

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: FEBRUARY 16 -17, 2006

Haiti's Preval Keeps Low Profile After Win

Friday February 17, 2006

By ANDREW SELSKY

Associated Press Writer

Guardian Unlimited

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Haiti's president-elect met privately on Friday with political leaders - including at least one opponent - to try and smooth the tensions that followed his turbulent election victory.

But Haiti, and much of the world, waited to hear Rene Preval's plans to form a new government and address violence and poverty in Haiti - as well as his stance on his former mentor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former slum priest living in exile after being ousted as president by a violent rebellion two years ago.

A day after Preval was declared the winner of the Feb. 7 elections, he postponed a news conference until Wednesday and remained inside his sister's gated house in the hills east of the capital, where he has been meeting with politicians of various stripes. Among them was Chavannes Jeune, who finished fourth in the election with about 5 percent of the vote.

``Preval has always preached reconciliation," said Preval's campaign manager, Volcy Assad. ``It's logical that he's meeting political leaders."

Fritz Longchamp, one of Preval's campaign coordinators, said the president-elect wants to forge a parliamentary coalition.

``He has begun a dialogue with some political leaders," Longchamp said, without elaborating.

More details emerged, meanwhile, on the negotiating of a deal to declare Preval the winner earlier this week as protests paralyzed this Caribbean nation and allegations swirled that the results were being rigged to deny him a first-round victory.

Preval was a hair short of an outright majority with more than 90 percent of the vote tabulated. Haitian officials decided in a meeting Wednesday that ran past midnight to divide the 85,000 blank ballots cast among the candidates in proportion to the percentage they had already received. That gave Preval just over 51 percent and outright victory.

If he had fallen short of a majority, he would have faced a second-round election in March against the second-place finisher, Leslie Manigat.

Chilean Ambassador Marcel Young said his country and Brazil sought to resolve the election dispute with Haitian authorities as the nation teetered on the brink of upheaval. Tens of thousands of Preval supporters had taken to the streets, claiming fraud. Some erected flaming barricades across roads.

Shops were closed. Thousands briefly occupied the luxury hotel where election officials announced the latest returns.

“We expressed our worry and I think it produced healthy dialogue and helped lead to a quick solution,” Young said, adding that Haitian authorities decided to divide the blank votes among the candidates.

“We were talking with them almost every day because it was an untenable situation,” he said. “There was no commerce and things couldn’t continue this way ... Our country didn’t do anything but facilitate a dialogue.”

Manigat, also a former president, has accused election officials of breaking the rules to give Preval a first-round victory.

Charles Henri Baker, the third-place finisher, was also unhappy.

“There was no clear winner in the first round,” Baker said. “What happened was that Haiti’s future president took hold of the results.”

Bob Maguire, director of the international affairs program at Trinity University in Washington, said Preval could be keeping silent because he wants to choose his words carefully.

“This is a very delicate moment and he has to be really careful about what he says, because every word is being parsed like it hasn’t been before,” Maguire said by phone.

Maryse Narcisse, Aristide’s spokeswoman, declined to say whether Aristide and Preval were in contact, saying only that the ousted leader would make a statement next week.

The U.S. government believes the return of Aristide could destabilize the country and has hinted that he should remain in exile in South Africa.

Preval, who led Haiti from 1996 to 2001, became the first elected president ever to finish his term when he left office five years ago.

After he is inaugurated on March 29, he will lead a nation where heavily armed street gangs wage gunfights with U.N. peacekeepers, where the rich and poor are divided by mistrust and hatred and where a rash of kidnappings is driving out business owners.

The son of a former government official, Preval has vowed to crack down on hardened criminals.

Associated Press writers Stevenson Jacobs, in Port-au-Prince, and Alfred de Montesquiou in San Juan, Puerto Rico contributed to this report.

Rice calls Venezuela a big problem for Western Hemisphere

AP

Malaysia Star, Malaysia

February 17, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP): Venezuela's close ties to Cuba and efforts to subvert democracies elsewhere make the country one of the "biggest problems" in the Western Hemisphere, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Thursday.

Testifying before the International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives, Rice also urged democratic nations worldwide to be "more active in supporting and defending Venezuelan people" against actions President Hugo Chavez has taken against nongovernmental organizations and labor unions.

On Haiti, Rice pledged to work with and support the new Haitian government to be headed by former President Rene Preval, who was declared on Thursday the winner of disputed elections held Feb. 7.

The country has been bedeviled by violence and instability for two decades.

"Haiti is a country that has had too few chances," Rice said, noting that the administration has committed \$400 million (euro337.3 million) in aid to Haiti.

Rice acknowledged that fragile democracies are a problem throughout the hemisphere and said she discussed that with top officials from Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador and Panama at a State Department dinner Tuesday night.

Rep. Eliot Engel said the United States must do more to help lift Latin America from the "grinding poverty" in which, he said, 25 to 40 percent of the population lives.

He said it was a mistake for the United States to cut aid to Bolivia even though an avowedly anti-American, Evo Morales, took over last month as the elected president.

"Cutting development programs in Bolivia is going in the wrong direction," Engel said. Rice said the administration has reached out to the new Bolivian leader. While acknowledging that aid cuts have been imposed on a number of Latin American countries, she said U.S. programs are being directed increasingly at the region's poorest.

Rep. Dan Burton, chairman of the House International Relations subcommittee on Latin America, raised the Venezuelan issue with Rice. He alleged that Chavez's activities are generating misgivings among presidents throughout Latin America.

He also took note of Venezuela's increasing friendship with Iran, pointing out that Iranian parliament speaker Gholam Ali Haddad Adel made an official visit to Venezuela on Wednesday.

Rice said Venezuela's recent support for the leftist Sandinista party in Nicaragua "was producing a situation where the democratic government could not function."

In response, she said the United States froze the assets and revoked the visas of some Sandinista officials.

During his seven years in power, Chavez's critics have described him as a populist, a path that Rice said is doomed to fail.

"The best thing we can do is to have an alternative to Latin brand of populism that has taken countries down the drain," Rice said. U.S. options include more free trade agreements and more aid to the most vulnerable, she said.

Much of Chavez's support in Venezuela is derived from poor neighborhoods, where his government has increased social services sharply.

Criticizing Chavez's policies on another front, Rice said the Venezuelan civil society group Sumate is being subjected to "kangaroo court" treatment.

Sumate describes itself as a vote monitoring group. The government has charged that Sumate conspired against Venezuela's interests by accepting money from the congressionally supported National Endowment for Democracy, which supports pro-democracy groups worldwide.

The trial against Sumate officials began last week.

Rene Preval will need help and a lot of luck
Jamaica Observer
Friday, February 17, 2006

We are relieved that the election stalemate in Haiti has ended and that the majority of Haitians, it appears, are happy with the outcome.

Now that Mr Rene Preval has been declared the winner of the presidential vote, with just over 51 per cent, it is our hope that some semblance of stability will return to Haiti, and that the international community will assist in the country's social, political and economic recovery. The signals already coming from Washington are very instructive, with the State Department offering congratulations to Mr Preval and America's top diplomat, Ms Condoleezza Rice, saying that the United States wants a stable Haiti and will offer help to the Haitian people.

Most Haitians, we are sure, would regard Ms Rice's statement as refreshing but in stark contrast to the Bush administration's stance two years ago when Haiti's democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown in a bloody coup d'etat.

For what that coup really achieved was an erosion of the appreciation and respect that were gradually being built - with the help of the Caribbean Community - for democratic institutions in Haiti.

The method used by election officials to end the stalemate - dividing the 85,000 blank ballots cast among the candidates in proportion to the percentage they had already achieved - was, in our view, creative but far from ideal. However, the important factor is that it was a solution found solely by Haitians and as such should be respected.

It now leaves Mr Preval with the huge task of uniting the country which, for too long, has been thrown off balance by violence, abject poverty and class division.

Already, his supporters are claiming that he will provide jobs and security. They probably are encouraged by memories of his first tenure as president between 1996 and 2001, a period that many agree was relatively calm. However, a lot has gone downhill since then, and president-elect Preval now needs to quickly present his supporters with the cold, hard fact that their expectations will not be realised overnight and that they, the Haitian people, have a vital role to play in shaping the country's future.

But equally, president-elect Preval must engage the international community to secure the assistance he will need to turn around decades of rot in Haiti's security, judicial and health systems. He will also need substantial help to counter corruption, capital flight and brain drain. In short, Mr Preval will not have a honeymoon. We wish him the best of luck.

Haiti Elections: What About the Fraud Allegations?

OneWorld United States

Open letter to Juan Gabriel Valdes, United Nations special envoy to Haiti.

February 17, 2006

Dear Mr Valdes,

The British solidarity organisation, the Haiti Support Group, notes the decision taken by the Haitian authorities to override the electoral law and to no longer include blank votes in the valid votes total, and we understand that this decision was taken in order to avoid further instability. Mr Rene Preval has won the presidency, but we remain very concerned about the charges of fraud and vote-rigging that have not yet been addressed.

While the popular will favouring a Preval presidency may have been acknowledged, we are concerned that the mass of the population will still lack confidence in the electoral process if the questions surrounding the 7 February elections are not resolved. Indeed, if the allegations of vote-rigging and fraud are not cleared up, how can anyone be sure that the results of the Parliamentary elections that took place on the same day, but that have not so been mentioned, will be an accurate reflection of the electorate's intentions? If the legitimacy of the new Parliament is in doubt, political instability will continue.

In this context, the Haiti Support Group is writing to request clarification from the MINUSTAH on three issues relating to suspicions of vote-rigging, fraud, and/or manipulation of the results in Haiti's first round presidential and legislative elections on 7 February 2006.

1) Missing, stolen and destroyed ballot papers.

Following the discovery of ballot papers at the Truitier municipal dump http://news.yahoo.com/photo/060215/ids_photos_wl/r1742304631.jpg, the MINUSTAH's David Wimhurst was reported by both Reuters and the Associated Press as suggesting that the discarded ballots could have come from nine polling stations outside Port-au-Prince ransacked during the election, with the loss of around 35,000 votes. We can only assume that Mr Wimhurst's comments have been misquoted, and that the number of missing votes is nowhere near as many as 35,000, but what is desperately needed is an informed and accurate statement answering the following questions:

a) Where did the ballot papers found at Truitier come from, and had they been counted already?

b) If they had not been counted already, how many ballot papers were found at Truitier? Was it hundreds, or thousands, or tens of thousands? Obviously the approximate number of ballots found is a crucial issue with regard to whether
- if uncounted - the Truitier ballot papers could have significantly influenced the election results.

c) Mr Wimhurst speculated that the Truitier ballot papers could have been taken from ransacked polling stations, but exactly how many polling stations were ransacked, and how many ballots went missing? In an interview with Radio Metropole, on 15 February, Mr Wimhurst said, "these materials could have come from one or more polling places that were vandalized on election day, when people

stole the ballots and all the materials." How many votes were lost in these incidents, and is the number large enough to significantly alter the results?

