

**Haiti's Preval Claims Fraud Spoiled His Win
Protesters Calmed by Words of Leading Contender
By Manuel Roig-Franzia
Washington Post
Wednesday, February 15, 2006**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 14 -- Haiti's fractured electoral process, already disrupted by street protests Monday, stalled further on Tuesday as the leading presidential candidate, Rene Preval, said "gigantic fraud" had kept him from a first-round victory and official vote-counters refused to report for work because they feared attacks by protesters.

Preval's return to the capital after nearly a week at his remote mountain home had a soothing effect on demonstrators, who responded to his plea for calm Tuesday by taking down most of the fiery roadblocks they had set up since early morning. But the lull appeared to be only temporary as the country anxiously awaited final results a full week after the Feb. 7 election.

"If they publish the results as they are now, we will oppose them, the Haitian people will also oppose them, and there will be protests," Preval said, addressing reporters as he sat on a striped couch beneath a flame tree in the back yard of his sister's gated home in suburban Pegguyville.

Preval, a former president and agronomist who is popular with Haiti's poor, railed about "gross errors" in vote counting, but he declined to discuss specifics or present evidence to support his claims.

With about 90 percent of ballots counted, officials said Preval had won 48.6 percent of the vote. That total is short of the simple majority required to avert a runoff with Leslie Manigat, another former president, who won 11 percent of the vote.

Liszt Quitel, an adviser to Preval, said the campaign had been told that the remaining ballots are missing. "People on the inside are saying they don't know where they are," Quitel said.

David Winhurst, a spokesman for the United Nations, said that "we have no evidence of fraud." The United Nations supplied 9,000 troops to safeguard the election.

Preval asked demonstrators to allow truck drivers to take food to markets and students to get to school. But he also encouraged his supporters to continue demonstrating to show their displeasure with the vote counting.

"Continue to protest, but respect the rights of others," he said at the news conference, which was broadcast live on national radio stations.

The capital, brought to a standstill by Monday's violent protests and left with eerily empty streets that night, lurched back to life Tuesday after Preval's remarks. In Pegguyville, the calls of street hawkers

filled the market air and women balancing bowls of grapefruit on their heads navigated the steep streets.

Parades of Preval supporters -- the same groups who burned tires and erected roadblocks the day before -- turned celebratory and hopeful. They marched through the streets, banging drums and waving posters with the emblem of Preval's party, Lespwa (the Haitian Creole word for "hope").

Preval supporters were furious late Tuesday, and said their fraud allegations had been proved when a local television station in Port-au-Prince repeatedly broadcast footage of ballots with Preval's name checked that were found discarded and, in some cases, partially burned at a dump in Port-au-Prince and two other locations.

"We knew that there was a massive fraud, but we could not put our fingers on it," said Fritz Longchamp, a Preval adviser and former Haitian ambassador to the United Nations. "Now we have the proof."

Interior Minister Paul Magloire told the Associated Press late Tuesday that the interim government had ordered a review of election results, in what would be a first formal step to investigate possible irregularities.

Four presidential candidates have already conceded Preval's victory after receiving small percentages of the vote, but businessman Charles Baker, who was in third place, said he would demand a spot in a runoff. Manigat's wife told the Associated Press that her husband would not cede the election to Preval.

Quitel said the Preval campaign was suspicious about the high percentage of blank ballots, more than 7 percent, and discrepancies on the electoral commission Web site.

Preval has spent the past two days in intensive meetings with U.S. and other international diplomats, as well as leaders of Haiti's interim government, which was set up two years ago after the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Preval, Haiti's president from 1996 to 2001, was a protege of Aristide's but has distanced himself in recent years, leaving Aristide's Lavalas party and forming Lespwa.

Winhurst said U.N. officials hoped a renewed sense of calm in Port-au-Prince would hold through the night, enabling ballot counters to resume working on Wednesday morning.

"They were uneasy with the big crowds," he said. "The crowds on the street who want a result are actually impeding results being completed."

Preval accused "provocateurs" in the opposition of trying to stir up his loyalists in an attempt to isolate and discredit them in the eyes of international observers. Preval's supporters, however, appeared largely responsible for the chaos that gripped this impoverished nation of 8.1 million Monday, when hundreds of roadblocks paralyzed cities and towns across the nation.

"The president told us to do this," demonstrator Maxim Detouche said Tuesday as he walked away from a dismantled roadblock in Petionville, a wealthy neighborhood in the hills above Port-au-Prince. "Now they are trying to bluff him; the election commission is trying to trick him."

Hundreds of people streamed past Detouche, blowing horns and chanting Preval's name. A dozen young women sang, "Oh yeah, Preval. I have been waiting for you."

Brazil Will Support Haiti Accord to Declare Preval President
Bloomberg News
February 15, 2006

Brazil will support an agreement to declare Rene Preval president of Haiti, avoiding a runoff amid growing unrest, the government's Agencia Brasil said on its Web site, citing a top presidential adviser.

Haiti's presidential contenders should reach an accord to accept Preval as the winner to avoid escalating violence, said Marco Aurelio Garcia, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's top aide for foreign affairs, according to the government's agency. Brazil leads a United Nations peacekeeping force of 9,000 soldiers in Haiti.

Preval, who on Feb. 13 slipped below the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff from an initial count of more than 60 percent, has now 49.5 percent of counted votes, the agency said, citing Garcia.

The former prime minister for deposed president Jean- Bertrand Aristide has more than half the votes to beat Leslie Manigat, who has 12 percent, if blank and invalid votes aren't counted, Garcia said, according to the agency.

Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, held a first round of votes for president on Feb. 7.

UN investigates election materials found in Haiti dump
Wed, 15 Feb 2006
CBC News, Canada

United Nations peacekeepers went to a Haitian garbage dump on Wednesday to recover ballot boxes amid allegations that the Feb. 7 presidential vote was marred by fraud.

orders review of election results amid fraud allegations

That evening, a local television station broadcast images from the dump near Port-au-Prince that showed crumpled ballot boxes surrounded by heaps of ballots, many marked for Préval.

Associated Press reporters who visited the site on Wednesday said they saw hundreds of empty ballot boxes, empty ballot bags and at least one vote tally sheet.

"That's extraordinary," a UN spokesperson, David Wimhurst, told AP.

Officials question whether materials are genuine

Wimhurst, who is part of a 9,000-member UN force sent to stabilize the Caribbean country before the election, said the ballots could have come from several polling stations across the country that were ransacked on election day.

He said some were destroyed by voters who grew frustrated after waiting hours to cast their ballots, while others were wrecked by political factions.

Both Wimhurst and the head of Haiti's electoral council, Max Mathurin, raised the possibility that someone may have dumped the ballots to create the appearance of fraud.

Haiti's interim government, which was appointed after the ouster of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, has promised to appoint a commission to investigate allegations of vote fraud.

In the meantime, it said the judiciary would examine the materials found at the dump.

"We are looking closely at specimens of the ballots found at the dump, to check whether these are real ballots," said Michel Brunache, chief of staff of interim president Boniface Alexandre.

UN extends peacekeeping mission by six months

Tens of thousands of Préval's supporters have flooded the streets of Port-au-Prince in the last few days, demanding that he be declared president.

The protesters, who are largely drawn from Haiti's impoverished majority, accuse election officials of conspiring with the country's elite to manipulate election results against Préval.

FROM FEB. 14, 2006: UN accused as gunfire erupts during Haiti election protests

Among other developments on Wednesday:

Brazil, which heads the UN mission in Haiti, said it was leading efforts to persuade other presidential candidates to recognize Préval's victory in order to prevent a mass uprising.

The UN Security Council extended the peacekeeping mission by six months, to Aug. 15.

Preliminary results suggested Préval had captured more than 60 per cent of the ballots. But as the counting continued, he slipped below the majority he needs to be declared victor outright and avoid a March runoff election.

The most recent election results, published Monday, show Préval with 48.7 per cent of the ballots. About 90 per cent of the ballots had been counted by that point.

His closest rival, Leslie Manigat, held only 11.8 per cent of the vote.

About 125,000 of the 2.2 million ballots cast in the presidential and parliamentary poll have been declared invalid because of irregularities, fuelling fears of fraud among Préval's backers. Nearly 90,000 others were blank but were still added to the total, making it harder for Préval to get a majority.

The Miami Herald

Haiti needs peace, legitimate vote count

OUR OPINION: INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL PANEL WOULD VALIDATE RESULTS

February 15, 2006

Haiti needs a legitimately elected government if it is to have any hope for a turnaround. It also needs for cooler heads to prevail until all votes are counted and credible results are announced. Such a scenario is in the best interest of clear presidential front-runner René Préval, his supporters and all who wish for a better fortune for Haiti.

It is better for Mr. Préval to wait out the electoral process to ensure results that are legally uncontestable, even if that takes more time. Conversely, it does him and Haiti no good to have a new presidency marred by electoral improprieties or violent protests.

'Be mature, nonviolent'

At this point, with questions being raised about invalidated and missing vote-tally sheets, an international panel of election experts should be convened to examine the disputed items and, ultimately, to validate Haiti's vote results.

Mr. Préval did well yesterday in calling for his supporters "to be mature, to be responsible, to be nonviolent." Doing so defused some of the tension in Port-au-Prince. Those supporters had paralyzed the capital with barricades and largely peaceful protests on Monday. Their protests had raised the specter of violence if Mr. Préval were not declared the presidential winner in this first-round vote. Mr. Préval was less diplomatic in declaring that "either massive fraud or gross errors stain the (electoral) process."

The concerns are understandable given Haiti's history of fraudulent elections. Electoral officials didn't help by promising quick election results, thereby raising unrealistic expectations. Another problem was their release of partial results. Last week Mr. Préval appeared to have a runaway lead of 61 percent of the vote in a field of 33 candidates. On Monday the number had dropped to 49 percent, with 90 percent of ballots counted, raising suspicions of fraud.

That's why the international community, including the U.S. government, should recruit independent election experts to review any questionable vote tallies and affirm that good-faith efforts have been made to find and include all valid votes in the election counts.

Popular candidate

This would boost the transparency and credibility of the process. We also urge Mr. Préval to accept the results validated by such a process. Even if the election goes to a second-round vote, Mr. Préval is far and away the most popular candidate. Following the legal electoral process would set a precedent for the rule of law, which is sorely needed in Haiti.

In the meantime, the U.N. Security Council did well to extend the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti and urge Haitians to maintain the peace. Haiti has had too much political violence for too long. This is the opportunity for a fresh start.

The vote in Haiti - a new hope
The Monitor's View
The Christian Science Monitor
Wed Feb 15, 2006

US officials may be little a happier with the results of the presidential election in Haiti than they were when Palestinians voted the militant Hamas movement into power last month. But in both cases, the people of a nascent democracy have spoken.

After peaceful balloting on Feb. 7 that included a large turnout, violence and street protests have sprung up expressing frustration at the slow vote count. As of this writing, candidate René Préval, with a huge lead, remains just short of outright victory.

If Mr. Préval's vote count remains less than 50 percent, a runoff election will be held next month. But even then, he appears certain to be the next president.

Préval has been called the "twin" or protégé of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted from power in 2004 and is now in exile in South Africa. Many in Haiti and across the Caribbean believe the US had sought to remove Mr. Aristide, who was democratically elected.

Some worry Mr. Préval will invite Aristide to return, further destabilizing the fragile politics of the most impoverished country in the Americas. Préval has been noncommittal, perhaps out of political necessity: Aristide's supporters in the urban slums form Préval's political base as well.

But the quiet-spoken Préval, who earlier served a term as president from 1996 to 2001, has also charted an independent course. He ran not as a candidate of Aristide's Lavalas Party, but as the leader of his own new party, called Lespwa - Creole for "hope." In his previous term as president, he earned a reputation as that rare Haitian politician who actually improved the lives of the people through road- and school-building projects, land reform, and by keeping down the price of fertilizer - a vital commodity to peasant farmers.

For a nation beset by kidnappings, murders, and other violence, reports that slum gangs have said they would lay down their weapons once Préval took office is another hopeful sign.

Préval is also depicted as a man who speaks little but listens a lot - surely a plus in a nation that has more problems than answers. Haiti's proud past, winning independence from France in 1804, has since been marred by a series of coups and corrupt military dictatorships, culminating in the reign of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, whom Préval helped oust in 1986.

The US has long been involved in Haiti, including an occupation by US Marines from 1915 to 1934. Any further slip toward anarchy, and Americans could view a new humanitarian disaster unfolding on their TVs. That in turn could send thousands of desperate Haitians fleeing in boats toward a hope of haven in Florida.

Haiti urgently needs stability, and a period of reconciliation and dialogue between its political factions. Perhaps the first sign of hope was last week's election itself. For a country with little history of successful democracy, it was a hopeful sign.

Préval has indicated he will call on successful Haitians abroad for help.

