polling places and the province was completely calm.

2. The almost-complete lack of controversy immediately after the vote contrasted strongly with the incessant disputes over stolen ballots and ballot-box stuffing by Aristide's party that marred the May 2000 election and led in a direct line to the erasing of a million votes for opposition candidates by the

central counting office. In that case, security of the ballots was entrusted to chaotic departmental electoral bureaus and poorly-secured police stations. In this case, the sealed sacks of votes were taken to MINUSTAH bases where they were in perfect security before being delivered to the Provisional Electoral Commission in Port-au-Prince.

Given the high sums the foreign community invested in this election, and the participation of high-level, capable U.N. staff in the election preparation, it's hard to understand why foreign U.N. personnel were not present in a supportive administrative role at the voting centers on voting day. All the voting stations visited by this observer opened late. Long lines were forming outside while the officials were still inside counting their ballots. To be sure, the ballots were delivered on time early in the morning of the voting day at the precincts visited by this observer and for this the United Nations and CEP must be given credit. But some crucial detail always seemed to be overlooked. For example, the package included candles, but not matches, and the election workers didn't have matches either. So the two hours between 4:00 and 6:00 a.m. when the ballots were there were wasted because the candles couldn't be lit, and the ballot-counting didn't begin until dawn. The polling station then wouldn't open until 7:30 a.m. and by then long lines had formed. By opening on time these polling stations could have stayed ahead of some of those lines.

Another obvious detail seemingly overlooked was clear directions to the voters to vote for only one presidential candidate. A large number of ballots, more than 10 percent of those observed in one precinct, were spoiled by voters voting for more than one. There was no clear direction on the ballot to vote for only one. It can of course be argued that they implicitly should have known. But a good third of those voting in the Nord-Est department were illiterate and could not even sign their names. A major reason for the slow lines was the time that these voters took to puzzle out the ballot. That some voters thought they could express several preferences is to be expected, and it is the electoral authorities, not the voters, who are to blame for the high numbers of spoiled ballots. As a result, all over the country tens of thousands of voters stood in line all day to vote only to have their presidential ballots thrown out, although their legislative ballots may have been valid..

In the Nord-Est province, foreign security was present in the MINUSTAH troops outside the big voting stations and spot-checking the ones up-country. During the day, a CIVPOL French policeman was observed warning the party pollwatchers against helping people vote, since that was a form of interference. But given the enormous sums invested in these elections, and the relatively low numbers of voting centers needed to be covered, there should have been a foreign election worker acting as a fixer and organizer at each voting center. If the Haiti Democracy Project could mobilize twenty-two foreign observers with no funding, the United Nations could have mobilized advisers to rotate among and cover all of the seven hundred voting centers with its \$60 million of foreign funding.

Yet all this fumbling was overcome by the Haitian masses' infinite patience and seeming acceptance of such incompetence as the natural order of things. Truly then, as the 2000 election commissioner Léon Manus said in similar circumstances, "Glory to the Haitian people!"