Where were these polling stations? (in the footnote, please see a partial tally of election day incidents that may have resulted in the theft or destruction of votes.)

d) How was it that such a number of polling stations came to be ransacked on election day, when the MINUSTAH had specifically reduced the number of polling centres to just over 800 in the entire country so that its 9,000 or so troops and police could provide an effective security presence? Where was that security presence when these polling stations were ransacked?

2) Blank ballot papers.

Of the 1.973 million votes cast and so far tabulated, 85,000 were blank votes - that is 4% of all votes cast. Is this a credible percentage? How does it compare with the percentage of blank votes cast in previous elections?

What is the explanation for the fact that in the (closely monitored?) West department, only 2.8% of valid votes were blank, whereas in the more remote (and less closely monitored?) Centre department, the percentage was 9.1%? Is there any connection between the differing percentages of blank votes, and the differing percentage of votes won by the Lespwa candidate: 61% in the West compared to 34% in the Centre?

Were blank votes deliberately added to the ballot boxes in order to influence the results?

3) Other invalid ballot papers.

Of the 1.973 million votes cast and so far tabulated, 148,000 were declared invalid for other reasons - that is 7.5% of all votes cast. Is this a credible percentage? How does it compare with the percentage of invalid votes cast in previous elections?

What is the explanation for the fact that in the (closely monitored?) West department, only 5.2% of valid votes were declared invalid, whereas in the more remote (and less closely monitored?) Nippes department, the percentage was 13.8%? Is there any connection between the differing percentages of invalid votes, and the percentage of votes won by the Lespwa candidate: 61% in the West compared to 39% in Nippes?

Were what should have been valid votes, declared invalid in order to influence the results?

In relation to points 2) and 3) we are quite ready to accept reasonable explanations for the discrepancies between the results in the West and those in other departments, but, as you will appreciate, without any explanations, without any comparison with earlier election results, suspicions are aroused. (We know of course that the presidential elections in 2000 and 1995 were marred by very low turnouts and for that reason might not make good comparisons, but the legislative elections in both years had high rates of participation and the results from those contests could provide useful comparisons.)

While we fully understand the desire of many players involved in Haiti to press ahead with the election calendar and move on to the second round run-offs for the Parliament and to the local government elections, the Haiti Support Group believes that before this can happen it is essential to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into these various issues. If these issues are not addressed, confidence in the electoral authorities will not be restored, and the credibility of the next steps in the electoral calendar will be fatally undermined.

Haiti has already suffered from years of political deadlock and suspended development assistance resulting from the disputed results of the May 2000 legislative elections. Everything must be done to avoid a repetition of that situation.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Arthur
Director, the Haiti Support Group
London,
UK

Reports of election day incidents involving the theft or destruction of votes:

In the North-West department - "Individuals set fire to the election office in the commune of Bombarde. Several pregnant women were hit. Some of them fainted. The police arrested several individuals." Source: InfoHaiti.net, 8 February 2006.

Also in the North-West department: "In Bombardopolis, supporters of the MIRN, Alyans, Lespwa and Union candidates entered the polling station in the evening and destroyed the voting materials. As a result, there are no results for the town or for the 2nd and 3rd sections." Source: Commission Episcopale Nationale Justice et Paix, 9 February 2006

In the Centre department - "Armed men, with their faces covered, disrupted the voting process in the commune of Lascahobas: voters fled and did not return." Source: InfoHaiti.net, 8 February 2006.

In the Artibonite department: "In Verrettes, 12 people, two of them candidates for Deputy, were arrested on Tuesday when they attempted to disrupt the voting process. The two candidates concerned were from the l'Artibonite en Action (LAA) and Fusion parties." Source: Signal FM, 9 February 2006.

Also in the Artibonite: "In Grande Saline (section Poteneau), three Deputy candidates (LAA, Mochrena and Fusion) destroyed ballot papers. In Martineau (section La Chapelle) supporters of the LAA and Fusion parties did the same thing." Source: Commission Episcopale Nationale Justice et Paix, 9 February 2006

In the Grand Anse department: "In Bourdon, in the commune of Chambellan, an election centre containing 12 polling stations was set on fire, and all the election materials and ballot papers were destroyed." Source: Signal FM, 9 February 2006.

Bachelet and Senate to Decide on Haiti
Prensa Latina
Feb. 17, 2006

Santiago, Chile -- Chilean Foreign Minister Ignacio Walker said it will be up to President-elect Michelle Bachelet to decide on the controversial presence of Chilean troops in Haiti.

"The troops should come home after they accomplish their mission, but this is something to be determined by the next government, President-elect Michelle Bachelet and Parliament, because the Senate has final say in authorizing their presence," Walker said.

In a meeting Wednesday, newly-elected Haitian President Rene Preval told OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza and UN Special Representative Juan Gabriel Valdes that he agreed with the presence of foreign troops, according to Walker.

In his press conference, Walker reiterated that the solution to the Haitian issue is a long-term one, and he explained that UN Mission (MINUSTAH)'s main task has been in the security field, with other outstanding objectives such as democratization and economic development.

In this regard, he said he absolutely agrees with Valdes, who has reiterated that Haiti will need a UN presence for at least another three years. "No one knows better than he," he stressed.

Walker said aid wouldn't necessarily have to be military, but also in other fields, and highlighted the leadership of Valdes and Insulza (both Chileans) in dealing with the Haitian crisis.

However, his views contrast with those of internal political sectors ranging from radical left to opposition extreme right, which favor a Chilean pullout by June.

Chile was the first country in the region which supported the US when it ousted and expelled elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide in April 2004. Since then, Haiti has been one of its main foreign policy priorities.

Préval declared winner
BY LETTA TAYLER
Newsday.com
February 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Banging pots, blowing tin horns and chanting, "The people won!" Haitians took to the streets yesterday to celebrate the victory of René Préval, a champion of the poor who was named president in an unusual, pre-dawn move to avert chaos in this volatile island nation.

Préval was declared the winner after a tumultuous week in which he slammed returns from the Feb. 7 vote as "fraudulent," thousands of his supporters paralyzed Haiti with protests and mounds of half-burned ballots were discovered in a dump.

Using a legal loophole, Haiti's electoral council changed its tallying methods to push Préval's lead in the 33-way race to 51.1 percent. He needed at least 50 percent to avert a runoff with his closest rival, intellectual Leslie Manigat, who got about 12 percent of the vote.

"We have won," Préval told the Haitian Press Agency in his only public statement yesterday. "We thank God and the population. We will now fight for parliament."

Manigat blasted the tallying maneuver as an "electoral coup d'état."

"This statistical manipulation of the vote amounts to a prize to those who advocate violence," said Manigat, who briefly served as president in 1988 in a vote rigged by the military.

But diplomats and United Nations officials hailed the electoral council's decision as a road out of chaos in a country with a bloody political history. Haiti has teetered on the brink since armed rebels ousted firebrand leftist President Jean-Bertrand Aristide two years ago.

"In mature democracies, the social tissue is strong enough to heal the wounds of polarization created during an election campaign," said Gérard Le Chevalier, who heads a UN electoral team that helped oversee the vote. "But in this society, a political campaign can aggravate tensions which will break the net. We were in a crisis, and a crisis requires extraordinary measures."

For days, Préval supporters - many from Port-au-Prince's squalid slums - had staged peaceful but massive protests. But many had threatened violence if a runoff was required, saying the country's tiny but powerful elite would try to sabotage a second round.

In Washington yesterday, a State Department spokesman said the United States "looks forward to working with the new government."

Early returns had shown Préval, 63, with nearly two-thirds of the vote. But when most ballots were counted, his lead dipped to 48.7 percent, in large part because 4.7 percent of votes that were cast had not been marked for any candidate.

The unusually high number of blanks raised suspicions that unused ballots had been intentionally or accidentally stuffed into ballot boxes.

A new Haitian election law requires blank ballots to be counted in the vote total. But under a deal brokered by foreign diplomats, the Haitian electoral council distributed them according to the percentage that each candidate won, effectively nullifying their impact.

An additional 15 percent of ballots cast were lost, stolen, improperly filed or declared invalid because they weren't clearly marked.

The election's crowning blow was the discovery Tuesday night of tens of thousands of ballots, many marked for Préval, in a fetid landfill outside a Port-au-Prince slum.

UN and Haitian authorities here said it wasn't clear if the marked ballots had been cast and then stolen, or if they were unused ballots that were fraudulently marked for Préval and placed at the dump to provoke violence that could spoil the vote. Either way, they said, it appeared the ballots were from polling or tabulation centers that had been guarded by UN troops.

That presented a colossal embarrassment to a UN mission that has been struggling to keep order with 9,300 peacekeepers since Aristide fled in 2004.

Préval, a former Aristide protege who distanced himself when his mentor became mired in corruption scandals, served as president from 1996 to 2001. He faces daunting problems when he takes office March 29, including armed gangs and rogue police that rob and kidnap at will, a 50 percent illiteracy rate, 70 percent poverty and nearly two-thirds unemployment.

But in poor neighborhoods yesterday, residents were ecstatic, even smiling and waving at UN peacekeepers they usually describe as enemies.

"This is the end of the armed struggle," said Cesar Frantz, 28, a reputed gang member in the notorious Port-au-Prince slum of Cité Soleil. "It's a new day in Haiti."

New York Times Editorial
Stumbling Forward in Haiti
Published: February 17, 2006

The internationally brokered deal that declared René Préval the official winner of last week's Haitian election provided the best available exit from a bad and worsening situation. It required reinterpreting the election rules after the votes had been counted, which tarnishes the democratic legitimacy this election was supposed to provide.