Now the US and the United Nations, with 9,000 peacekeepers on the ground, must do their part. Haiti's problems won't be solved quickly. That's why the world and the US must commit to aid over the long haul - over many years, not months.

For the US, that's simply a matter of enlightened self-interest.

Counting Some of the Votes in Haiti

By Brian Concannon

Truthout.org

Wednesday 15 February 2006

Haiti's elections on February 7 went well enough that the post-election vote counting should have been uncontroversial. The turnout was huge, there was almost no violence, and the people's choice was so clear that the second place finisher received less than 12% of the vote. But incredibly, a week later the final results have not been declared, and the Electoral Council is in disarray. The voters have taken to the streets to protect their vote, and the clear winner is alleging fraud.

The battle lines have been drawn around the 50% of the total vote that former President Rene Preval needs to avoid a runoff election against his distant nearest challenger. Initial official results and unofficial reports had Mr. Preval comfortably above that bar, but his official numbers crept steadily downward over the last week. As of Tuesday morning, with 90% of the votes counted, Mr. Preval was stuck at 48.7%, 22,586 votes shy of outright victory.

What's at Stake

In a better world, Mr. Preval would be happy to go into a runoff with a 48.7% share, assured that he could attract 1.3% of the voters more easily than his opponent, Leslie Manigat, could attract 38%. Mr. Manigat might even save his country time and money by conceding an obviously futile contest. But this is Haiti, where electoral support does not always translate into political power. Mr. Preval and his supporters know that the vote only came close to 50% because the votes of Haiti's poor - who overwhelmingly voted for Mr. Preval - had been systematically suppressed through a series of irregularities, from the voter registration last summer through election day. They draw a line from this vote suppression through questionable tabulation practices and see it pointing toward a second round somehow stolen from them.

Mr. Manigat may have Haiti's history on his side, if not Haiti's voters. He knows from experience that there are many routes to Haiti's presidency, not all of them requiring electoral support. He ran in the first elections under Haiti's current constitution, in November 1987, and was projected to run a distant third at best. But the army and paramilitaries stopped the voting by firing at voting centers, killing at least 34 people. Two months later the army ran new elections. The candidates with democratic convictions called a boycott of the charade, which the voters supported. But Mr. Manigat, Hubert de Ronceray (who won less than 1% this year) and one other candidate threw their hats in the ring, and the army declared Manigat its president.

Last week's election was Haiti's fourth presidential election since 1990. The previous three - 1990, 1995 and 2000 - were all conducted without serious violence. Each time, the voters delivered a landslide to the candidate of the Lavalas political movement - no runner-up ever topped 16% of the vote. But each time, a minority in Haiti - usually with outside support - successfully limited this mandate. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the victor in the first and third of those elections, suffered two successful coup d'états, and spent half of his two terms in exile. President Preval managed to spend his whole term in office and pass power to an elected successor (the first Haitian president to do so), but a manufactured political crisis and perpetual squabbling about the extent of the Lavalas

landslides prevented the seating of a legislature. More important, the crisis successfully diverted President Preval's energies and attention from the economic and social development policies he was elected to implement.

Mr. Preval did not run this year under the banner of the Fanmi Lavalas party, but with a brand-new party, Lespwa (Hope). Fanmi Lavalas boycotted the elections because the Interim Government of Haiti (IGH) refused to stop its persecution of the party, which included jailing dozens of political opponents, attacking anti-IGH protests, and mounting murderous police raids in the poor neighborhoods that were the party's strongholds.

But Preval's victory was nonetheless delivered by the Lavalas base. Voters said as much to anyone who would listen as they waited to vote, afterward, and in this week's demonstrations. More tellingly, Preval won his landslide with almost no institutional support or even campaigning. The Espwa party is brand new, fielding candidates in barely half of the senatorial races. Preval received almost no formal endorsements, and did not even speak publicly until the last weeks of the campaign. He planned very few rallies, and many of these were cancelled after two events were violently attacked. But despite these handicaps, he won a landslide because the Lavalas base voted overwhelmingly for him (candidate Marc Bazin claimed the Lavalas mantle, but had the support of neither the party's top leadership nor its base, and won less than 1% of the vote).

Pre-Election Vote Suppression

The IGH engaged in a comprehensive program to suppress Lavalas political activities in the ten months before the elections. Several prominent politicians were not able to participate, as candidates or activists, because they were kept in jail illegally, including Haiti's last constitutional Prime Minister, a former member of the House of Deputies, the former Minister of the Interior, and dozens of other local officials and grassroots activists. When Haiti's most prominent dissident, Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, was diagnosed with leukemia, it took a massive campaign, including intervention of top US Republicans, just to obtain his provisional release for desperately needed treatment.

Making Registration Difficult

The voting registration process systematically discouraged poor rural and urban voters from signing up. Where Haiti's democratic government provided over 10,000 voter registration centers for elections in 2000, the IGH installed less than 500. The offices would have been too few and far between for many voters, even if they had been evenly distributed. But placement was heavily weighted in favor of areas likely to support the IGH and its allies. Halfway through the registration period, for example, there were three offices in the upscale suburb of Petionville, and the same number in the large and largely roadless Central Plateau Department. In cities, the poor neighborhoods were the last to get registration centers, and Cite Soleil, the largest poor neighborhood of all, never got one.

Complaints and protests forced the IGH to extend the registration period three times and open additional registration facilities. Eventually, over 3.5 million voters registered, about three quarters of the estimated eligible voters. But we will never know how many voters could not get to a registration center, or gave up after losing too many precious work days in the effort. We do know that the

registration difficulties disproportionately impacted the rural and urban poor, who voted overwhelmingly for Preval.

Making Campaigning Difficult

Neither Lavalas nor the Preval campaign was able to effectively engage in pre-election campaigning. Police repeatedly fired guns at peaceful pro-Lavalas demonstrations throughout the two years of the IGH's reign. In January, a pro-government gang destroyed structures erected for a Preval campaign speech in the town of St. Marc, cancelling the event. No arrests were made. Violence and threats of violence forced the cancellation of subsequent events, even the campaign's grand finale the week before the election.

Election Day Vote Suppression

The IGH had limited the voting centers to 807, which would have been inadequate even if the elections had run smoothly (Los Angeles County, with a slightly larger population but only 37% of Haiti's land area and infinitely better private and public transportation had about 4,400 polling places in November 2005). But by 1:00 p.m. on election day, Reuters' headline read: "Chaos, fraud claims mar Haiti election." Most election offices opened late and lacked ballots or other materials; many did not become fully functional until mid-afternoon. Voters arrived at the designated centers to find the center had been moved at the last minute. Many who found the center identified on their voting card waited in line for hours only to be told they could not vote because their names were not on the list. At some centers, tens of thousands of voters were crammed into a single building, creating confusion, and in one case a deadly stampede.

As with the registration deficiencies, the poor bore the lion's share of the election day problems. The two voting centers for Cite Soleil, both located well outside the neighborhood, saw the worst. One of the two, the Carrefour Aviation site, was transferred at the last minute to a single building where 32,000 voters had to find the right line to wait in without posted instructions, lists of names or an information center. Throughout the day, journalists and observers noted over and over that centers in Petionville and other wealthy areas were better organized and equipped.

As with registration, many voters persevered despite the obstacles. After frustrated would-be voters took to the streets in spontaneous protests, the IGH made concessions, such as keeping the polls open later and allowing people with voting cards whose names were not on the local list to vote in some places. By the end of the day, most voting centers were operating at a minimal level, and over 60% of registered voters did vote. But we will never know how many people gave up, because they were sick or frustrated or needed to get back to their families.

Counting Some of the Votes

After the problems with registration and voting, Mr. Preval's supporters were pleasantly surprised that the CEP gave him a large lead in initial reports. On Thursday, the CEP announced that with 22% of the votes counted, Preval had a commanding lead with 62% of the vote. Mr. Manigat trailed at 11%, and Charles Henri Baker, in third place, had 6%. Unofficial reports of the local results from

international and Haitian observers and journalists consistently had Preval far over 50%. But by Saturday night the Preval's official vote had decreased to 49.61%, and by Monday it was at 48.7%.

The IGH claims that Preval's decrease was the result of more information coming in and better calculations. But many questions about the tabulation process, combined with the efforts to suppress the Lavalas vote before and during election day, raise doubts about those claims. On Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Preval claimed that he had proof that he won 54% of the vote, and that the Electoral Council fraudulently reduced his number. Shortly after Mr. Preval's announcement, Haitian television broadcast such proof: thousands of ballots, most of them Preval votes, dumped in a remote area near Cite Soleil.

Who's In Charge?

The Electoral Council is supposed to be running the counting, but it is not. Jacques Bernard was appointed "Executive Director" of the Council - a position not previously recognized in Haitian law - by the Prime Minister late last year. He is running the show and has kept regular Council members out of the counting room. Councilor Pierre Richard Duchemin charges "manipulation," and "an effort to stop people from asking questions." Another Councilor, Patrick Fequiere, claims that Mr. Bernard is working without the Council and not telling them where his information is coming from. The UN Peacekeeping mission was forced to remove the doors to the tabulation center to prevent Mr. Bernard and his advisors from acting secretly.

Uncounted Votes

A large number of tally sheets from polling centers are not being counted. 254 sheets were destroyed, reportedly by gangs from political parties opposed to Preval. 504 tally sheets reportedly lack the codes needed to enter them officially. The missing tally sheets probably represent about 190,000 votes - over 9% of the total votes cast - and according to the UN, disproportionately affect poor areas that support Preval.

Null and Blank Votes

Electoral officials have also discarded 147,765 votes, over 7% of the total, as "null." Article 185 of the Electoral Code allows officials to nullify ballots if they "cannot recognize the intention or political will of the elector." The Presidential ballots were complicated - 33 candidates, each with a photo, an emblem and the names of the candidate and the party. Some Haitian voters, unused to filling out forms or writing, undoubtedly made mistakes - like marking two boxes - that made determining their choice impossible. But 147,765 voided votes is a lot, especially when that decision was made by local officials handpicked by an Electoral Council that had no representation from Lavalas or Lespwa. Overly strict criterion (such as requiring an "x" to be completely within a candidate's box), even if neutrally applied, would have a disproportionate impact on Preval voters, who are more unused to filling out forms than their better-heeled compatriots, and therefore more likely to make mistakes.

Another group of votes, 85,290 - or 4.6% - are classified as blank ballots. These votes are actually counted against Preval, because they are included in the total number of valid votes that provides the baseline for the 50% threshold. This is a potentially reasonable system, just unreasonably applied to

Haiti. It allows voters to show their displeasure with all the candidates by voting for no one. It makes sense in wealthy countries, but it is absurd to think that 85,000 people would leave their babies, their fields and other work and spend hours walking or waiting in the tropical heat just to say they did not like any of the 33 candidates. A more likely explanation is that illiterate voters got confused by the complicated ballots and marked nothing. Again, this problem would disproportionately affect poor voters likely to vote for Preval. But even if it did not - if the blank votes were allocated to candidates based on their percentage of other votes - Preval would clear 50%.

The blank and null ballots combined exceeded Mr. Manigat's vote by 17,000. The rules for blank and null votes are consistent with previous Haitian elections, so it is hard to call the rules themselves fraudulent. But the scale of the distortion of the vote caused by these rules was both foreseeable and preventable. The same problem has arisen at every election since 1990, most of which were observed by the UN and the Organization of American States, which were active in preparing the elections this time around. The distortion could be sharply reduced with a simple voter education campaign: going into poor neighborhoods, showing how to mark ballots and giving voters an opportunity to practice on sample ballots. There was money available for such a program - the election cost over \$70 million dollars, most of it coming from abroad, more than \$30 for every vote cast. The political parties, many of which represented a fraction of one percent of the electorate, received generous subsidies. But no concerted effort was made to help the much larger share of the voters who had demonstrated difficulty with filling out the ballots.

Foxes Guarding the Henhouse

Although there are international observers on the ground, they do not reassure Haitian voters. The observation delegations are organized and funded by the US, Canada and France, the three countries that led the overthrow of Haiti's Constitutional government in February 2004. With good reason, Haitians wonder whether countries that spent millions of dollars two years ago to remove the president they elected will make much effort to install their latest choice. The Bush administration fanned the fires of distrust last Friday, just as concerns about the count were rising, by signaling its continued intention to intervene in Haiti's affairs. White House spokesperson Scott McLellan publicly warned Mr. Preval that if he is installed as president, he should not allow President Aristide back from his exile in South Africa. The US, obviously, has no right to tell another country not to let a citizen return. In this case, Mr. Preval, even as president, would not have the right to exclude Mr. Aristide: as Mr. Preval has noted, Haiti's constitution prohibits involuntary exile.