But the prospects for a democratically acceptable outcome faced a more imminent threat from escalating violence by the frustrated Préval supporters who believed, perhaps accurately, that they had been defrauded of a first-round victory. By any count, Mr. Préval won at least 48.7 percent of the votes and led his nearest rival by a margin of four to one. Dispensing with a runoff creates a narrow path forward, if Mr. Préval is wise enough to take it.

That will require reaching out to his opponents, as well as reining in his violence-prone supporters, many of them inherited from his mentor, the twice-elected, twice-deposed former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Mr. Aristide and Mr. Préval, who won an election in 1995, are the only two democratically elected leaders in Haiti's long history. Only Mr. Préval peacefully served a full five-year term.

Beyond this feat of survival, Mr. Préval did not have a successful first term. The police remained brutal and corrupt. No progress was made toward creating a competent judiciary. Legislative elections were badly flawed. Drug trafficking flourished. Pro-government gangs ruled the slums. Little economic growth trickled down to the impoverished majority.

At least some of the responsibility for that lies with Mr. Aristide, the real political power during the first Préval presidency. If Mr. Préval again lets Mr. Aristide run things, those problems could recur. If he tries to keep Mr. Aristide at a distance, popular support for him could shrink fast. Under any circumstances, Haiti will need international support for a long time.

Haiti's Elections: Right Result, For The Wrong Reason
Brian Concannon Jr., Esq.
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
February 17, 2006

On February 7, Haitian voters went to the polls to elect a President for the fourth time since 1990. Through great patience and determination they overcame official disorganization, incompetence and discrimination, and for the fourth time since 1990 handed their chosen candidate a landslide victory. And for the fourth time Haitian elites, with support from the International Community, started immediately to undercut the victory, seeking at the negotiation table what they could not win at the voting booth.

The foothold for the negotiation was an impasse over whether the successful candidate, Rene Preval, won the 50% of the vote necessary to avoid a runoff election against his nearest competitor. Although early official results and the unofficial tallies by the Preval campaign, international observers and journalists all showed Mr. Preval comfortably above the 50% bar, after 5 days of counting his official results crept 1.3% below it.

The negotiations resulted in a deal that changes the way that the Electoral Council treats blank ballots, which, according to the Council's calculation, puts Mr. Preval back above 50%. By giving Mr. Preval the election, the agreement closes the book on serious charges that the Interim Government of Haiti (IGH) manipulated vote tabulations and discarded ballots to prevent him from winning. It also allows the international community to say, after two years under the brutal and undemocratic IGH, that there is now democracy in Haiti.

The election deal gives a little something to everyone, and that's the problem. Elections are not supposed to make everyone happy; they are supposed to apportion political power according to majority vote, on the basis of set rules. In all likelihood, a correct tabulation of the votes would have given Mr. Preval a first round victory, as exit polls and unofficial tabulations had predicted. Although the negotiated agreement reaches the same result as a correct tabulation would have reached, it does so by changing the rules instead of correcting the violations of the rules.

The deal provides leverage for those seeking to delegitimize Preval's presidency and block the progressive social and economic policies that he was elected to implement. The election's also-rans are already crying foul, and they will be joined by more voices from Haiti's elite and the International Community. Soon enough, invoking "the contested elections of February 2006" will suffice to justify an array of economic and political coercion against Haiti's elected government.

Even Leslie Manigat, the second place finisher, wins with the deal. He earned less than 12% of the votes the first time around, and had no chance of winning a fair second round vote. There were 17,000 more mistakes- unmarked or improperly marked ballots- than Manigat votes. Even if all 30 of the other losing candidates had thrown their support behind Mr. Manigat- and many had already declared for Preval- he still would have been far short of a victory.

The deal spares Mr. Manigat a drubbing in the second round, and more importantly, allows him to claim, forever, that he was cheated out of a chance to win on the second round. He got this ball rolling

by immediately calling a press conference to criticize the International Community and the IGH for caving into the threat of violence.

Mr. Manigat is right that no one should have caved into the threat of violence. But they should have caved into the clear popular vote in favor of Mr. Preval.

The Problem

The defective vote tabulation is just the latest in a long string of efforts to minimize the impact of the poor voters who backed Preval. The IGH engaged in a comprehensive program to suppress political activities of the Lavalas movement, where Mr. Preval drew most of his support, 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. Political prisoners included Haiti's last constitutional Prime Minister, a former member of the House of Deputies, the former Minister of the Interior, and dozens of 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 U.S. 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 the Lavalas movement 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, canceling 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 PM 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 Provisional Electoral Council, or 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 CEP had reduced Preval's official vote to 49.61%; by Monday it was at 48.7%, about 22,500 votes below 50%.

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 had fraudulently reduced his number.

Shortly after Mr. Preval's announcement, Haitian television broadcast such proof: thousands of ballots, some burnt, most of them Preval votes, found in a dump near Cite Soleil, and not far from the CEP's tabulation center. Preval's opponents claim that his supporters dumped the ballots as a provocation after his speech. But that theory does not explain why witnesses report seeing the ballots at the dump for a day before the speech, nor how thousands of ballots were removed from CEP custody.

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. Mr. Preval would not have needed to win an overwhelming percentage of these 190,000 votes to increase his lead by the 22,500.

Who's In Charge?

The Electoral Council, which was named through a complicated process in 2004, is supposed to be running the tabulation of votes. In fact, Jacques Bernard, who was appointed "Executive Director" of the Council- a position not previously recognized in Haitian law- by the Prime Minister late last year, is running the Council's activities. Councilor Pierre Richard Duchemin charges Mr. Bernard with "manipulation" of the results, 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.

Null and Blank Votes

Electoral officials have 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." As the U.S. experience with butterfly ballots and hanging chads demonstrated, voters are going to make mistakes even under the best conditions. Haiti's conditions were far from the best- Presidential ballots were complicated, with 33 candidates, each with a photo, an emblem and the names of the candidate and the party; voters were tired from walking and waiting; some voting was done in the dark by candlelight; and many voters are unused to filling out forms or writing. All these factors could lead to a high number of mistakes-like marking two boxes- that made determining the voters' choice impossible.

But 147,765 voided votes is a high number, suspiciously high since the decision to nullify was made by local officials handpicked by an Electoral Council that had no representation from Preval's Lespwa party or Lavalas. Overly strict criterion (such as requiring an "x" to be completely within a candidate's box), even if neutrally applied, would have had a disproportionate impact on poor 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% of the total valid votes, are classified as blank ballots. These votes were actually counted against Preval, because under the election law 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. In principle the system allows voters to show their displeasure with all the candidates by voting for no one, which can make sense in places where voting is easier. In practice the system makes no sense in Haiti- it is absurd to think that 85,000 people, many without enough to eat, 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 some voters got confused by the complicated ballots and marked nothing. Again, this problem would disproportionately affect poor voters likely to vote for Preval.

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, demonstrating 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, more than \$30 for every vote cast- most of it coming from abroad. 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.

The Best Solution

The remedy to the problems with the vote tabulation should have been to carefully redo the calculations, in the open. First, the math from all the calculations that were previously made should have been checked against the original tally sheets. Where the tally sheets lacked the codes, the local officials should have been tracked down to confirm that the results are correct.

In the case of electoral materials intercepted on the way to the CEP, it is possible to reconstruct the result through the Electoral Code's backup systems. The actual counting of the ballots is done on site, immediately after the closing of the polls, by each Bureau de Vote (each Bureau serves 400 voters). The Bureau officials conduct the counting, but are observed by mandataires, or representatives of political parties. A report listing the results of the counting is prepared, and at least six copies are made. The Bureau officials and the mandataires all sign each of the copies if they agree with the report. The copies are then distributed widely: one is posted on the voting center door, one copy each is sent to the Communal Electoral Office, the Departmental Electoral Office, and the Electoral Council, and each mandataire is entitled to one.

Presumably these copies will leave the Bureau in many different directions. It may be easy to intercept the official results in some areas, but it would be much harder to track down all the copies in the hands of mandataires. It would be difficult for a mandataire to introduce a fraudulent copy of the results that were intercepted, because that would require forging several signatures.

The null votes could have been rechecked through a procedure that applied consistent rules across the country. The null ballots are supposed to be segregated in a separate envelope, so it would be easy to go through the envelopes from a few Bureaus, to ascertain whether there were enough improperly nullified ballots to justify a comprehensive review. If Preval could have added 22,500 votes to his lead from the 147,000 null votes, this alone would have put him over the top.

The blank ballot rule is inappropriate, and it should be changed. But it should be changed for Haiti's next election, when it should be less of a problem anyway because of better voter education.

The ballots found in the Cite Soleil dump could have been traced. All ballots are numbered, and each Bureau keeps a record of the numbers on the ballots it used and did not use. The chain of custody could have been followed, to see how the ballots left CEP custody.

Following these procedures would have been time consuming, but it would have provided verifiable answers to the questions raised about the vote tabulation, and a clear answer as to whether Mr. Preval needed to face a second round. It also would have provided other answers- whether the charges of manipulation in the tabulations were justified, and who diverted the ballots to the Cite Soleil dump.

In giving up his right to a correct tabulation of the vote, Mr. Preval probably calculated that the international community, which had not complained about the inadequate registration and voting facilities, and only lightly complained about the IGH's political prisoners, would show similar restraint when faced with tabulation irregularities. And he knew that if the first round could be stolen from him, the second round could as well.

The Chosen Solution

The negotiators, instead of correcting the tabulation, decided to change the rules for the calculation of blank votes. They allotted blank votes to the candidates' totals proportionately to each one's existing vote share. So Preval got 48.7% of the blank votes, Manigat 12%, etc., which pushed Preval up over the 50% bar. This solution does make sense- it assumes, probably correctly, that the blank votes resulted from confusion, and allocates the votes accordingly. The result is the same as if the CEP simply discarded the blank votes, and treated them the same as null votes.

But what is sensible is not always what is legal. Preval's opponents know that a regime that can be negotiated into power can be negotiated out of power. They have already staked out the position that Preval is illegitimate because the deal changed the rules of the game in the middle of the contest. They will keep saying it, and will soon enough be joined by the International Community who will keep saying it. In the not-too-distant future, the election's illegitimacy will be accepted as "fact" in the elite Haitian and international press, at the UN, the OAS and the International Financial Institutions. The "fact" will justify withholding money for schools and hospitals, and sending money to political parties with no electoral support. The fact that Mr. Manigat had no chance of winning a second round, widely acknowledged now, will be forgotten or never learned by the next rotation of diplomats and journalists to Haiti.

Conclusion

An editorial in this Friday's New York Times proclaims that this future begins now. The Times declares that the election deal "tarnishes the democratic legitimacy" of Preval's landslide. It recommends that Preval remove the tarnish by "reaching out to his opponents" (e.g. pursuing policies that the voters rejected), and "reining in his violence-prone supporters." The editorial did not suggest that Mr. Preval's opponents, many of whom were key players in the violent overthrow of Haiti's democracy two years ago which led to thousands of deaths, rein in their supporters. Nor, when it declared that "Haiti will need international support for a long time," did the Times mention its own groundbreaking report of January 29 that the U.S., among other members of the International Community, intentionally undermined and overthrew Haiti's elected government in 2004.

Although the Times does not find the context of two weeks or two years ago relevant, it does catalogue Preval's sins from his first administration, and it is a fair bet that we will hear this list often over the next five years. The police "remained brutal and corrupt" (by any account, the police have become

much more brutal and much more corrupt under the IGH); “no progress was made toward creating a competent judiciary” (Preval’s administration saw the two best human rights prosecutions in Haiti’s history in 2000, both lauded by the UN, Amnesty International and, among others, the New York Times; Preval also made the Judges Academy, dismantled by the IGH, operational); “legislative elections were badly flawed;” “drug trafficking flourished;” etc.

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 supported the candidate of the Lavalas political movement at levels unheard of in “mature democracies”-no runner-up ever topped 16% of the vote. But each time a minority in Haiti, with support from the International Community, successfully limited this mandate. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the victor in the first and third of those elections, suffered two successful coup d’etats, 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 away from the economic and social development policies he was elected to implement.

Haiti’s politics are not parlor games. Each coup d’etat leads to thousands of deaths, and many more times that are killed by diseases that would be prevented or treated by the programs of a less embattled government. The life expectancy for men in Haiti has dropped below 50. It is far past time for the International Community to stop condemning Haiti to repeating this outrageously unjust history.

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Haiti's new President slow to go public

ABC News

AP

By Andrew Selsky

February 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti Feb 17, 2006 (AP)— President-elect Rene Preval, the man of the hour after his turbulent election victory, appeared before reporters and cameras at his sister's home Friday but would only say he will make a statement next week.

"Wednesday at 11, Wednesday at 11," Preval, speaking in Spanish, French, Creole and English, said to a crowd of reporters on the lawn of the house, his only response to questions at the photo opportunity.

His victory in a bitter election marred by fraud charges sent jubilant Haitians dancing and singing in the streets, many calling on the soft-spoken former agronomist to bring security and jobs to the impoverished Caribbean nation.

That's a tall order for Preval, who remained shuttered in his sister's house in Haiti's capital late Thursday, hours after electoral and government officials declared him the election winner in a move that eased the threat of rioting by his supporters.

"We have won, we thank God and the population," the shy, former president who is backed by the nation's poor majority told the Haitian Press Agency. "We will now fight for Parliament."

Preval, who led Haiti from 1996 to 2001, became the coup-prone nation's first elected president ever to finish his term when he left office five years ago.

This time around, he inherits a nation in worse shape than when he first assumed power. Heavily armed street gangs wage daily gunfights with U.N. peacekeepers, and seething mistrust and tension divides the rich and poor.

"I think that Mr. Preval has a very crucial role in inviting Haitians to participate in the future of the country and to have an open dialogue with all sectors," said U.N. special envoy to Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes.

Expectations among Haitians are running high.

On Thursday, people began dancing in the streets of Port-au-Prince as word spread that elections officials decided, eight days after the Feb. 7 vote, to redistribute blank ballots among the candidates, giving 63-year-old Preval just enough votes to avoid a runoff with second-place finisher Leslie Manigat.

"I'm so happy, because we have what we were looking for," said Elvia Pressoir, 36, as she waited outside the gate of the sister's house for him to appear. "With Preval, we'll have security, jobs and life will get back to normal."

Exultant Haitians waved ripped tree branches, which some say is a Voodoo gesture to sweep away bad spirits.

"Now we have hope," said Dabual Jean, a 24-year-old who sells fruit on the street in the capital. "The country is upside down. With Preval, hopefully we'll get on the right path."

But that won't come easy in Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Most people here live on less than \$2 per day and have no running water or access to doctors.

The son of a former government official, Preval has vowed to crack down on hardened criminals.

But he has been vague on whether he would welcome back ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is in exile in South Africa. A former slum priest, Aristide fled Haiti as the United States withdrew support for his government amid an armed rebellion and accusations that he was corrupt and had encouraged his supporters to attack his opponents.

The U.S. government considers a possible return of Aristide to be a destabilizing factor, and has hinted that he should remain in exile.

On Thursday, the U.S. State Department congratulated Preval on his win, saying Washington looked forward to working with his government.

"We understand that the results of the elections respect Haitian laws and regulation," press officer Jan Edmonson said.

Preval had remained a hair short of an outright majority after 96 percent of the vote was tabulated. Haitian officials then decided to divide the 85,000 blank ballots cast among the candidates in proportion to the percentage they had already achieved giving Preval just over 51 percent, said Michel Brunache, chief of Cabinet for interim President Boniface Alexandre.

The decision appears to have averted chaos in Haiti, where the masses loyal to Preval had said the elections were being rigged to deny him a first-round victory. The allegations gained weight with the discovery of thousands of ballots and other election material in a garbage dump.

Preval had vowed to challenge the results if officials insisted on a runoff, but meanwhile urged his supporters to demonstrate peacefully.

"Since last Tuesday, the government was looking for a solution out of the crisis," Brunache told The Associated Press. "It was obvious that the people had massively made a choice, and that we needed to make sure that choice was respected."

Brunache said redistributing the blank ballots was justified because the interim Haitian government also suspected fraud.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the ballot redistribution was "a reasonable way to attempt to resolve a conflict, an impasse that could have led to conflict and violence."

But Manigat accused election officials of breaking the rules to give Preval a first-round victory.

"We are not going to be sore losers but we are human beings," Manigat told reporters. He would not say if he would register a formal complaint.

Associated Press writer Alfred de Montesquiou in San Juan, Puerto Rico, contributed to this report.

Haiti election authority says fraud tainted vote

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

Fri Feb 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haiti's presidential election was tainted by signs of fraud including blank ballots that represented a third of the votes cast in some polling stations, electoral authorities said on Friday.

The conclusion of fraud served as a defense of the Provisional Electoral Council's decision a day earlier to hand the election to Rene Preval, a champion of Haiti's poor who had complained over the ballot irregularities. The finding conflicts with statements from some international organizations.

In addition to the blank ballots, in other polling stations the number of ballots left over at the end of the day was less than the number of people who had voted would indicate.

"The blank ballots were probably introduced into the ballot boxes in a fraudulent manner," Max Mathurin, president of the electoral council, told Vision 2000 radio, "This looked weird," he said.

It was the council's first public acknowledgment that the February 7 election was tainted by what Preval called massive fraud.

The council on Thursday morning gave the election to Preval after he complained about the large number of ballots that had been left unmarked by voters. The total number of blank votes amounted to between 85,000 and 90,000, Mathurin said, out of 2.2 million votes cast.

The blank ballots reduced Preval's vote share to less than the majority needed for a first-round victory. Several of Preval's rival candidates had earlier agreed to join forces against him in the event of a second round.

Blank ballots are a common way to express a protest vote in established democracies. But few Haitians believed that their fellow voters were unable to find a suitable candidate among the 33 rivals running for the presidency.

Nor was it likely that all those people would have walked miles (km) and waited in line for hours, just to leave ballot papers unmarked, Mathurin said.

The discovery of half-burned votes, many cast for Preval, on a garbage dump in Port-au-Prince fueled suspicions and the final straw was when the council discovered the large numbers of blank votes in some polling stations -- numbers it could not believe were legitimate.

"In some polling stations, blank ballots totaled a quarter of the votes, and in some others, one third of the votes," Mathurin said.

He blamed polling-station workers, who were often all of the same political persuasion.

He also said that 4 percent of votes could not be found. Preval was granted a first-round victory with 50.15 percent after 96 percent of ballots had been counted.

Some international organizations said the election was clean.

"There was no fraud," Jose Miguel Insulza, secretary general of the Organization of American States, said on Thursday. "The votes were properly counted, and despite some reports, there should be no talk about fraud and nobody can prove there were irregularities."

After Good Election Day, an Extra-Legal Move to Award First-Round Victory
Originally: Half a Loaf: The Haitian Election of February 7, 2006
Members of Haiti Democracy Project electoral-observation team
Feb. 17, 2006
Haiti Democracy Project web page item #3463 (<http://www.haitipolicy.org>)

Concerning the final disposition of the Preval question, the Haiti Democracy Project is deeply concerned when people (generally in Europe, the developed parts of Latin America, and the U.S.) declare that the process was "good enough by Haitian standards," as if Haitians deserve less than credible due process and full accountability. Haitian political culture will never mature if we set the bar lower and assume some political questions will always be answered in the streets. Preval was the obvious winner, but improvising with law and the constitution will neither produce a Preval presidency any sooner nor change the plight of the average Haitian on the day after inauguration.

On February 15, 2006 at 11:00 PM, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) declared former President Rene Garcia Préval the winner of presidential balloting conducted February 7th. The decision by the CEP followed a suggestion by the European Union (EU) to allocate 85,290 unmarked ballots collected on February 7th proportionally among all presidential candidates and thereby end large scale street protests by Préval supporters claiming that he had been denied a first round victory by virtue of fraud. This move enabled Préval's vote total to rise from 49% to 51%, obviating the need for a second round of presidential balloting as required when no candidate achieves a majority of first round votes.

Although Préval emerged as the clear front-runner and odds-on favorite to win the presidency had second-round balloting for president been conducted, awarding victory to Préval was an extra-legal move by the CEP that contravenes both the Haitian Constitution and Haitian electoral law. Moreover, a second round of voting still is required to determine outcomes in various races for the Haitian Senate and National Assembly.

Seldom, if ever, has Haiti conducted all aspects of a national election in compliance with law and due process. The first election of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1990, frequently cited as the high water mark for free, fair, and credible elections in Haiti, was itself determined on the strength of exit polling, without a final, official vote count.