Taking the Streets

Haiti's voters may be inexperienced in filling out forms, but they have seen enough stolen elections to qualify as world-class experts in the field. They can trace the pattern from registration through election day to the current calculations, and they can see their votes discounted at every step. They know that they did enough to win according to the rules of the game, which they believe in. But they know that voting, in Haiti, is not enough, so they are now out in the streets by the thousands, erecting barricades, protesting, even occupying the pool at the luxurious Montana Hotel, where the votes are counted and the journalists and other expatriates are lodged.

The IGH and the US government have responded by calling on Preval to call off the protests. He implored his supporters not to damage people or property, but also recommended that they keep demonstrating until the IGH stops trying to steal the election. Haiti's voters will undoubtedly take this recommendation. They have done their job in marking their ballots, but know that they need to keep fighting to ensure that the IGH counts them.

By Tuesday afternoon, many of the other candidates, including fourth place finisher Jean Chavannes Jeune, had called on Manigat to bow out, but he refused. Under pressure, the IGH agreed to name a special commission, with one representative each from the Executive Branch, the Electoral Council and the Espwa party to go over the results. As of Wednesday morning, the standoff over another landslide victory continued, with Haitian voters once again in the streets, shouting: "veye yo"- "watch them."

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Editorial: Suspect vote in Haiti
Feb. 15, 2006
The Toronto Star

Canada let Haiti's democrats down in 2004 when Ottawa refused to send troops to prevent the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, from being driven into exile.

Now, as Haitians elect a successor under the eyes of more than 100 Canadian and other international monitors, democrats contend they are being betrayed again.

The frontrunner in the Feb. 7 election, René Préval, a popular former Aristide loyalist, yesterday complained that a "gigantic fraud" may prevent him from winning outright.

He is not alone. Pierre Richard Duchemin, who sits on Haiti's nine-member electoral council, says "manipulation" marred the process.

And thousands of angry Haitians have marched and threatened to torch the capital on Préval's behalf.

Given this turmoil, Prime Minister Stephen Harper now looks hasty in sending premature "congratulations" to Haiti's 8.5 million people.

And election scrutineers do not look any better. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the Canadian who heads the International Mission for Monitoring Haitian Elections, last week flatly discounted the likelihood of fraud.

Yet the issue of fraud has now been raised. By the frontrunner.

Yet the monitors remain oddly mute. We should hear from them.

Canada has 150,000 residents of Haitian origin. We have given \$180 million in aid and have 125 police there to help train the local force.

Préval is Haiti's best hope for restoring some political and economic order two years after Aristide was forced out by a tiny elite. If Préval is being subverted, we should care.

Yesterday, with 90 per cent of ballots counted, Préval had 48.7 per cent, just shy of a 50 per cent plus one outright win. Leslie Manigat ran far behind with 11.8 per cent.

Yet of 2.2 million votes cast, 5 per cent were declared invalid, fuelling fear that Préval was cheated out of the percentage point and a bit he needed. Another 4 per cent of ballots were blank but were still counted, making it harder for Préval to win. He now faces a March 19 runoff vote.

But rather than issue breezy assurances that the vote went well, Canada's monitors should take a hard look at this process. They must explain how Préval's initial 60 per cent lead withered, why many ballots were invalidated and why the last 10 per cent of ballots still have not been counted a week after the vote.

Canada sent observers to show that we stand for "freedom, democracy, the rule of law," Harper said.

If Haitians have been betrayed again, the world had better know.

Haiti Orders Election Fraud Investigation

February 15, 2006

Hector Duarte Jr.

All Headline News

Port-au-Prince, Haiti (AHN) – Haiti’s interim government orders an investigation into allegations of fraud during last week’s presidential election, as front runner Rene Preval claims “massive fraud” was the likely culprit of his not receiving a clear victory during the first round.

Preval warned Haitians would continue to take to the streets if partial poll results, which indicate the need for a second round, are published as the final tally.

In the meantime, the government has banned the publication of full results until the investigation wraps.

Tuesday night, local Haitian TV footage appeared to show hundreds of smoldering ballots at a Port-au-Prince garbage dump. Many of these ballots appeared to favor Preval.

Crowds of protestors filled the streets later, shouting Preval’s name and decrying the alleged fraud.

Reuters reports there will be an investigation into the apparent dumping of ballots.

“Made in the USA” election crisis in Haiti

By Bill Van Auken

World Socialist Website, wsws.org

15 February 2006

The front-runner in Haiti’s election charged Tuesday that the vote count—now entering its second week—was plagued by “gross errors and probably gigantic fraud.” The totals being reported by the country’s electoral council “do not correspond with reality,” he said.

Former Haitian president Rene Preval made the accusations in the wake of mass protests Monday that saw two Haitians gunned down by United Nations “stabilization” troops and the capital of Port-au-Prince paralyzed by demonstrations and burning barricades.

The political crisis ignited by the prolonged delay in announcing the results of the February 7 election has brought the impoverished Caribbean country to the brink of civil war. There are strong indications that this is precisely the intention of the US-backed figures from within Haiti’s right-wing political class who control the ballot tabulation.

The Haitian people are entirely justified in believing that the election is being rigged by Washington to impose US policy on the island nation. In February 2004, the US orchestrated a bloody coup by ex-soldiers, criminals and death squad leaders to oust President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was kidnapped by American operatives and forced into exile. Washington then sent in the US Marines, who have since been replaced by some 9,500 blue-helmeted UN troops. The one party that enjoyed mass support, Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas, has been outlawed since the coup, with its prominent members imprisoned, exiled or forced into hiding.

Having used violence and military force to overthrow an elected government that it opposed, the Bush administration has no compunction about employing fraud and provocation to shape the kind of regime it wants in Port-au-Prince. After all, similar methods for stealing an election were used to install George W. Bush in the White House in the first place.

Seven days after millions of Haitians went to the polls, the ballot count has inexplicably ground to a halt. There is no dispute that Preval was the overwhelming victor in the election, winning at least four times as many votes as his nearest rival. The issue is the attempt by those opposed to Preval to deny him an outright majority and thereby force the election into a second round next month.

While initially vote totals had Preval sweeping the election with over 61 percent of the vote, as the count has dragged on his percentage has precipitously fallen to just below the 49 percent mark—a shift that is widely attributed to the throwing out of tens of thousands of ballots from the impoverished shantytown neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, which voted massively for the ex-president. In addition, some 72,000 blank ballots were reportedly added to the total, thereby diluting Preval’s lead.

Pierre Richard Duchemin, the Catholic Church’s representative on the electoral council, and Patrick Requiere, another council member, both charged Sunday that the results of the election were being manipulated to deny Preval a clear-cut victory.

While the US State Department has signaled that it is willing to work with Preval, who during his 1996-2001 presidency faithfully implemented a draconian structural adjustment program dictated by the International Monetary Fund, his election by a landslide was by no means a welcome development in Washington.

The vote, which saw a powerful turnout by Haiti's oppressed masses, represented a stinging repudiation of US policy and, above all, the 2004 coup that toppled Aristide, whose populist rhetoric made him anathema, both to the Bush administration and the Haitian oligarchy.

Among Haiti's privileged classes, Preval's former ties to Aristide made him suspect, at best. Their favored candidate, sweatshop owner Charles Henri Baker, who garnered barely 5 percent of the vote, has vowed to challenge the election and to prevent Preval from taking office.

US officials have pressed Preval to give them a guarantee that he will not allow Aristide to return from exile in South Africa and that he will bring his political opponents into the government. Forcing a second round would provide Washington and its right-wing Haitian allies with political leverage either to compel Preval to accept their dictates or, failing that, to unleash a campaign of violent destabilization similar to that utilized to oust Aristide two years ago.

There are in all probability differences within the Bush administration over what course to pursue in Haiti. In an article published January 29, the New York Times cited past "ideological wars and partisan rivalries" in Washington over how to deal with the Aristide government. Extreme right-wing elements with ties to the anti-Castro Cuban exile groups, like Otto Reich, who was appointed the State Department's top official for Latin America, supported Aristide's overthrow, just as they had sought to overthrow Venezuela's elected president, Hugo Chavez, two years earlier. Other State Department professionals had warned that such a coup would only throw Haiti into chaos.

The Times report detailed the operations of the International Republican Institute (IRI), a Republican Party-linked body that is a constituent part of the National Endowment for Democracy, the agency created by Congress in the 1980s to carry on the kind of US political operations that were previously conducted by the CIA.

The IRI, working with elements like Baker and fellow sweatshop owner Andy Apaid, organized in the Group 184, poured in money and advisors to destabilize the Aristide government and pave the way to the violent coup of 2004. No doubt, these extreme right-wing Republican ideologues are just as opposed to Preval taking power as their Haitian allies.

While the Bush administration has claimed to be pursuing a global crusade for democracy and, together with the US media, portrayed elections held under US military occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq as major achievements, it has drawn no such attention to the chaotic process in Haiti.

The Haitian developments expose all too clearly what the US ruling elite means by democracy. The gross manipulation of the election is only the latest episode in a long history of oppression dating back to the US invasion of Haiti in 1915, the 20-year occupation that followed, and Washington's subsequent support for the Duvalier dynasty, which ruled the country through naked terror for three decades.

The “democracy” that Washington is exporting begins and ends with the establishment of regimes that allow the unhindered domination of US-based multinationals over all facets of the economic and political life of their countries.

To the extent that the people seek to express their democratic aspirations by voting against US interests, Washington is prepared to use more violent or coercive methods to achieve its aims. Significantly, even as the vote-rigging drama was unfolding in Port-au-Prince, the New York Times reported Tuesday that the Bush administration and Israel were drafting plans to destabilize and topple the newly elected Palestinian government controlled by Hamas by starving the Palestinian people into submission.

In Haiti, a century of US domination has yielded a social catastrophe, with two thirds of the population of 8 million somehow surviving on less than a dollar a day, 80 percent unemployment, and a life expectancy of barely 51 years. It has also produced extreme social inequality, with a tiny ruling elite that is prepared to utilize the bloodiest forms of terror to defend its privileges.

The fight for genuine democracy in Haiti, as elsewhere in the world, must inevitably take the path of confrontation with US imperialism and its local allies. The bitter lesson of the Aristide presidencies is that such a struggle cannot be waged on a nationalist basis, but rather requires a unified struggle of the workers and oppressed masses of Haiti, the Caribbean and the United States itself against global capitalism.

Organizations mount campaign against UN mission in Haiti

Thaís Leitão

Agência Brasil

February 15, 2006

Rio - Organizations and social movements that participated in the World Social Forum in Venezuela last month have launched a Haitian Solidarity Campaign. The activists demand the withdrawal of international troops from that country, cancellation of its foreign debt, and nonrenewal of the mandate of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which the UN Security Council extended, yesterday (14), for another six months.

"The MINUSTAH is a complete failure. It has been unable to achieve its goals, which are to train the police, disarm the population, and guarantee the election. In 18 months of activity, only 265 arms were picked up, the police isn't being trained, and the troops that operate in the country don't even speak the local language. Moreover, the election is beset by confusion," declared Sandra Quintela, one of the coordinators of the campaign.

In her opinion, what is needed in Haiti is professional help from doctors and social workers, for example, not the armed presence of military troops. "They have intellectuals and organized social movements and can put together a structure without losing their national sovereignty. History shows that the Haitian people are capable of struggling," she said.

The MINUSTAH was established on April 30, 2004, by Security Council Resolution 1542. The military mission, which is commanded by Brazil, is in Haiti to provide security to the country under the provisional government. Argentina, Sri Lanka, Jordan, Uruguay, and Peru are the other countries besides Brazil that are contributing troops to the mission.

According to João Luís Pinaud, a lawyer and member of the Brazilian Bar Association's (OAB) Human Rights Council, the presence of the mission represents an act of cruelty against Haiti and the Brazilian troops who are there. In his view, the troops "are lost."

The Brazilian Army's press office stated that troops are maintained in Haiti by determination of the UN. It also denied that the 1200 Brazilian soldiers stationed there are facing such problems as being abandoned by Haitian government officials. The MINUSTAH press adviser, David Wimhurst, said that the mission has fulfilled its role and is striving to ensure the safety of the population and the transition to an elected government.

Translation: David Silberstein

UN mission in Haiti will be extended

Aloisio Milani

Agência Brasil

February 15, 2006

Brasília – The UN Security Council has voted to extend its Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah) for another six months. Minustah, which is led by a Brazilian general, was originally set up to bring some order to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country after its elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown in February 2004. Minustah was supposed to terminate its mission after elections took place.

General elections finally took place last week in Haiti (after being postponed a number of times due to continuing disorder). But the vote count has still not been concluded and there is a possibility of a need for a runoff election to decide who will be the next president. In light of those facts, the UN Security Council decided it was prudent to keep its stabilization force in the country.

UN country-members who have troops in Minustah are free to decide if they want to remain. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva recently stated that he intends to keep Brazilian troops in Haiti until there is a new government and it is "consolidated." At the moment there are more than 9,500 soldiers and poliemen in Haiti as part of Minustah. Approximately 1,200 are Brazilian soldiers.

Translation: Allen Bennett

15/02/2006

UN Security Council calls for stability in post-election Haiti
China View News
February 16, 2006

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 15 (Xinhuanet) -- The UN Security Council on Wednesday called on all the Haitian people to refrain from violence as the results of the election are tabulated and reviewed.

In a press statement read out by Council President John Bolton of the United States, the council called on the Haitian people to uphold their commitment to democracy and the rule of law manifest in their peaceful participation in the vote of Feb. 7 by refraining from violence.

"They urge all Haitians with concerns or questions about possible post-electoral irregularities to pursue these peacefully and legally with the Haitian electoral authorities immediately, and they call on those authorities to fully investigate those charges," Bolton noted.

The council reiterated their call for all Haitians to respect the results of the election when they are announced and to remain engaged in the political process, he added.

Haiti is now facing mounting tensions due to allegations of fraud in the elections. Protests erupted when election results indicated candidate Rene Preval did not get 50 percent of the vote needed to secure victory in the first round.

Election Material Found in Haitian Dump

By ANDREW SELSKY

Associated Press Writer

The Herald Tribune, SW Florida

February 15, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- U.N. police went to a garbage dump near the Haitian capital Wednesday to recover election materials, including numbered bags apparently used to carry results and tally sheets, amid charges that last week's presidential election was marred by fraud.

Thousands of ballots, including some that were marked, also were strewn over about an acre at the dump.

Associated Press reporters saw hundreds of empty ballot boxes, at least one vote tally sheet and several empty bags - numbered and signed by the heads of polling stations - strewn across the fly-infested dump five miles north of Port-au-Prince.

"That's extraordinary," U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said.

Catherine Sung, a U.N. electoral adviser who works at the main vote tabulation center, said the discovery of empty bags was troubling because they were not supposed to be thrown out.

When shown photographs of the bags, Sung said three of them were the kind used to carry invalid and blank ballots.

"They're supposed to be kept," she told the AP.

Leading candidate Rene Preval has alleged that the Feb. 7 vote was marred by "massive fraud or gross errors" designed to leave him just short of the majority needed for a first-round victory. Preliminary results from the first election since Jean-Bertrand Aristide's ouster two years ago showed Preval, a former Aristide protege, with a sizable lead.

A wave of chaotic protests by Preval supporters sent foreign diplomats scrambling for peaceful solutions. Preval, a former president, has urged the protesters to continue peacefully.

Ambassadors from countries "directly involved in the crisis" were discussing a Brazilian plan to persuade other candidates to recognize Preval's victory and prevent a mass uprising, according to Marco Aurelio Garcia, foreign affairs adviser to Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council urged Haitians to respect election results and refrain from violence, and it extended the Brazilian-led U.N. peacekeeping mission for six months through Aug. 15.

The United Nations provided security for the vote and helped ship election returns to the capital, but it is not directly involved in counting ballots.

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. Gangs have gone on kidnapping sprees and factories have closed for lack of security.

Haiti's interim government ordered the vote count suspended with 90 percent tallied, pending a review of tally sheets by an investigative commission representing the president's office, the electoral council and Preval's party.

"We are looking closely at specimens of the ballots found at the dump, to check whether these are real ballots," said Michel Brunache, chief of staff of interim President Boniface Alexandre.

The ballots were being examined by the judiciary because the investigating commission had not been formed, he said.

But Max Mathurin, the electoral council president, said Wednesday that election workers were ignoring the government order and continuing to tabulate results.

"The government and the established commission can't under any circumstances ask or order the cancellation of the operations," Mathurin told Radio Metropole.

Workers have completed 92 percent of the vote count, he added without disclosing any more information. Mathurin also denied that the electoral commission had manipulated the vote count.

"We're working transparently," he said.

Of the 2.2 million ballots cast, about 125,000 ballots have been declared invalid because of irregularities, raising suspicions among Preval supporters. Another 4 percent were blank but were still added into the total, making it harder for Preval to obtain a majority.

The most recent results posted on the electoral council's Web site Monday showed Preval had 48.76 percent of the vote, with 90 percent of ballots counted. He would need 50 percent plus one vote to win outright.

Another former president, Leslie Manigat, was in second place with 11.8 percent of the vote.

Preval has vowed to challenge the results if officials insist on holding a March runoff. Haiti's constitution indicates that a challenge would go to the Supreme Court, but the interim government recently decreed that any complaints should go to the electoral commission - the same body accused of manipulating the results.

Late Tuesday, the local Telemax TV news broadcast images from the dump north of the capital showing smashed white ballot boxes with wads of ballots strewn about. Ballot after ballot was marked for Preval.

The materials seen by the AP at the dump included one vote tally sheet from the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Carrefour that recorded 129 votes for Preval out of 202 cast.

A man picking through the dump, Jean-Ricot Guerrier, said the material was dumped by a truck the day after the election, and someone tried to burn the material before rainfall put out the fire.

Associated Press reporter Stevenson Jacobs contributed to this report.

No Filipino peacekeeper hurt in Haiti violence -- envoy
Feb 15, 2006
By Veronica Uy
INQ7.net , Philippines

NO Filipino peacekeeper in Haiti was hurt in Monday's poll-related violence in the Haiti capital of Port-au-Prince, the Philippine Mission to the United Nations said Wednesday.

In his report to Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, Ambassador Lauro Baja Jr., permanent representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, said that all 214 military and police peacekeepers in Haiti were safe.

"No harm befell our peacekeepers during Monday's violent protests in Port-au-Prince," Baja said, quoting reports from Colonel Cesar Dionisio Sedillo, commanding officer of the 3rd Philippine Contingent, and Superintendent Lester Camba, commanding officer of the Philippine civilian police contingent.

In Port-au-Prince Monday, news reports said that thousands of angry protesters took to the streets, demanding that frontrunner Rene Preval be declared the winner of last week's presidential election. They burned barricades and stormed a luxury hotel.

said at least two people were killed and several were injured in gunfire initially blamed on UN peacekeepers but which a UN spokesman disputed.

Baja said the Philippines had 185 troops and 29 civilian police officers that serve under the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by its French acronym MINUSTAH.

He said the Filipino contingent accounted for the biggest number of peacekeepers among the eight UN peace missions in Haiti.

The ambassador said Filipino troops served in the Force Headquarters Support Unit and were responsible for securing the headquarters of MINUSTAH, as well as the residence of the Special Representative of the Secretary General and head of MINUSTAH, Ambassador Juan Gabriel Valdes, and the Le Plaza Hotel which houses MINUSTAH personnel. All are located in Port-au-Prince.

Civilian police officers are helping in reforming and restructuring the Haitian National Police.

In April, a Filipino peacekeeper, Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque, was killed when UN peacekeepers were attacked by gangmen in Port-au-Prince. He was the first Filipino peacekeeper to die in combat.

Haiti marks time as election fraud claims probed

By Joseph Guyler Delva and Jim Loney

Feb. 15, 2006

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - The counting of ballots in Haiti's presidential election ground to a halt more than a week after the vote as the authorities on Wednesday bowed to a demand by the top candidate for a fraud inquiry.

Thousands protested after charred and still smoldering ballots were found on a garbage dump in Port-au-Prince, reinforcing the claims of fraud leveled by Rene Preval, a former president opposed by the same wealthy elite who helped drive Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile two years ago.

With 90 percent of ballots counted, Preval held an insurmountable lead at 48.7 percent, just shy of the simple majority needed to avoid a runoff in March in which several of his rivals have vowed to join forces to defeat him.

Michel Brunache, chief of staff for President Boniface Alexandre, said the interim government had asked the Provisional Electoral Council not to publish final election results until a commission composed of council members and aides to Preval had reviewed Preval's allegations.

"We have people who are angry, who are ready to set the country on fire," Brunache said.

How long it would take to conduct a review of the vote count was unclear.

But the review alone was not enough to prevent street protests, as happened on Monday, when Port-au-Prince was brought to a standstill by angry Preval supporters and impromptu roadblocks.

Crowds poured out on Wednesday from slums like Cite Soleil and Belair, where Preval has won the same passionate support among Haiti's poor masses that formed the backbone of Aristide's political power.

Waving burned ballot papers and ballot boxes found in the dump, the protesters chanted, "Look what they did with our votes," as they marched past the U.S., Canadian and French embassies.

Brazil, whose military is leading the U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, urged that Preval be declared the winner, for fear the situation would deteriorate.

"Considering the existing climate in the country, that would be the best solution," President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's chief foreign relations adviser, Marco Aurelio Garcia, told reporters in Brasilia.

Canada, a major aid donor, said it was troubled but was optimistic the fraud allegations would be dealt with.

"We knew just from the appearance of the process that the potential was there and that was everyone's worst fear," Foreign Minister Peter MacKay told Reuters.

The U.N. Security Council reiterated a call for calm and called for a full investigation.

BLANK BALLOTS

Preval said on Tuesday that "massive fraud" had kept him from winning an outright first-round victory. He provided no details or evidence.

A distant second, with 11.8 percent, was Leslie Manigat, another ex-president whose brief tenure in 1988 -- as has been the case all too often in Haiti's two turbulent centuries of independence -- was interrupted by a military coup.

Max Mathurin, president of the electoral council, said he hoped the commission would rapidly resolve the controversy.

"If there's fraud, it happened at the level of the polling stations, not at our level," Mathurin told local radio.

A large proportion of votes, 4.7 percent, were "blank," showing no choice for president among the 33 candidates. But they were included in accordance with the law in the total votes cast and therefore reduced the final percentage allocated to each candidate. Had the blanks not been included, Preval would have held more than 51 percent.

Preval on Tuesday cited a count by U.S. nonprofit group, the National Democratic Institute, as showing he had won 54 percent of the vote. But the NDI said its count had not included blank votes.

While blank votes are a common way to express a protest vote in sophisticated democracies, few in Haiti can imagine large numbers of their countrymen walking several miles (km) to polling stations and then waiting in line for up to eight hours simply to leave their ballots unmarked.

(Additional reporting by Irwin Arief, United Nations, and David Ljunggren, Ottawa)

Canada troubled by Haiti vote fraud allegations
Wed Feb 15, 2006
Reuters

OTTAWA - Canada, a major aid donor to Haiti, is troubled by allegations that last week's presidential election in the impoverished Caribbean nation was marred by fraud, Foreign Minister Peter MacKay said on Wednesday.

Counting of ballots stopped on Wednesday as Haitian electoral authorities bowed to a demand by Rene Preval, the leading candidate, for a fraud inquiry.

Thousands of people protested after charred ballots were found on a garbage dump. Some demonstrators chanted, "Look what they did with our votes," as they marched past the U.S., Canadian and French embassies.

"We've invested an enormous amount of both financial and political resources to helping with the democratic process in Haiti so it's troubling, to say the least, that these allegations have now emerged," MacKay said.

"We knew just from the appearance of the process that the potential was there and that was everyone's worst fear. (But) we're very hopeful and remain optimistic that this is going to be dealt with properly," he told Reuters in a phone interview.

Canada -- which donated C\$30 million (\$26 million) to help finance the election -- has a large community of immigrants from French-speaking Haiti and sent more than 100 monitors to oversee the vote.

In July 2004, Canada pledged more than C\$180 million in aid to Haiti over two years. It has also sent 100 police officers to help the United Nations stabilization mission based in the country.

(\$1=\$1.16 Canadian)

**Possible Evidence Of Vote Tampering Found In Haiti
Ballots Could Be Seen At Plain Site At Dumpster
Citizens And Journalists Were Going Through Them**

**Mike Kirsch
CBS4, South Florida
February 15, 2006**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

U.N. police rushed Wednesday to recover official voting bags, marked ballots and other election materials found in a garbage dump. Supporters of presidential candidate Rene Preval marched through the capital, claiming fraud.

CBS4's Mike Kirsch saw thousands of ballots, some marked for Preval, deep in the dump along with a vote tally sheet and four bags meant to carry returns from the Feb. 7 elections. The ballots were strewn everywhere, and citizens were going through them at the dump site, wondering what was going on and how they got there.

With 90 percent of the returns counted, Preval was just short of the majority needed for a first-round victory. He claimed Tuesday that "massive fraud or gross errors" had been committed and vowed to challenge the results if officials insist on holding a March runoff.

Local TV Tuesday night showed the discarded ballots at the dump. AP journalists who went to the fly-infested site Wednesday morning found the voting bags among the thousands of ballots, some marked, some blank. Three of the bags were signed by presidents of local election bureaus.

The discovery troubled U.N. officials because the bags were not supposed to be thrown out.

"They're supposed to be kept," U.N. official Catherine Sung, an electoral adviser who works at the main vote tabulation center, told the AP.

Shown photographs of the signed bags, Sung said they were meant to contain annulled and blank votes. The journalists also saw a green tally sheet of votes, but U.N. officials said that was not important because it was a copy of the original given to political party representatives.