During the first round of presidential and legislative balloting on February 7, 2006, Haiti conducted an apparently credible voting process with the help of substantial foreign oversight and investment (\$60 million) and with the assistance of approximately 300 foreign observers and upwards of 140,000 domestic observers. Despite the irregular process by which the CEP declared a Préval victory, there is no serious challenge to the assertion that Préval was the favorite of the largest number of voters by a wide margin.

This report documents observation of the voting process by international observers sponsored by the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP) and credentialed by the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). HDP's objective in preparing this report recognizes that elections in Haiti are a work in progress, and observations/recommendations are intended to improve the process during future elections.

HDP observed the electoral process at a variety of locations, including multiple voting centers in Petion-ville, Delmas, the Carrefour-Feuilles area, Leogane, Cité Soleil, Bas Lalue, Lalue Nord, and in northern areas of the country in the vicinity of Cap Haitien..

In most areas, large numbers of Haitians cast ballots in what appeared to be a free and fair but marginally-organized process, without violence, coercion, or apparent manipulation. Initial problems (late opening of voting centers, late delivery of voter lists, disorganization due to poor planning and a very large early turnout) were generally overcome during the course of the day. Operating hours were extended up to three hours to accommodate voters who could not cast ballots even though they presented themselves within normal voting hours (6:00 AM to 4:00 PM) because the voting process itself was too slow.

This initial report is based heavily on observations in and around Port-au-Prince. Experiences were not uniform at all locations, but were sufficiently consistent to produce recommendations to improve future rounds of voting that can be applied nation-wide. Pre-election day observations based on visits to CEP Headquarters, one voting center, and Haitian National Police (HNP) and UNPOL police facilities are included in this report. HDP observers did not witness ballot tabulation center operations, although planning and security for such operations appeared adequate.

It should be noted also that the balloting conducted on February 7 benefited from favorable but unpredictable conditions that are beyond the direct control of election officials or observers. These included favorable weather conditions, lack of widespread or organized violence, and a high tolerance among the Haitian people for systemic delays and inefficiencies. Had any of those conditions been different—for example, if heavy rains or extreme heat were present—the ability of certain large voting centers to sustain operations throughout the day would have been severely compromised. In many cases, voting tables were located outdoors because indoor capacity was inadequate. In most indoor locations visited, lighting was inadequate, electric power was unavailable, and access was difficult.

Pre-Election Preparations:

- Ballots and voting paraphernalia (but not voter lists) appear to have been distributed, pre-positioned, and secured successfully.
- Voting Center officials and some CEP security augmentees were present at a voting center visited prior to Election Day, both to secure materials and provide guidance to poll workers. However, officials frequently were unclear on specific responsibilities of poll workers and were in some instances unable to answer questions relating to a poll worker's specific assignments on Election Day.
- CEP Headquarters had substantial difficulties producing a current listing of voting centers/locations less than 24 hours prior to balloting.
- Although voter I.D. cards played a key positive role in creating enthusiasm and voter interest, automated card procedures did not make adequate allowance for changes to voting locations, requiring manual entry of each location affixed to the I.D. cards. Automated number coding included on the reverse of the cards to direct voters to specific voting locations was not comprehensible to many voters.

Election Day Operations:

- A high percentage of prospective voters, some officials have estimated as comprising an absolute majority of those intending to cast ballots, arrived at voting centers prior to the official opening time of

6:00 AM. At virtually all centers visited with the exceptions of the École Nationale Colbert Lochard and the offices of the Interim Prime Minister, where voters were guided to their appropriate voting location, voting sites were unprepared to deal with the volume of early voters and were quickly overwhelmed. At those centers where order was maintained throughout observer visits, the process was aided significantly by students dressed in yellow polo shirts (société civique des jeunes) who assisted site supervisors.

- Elsewhere long and unmanageable lines formed, made worse by the delayed opening of many centers and poor or absent entry control. Despite pre-positioning of materials, some centers did not open for up to four or five hours after the official starting time because voter lists or official personnel were unavailable.

- Voters were allowed to enter voting centers more rapidly than those who had already voted were compelled to depart. Too few election officials and security personnel (including both Haitian and UNPOL) were on-hand to deal with the crowds, both inside and outside the voting centers. UNPOL personnel were deployed in numbers too small proactively to prevent or alleviate overcrowding of voting centers.

- Where possible, voting centers need designated exits as well as entry points, with direct communication/coordination among UNPOL, Haitian police and security augmentees to require voters who had completed marking ballots to exit promptly thereafter. Some centers (e.g., Lycée de Guatemala, co-located with Lycée de Uruguay) had no separate exit. Others (e.g., Lycée de Petion-ville, Cité Soleil/Industrial Park, Upper Delmas) had a designated exit, but most voters were not using it. In these instances, no organized effort was made to compel people to leave.

- At centers where massive crowds appeared, estimated at 10,000 voters, and too few security personnel were present (e.g., Lycée de Petion-ville, Lycée De Carrefour-Feuilles), there was no way of knowing whether people who gathered within a voting center were waiting to vote but had failed to locate their individual voting station, had already voted, or had voting rights denied because their names did not appear on voter lists even though their voter I.D. card indicated that they were at their proper voting location. Moreover, there was no standard local means to accommodate voters who possessed valid voter I.D. cards but whose names did not appear on voter lists, and no uniform process for dealing with such voters. Supervisors of voting centers improvised, in some cases allowing such individuals to vote while setting aside for later validation ballots marked by those individuals.

- In some instances, voting center supervisors failed to utilize available personnel. At the Lycée Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Avenue Christophe), the entry gate was completely unmonitored and chaos ensued because the voting center supervisor refused to allow available volunteers from the “Société civique” to perform crowd control functions.

- Throughput at voting centers must be improved significantly, especially at large centers containing 20 to over 40 individual voting tables. There, large crowds blocked the streets to normal traffic and there was no apparent pre-established procedure for directing voters once inside the voting center. Many voting centers were overwhelmed by volume because people were allowed to enter too rapidly. The pace of exit by those who have completed voting must dictate the pace of entry by new groups of voters. Within voting centers, those entering need to be channeled by fixed barriers into a line or lines to election officials capable of directing individuals to appropriate voting tables. Press/media were permitted inside some voting centers and conducted on-the-scene interviews with candidates, further disrupting the process.

- Choke points quickly developed within voting centers and at voting tables for a variety of other reasons:

- o Some names and pictures on voter lists were not printed in alphabetical order, making it difficult to find names of voters quickly and requiring extra time for voters to cast their ballots. Requiring officials to sign the reverse of completed ballots slowed the process further. Although this step presumably was intended as an anti-corruption measure to prevent later marking of unmarked ballots, signatures were not verified.
- o Voting stations had little structural integrity. Using a small bench divided with lightweight paper board for 3-4 voters to place their ballots and vote often collapsed and needed to be reassembled because lightweight paper board privacy screens kept braking apart; requiring voting to stop so the cardboard could be reconstructed. Had even moderate rain been present, such devices could not be used.
- o Many poll workers complained that they have been at one specific bureau for over 10 hours without a lunch break, food or water. After an extended period of time, an individual's level of alertness diminishes without food and water, which compromises the process. Allowing a break after 4-5 hours could prevent careless errors. Toward the end of the day, poll workers' fatigue and diminished level of commitment may compromise the remaining part of the process.
- o Voting centers had no obvious provision for voters unable to read. In some instances, alphabetical signs intended to direct voters were hand scribed and/or incomplete.
- o Although ballots and voting stations were pre-positioned, voter lists often arrived late and some names of voters were missing. Some lists arrived late in the morning and some as late as 2:00 PM. This caused some voters who had waited for hours to depart in frustration. It is not known what percentage of such voters returned at a later time. In Cité Soleil, voting did not begin until 10:30 AM. In centers such as the Industrial Park, voting was slowed by poor lighting and would have ceased entirely by about 4:30 PM, with thousands still waiting to vote, had not HDP observers contacted senior CEP and UN/ MINUSTAH officials and pressed for generators and artificial lighting to be installed. There were no contingency plans for such circumstances.
- o There appeared to be no planning for emergency evacuation of voters requiring immediate medical attention. Even when MINUSTAH personnel were present with an ambulance, as occurred at a site in Upper Delmas, Jordanian troops refused to use that capability for voters, advising observers that ambulance equipment was for use of MINUSTAH personnel only. Accommodations should be made for certain groups whose votes may affect the voting count: pregnant women, stroke patients, elderlies (with or without walkers). Given the amount of time that these individuals stand in line, exhaustion and abandonment become inevitable. A separate line for these individuals could alleviate additional emergency and medical situations that are difficult to manage under "normal" circumstances. This problem was overcome in some locations (Lycée de Guatemala, Lycée de Uruguay) where poll workers simply carried disabled and elderly voters to the head of the line, then returned them to the street after voting

As a consequence of lack of CEP planning and procedures for voting center operations, voting was unnecessarily delayed during the initial 3-4 hours in most locations. Due to the goodwill and patience of the average Haitian voter, locally determined fixes to process problems appeared to allow most Haitian who were determined to vote to do so eventually during the course of the day, but those fixes were not uniform.

Management Planning for March 19

The plan should set out the key issues to be addressed and deal with lessons learned from February 7, 2006. It should identify the various key operational areas and who will be responsible for each. The strategic plan should set out the overall principles for the work of the electoral management body. The

operational plan should then apply these principles to the specific electoral task(s) involved and prepare a detailed plan which will put a time frame and programmed action against each of the activities.

This plan need not be complex or lengthy. At individual voting centers, for example, a single-page directive could advise local officials of steps that must be taken in every case (e.g. installation of fixed cordons to channel incoming voters to officials who can further direct them to voting tables), and “if, then” directives telling local officials what to do when the process fails (e.g., what to do with voters who possess valid I.D. cards but whose names do not appear on voter lists, what to do if it rains, what to do if voting must continue into hours of darkness to accommodate those already in line by 4:00 PM).

Learning from the February 7 Election:

Strategic planning of the next election process should focus on what happened on February 7th. A review of the strengths and weaknesses of the last electoral process is essential. Electoral work is normally repetitive and the lessons learned during the last election must be taken into account in planning for March 19th. The same issues and problems often come up time after time during the electoral process - polling sites are poorly laid out causing delays and confusion, the vote counting is conducted in cramped, poorly-lit conditions with poor layout and organization, or poll workers in one site deal with a situation differently from those in another site due to inadequate training. One must ensure that problems experienced during the last electoral process have been identified and include in the strategic plan to make sure that they do not recur.