Preval backers -- who have held massive demonstrations, erected barricades and stormed into a luxury hotel this week to protest alleged fraud -- said election officials were attempting to annul votes for him to force a runoff.

If some of the annulled ballots and the corresponding bags have been discarded, it could skew any possible recount. Asked if it was important the bags be retained and not thrown out, Sung said: "Yes, of course."

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said Tuesday night after the TV news images of the dumped ballots were shown that someone may have dumped the ransacked ballots to create an appearance of fraud.

When told by the AP Wednesday morning of the discovery of the bags and of a tally sheet at the site, he said: "That's extraordinary." U.N. police were dispatched to retrieve what they could.

Hundreds of people have been carrying away the election materials, some to brandish at street protests. The reeking dump is located more than two miles down a pitted dirt road from a paved highway. The election materials were strewn over at least two acres deep in the smoldering dump.

Jean-Ricot Guerrier, who lives near the site, said the election material was dumped by a truck the day after the election and that someone tried to burn the material before rainfall put out the fire. Impoverished children picking through the garbage found the ballots, he said.

"We've been trying to call the media about this for days, but no one came until yesterday," he said.

At the dump, Cilius Apolon, 33, walked over the discarded ballots and past smashed white plastic ballot boxes, and expressed disgust.

"I got up very early in the morning to vote last week," Apolon said. "This shows disrespect for the Haitian people."

The interim government said an investigation has been launched.

"We are looking closely at specimens of the ballots found at the dump, to check whether these are real ballots," said Michel Brunache, chief of staff to interim President Boniface Alexandre.

Meanwhile, foreign envoys were discussing a Brazilian plan to persuade the other candidates to recognize Preval's victory and thus prevent a mass uprising, according to Marco Aurelio Garcia, foreign affairs adviser to Brazil's president.

Some 7,300 U.N. troops and 1,750 international police are in the country under Brazilian command, helping maintain order. The U.N. mission replaced a U.S.-led force that arrived after an uprising toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

A popularly elected government with a clear mandate is seen as crucial to avoiding a political and economic meltdown in the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation. Gangs have gone on kidnapping sprees and factories have closed for lack of security.

Preval urged his followers Tuesday to continue protesting nonviolently. Scattered demonstrations occurred Wednesday in Port-au-Prince, with protesters waving Haitian flags and Preval posters.

Haiti's interim government ordered the count suspended with 90 percent of the votes tallied, pending a review of vote tally sheets by an investigative commission. But Max Mathurin, the electoral council president, said Wednesday that election workers were ignoring the government order and continuing to tabulate results.

"The government and the established commission can't under any circumstances ask or order the cancellation of the operations," Mathurin told Radio Metropole. Workers have completed 92 percent of the vote count, he added, while refusing to release any more information. "When everything is ready, we're going to publish the official results," he said.

Mathurin denied that the electoral council had manipulated the vote count. "We're working transparently. If Preval has 50 percent plus one vote, he will be the president. If that's not the case, there will be a second round."

The electoral council's latest published results show Preval -- a former president and agronomist -- having 48.76 percent of the vote with 90 percent of ballots counted. In second place was Leslie Manigat, also a former president, with 11.8 percent.

Hundreds of ballot boxes found in Haiti dump

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

Associated Press

CNN.com

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- Hundreds of smashed ballot boxes and bags apparently used to carry vote count sheets were scattered across a garbage dump Wednesday, more than a week after Haiti's disputed presidential elections.

U.N. officials sent troops to the garbage dump five miles north of the capital to recover the election material, according to U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst, who called the discovery "extraordinary."

Associated Press journalists saw hundreds of empty ballot boxes, at least one vote tally sheet and several empty bags, numbered and signed by the heads of polling stations, strewn across the fly-infested dump.

Leading candidate Rene Preval has alleged that election officials have undercounted his support in an effort to prevent him from winning a first-round victory.

Hours earlier, the local Telemax TV news broadcast images from the same dump showing smashed white ballot boxes with wads of ballots strewn about. Ballot after ballot was marked for Preval.

Among the bags seen by AP was one vote tally sheet from the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Carrefour that recorded 129 votes for Preval out of 202 cast.

A man picking through the dump, Jean-Ricot Guerrier, said a truck dumped the material a day after the election. Someone tried to burn the material, but rain put out the fire, he said.

Wimhurst said the ballots could have come from any of nine polling stations across the country that were ransacked on election day, forcing officials to throw out up to 35,000 votes. At least one voting center was destroyed by people tired of waiting in line, others were destroyed by political factions, he said.

Wimhurst also said it was possible someone dumped the ransacked ballots to create an appearance of fraud.

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Brazil Wants Preval Named Haiti Winner
By STEVENSON JACOBS, Associated Press Writer
Wed Feb 15, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Haiti's interim government ordered a review of the results from last week's presidential election after the leading candidate claimed the vote was marred by fraud and marked ballots were found strewn in a garbage dump.

Brazilian officials said Wednesday that they were seeking a way to end Haiti's crisis by having leading candidate Rene Preval recognized as the victor.

Haitian officials said on Tuesday a commission will be formed in the coming days to make a quick review of voter tally sheets from the Feb. 7 election that front-runner Preval said was marred by "massive fraud or gross errors." Preval said he would contest the results if he is denied a first-round victory.

When the most recent results were posted on Haiti's electoral council's Web site midday Monday, Preval — a former president and agronomist — had 48.76 percent of the vote with 90 percent of ballots counted. He would need 50 percent plus one vote to win outright and avoid a March runoff.

"The government wants to make sure that everything with the process is correct," interim Interior Minister Paul Magloire told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "We're going to review the results because we want to make sure what we have is right."

The review — the first step in investigating possible election fraud — will be conducted by a commission comprised of the president's office, the electoral council and Preval's party, said Michel Brunache, chief of staff of interim President Boniface Alexandre. No further election results will be released pending the outcome of the review.

"We are convinced that either massive fraud or gross errors stain the (electoral) process" Preval said, adding that the official results "do not correspond with reality."

In Brazil, the foreign affairs aide to President Luz Inacio Lula da Silva said Wednesday that ambassadors from several countries have proposed a solution that would have rival candidates recognize Preval's victory as a way to head off further disorder.

He said the diplomats involved were from nations "directly involved in the crisis there," such as the United States.

Brazil heads U.N. peacekeeping forces in Haiti.

Preval, the former protege of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide urged his mainly poor supporters to continue protesting peacefully. Tens of thousands of Preval backers have flooded the streets of the capital since Sunday burning tires and erecting barricades.

White U.N. armored vehicles on Tuesday shoved aside some roadblocks of junked cars, old refrigerators and other debris that were laid across the streets of the capital a day earlier. Businesses were shuttered, although street markets bustled with shoppers.

Preval called on supporters to remove the roadblocks so people could get to work.

"I ask the Haitian people ... to be mature, to be responsible, to be nonviolent," Preval told a news conference while sitting on a couch on the lawn of his gated home in the hills east of the capital.

But after nightfall, new roadblocks went up around the capital, slowing traffic.

Local Telemax TV news late Tuesday showed smashed white ballot boxes in a garbage dump, with large wads of ballots strewn about. Ballot after ballot was marked for Preval.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said the ballots could have come from any of nine polling stations, where a total of 35,000 votes could have been cast, that were trashed in several parts of the country on election day.

Wimhurst said in a telephone interview that someone could have dumped the ballots there to create an appearance fraud had been committed.

The electoral council issued a statement saying it will investigate the incident because it "could cause confusion in the electoral process."

An official with the European Union, which has election observers here, said the mission has refrained from commenting on the vote count.

"The situation is volatile and difficult, and we do not want to make any declaration," she said on condition of anonymity because she was not an official EU spokeswoman. The Canadian observer group also declined to comment.

The constitution indicates that a challenge would go to the Supreme Court, but the interim government recently decreed that any complaints should go to the electoral commission — the same body that is releasing the results.

The U.N. provided security for the vote and helped ship election returns to the capital but is not directly involved in counting ballots.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council urged Haitians to respect election results and refrain from violence, and it extended the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti for six months, until Aug. 15.

A runoff election would pit Preval against second-place finisher Leslie Manigat, also a former president, who received 11.8 percent of the vote. Manigat's wife, Myrlande Manigat, declined to say whether anyone had approached him about withdrawing.

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. Gangs have gone on kidnapping sprees and factories have closed for lack of security.

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 50 percent plus one vote needed

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Associated Press Writer Andrew Selsky contributed to this report.

Dean says U.S. needs to reach out to Latin America
By DENISE KALETTE
Associated Press Writer
The Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, Florida
Tuesday, February 14, 2006

MIAMI - Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean on Tuesday said the United States should reach out to Latin America with programs that encourage trade and reduce poverty.

Dean spoke to a crowd of about 300 students and supporters at Florida International University in Miami.

"We need to reach out. There are extraordinary opportunities and extraordinary things going on in Latin America," Dean said.

Dean added that he would support legislation proposed for the U.S. to invest in Latin America, in programs that would target minorities and women. Rep. Bob Menendez, D-N.J. has proposed creating a development fund of \$250 million to fight poverty in Latin America.

Dean said more goods bound for Latin America travel through Miami than any other U.S. city.

"This is an extraordinary city. It is the jumping off point for Latin America," he said of Miami.

Dean added that President George W. Bush missed an opportunity to improve relations with Latin American countries, despite a promise made to Mexican President Vicente Fox.

Dean also said he would support a policy that would allow Haitian migrants to remain in the U.S. until their country stabilizes, a policy now offered to migrants from some Central American countries, but not to Haitians.

The public is concerned about illegal immigration into the U.S., and the Bush administration has fueled fears by referring to immigration quotas, leading to concern that immigrants may take U.S. citizens' jobs, Dean said.

Danny Diaz, a spokesman for the Republican National Committee in Washington responded that Dean's remarks were misleading.

"I would say that Howard Dean's rhetoric is long on rhetoric and short on reality," Diaz said.

PBS Online NewsHour Focus
ELECTION PROTESTS IN HAITI
February 14, 2006

The recent Haitian presidential election was marked by riots and protests after revised election results showed that presidential candidate Rene Preval did not win enough votes to avoid a run-off election in March as was initially predicted.

RealAudio of this report

PBS: Wide Angle -- Haitian Elections

SPENCER MICHELS: Demonstrators took to the streets of Port-au-Prince today protesting the vote count in last week's presidential election.

Incomplete results show the leading candidate, Rene Preval getting just under 49 percent of the vote. That was significantly ahead of the runner up, Leslie Manigat but not enough to avoid a run-off next March. Last week initial returns showed Preval winning an outright majority.

The updated count sparked violent demonstrations yesterday in the capital as angry protesters got word of the results. Preval's supporters charged fraud. They set tires ablaze, erected barricades in the street and stormed hotels. Witnesses reported U.N. peacekeepers who have been in Haiti for a decade fired on the crowds, killing two people and wounding four.

U.N. officials at first denied those reports but later said the Jordanian peacekeepers shot into the air.

Today Preval announced he'd seen gross errors and probably gigantic fraud in the vote. He said the official count didn't match that of international observers.

RENE PREVAL, Presidential Candidate (Translated): Haitian people have shown a lot of enthusiasm. The provincial electoral council is taking too long to announce the results. At first, they announced one percentage, then day after day they have lowered them. If we compare those results with the National Democratic Institute, the observers and the international media, it would show clearly that the winner of this election is my party on the first round.

SPENCER MICHELS: A United Nations spokesman said there is no evidence of fraud in last week's election. Preval, the 63-year-old former prime minister, served under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was forced into exile two years ago. Preval enjoys wide support among Aristide's backers, most of them very poor.

The elections themselves were for the most part calm. Many Haitians faced long lines in the hot sun as some polling stations were overwhelmed. That was partly because ballot boxes were removed from the most violent areas of the capital. Last Tuesday's polling was postponed four times. It was the first election in five years.

Investigating fraud

GWEN IFILL: For more on the uncertainties in Haiti, we are joined by Alex Dupuy. He is professor of sociology and Latin American studies at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. A native of Port-au-Prince, he is the author of "Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution." He is now a U.S. citizen. James Dobbins was President Clinton's special envoy for Haiti from 1994 to 1996. He is now director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at Rand Corporation.

Mr. Dobbins, what is your reaction to what we just heard, the apparent likely perhaps, perhaps not President-elect Preval say about gigantic fraud in this election?

JAMES DOBBINS: Well, it may be an element of exaggeration there. On the other hand, you know there's a complete lack of trust in Haiti on all sides. And, unfortunately, it's all too often well grounded -- some degree of fraud possibly -- massive, I think there's probably enough international oversight so that would be caught.

On the other hand, if he's got 49 percent of the vote, there doesn't have to be a lot of fraud to have denied him the victory on the first ballot. And finally, there doesn't seem to be any doubt but that he would win on the second ballot.

GWEN IFILL: Professor Dupuy, what are the consequences when is someone like Mr. Preval raised these questions? He's a former president himself. He clearly has some bit of following there, and there has been some discontent so far about the early election results. Is he signaling people to protest?

ALEX DUPUY: Well, he said at his press conference today that he would not call off the protests by his supporters, but he did call on them to protest peacefully and to respect the law and not to violate other people's rights in the process.

It is clear that the discontent has to do with the discrepancy between the results announced by the independent electoral council, which is monitoring the elections and in charge of tabulating the returns and announcing the results, and the projections put forth by independent observers as Mr. Dobbins just mentioned and as the report also mentioned.

And Preval himself at his press conference claimed that he had enough evidence to show that he had won in the first round. So this is where the discontent is coming from. And his supporters feel that he's being robbed or deprived of the victory on the first round so that he would be forced then to go into a second round where, you know, all indications are that he would sweep the second round but the point is that they feel that he's already won and should be declared president.

Preval and Aristide

GWEN IFILL: How closely is Preval linked to Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Professor Dupuy, the former president who was of course driven from Haiti into exile?

ALEX DUPUY: Well, Mr. Preval was President Aristide's prime minister when Aristide was first elected in 1990. And of course Aristide was overthrown in a coup de etat seven months later in 1991 and Preval went with him into exile.

When they returned to Haiti in 1994, Preval became president in 1996 from 1996 to 2001. And many believe that he was still being manipulated by Aristide behind the scenes -- that Aristide was still running the show and Preval was presented as a rather weak president the first time around.

But since then I think he's been trying to distance himself from Aristide. He's in fact not run under the Lavalas banner but he formed his own party, called the Party of Hope, the Lespwa Party. And he's also made signals that he's not going to necessarily follow the dictates of Aristide or that Aristide will influence him in any way.

But, of course, his supporters have turned to him because they hope that he will be able to carry out some of the promises that Aristide made but never delivered. So it remains to be seen how in fact he can distance himself from Aristide if he becomes president.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Dobbins, how would you assess his connection to Aristide and, in general, what are western diplomats saying about what hangs in the balance here with this election?

JAMES DOBBINS: Well, I think he has somewhat distanced himself from Aristide. He certainly represents the same constituency. He's appealed -

GWEN IFILL: Who are -

JAMES DOBBINS: -- to the same segment of the population, which is the poor, the dispossessed and in Haiti, poor means desperately poor. When in office, I think those in the United States government who dealt with him found him personally to be honest and accessible if rather undynamic.

Aristide was still living in the country and clearly was exercising a good deal of influence, which limited Preval's freedom of action. That's not going to be the case this time around. And I think it's likely he will show more independence and perhaps will as a result prove to be more dynamic.

U.S. expectations

GWEN IFILL: We've had this conversation, Mr. Dobbins, over and over again about Haiti and about the future of Haiti at every political turn. Is this a political turn which could actually change the direction we've seen?

JAMES DOBBINS: I think it could. I mean, I think that the positive aspects of this election were first of all the turnout was much higher than anticipated, despite, you know, grave problems in registration and actually conducting the ballot; and the Haitian people deserve a lot of credit for having stood in line for hours and hours and turned out in the very large numbers.

Secondly, even though there's some dispute about the exact vote count, this is a pretty decisive election in which Preval outnumbers his closest opponent by 40 percent of the vote. So the result is whether they go to a second round or not going to be pretty clear cut.

And finally, and this is interesting I think, you have a Republican administration here which clearly would have preferred another outcome but which is nevertheless to its credit persevered in pushing the

necessity for elections even when it became clear they weren't going to be that pleased with the outcomes.

GWEN IFILL: Pardon me, what other outcome?

JAMES DOBBINS: Well, I think there were other candidates who represented more liberal democrat - liberal -

GWEN IFILL: Small "l."

JAMES DOBBINS: -- small "l." The business community people who were looking for market economy based solutions rather than the populist candidate that Preval was. That would have been more comfortable to Washington.

But I guess the point I'm make something that the administration has nevertheless supported holding these elections even when it became pretty clear they weren't going to be entirely delighted with the outcome; and if they do embrace the result, if they do congratulate Preval and try to work with him, then this result could overcome more than a decade of partisan division here in Washington which has bedeviled all of America's efforts to promote reconciliation in Port-au-Prince.

Rebuilding Haiti

GWEN IFILL: Professor Dupuy, is Haiti as a nation resistant in some ways to these kinds of outside intervention - nation building, if I can use that term?

ALEX DUPUY: Well, yes and no; that is, Haiti has been occupied before by the United States. The U.S. has interfered since it became the major player in Haiti. After it occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. It has interfered in Haitian political affairs, and there is a sense of intrusion and interference from the outside.

At the same time it is clear also and Preval has made it clear that the United Nations peacekeeping force would have to remain in Haiti for quite some time after the elections, if he becomes president and that the U.N. would be needed to help bring about peace and stability in their country.

So at the same time that there is a resentment in the external interference in Haitian affairs, there's also the recognition that Haiti needs the support of the international community and needs the support of the U.N. in order to probably establish peace and stability that are necessary for any sort of economic development to take place.

GWEN IFILL: Professor, you mentioned the United Nations' involvement. Is there any resentment or chafing on the ground about the continued presence of U.N. peacekeepers?

JAMES DOBBINS: Well, there has been, particularly on the part of the Aristide -- former -- supporters of former President Aristide who felt that they were being unduly targeted by the LoDolce government who did try to crack down on Aristide supporters in the slums of Port-au-Prince. But at the same time, without the presence of the peacekeeping forces, the situation might have gotten worse.

So as I said before, it's a sort of a two-way relationship. On the one hand, they would prefer not to have the presence of United Nations troops or any foreign troops on Haitian soil. On the other hand, they recognize a necessity of such presence in order for some stability to occur because the Haitian police is notoriously corrupt and repressive, and so with the U.N. presence, hopefully some better peacekeeping results can be obtained.

GWEN IFILL: Alex Dupuy, James Dobbins, thanks very much.

ALEX DUPUY: A pleasure.

JAMES DOBBINS: You're welcome.

Haiti gives Aristide ally a second chance

By Danna Harman

The Christian Science Monitor

from the February 14, 2006 edition

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI – Nearly a week after elections in Haiti, with the final votes still being counted, René Préval, a mild-mannered former president, was leading 33 candidates with 48.7 percent of the votes - a clear victory, but not the 50 percent needed to avoid a March 19 runoff.

As news of the outcome spread, thousands of Préval supporters took to the streets in the capital pounding drums, erecting roadblocks, and calling for a recount. They claim tens of thousands of Préval ballots had been invalidated so as to deny the candidate an outright win. "The electoral council is trying to do what it can to diminish the percentage of Préval so it goes to a second round," Jean-Henoc Faroul, president of one electoral district told The Associated Press.

But even with the vote almost certainly going to another round, Préval seems most likely to become Haiti's next leader. With 90 percent of the votes counted at press time, Leslie Manigat was coming in a distant second with only 11.8 percent. Haitians now are looking ahead to how Préval will try to bridge an entrenched rich-poor gap and bring security to this troubled nation.

Born 63 years ago in Port-au-Prince into a relatively well-to-do family, Préval's father was a minister of agriculture - until the family was forced to flee the dictatorship of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier in the early 1960s. Préval studied agronomy in Belgium, before returning to Haiti in 1975.

Préval and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a liberation theologian hugely popular among the poor, became friends when they joined forces in "Lavalas," a movement formed to protest the dictatorship of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. And, when Mr. Aristide later won the country's first democratic election in 1990, Préval was named prime minister - until a military coup pushed them both into exile less than a year later.

When the US restored Aristide to power three years later, Préval was appointed Haiti's director of the Economic and Social Assistance Fund, a USAID/World Bank-funded effort to promote small development projects. And in 1995 Préval entered the presidential campaign and won.

Préval's presidency is distinctive because he remains the only president in Haiti's 202-year history to win a democratic election, serve a full term, and peacefully hand power to a successor. But while his years in office, from 1996 to 2001, were calm and lacking in any major corruption scandals, many dismissed him as nothing more than a puppet of his mentor Aristide who returned to power after the 2000 elections.

Now, as Préval enters a second round to become the leader of this beleaguered country that has been led by an interim government since Aristide was ousted in 2004, he will no doubt be pressed to answer a question he has dodged for months: will he bring Aristide - who remains in exile in South Africa - back to power?

Préval did not run under Aristide's Lavalas party banner but rather with his own party - Lespwa, which means "hope" in Haitian Creole. Nonetheless, he was adopted by many of Aristide's former supporters as their candidate, and his rallies echoed with chants of "Bring Aristide home." Likewise, those who had campaigned to get Aristide out of office have expressed deep concern about Préval because of his association with the former leader.

"It's incumbent that he ... be his own man," stressed Dumarsais Simeus, the popular Haitian-American business tycoon who was blocked from running for constitutional reasons. "He seems serious about doing something to be a bridge between the poor and rich in this country - not to bring back the days of Aristide," says Mr. Simeus, who adds that he would be keen to work with a Préval government.

Charles Henri Baker, who came in third in tally to date, expresses a view typical of the business elite when he complains that Préval, "didn't do anything in office, except give us the chimères in Cité Soleil." Mr. Baker is referring to the slum gangs that Aristide allegedly armed - and which have since set off a devastating wave of kidnapping and bloodshed. "We are in bad shape if he becomes president," says Baker.

Préval has not responded to these charges, but has repeatedly said the solution to the violence in Cité Soleil cannot be a military one, and should involve social, economic, and political investment.

- Ms. Harman is Latin America correspondent for the Monitor and USA Today.

Haitian's Words Quell Unrest

Electoral council is to review the vote count. Presidential front-runner charges fraud or error has delayed victory, but he cautions supporters against destroying property.

By Carol J. Williams

Los Angeles Times

February 15, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haiti's interim government agreed Tuesday to review vote counts from the Feb. 7 election, after presidential front-runner Rene Preval claimed that "massive fraud or gross errors" had deprived him of victory.

The agreement came after Preval urged his supporters to continue protesting the vote count, but to do so peacefully. Blazing roadblocks that had paralyzed Port-au-Prince, the capital, for two days disappeared almost immediately after Preval's nationally broadcast radio address, demonstrating his power to control the streets, and sending a signal to political opponents to concede the election to him. None complied.

Although sporadic gunfire crackled across the capital, the mood of demonstrators switched from menacing to merry.

"The people are frustrated and they have the right to demonstrate, but they should respect the rights of others," Preval said from his campaign headquarters at his sister's hilltop villa.

"No one should go into private houses or destroy cars or block roads. The simple people are the ones who suffer, the small vendors and drivers and workers."

The scenes of shouting, stick-wielding youths torching cars, tires and debris were harmful to his campaign's effort to "retain international sympathy," Preval said.

Long a close ally of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Preval inherited his mentor's impoverished followers but also their penchant for violent outbursts at perceived injustice.

While urging his supporters to keep up the pressure for review of what he contends are manipulated vote tabulations, Preval warned them to be wary of radical infiltrators bent on painting his Lespwa movement, which means "hope" in Creole, as violent and undemocratic.

One pro-Aristide activist in the capital's Cite Soleil slum, Jean Joseph, called on Aristide loyalists Monday night to converge on the National Palace to clamor for a declaration that Preval had won. Thousands swarmed the scene of tense talks between Preval and Haiti's distrusted interim leaders, chanting and setting parked cars and vendors' kiosks ablaze.

Many of Haiti's poor probably voted for Preval because they believed he would allow Aristide to return from South Africa, where he has spent most of the last two years, after fleeing an armed rebellion under U.S. escort. Preval, who served as president between Aristide's two terms, has said nothing

stands in the way of Aristide's repatriation but has been vague about whether he would welcome the fiery former priest's presence.

Official balloting results are not expected to be published for several days. Counting stopped Sunday when protesters converged on the media center at the Hotel Montana, where nightly press conferences had been used to announce a running tally. When Preval's margin began to slip below 50%, the protests began. Thousands returned to the hotel Monday to confront election officials, overrunning security guards and trampling the grounds after discovering the officials were not there.

Preval has sought to persuade U.N. officials, foreign diplomats and Haiti's interim authorities to review his claims of counting irregularities before announcing final figures. Preval hinted that any determination by the electoral council that a March 19 runoff would be needed could ignite uncontrolled protests by supporters.

"If they publish these figures as they are, we will contest them — and if Lespwa contests them, the Haitian people will contest them," Preval warned.

The latest figures from the Provisional Electoral Council, posted midday Monday, showed Preval just short of an outright majority among the 33 presidential contenders, with 48.76%.

The nearest challenger was Leslie Manigat, 75, who polled 11.8% and has so far spurned suggestions that he concede victory to spare the country a costly and potentially chaotic runoff.

The third-place candidate, garment factory owner Charles Henri Baker, whose share stands at less than 8%, also opposes any concession that would hasten Preval's ascent to the National Palace.