If the problems are beyond the control of the electoral management body or election manager, they must be highlighted and contingency planning must be done. For example, if installation of lighting to accommodate late voting or voting in inclement weather simply is not feasible in some areas, the CEP could distribute/preposition large numbers of inexpensive self-rechargeable flashlights instead of relying on candles. If a disaster occurs, officials should focus not only on the logistical aspects of conducting the election, but also on the necessity of defending steps taken to complete the process. Some February 7th problems can be avoided by making electoral officials available to voters prior to March 19th to validate their voting location, for example. Some problems can be mitigated by media, such as encouraging voters to present themselves for voting throughout the day, rather than appearing at 6:00 AM.

There may be other issues to include in contingency planning. Clearly, there needs to be more effective and comprehensive observer attention to the chain of custody of tally sheets and ballots after voting is completed. The important point for the CEP and UN Mission personnel to recognize is that however good the system and the people operating it are and however well planned the process may be, problems (hopefully small but occasionally very large) will occur. These problems may be totally beyond the control of designated officials, but if there is a proper contingency plan, the issue will be minimized and the response should be defensible. If electoral officials have no contingency or emergency plan, a problem that does not necessarily impact the electoral outcome may be used by disappointed candidates or parties as a rationale for discrediting the electoral process itself, as occurred in Haiti's streets following February 7th balloting.

**Editorial: Counting on Haiti / The country needs to see its election through
Tuesday, February 14, 2006
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

Haiti's presidential elections process, which began last week after four postponements and erupted into public violence yesterday, is not over yet.

Last Tuesday, an estimated 2.2 million Haitians, a high turnout, voted to choose a new president. Some 33 candidates were in the running to succeed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, forced out of office and into exile in South Africa in 2004. The favorite was Rene Preval, 63, an agronomist and former president, considered to be the anointed successor to Mr. Aristide although the exiled president did not endorse him. The winning candidate needed to get 50 percent plus one vote to avoid a second round run-off.

Early results showed Mr. Preval getting 61 percent. As the count proceeded, however, that dropped to 48.7 percent with about 90 percent of the votes counted, greatly disappointing Mr. Preval's supporters and putting at risk the election process. It had also been judged fair and reasonably well-organized by international observers.

Now comes the test of the Haitians. The way many of them see it, Mr. Preval has won. His nearest competitor has less than 12 percent of the vote. Thousands of Mr. Preval's supporters marched yesterday, demanding that his victory be confirmed by the Provisional Electoral Council. Violence erupted in the capital city of Port-au-Prince and at least one protester was shot and killed.

The country has an unenviable history of violence and of changing presidents like late-inning relief pitchers in baseball. Its struggle for independence began with a bloody slave revolt against the French in 1791. Among Mr. Aristide's and now Mr. Preval's supporters are the angry, desperate poor of the slums of Port-au-Prince.

It is nonetheless vital that Haitians continue to go for the gold -- which would be a democratically elected president chosen in free, peaceful elections. Such a president would have the best prospects of turning around the country's dismal economic situation.

It is also up to the international community, in the form of the 9,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops in Haiti, to help the shaky forces of order to hold the line through a second round of elections, if necessary. The United States, which has put troops in the country on many occasions, might consider a rapid reinforcement of the international forces to help keep the lid on until March 19, when such a runoff would be held.

The United States has a big stake in Haiti's stability.

Exiled Haitian leader remains mum on vote

By MICHELLE FAUL

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Seattle Post Intelligencer

Friday February 17, 2006

PRETORIA, South Africa -- Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the exiled Haitian leader who still claims to be the country's real president, has remained silent about the electoral victory of a one-time protege.

Thursday's announcement that Rene Preval has won the first elections since Aristide's ouster in a February 2004 coup has raised speculation about the former leader's future.

Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president, fled a rebellion amid allegations of corruption and oppression.

His South African hosts still call him "President Aristide," let him live in a villa in the presidential compound in Pretoria, and say he is welcome to stay as long as he needs but hope "he is not here for life," in the words of Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

Aristide's spokeswoman Maryse Narcisse said Friday "President Aristide is still the elected constitutional president of Haiti."

"I think the people of Haiti said 'We are voting to ensure the return of our constitutionally elected president, we want our leader-in-exile to be able to come back,'" Narcisse said in a telephone interview from her base in New York.

Preval's rallies were punctuated by occasional calls for the return of Aristide, whose tenure as president would officially have ended on Feb. 7.

"Preval would still be president, but it's time for Aristide to come back. He's been gone for too long," said one Preval supporter, 53-year-old Andre Octave Laplante.

Aristide nurtured Preval's political career. When the constitution banned Aristide from seeking a second consecutive term in 1994, Preval ran and won. He was largely seen as keeping the presidential seat warm for Aristide's 1999 bid, but the two fell out.

The cause and extent of that rupture have never been clear.

"This is a huge dilemma and I can't imagine that Mr. Preval would desire to once again have Aristide's presence casting a cloud over his ability to lead," Robert Maguire, director of international affairs at Trinity University in Washington, said by telephone.

Preval, who was silent when the rest of the country was calling for Aristide's return in 2004, has been ambiguous about whether or not he favors his return.

But Leslie Voltaire, a former Aristide Cabinet minister, said Aristide now "has a friend and an ally in power."

"It will be very difficult for Mr. Preval to work for Mr. Aristide's return right now because Mr. Aristide has a lot of powerful enemies," Voltaire said from Haiti's capital, "But I think that in the near future we could prepare the way for his return."

Those enemies include the United States and France, Haiti's former colonizer, which refused Aristide's pleas for help as armed rebels closed in on Port-au-Prince.

Instead, U.S. officials told Aristide to prepare for a bloodbath or leave on a plane that they chartered. Afterward, U.S. officials accused Aristide of profiting massively from cocaine-trafficking. Aristide denied the charges and no proof was ever offered.

U.S. officials look on an Aristide return as potentially destabilizing and State Department spokesman Sean McCormack strongly hinted last week that he should remain in exile.

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

Associated Press writer Evens Sanon contributed to this report from Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Behind-scenes pressure put Préval over the top

Following a tension-filled week, supporters of René Préval celebrated in the streets after he was declared Haiti's president-elect.

BY JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

Feb. 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE - The tension and burgeoning sense of doom that gripped Haiti this week broke on Thursday with the predawn announcement that René Préval had been elected president. The decision came after Haitian officials met day and night under pressure from foreign diplomats.

Supporters of the quiet 63-year-old agronomist and former president filled the streets soon after the official 3 a.m. announcement, dancing and chanting to the tin warbling of carnival trumpets. The news came after a day of closed-door meetings involving Préval, foreign diplomats, the U.S.-backed interim Haitian government and the nation's electoral council, according to Haitians and foreigners who participated in the meetings.

Diplomats from the half-dozen countries that give heavy financial and military assistance to Haiti -- and largely funded the \$60 million election -- were desperate to find a way to resolve an impasse in the vote-counting that left Préval just short of the outright majority he needed to avert a runoff.

ADDRESSING THE FLAWS

Ambassadors from Brazil and Chile led a push to change the way blank votes were tabulated, something first suggested by U.N. electoral advisors, according to people in the meetings. Canada and France, two countries with long-standing traditional ties to Haiti, initially insisted the council stick to a count that would have forced a runoff, but agreed that significant flaws in the election process would make it impossible to declare the results with precision.

They met with Préval at a U.N. base Monday afternoon, and then flew him to the National Palace, where President Boniface Alexandre promised to work with the electoral council to resolve the crisis. On Tuesday morning, as he promised, Préval went on Haitian radio to tell his supporters to remain peaceful while the dispute was hashed out. He said he suspected "massive fraud."

That evening, diplomats from the United States, Brazil, Chile, Canada, France and the United Nations met with Préval again. Brazilian Ambassador Paulo Cordeiro de Andrade Pinto offered up the notion of allocating the blank votes to candidates according to the percentage of the votes they had received until then.

"This was the technicians' choice," Cordeiro told The Miami Herald.

And the early 2005 electoral decree that laid out the rules of the election was ambiguous, only requiring that the blank votes be included in the total, not explaining how they would be counted.

U.N. advisors, council members and observers agreed that the stunningly high number of blank votes cast -- one out of every 20 votes -- could be a result of poorly trained poll workers dumping unused ballots into ballot boxes.

In a meeting that began Wednesday morning and lasted well past midnight, the council ultimately decided to allocate those blank votes to candidates in proportion to the share of valid votes they received. While this move pumped up everyone's share of the vote, it put Préval over the 50 percent he needed to avoid a runoff. They declared him the winner after 3 a.m.

'TRAGIC EXPERIENCE'

The second-place candidate, 75-year-old former President Leslie Manigat, vented at his estate in the Port-au-Prince suburb of La Plain on Thursday, calling the decision a "tragic experience for the Haitian people," but did not say he would contest the results.

"We are not duped by this Machiavellian comedy of imposing a winner," said Manigat, who had less than 12 percent of the vote before the late-night decision. "This right to a second round was confiscated by a manipulation of statistics . . . The ones who did it have a grave responsibility."

POOR PREPARATION

The first round of national elections on Feb. 7 was supposed to be a model of high-tech precision and efficiency for a country accustomed to fraudulent and violent balloting.

Minimizing potential fraud was crucial to calm the highly charged political atmosphere that followed the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Washington and other foreign donors said credible elections were the only way to restore democracy to the troubled and desperately impoverished nation.

But poor preparation led to a range of problems that soon brought the tabulation of results to a virtual halt. Out of about two million votes cast, 147,000 either disappeared or were nullified, and 85,290 were blank.

The uncertainty was large enough to muddle whether Préval, who had 48.76 percent with more than 90 percent of polling stations accounted for, had won an outright majority or needed to face a runoff.

Suspensions of fraud deepened when television footage showed hundreds if not thousands of ballots and boxes found at the municipal dump. This set off Préval supporters again, and flaming barricades lit the night.

Haitian interim President Boniface Alexandre implored the nine-member electoral council to resolve the crisis.

"We had to do something," said council member Patrick Féquiere. "We could have just told Préval he got 48.76 percent, but when he contests the results all of this mess is going to come out -- the blank votes, the missing votes."