Baker, 50, a member of the tiny, light-skinned elite that controls Haiti's economy, was one of Aristide's most passionate adversaries.

Some distant finishers have offered to cede their votes to Preval, including former Aristide police chief Dany Toussaint and former Port-au-Prince mayor Evans Paul. But others argue that Preval needs a clear victory to prevent a cloud of illegitimacy over his presidency.

Voting irregularities in the May 2000 parliamentary election prompted a boycott of the presidential vote six months later that returned Aristide to power for a second term, and set Haiti on its descent into institutional chaos.

Preval, a 63-year-old gentleman farmer and entrepreneur, declined to discuss his reluctance for a second round of voting that nearly all analysts calculate he would win easily. He insisted that his campaign staff had evidence that he had polled well over 50% in the initial vote. Neither he nor his aides would be specific, though, about the discrepancies they claimed to have uncovered.

"I don't want to say it's 60% if it turns out to be 55%. We have to check all the results again," said Liszt Quitel, an advisor who served in Preval's Cabinet during his presidency from 1996 to 2001.

Preval and his advisors pointed to voter sampling by the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute that suggested he had 54% of the vote.

"The international press and NDI clearly said that Lespwa had won in the first round," Preval said. "We are convinced that either massive fraud or gross errors are staining the electoral process."

Campaign officials also intimated that vote tabulators hired by the electoral council, whose nine-member board is composed mostly of figures who opposed Aristide, had inexplicably put aside counting votes from the massively pro-Preval capital.

Quitel said that at least 25,000 Port-au-Prince ballots had yet to be tabulated. Because Preval polled above 80% in other areas of the capital, his campaign believed the remaining ballots could push his total over the threshold for outright victory.

Other aides complained that more than 80,000 blank ballots — more than 4% of the votes cast — were being included in the total of valid votes, making it harder for Preval's share to constitute a majority. An additional 125,000 votes, about 5.6% of the 2.2 million cast, were invalidated for multiple or indiscernible markings.

"There's 10% of the vote still missing. That's not a margin of error. That's fraud," said one Preval aide, who said he had visited the tabulation center early Tuesday to find it locked and abandoned.

Those hired by the electoral council to count the vote failed to show up Monday or Tuesday because of "security concerns," said David Wimhurst, spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission deployed in Haiti.

Despite having more than 9,000 foreign troops and police in the country, the peacekeepers were in little evidence during the two days of angry and disruptive protests. A few armored vehicles were seen nudging charred auto chasses and scrap metal to the roadsides after the protesters abandoned their barricades to march and sing their support for the man they believed to be the victor.

The 'Pottery Barn Rules'

By John Maxwell

February 11, 2006

If you really want to know what's wrong with Haiti consider this: On Thursday night, when it was clear that Rene Preval was getting something over 60% of the votes in the UN organised Haitian election, one of his opponents, the man coming second with about 12% of the votes was a former stand-in president, Leslie Manigat.

Manigat, recognising reality, said that the trend suggested that Preval had swept the board and that there might be no need for a runoff.

The candidate running third, a millionaire sweatshop owner named Charles Henri Baker, had a different opinion. Mr Baker, with about 6% of the vote, one tenth of Preval's and half as many as Manigat's, was promising to launch an election petition, charging fraud, hoping to overturn the results.

I cannot imagine anything which more clearly illustrates the mind-set of Haiti's so-called ruling class, the Elite, whose rapacious greed, racist intransigence and bone-headed stupidity have provided the main roadblock in Haiti's 200 year long struggle to establish a free and civilised society.

I don't think it is possible for anyone, anywhere else in the world, to believe that Mr Baker's initiative makes any sense whatever. I don't believe that even in the US Embassy in Port au Prince or in the State Department itself that there is anyone who could believe that there is any way, short of assassination, to deny the people of Haiti their basic human rights after this week's demonstration of resolution and will.

For the last ten years Charles Henri Baker and an assortment of freebooters like himself, notably fellow sweatshop owners Reginald Boulos and Andy Apaid, have been able to convince the United States that 'populists' like Preval and Jean Bertrand Aristide do not represent the Haitian people. The Elite's stiff-necked refusal to cooperate, negotiate or participate in the democratic process recruited support from the most backward and primitive forces in US politics and effectively brought the operations of Haitian government to a standstill.

'Enhancing democracy'

They also managed to recruit the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, whose Jamaican heritage should have informed him that he and the rest of the world, were being samfied (conned) by the Haitian elite and their co-conspirators against democracy – the International Republican Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Haiti Democracy Project, among others. Under the guise of "enhancing democracy" these apparatchiks sabotaged the hopes of the Haitian people for a new birth of freedom after generations of savage dictatorship initiated by the American invasion of 1915.

The American 1915 intervention was explicitly and essentially racist and was perhaps best exemplified by the notorious remark of the American Secretary of State at the time, William Jennings Bryan. Upon discovering the ethnic character of Haiti he was appalled: "Imagine!" he expostulated, "Niggers

speaking French!" encapsulating for a century white American incomprehension of the humanity of people who don't look like them.

This incomprehension extended to the first black American secretary of State, Colin Powell, and even more strongly to his successor, another "brilliant African-American" Dr Condoleezza Rice.

Powell bought the Elite nonsense so thoroughly that he was able to say, with a perfectly straight face, that President Aristide's "...failure to adhere to democratic principles has contributed to the deep polarization and violent unrest that we are witnessing in Haiti today... His own actions have called into question his fitness to continue to govern Haiti. We urge him to examine his position carefully, to accept responsibility, and to act in the best interests of the people of Haiti"

And he suggested that President Aristide was corrupt and that the US with its high tech and pervasive reach, would very soon charge Aristide with high crimes and misdemeanours.

That was two years ago

According to the North American pundits, the best interests of Haiti meant selling off the few national productive assets and accepting the wise guidance of people like Apaid, Boulos and Baker, all of them suspect as collaborators with the dictatorships under which they had amassed immeasurable wealth and power. .Aristide was also supposed to accept the dictates of the International Financial institutions (IFIs), the World bank, the IMF et al, to mortgage his poverty-stricken country to foreign usurers to build super-highways and other hard infrastructure when what Haiti wanted was the development of its people first so they could handle the work of re-inventing and rebuilding their country.

One of the Poorest countries in the World

It wasn't that the the US the World Bank and the IFIs didn't know what was needed. "Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest countries in the developing world. Its per capita income--\$ 250--is considerably less than one-tenth the Latin American average. About 80 percent of the rural Haitian population live in poverty. Moreover, far from improving, the poverty situation in Haiti has been deteriorating over the past decade, concomitant with a rate of decline in per capita GNP of 5.2 percent a year over the 1985-95 period.

"The staggering level of poverty in Haiti is associated with a profile of social indicators that is also shocking. Life expectancy is only 57 years compared to the Latin American average of 69. Less than half of the population is literate. Only about one child in five of secondary-school age actually attends secondary school. Health conditions are similarly poor; vaccination coverage for children, for example, is only about 25 percent. Only about one-fourth of the population has access to safe water. In short, the overwhelming majority of the Haitian population are living in deplorable conditions of extreme poverty.." – The World Bank –Challenges of Poverty Reduction.

And they all pledged to support Haiti get her back on her feet. But the Elite, citing Aristide's supposedly divisive populism and dictatorial tendencies, convinced anyone who could help to put their investments somewhere else. The Elite despised 'the ghetto priest' – as poor and black as his parishioners. Aristide nevertheless went ahead. Haiti wanted doctors; with the help of the Cubans he

established a medical school for the children of the poor. Haiti wanted teachers; Aristide built more schools in his short time than had been built in Haiti in 200 years. Yet, to the foreign NGOs, busy building 'civil society' the man was a menace. They could not and would not work with him. They 'knew' that in a fair fight they would defeat him, so they refused to contest elections, because they would be stolen.

This time round the ground was better-prepared. Dozens of convicted rapists, torturers and murderers were let loose when the Marines took over. The Marines drove out the students and took the medical school for their barracks; their accomplices in 'civil society' burned the new Museum of Haitian Folkloric history. They shut down the children's television station. It was clearly subversive of good government and capitalism.

Press freedom became a memory with journalists tortured and murdered. Leaders of the Lavalas popular movement were sometimes murdered, sometime simply imprisoned without charge. The Prime Minister was jailed, as was the country's leading folklorist, a 69 year old woman named Anne August who was arrested at midnight on Mothers Day 2004 by Marines using stun grenades to shatter her front door. They shot her dog and carried away her young grandchildren in handcuffs. She is still in prison.

Convicted terrorists were freed by a compromised judicial system and one of the most notorious and dangerous even ran for the presidency. The work of years in bringing the torturers and murders to Justice was undone overnight. The US installed 'President' acclaimed the murderers as "Freedom Fighters" He was in good company, the Canadian representative of the OAS was on his bandwagon as he hailed the criminal resurgence. And Condoleezza Rice, with more doctorates than common sense, was ecstatic about the prospects of an election. After all, lavalas had been silenced, the chimeres (Lavalas 'terrorists') had been murdered, the people were leaderless. When a leader stepped forward in the person of Father Gerard Jean Juste, a Roman Catholic priest like Aristide, he too was thrown into jail, prevented from becoming a candidate for President and only released two weeks before the election because he had been examined in prison by the internationally known Professor Paul Farmer and found to be suffering from leukemia. Not even the State Department could challenge that diagnosis.

Spreading 'democracy'

All was set fair for democracy to sprout. In a country of 8 million people with 4 million voters spread over 28,000 sq. km (about the size of the US state of Maryland and nearly three times the size of Jamaica) there were 800 designated polling stations. about as many as would serve in the city of Kingston, Jamaica. There were three polling stations outside of the main slum cities adjacent to Port au Prince – to serve nearly 300,000 voters. There were none inside.

Condoleezza Rice had a message for the Haitian people. In an interview last September, before the election was postponed three times, her "message for the Haitian people is don't miss this chance to go out and vote and to decide your own future. There is nothing more important to a human being than to control his own future and the vote is the way to begin to control your own future."

“Nou lèd, Men Nou La!”

The election was expected to be a shambles in which anything could happen to frustrate the popular will: widespread violence, too few polling stations, too many voters convinced that the rich would get many chances to vote while they waited, shoeless and voteless, in mile-long lines under the hot Haitian sun.

Yet, suspecting the worst, the Haitians were disciplined and resolute. There was one violent incident in the whole country.

People fainted as they waited for hours to vote, were revived, waited again and no doubt fainted again. All were hungry, I am sure. But they were hungrier for their rights than for food. Despite all the odds, they made the election work. Despite the intimidation, the confusion, the bad faith and the UN peacekeeping forces, they made the election work. If ever there were a people deserving autonomy, it is the Haitians. They proved it 200 years ago, when the Enlightenment made a soft landing in Haiti, when in advance of France and the United States and the world, the Haitians abolished slavery and promulgated the inalienable Rights of Man.

They proved it again on Tuesday when they cocked a snook at their 'benefactors' "Nou lèd, Men Nou La!" as they say in Haiti – "We may be ugly, but we are here!" or as we say in Jamaica "You a-go tired fi see mi face"!!

Preval won even in upscale Petionville.

And of course, we need to remember that despite this 'election' there is no vacancy in the office of President of Haiti. The President of Haiti is alive and well. He has been prevented from discharging his duties by the illegal machinations of the United States, Canada and France, aided and abetted by Kofi Annan. Those characters are simply attempting to legitimise the illegitimate.

The Haitian people know this and have used the election to explain to the world, as best they can under the circumstances, that they want their democracy and their President back. Of course, the American viceroy in Haiti, Timothy Carney, doesn't buy that:

Carney said he was not concerned about Préval's former alliance with Aristide and dismissed speculation that Préval would bring Aristide back to Haiti.

"Aristide is as much a man of the past as Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier is," Carney said in an interview. "I believe the electorate has absolutely understood that."

And of course, Mr Carney, like Dr Rice and Mr Bush, know what the Haitians want – much better than the Haitians themselves.

Colin Powell was fond of speaking about what he said were "the Pottery Barn rules":

'You break it; you've bought it.'

The United States, Canada and France broke Haiti on behalf of a thoroughly toxic Elite. The French already owed Haiti \$25 billion in blood money extracted by blackmail in the nineteenth century and the Americans, who financed that extortion at usurious rates, owe them even more having destroyed Haitian governance, killed and exiled their leaders and depraved their landscape as well as their politics.

Will they do the honorable thing and pay for their depredations?

Stay tuned.

Poetic Justice

They say revenge is a dish that men of taste prefer cold.

In his position as Foreign Minister of Canada Mr Pierre Pettigrew was one of the leading conspirators and mobilisers against President Aristide and Haitian democracy. So, it is with some satisfaction that I record that Mr Pettigrew, a rising star in the Liberal party, lost his seat in the Canadian Parliament in the recent elections. Pettigrew was defending a seat which had been safe for the Liberals for nearly 80 years – since 1917. He was defeated handsomely by – WAIT FOR IT..... (DRUMROLL and FANFARE!!!)

..... A Haitian woman.

I am sure that you too will feel that somehow, somewhere, there is, occasionally, some Justice.

IN MY OPINION

Priest, press strike fear in hotel honchos

BY FRED GRIMM

Miami Herald

Feb. 7, 2006

It was a crisp, clear Chamber of Commerce morning in South Florida, a touch of Super Bowl hangover in the air. TV crews, newspaper photographers, print reporters and a guy from a Creole-language radio station descended on an airport hotel for a scheduled press conference.

Not an exciting prospect. The Rev. Gérard Jean-Juste had promised to reveal who he was endorsing in today's Haitian national election. Anyone who read The Miami Herald already knew that he was backing former President René Préval.

Besides, he's so deadly earnest that a few words from Jean-Juste could have sent the rollicking fans of the Pittsburgh Steelers home to bed early Sunday night. No one fought their assignment editors for the chance to spend Monday morning with Jean-Juste.

Then the press conference disappeared.

"It's not at this hotel," the desk clerk said tersely, as if I had asked if the Southeastern Association of Crack Dealers was meeting at the Wyndham.

LAST-MINUTE MOVE

What the clerk didn't mention was that the Jean-Juste press conference had been roused at the last minute. Apparently hotel management had suffered a sudden panic at the prospect of this well-known Haitian activist and the imagined hoards of followers ripping through the "elegantly appointed lobby" or the "lush, magnificently landscaped gardens," chanting anti-Baby Doc slogans.

Now, that ain't what the business traveler needs to see on a Monday morning. They tossed Jean-Juste. And the press. So we gathered on the decidedly unlush, sparsely landscaped island of concrete and grass between Griffin Road and the service road. The hotel called in the Broward Sheriff's Office and tried to have us evicted from the vicinity. A tough request, even from managers of an elegantly appointed hotel, given that the unwashed rabble was now on public property.

Jean-Juste held his dangerous gathering. The ever-so-mild priest, weak from an onset of chronic lymphocytic leukemia, performed a bit of anti-climactic theater, putting on a René Préval baseball cap and unbuttoning his sports shirt to reveal a René Préval T-shirt. He said a few nice words about former President Préval.

Across the street, four BSO deputies watched, waiting to see if Jean-Juste and his entourage, all five of them, would storm the Wyndham and liberate the Paradise Pool Bar. They didn't look quite up to it. Thirty years ago, the chief organizer, Jack Lieberman, was known as Radical Jack, but the dark gray suit he wore Monday was poor gear for rioting.

UNSYMPATHETIC MANAGEMENT

Lieberman did suggest that the Wyndham management was unsympathetic to freedom for the Haitian people. I suspected the hotel bosses were just averse to foreign intrigue, knowing that in South Florida foreign intrigue can wash up around you like beach flotsam.

Dutifully, I hurried down the hotel driveway to get the hotel's official explanation.

Five suits standing in the turnaround wore grim expressions and gold hotel name tags. They were posed like soldiers expecting an onslaught of crazed zealots. I wasn't sure whether the expected zealots were coming from the Haitian activists or the reporters.

I asked if someone would explain the hotel's position. The grimmest of the grim faces asked, "Who are you?"

I told him the happy news. He said, "This is private property. Leave."

When I hesitated, taken aback that any commercial establishment that sells rum drinks would declare me unwelcome, he said, "Leave or we'll have the police escort you off."

Outside, poor exiled Jean-Juste was finishing his poor exiled press conference.

Unsmiling deputies then escorted Lieberman to his former hotel room, watching as he retrieved some belongings.

Maybe they were afraid Radical Jack would steal the towels.

Haitians take pride in vote
Early returns show Preval in the lead
By MIKE WILLIAMS
Cox News Service
Thursday, February 09, 2006

Port-au-Prince, Haiti — International observers on Wednesday praised the heavy turnout and the relatively calm vote in Haiti's national elections, saying it was a crucial first step to restore stability.

As everything from mules to helicopters carried ballot boxes to counting stations, early and unofficial tallies of Tuesday's vote showed strong support for former President Rene Preval, a champion of the nation's poor.

In a news conference Wednesday evening, Haitian election officials said initial estimates that final results would be known within three days of the election were probably overly optimistic.

"I believe by Friday evening or Saturday morning we'll have at least some partial results," said Jacques Bernard, director general of the Haitian electoral council.

Bernard said the vote counting was slowed by the fact that many polling stations remained open late into Tuesday evening to accommodate voters. Transporting ballots and tally sheets to a central processing center in the capital is also a slow process, he said.

There was clearly relief, and even pride, that the troubled nation avoided the widespread organizational glitches, chaos and violence that many feared would doom the election.

"It was an incredible beginning," said Claude Boucher, Canada's ambassador to Haiti. "The level of participation was a lot more than we expected. The Haitian people sent a message to the world that they can vote in numbers and they have confidence in the future of their country."

Although four people reportedly were killed, and many voters complained about mile-long lines, the people who turned out at most of the 800 voting centers waited patiently.

"We want a big change for Haiti," said Lelio Iverlius, 35, a construction worker who squeezed into a downtown Port-au-Prince school to vote with thousands of other people.

"We want food, we want work, we want security, we want a better life. This election is important to help us get those things."

Scattered returns from some precincts in the capital showed Preval, 63, an agronomist who served as president from 1996 to 2001, with a substantial lead over industrialist Charles Baker, Reuters reported

Haitians insist on right to asylum in U.S.
By SHELIA M. POOLE, TERESA BORDEN
Cox News Service
Wednesday, February 08, 2006

ATLANTA — Gabrielle Vincent still shudders when she recalls the morning more than a year ago when U.S. immigration officials came for her husband, Jose. He had fled his native Haiti by boat in 1996 after his political activities made him a target. Vincent said her husband sought and was denied asylum.

In June, after eight months in detention, Jose was sent back to Haiti, where he complains he is a virtual prisoner in Cap-Haitien.

"They deported my husband back in the middle of turmoil," said Gabrielle, a naturalized U.S. citizen who lives with the couple's two children in suburban Atlanta. "People leave home in the morning and don't know if they will return alive. That is my fear."

Thousands of Haitians in the United States share Vincent's fear as they have watched their homeland slide into chaos after the 2004 ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The chaos continued this week as the country held national elections.

Attorneys handling Haitian asylum cases across the nation say the situation in Haiti merits granting them special permission to stay in the United States under temporary protected status, a program created in 1990. The executive branch grants the status, when it deems necessary, to people from countries paralyzed by natural disasters or ongoing armed conflict. To date, it has not granted it to Haitians.

Tom Griffin, a Philadelphia attorney, has authored a sample motion to stop Haitian deportations until the U.S. grants them TPS. He wants attorneys to use it in as many Haitians' cases as possible. It's unclear how many have been filed.

"We're trying to save people from going back into the fire," Griffin said. "Our government thinks free and fair elections means Haiti is turning a corner from catastrophe to an atmosphere of peace and justice. But there are no indications that the elections will be free and fair."

The motions come as debate over illegal immigration heats up in Georgia and across the country.

The United States has granted temporary protected status to Salvadorans, Bosnians, Somalis, and many others who fled because of civil strife at home. So why not Haitians, the lawyers ask. They say that in recent years Haiti has suffered a coup and a natural disaster, two reasons used in the past to grant the status.

U.S. treatment of Haitians has always been a volatile issue. Many like Frantz Bourget, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Port-Au-Prince, believe Haiti fares worse because it is poor and black.

"So far they've been very consistent in anything that has to do with Haitians," said the accountant and treasurer of the Haitian American Task Force, formed last June to help Haitians here and abroad. "It appears to be racist and political."

Bourget said his organization hopes to join groups in cities with large Haitian communities, such as Miami, New York and Philadelphia, to press for temporary protected status. "If you send those folks back to Haiti right now the way Haiti is, you're sending them to die," he said.

But administration officials see things differently.

"At this time we do not believe that Haiti fulfills the narrow criteria established by Congress to qualify for TPS," said Dan Kane, spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security. "We are continuing to monitor the situation on the ground. It's still open."

The "narrow criteria," in the case of natural disasters, mean a country's president has to ask for the status, and the entire country has to be brought to a standstill, Kane said.

Griffin said as many as 40,000 Haitians could immediately benefit from TPS, which allows recipients to live and work in the United States for up to 18 months at a time. The government re-evaluates the situation at home and decides whether to renew or cancel the status.

"If they're going to grant TPS to El Salvador and Liberia and Montserrat, Haiti clearly fits the same criteria," said Charles Kuck, who is handling the case of Nixon Printemps, a Haitian in Atlanta facing possible deportation. "If [the status] is not granted, there's only one reason it's not granted, and that's politics."

Printemps, a former security guard in Port-Au-Prince, left Haiti four years ago fearing retaliation from a presidential guard sent briefly to prison for shooting and killing Printemps' brother.

"My father don't live in his house no more because he's afraid the police officer will go after him," Printemps said. "The guard killed my brother, and I was fighting for justice."

But getting temporary protected status is difficult. Only 14 countries have received the designation, and fewer than 300,000 people from seven countries are benefiting.

Liberians first received the status in 1991 because of armed conflict. Montserratians got it in 1997, when a volcano devastated the island nation. Salvadorans, the largest group now under protected status, received it because of civil war in 1990 and because of damage from Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

Advocates have argued that Haiti qualifies for the status because of ongoing political strife and because of natural disasters like Tropical Storm Jeanne, which unleashed flooding that killed more than 2,000 in 2004. At the time, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-New York) called for the country to receive the status because of the storm. Now, advocates seek it again because of the unrest.

"I think it's very interesting that Salvadorans and Hondurans have been given TPS for earthquakes that happened years ago," said Jocelyn McCalla, a New York-based Haitian activist. "So why not Haitians? The will has been missing."

Kuck says he understands Bush administration reluctance to give Haitians temporary protected status.

"Nobody is going to want to stay [in Haiti] till we fix things there if we give TPS," he said. "I think ... [U.S. officials are] terrified of the floodgates opening."

Today, about 9,000 U.N. peacekeepers patrol the country. Abby Maxman, CARE International's country director in Haiti, called conditions dire. It's not a new assessment. Real change, she said, has to involve more than just humanitarian organizations. "It requires a real, serious commitment for the long term," she said.

The U.S. Department of State issued a travel advisory before the elections, citing a volatile security situation. It said they could be a "stimulus" for tension and violence.

But the election results alone won't bring stability to the poverty-stricken nation, said Henry F. Carey, an associate professor of political science at Georgia State University.

Haiti for years has had neither a strong government nor any properly functioning institutions.

But that won't keep the Vincent family apart for long. Gabrielle Vincent said she recently quit her state government job to join a nonprofit that works in Haiti.

It means she will have to move to Ohio, but she will travel to Haiti.

"One thing, they cannot break our spirit," she said defiantly. "We are fighters."

Shelia N. Poole and Teresa Borden write for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Jean-Juste urges release of Haitians jailed for political acts
The Associated Press
The Gainesville Sun, Florida
February 12, 2006

A prominent priest called Sunday for the release of Haitians jailed for their political activities, while his supporters cheered the news that Rene Preval was leading in that country's presidential elections.

The Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste made his first public appearance in Miami's Little Haiti since being permitted by Haiti's interim government to seek treatment for leukemia in the United States.

"Every government in the world knows through common sense that the right thing to do when elections are near is to release all political prisoners," Jean-Juste said, specifically naming former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and activist and folk singer Annette Auguste.

His supporters, who greeted him on a white carpet scattered with rose petals, shouted "No second round" when he said Preval would be declared victorious in the Caribbean country's first elections since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a bloody rebellion two years ago.

With 75 percent of votes counted, Preval was falling short of winning Tuesday's elections outright by less than a percentage point, and a member of Haiti's electoral council said results of the presidential elections were being manipulated.

Preval, a former president, was leading 33 candidates with 49.1 percent of the vote, short of the 50 percent plus one vote he needs to avoid a March 19 runoff with the runner-up. Leslie Manigat, also a former president, was second with 11.7 percent of the vote.

"Everywhere in Haiti, in every corner, the majority of the people is with Preval. He is definitely the winner," Jean-Juste said.

Jean-Juste had been jailed in Haiti since July on suspicion of involvement in the killing of prominent Haitian journalist and poet Jacques Roche. The priest, 60, who has always denied those charges, is an influential advocate for Haiti's poor and a prominent figure in Aristide's Lavalas Family party.

"Father Jean-Juste was mistreated just like Jesus was mistreated when spreading his message of love," said William Joseph, who moved to Miami after Aristide's ouster. "He has always helped people, and all they did was incarcerate him. When he's in jail, we all are, emotionally speaking."