On Wednesday, seven members of the council set out to end the crisis. They holed up in a mansion in the hills above Port-au-Prince with Alexandre's chief of staff, the Minister of the Interior and the

Minister of Justice. They debated various options, from simply throwing the blank votes out to setting a limit to the number of blank votes gathered from any one polling station. By early evening, they had tentatively agreed to distribute the vote pro rata.

The U.N. envoy in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, and OAS Secretary General Jose Insulza informed Préval.

A FINAL CHECK

But before the council declared Préval the winner, they had to run numerous simulations to make sure issues with the missing votes would not bring him below 50 percent again. The other two members meanwhile joined the meeting.

Finally, well after midnight, eight of the nine members signed an agreement declaring Préval the winner.

Eric Joseph, 30, celebrated with a Prestige beer in front of the National Palace in the afternoon, after three days on the streets in protest.

"We will never be tired," he said. ``For two years we have been suffering. Today is a day of deliverance."

Rich-poor divide to challenge Haiti's Preval
Fri Feb 17, 2006
By Michael Christie and Joseph Guyler Delva
Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haitian President-elect Rene Preval has begun meeting rivals to build a parliament coalition as he embarks on an effort to patch deep divides between the country's small elite and the poor majority who propelled him to office.

A constant stream of well-wishers on Friday trooped through the hilltop house of Preval's sister outside Port-au-Prince. Meetings over the last two days have included fourth-placed presidential candidate Chavannes Jeune, and a Senate candidate for the Fusion party, both bitter enemies of Preval's one-time mentor, ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

A reticent, 63-year-old agronomist, Preval was declared the winner of the February 7 election after electoral authorities agreed to redistribute 85,000 unmarked ballots to settle allegations of vote fraud.

He had yet to address the Caribbean nation and lay out his plans after his election was announced in the middle of the night on Thursday.

But Haiti experts and nongovernmental organizations quickly sketched out Preval's challenges in a country where rich and poor are divided by hatred, 80 percent are unemployed and incomes average just \$400 a year.

The wealthy elite's mistrust of the large slum populations -- which fueled turbulence during Aristide's two terms and ultimately led to an armed revolt that ousted the former Roman Catholic priest in February 2004 -- has not gone. The country remains awash in firearms and plagued by gunmen and gangs.

The chaotic and ramshackle capital was ravaged by kidnappings and crime before the election, despite the presence of 9,000 Brazilian-led U.N. troops and police.

"As difficult as getting elected was, the challenges now are absolutely staggering," said Ken Boodhoo, a Florida International University professor who runs the Whole Man Ministries charitable missions in Haiti.

"MASSIVE SUPPORT" NEEDED

Security, jobs, "the problem of the elite" and the potential for Aristide to return from exile were leading challenges for Preval, Boodhoo said. "He needs massive support from the international community and he's probably going to get it."

Charles Arthur of the British-based Haiti Support Group said Preval's first problem will be managing the huge expectations of his supporters in the slums. Continued ...

The second challenge was working with parliament, where election results have yet to be announced, he said.

Preval's coalition "Lespwa," Creole for "The Hope," fielded 19 candidates for 30 Senate seats and 58 candidates for 99 lower house seats, he said.

But Arthur said other groups were likely to dominate parliament and elect a prime minister, who under Haiti's Constitution holds more executive power than the president.

"I see them all (the other leading parties in parliament) as hostile to Preval," Arthur said.

Preval's two main campaign rivals, ex-president Leslie Manigat and industrialist Charles Baker, have both condemned the unusual deal that led to Preval's election, a harbinger perhaps of continued political confrontation.

The United States, long the key foreign player in Haiti, has welcomed Preval's election, but U.S. officials have also warned him not to bring Aristide back from exile.

The international community and \$1.3 billion in promised aid that has been only partially dispersed since Aristide was deposed, are crucial to Preval's government, aid organizations said.

Mountain of problems faces Haiti's new leader

By Jacqueline Charles

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Seattle Times

Friday February 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haitian President-elect René Préval's victory Thursday after nine days of electoral chaos and street violence may have been the easy part. Now he must build a nation — starting with a sack of rice.

Amid grinding poverty, Préval must restore order, jump-start the economy and make the nation's emblematic staple again affordable to the vast majority of Haitians who live on less than \$1 a day.

He will need to address the dire needs of the poor masses who backed his campaign, while reassuring the foreign donors who provide much of Haiti's finances that his government merits their dollars. And he must establish a working relationship with a prime minister who will be chosen by a parliament where his party is unlikely to hold a majority.

Then there's the critical issue of whether he will let former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a populist priest revered by the poorest of Haiti's poor, to return from exile in South Africa and regain influence.

"Every single thing he has to do is a massive, complicated headache," said Robert Fatton, a Haiti expert and political science professor at the University of Virginia. "But he has a chance, however small, to begin to bridge the gap between poor and rich."

Préval's first presidential term, 1996-2001, is generally considered to have been lackluster. His few modest accomplishments were overshadowed by complaints of human-rights abuses and a paralyzing political crisis brought on by allegations of voter fraud in the 2000 parliamentary elections.

Still, the soft-spoken agronomist is far different from the fiery Aristide. He tends to act like a low-key bureaucrat, focusing on small- and medium-scale projects.

But today's Haiti is far different, and far worse off. Its judicial, health-care and police systems have all but collapsed. Most of its bright minds have left, and electricity and roads are sorely needed. Even the price of rice, a staple of the Haitian diet, has gone up and is out of reach for the vast majority of poor Haitians. It is \$31 for a 110-pound sack, compared with \$22.50 shortly before Aristide left two years ago.

"I don't think he has the leadership to do it," said Gervais Charles, an attorney for Group 184, the coalition of business and social groups that helped force Aristide's 2004 ouster. "Préval is very average."

The first test, both Haitian and international observers say, will come as Préval picks his prime minister and Cabinet. Pressure is mounting for him to establish a unity government by choosing either

someone from the opposition or the business elite for the powerful prime minister's post — what could be the first step toward reconciliation in this deeply polarized Caribbean nation.

"He's regarded as a reasonable guy and I think he is prepared to reach across to the opposition," said Roger Noriega, former U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Préval will inherit some projects already started by Haiti's U.S.-backed interim government, which started to build and repair roads with some of \$500 million in international aid pumped into Haiti since Aristide's ouster.

Despite those projects, the country remains a mess. Only an estimated 250,000 Haitians out of an eligible workforce of 5 million are employed in formal jobs. The rest eke out a living through anything from farming to selling chewing gum by roadsides.

Job creation, many Haitians say, must be the top priority of the Préval administration. The number of jobs at duty-free assembly plants, once a key sector of the economy, has dropped over the past two decades by about 40,000 from a high of 60,000. At the same time, the purchasing power of everyday Haitians is the same today as it was in 1955.

Averting Election Theft in Haiti

**By Rep. Maxine Waters,
AlterNet.**

February 17, 2006.

The Haitian people's choice for president narrowly won yesterday, despite the best attempts of the country's wealthy U.S.-backed elite.

A blatant and shameful attempt to steal a presidential election was blocked yesterday in Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. This outrageous injustice was being perpetrated by the same forces that have been oppressing the Haitian people for decades.

In the past, Haiti has been ruled by brutal dictators such as Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier. These dictators controlled a brutal army that protected the interests of a small group of wealthy elites and foreign industrialists, while repressing the poor. The people of Haiti have been exploited in every conceivable way. Haitians worked in sweatshops for foreign industrialists, receiving just pennies per day. The elites and the industrialists profited from cheap labor without doing anything to develop the economy or improve the country's infrastructure. Those who protested the exploitation and demanded better living conditions were arrested or killed by the army. The U.S. government trained the army and supported the elites.

President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was a priest who came from Cite Soleil, an impoverished region of Haiti, and advocated for the nation's poor. He was democratically elected by the people of Haiti in 1990, representing the Lavalas Party. He was elected on a platform of better working conditions for workers and improvements in health care, education and the quality of life for the poor. The elites hated President Aristide and were threatened by his platform, which required them to use a small fraction of their wealth for the good of the country. He was deposed less than a year later in a coup d'etat by the Haitian army. With the help of a death squad, the army terrorized the population for the next three years until the United States intervened under President Clinton to allow President Aristide to return.

The wealthy elites did everything within their power over the next decade to make it impossible for President Aristide and the Lavalas Party to govern the country effectively or implement policies that benefited the poor. Andre Apaid, a notorious sweatshop owner who holds an American passport, organized the Group of 184 to oppose President Aristide. Although President Aristide disbanded the army after his return, many of the soldiers did not disarm. Instead, they worked with the elites and the foreign industrialists to maintain control of the impoverished population.

The Bush administration worked with the Haitian elites to force President Aristide to step down. The International Republican Institute, which is affiliated with the Republican Party, funneled U.S. taxpayer dollars to the Aristide-haters, and Roger Noriega, President Bush's former assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs and the former chief of staff for Sen. Jesse Helms, conspired with Andre Apaid to organize, train and finance the opposition.

In January 2004, former soldiers and other heavily armed thugs took over several Haitian cities and then marched into the capital, while the Group of 184 staged confrontational demonstrations

throughout the country. On Feb. 29, 2004, U.S. Marines and embassy officials entered President Aristide's home and told him to leave immediately or he and thousands of other Haitians would be killed. President Aristide was flown aboard a U.S. plane to the Central African Republic and left there.

After the 2004 coup d'etat, the Bush administration installed an unelected interim government led by Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, who came from Boca Raton, Fla. Human rights violations have been widespread since the coup. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of extrajudicial executions attributed to members of the Haitian National Police, and the interim government has imprisoned hundreds of political prisoners without trials.

The U.S. government promised to help Haiti organize elections in order to restore democracy. The interim government was supposed to oversee these elections. However, the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), which had the responsibility for organizing the elections, did not include any representatives of the Lavalas Party, the party that represented the poor majority. The CEP refused to place any polling stations in several of Haiti's most impoverished areas, including Cite Soleil, a home to over 60,000 registered voters. It was a blatant attempt to disenfranchise the poor.

Several of Haiti's political prisoners could have run for office if they had not been in jail. Yvon Neptune, the former Prime Minister of Haiti, and Annette August, a popular Haitian singer, have both been detained illegally for over a year. Both are prominent members of President Aristide's Lavalas Party, but neither was able to participate in the elections.

Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest who ran a soup kitchen for poor children, was arrested last July and held without charges for six months. He was released in January only because he was diagnosed with leukemia, and an international outcry demanded that he be able to receive medical treatment. When several of Father Jean-Juste's supporters tried to register him as a candidate for president last fall, they were told that candidates must appear in person in order to register.

Ironically, the Lavalas Party did have a candidate in the presidential election. The interim government certified a local politician named Marc Bazin as the Lavalas' candidate for president. This would be comparable to the U.S. government arresting John Kerry, John Edwards and Howard Dean before the 2004 New Hampshire Primary and then letting the Republican Party choose a Democrat to run against President Bush.

Haiti's so-called democratic elections have always been under a cloud of suspicion because of the interim government's efforts to manipulate the electoral process. The elections were scheduled, postponed and rescheduled several times. Violence was rampant throughout the country, and there were shootouts between the Haitian National Police and armed gangs allied with various political factions.

Finally, the elections took place on Tuesday, Feb. 7, and they were rife with impediments to voting, especially in poor neighborhoods. Numerous polling stations opened several hours late because election workers did not show up on time or did not have the proper supplies. At one polling station outside of Cite Soleil, thousands of voters arrived hours before the polls were scheduled to open at 6 a.m., but they still had not cast a single vote by 11:30 a.m., because the election officials did not have any ballots.

Despite all of the obstacles, voters lined up and waited for hours, determined to exercise their democratic rights.

Early results showed an overwhelming victory for Rene Prval, the candidate with widespread support among the country's poor. Many polling stations posted their results the day after the election, and Prval won between 60 percent and 90 percent of the vote in all of these polling stations. By Thursday, the CEP was reporting that Prval had 61.5 percent of the votes counted thus far. The candidate in second place, Leslie Manigat, had only 13.4 percent. A sample of the results by the National Democratic Institute predicted that Prval would win the election with 52 percent to 54 percent of the votes, and a survey by the Organization of American States showed Prval with an estimated 55 percent.

The anti-Aristide elites hated Rene Prval, because the latter was elected president of Haiti in 1995 as a member of the Lavalas Party and succeeded President Aristide. President Prval served as president until President Aristide's reelection in 2000, and he is believed to be influenced by President Aristide. The elites' opposition to Prval is based on their belief that he would carry out President Aristide's policies, policies that benefit Haiti's poor.

The anti-Aristide elites reacted to the news of Prval's decisive victory by trying to steal the election. Evidence of election fraud was abundant. For example, hundreds and possibly thousands of burned ballots marked for Prval were found in a garbage dump. On Feb. 12, Jacques Bernard, the executive director of the CEP and a longtime opponent of President Aristide, miraculously discovered Prval's lead had dropped below the 50 percent required to avoid a runoff in March.

The counting rules used by the CEP seemed to be designed to deny Prval a victory. About 125,000 ballots, or 7.5 percent of the votes cast, were declared invalid by the CEP because of alleged irregularities. Another 4 percent of the ballots were allegedly blank but nevertheless included in the vote count, thereby making it more difficult for Prval to exceed 50 percent. Who in their right mind would believe that 4 percent of the electorate would get up early in the morning and wait for hours outside of polling stations that failed to open on time in order to cast a blank ballot?

The same forces responsible for the coup d'etat were determined to prevent the candidate who represents the poor majority from winning the election. Forcing Rene Prval into a runoff would have given them another opportunity to steal the election and deny the people of Haiti the opportunity to be governed by the president of their choice.

Haven't the Haitian people suffered enough? The man-made terror and violence coupled with natural disasters that have been inflicted upon the people of Haiti will be recorded in history as catastrophic events that caused tremendous loss of life and an unbearable and tragic existence for the Haitian people.

After all of this suffering, it would have been outrageous for the United States to continue its failed policies and deny the poorest of people, who have withstood so much pain, poverty and disenfranchisement, and who persevered on election day, walked for miles and waited for hours, the right to elect the president of their choice.

Yesterday, as Haitians demonstrated in support of Rene Prval and international observers examined the charred remains of ballots found in a garbage dump, the CEP and the interim government finally agreed not to count the so-called blank ballots. Excluding them from the vote count brought Prval's share of the votes up to 51.15 percent, and Prval was declared the winner of the presidential election, nine days after the votes were cast.

Rene Prval is obviously the elected president of Haiti. He received considerably more than 50 percent of the vote, and he must be granted the right to serve without further interference, obstacles or violence. If the wealthy elites of Haiti are willing to accept the outcome of this election and allow President-elect Prval to govern, Haiti may be able to move forward, and the Haitian people will finally have the democracy they deserve.

Congresswoman Maxine Waters represents Los Angeles County and is a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Chávez, Préval talk about Haiti joining Petrocaribe
El Universal.com, Venezuela
February 17, 2006

President Hugo Chávez Friday congratulated Haitian president-elect René Préval on the phone, and they addressed also the possibility that Haiti enters into Caribbean oil initiative Petrocaribe, an official report said, Efe reported.

Chávez claimed that "justice prevailed" in the Haitian electoral process. Préval won the election with more than 50 percent of the ballots cast last February 7th.

The Venezuelan ruler advised Préval of his plans to visit next March 12th the Haitian region of Jacmel, "to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of (Venezuelan independence hero) Francisco de Miranda) in that Caribbean port.

Further, Chávez and Préval discussed the possibility that Haiti "joins Petrocaribe," the presidential palace of Miraflores' press office said in a statement.

Chávez reassured Préval that he has ordered the creation of "committee of experts to take all the necessary steps to begin the process" of Haitian integration to Petrocaribe.

Propaganda in Haiti: NPR reporter Amelia Shaw is wearing two hats
HaitiAction.net
February 17, 2006

Haiti News Watch - In another dramatic infiltration of the mainstream press, Flashpoints has learned that Amelia Shaw, National Public Radio's current correspondent from Haiti, is also a reporter with the US government propaganda organization, Voice of America (VOA). By law, VOA is not allowed to broadcast on US frequencies. Shaw's reports have appeared both on Voice of America and National Public Radio in the same 48 hour period. Her reports - very much in line with the US State Department - have tried to suggest that René Préal is a troublemaker, a spoil-sport who was trying to undermine the mostly free and fair electoral process in Haiti.

NPR's willingness to collaborate with a Voice of America reporter without revealing her connection is a text-book example of US government infiltration into the media, and represents a glaring conflict of interest.

The Voice of America reporter was also used as a source for BBC and Pacifica Radio's KPFA Evening News broadcast on Thursday, February 16, 2006.

What follows is a transcript of the story as it was broken on Pacifica's Radio's Flashpoints show oDenis Bernstein February 16th 2006. The interview is conducted by FP's Executive Prodcuer, Dennis Bernstein

Bernstein: in Berkeley, I'm Dennis Bernstein. You are listening to Flashpoints, on Pacifica Radio.

Listen to this: In another dramatic infiltration of the mainstream press, Flashpoints has learned that Ameila Shaw, NPR's current correspondent from Haiti is also a reporter with the US government propaganda organization Voice of America. Shaw's reports have appeared both on voice of America and National Public Radio over the last 48 hours.

Her reports very much in line with the State Department, have tried to suggest that RenRéné Préal is a trouble maker, a spoil sport, who is trying to undermine the mostly free and fair electoral process in Haiti. NPR's willingness to collaborate with Voice of America reporters without revealing her connection, is a glaring example of US government infiltration into the media. Into the media. That's right. Voice of America reporting for national public radio.

Meanwhile, according to some kind of shaky deal, Préal has ended up with some fifty-one percent of the vote; thus, no runoff is required.

In one moment we will go to Brian Concannon, director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

But first, this short excerpt from today's NPR Morning Edition, in which hosts Steve Inskeep, is interviewing Voice of America's Amelia Shaw. It's Inskeep picking up the obviously anti-Préal line the begins this short excerpt. listen...

Inskeep: Alright. Well now that Préval has gotten what he wanted - he is going to become president - is that going to end the allegations of fraud?

Shaw: This has yet to be seen. I think what will be interesting will be the reaction of second place candidate, Leslie Manigat, who got about 12 percent of the vote. He - yesterday - called for a press conference [in the] morning. It will be interesting to see his reaction, and to see if he is going to accept this compromise. This deal that has been struck.

Inskeep: Maybe the way to put it is: Was Préval the only person who had thousands of supporters he could turn out into the street to cause mayhem?

Shaw: You know... [she laughs conspiratorially] ...yes, because there really were no signs from other people who did not vote for Préval. There was no big political protest from the people who did not support. For there had been some statements to the press from the other political candidates who have also alleged fraud. But, it will be interesting to see what the other candidates will say.

Bernstein: Alright that was NPR morning edition's host Steve Inskeep, talking to Voice of America and National Public Radio reporter Amelia Shaw. Now, joining us to talk about the situation in Haiti; and this is Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute for Democracy and Justice in Haiti. Brian, welcome back to Flashpoints.

Concannon: Thanks Dennis, it's great to be with you.

Bernstein: Well, it's good to have you with us. What is your reaction to that clip, and Voice of America reporting for National Public Radio?

Concannon: In terms of Voice of America reporting for National Public Radio, there is obviously a conflict of interest. The Voice of America is intended to be a propaganda machine to give the US Government policy, to spread it abroad. So much so, that VOA can't be broadcasted in the United States. And I think that the clip you show, does show an example of the biases that is inherent. They didn't mention in that story that René Préval had very good reasons to cry fraud. They mentioned one of them; the fact that there were a bunch of ballots found yesterday afternoon. But they didn't mention that there was a systematic effort to depress Préval's vote over the course of the last year and that is a very important piece of understanding why Préval's supporters are mad, and why they are out on the streets.

It's because that in the election, there was a sustained effort to steal the election from him in the first round, and certainly, that would continue in the second round, if they let it happen.

Bernstein: ...and a little detail that they forgot to mention also, is that there used to be 12 or 13 thousand voter polling places. That was when Jimmy Carter went and said free and fair elections; the elections that the world, at least the US presses have forgotten. I believe that we have narrowed the window down to 800 or so.

Concannon: Yes it was across the board, there were not enough voting booths. Just in comparison, Los Angeles county has about a third of the area of Haiti, and the same population; and they had 4,000

voting centers. and they have much better roads and transportation and the current government wanted to get by with 800.

The same thing happened with registration. They put more. They put as many registration offices in Petionville - which is an upscale suburb - as they did in the Central Plateau, which is a big, remote, difficult to access region.

Multiple elections changing region's leadership this year

BY MARIFELI PEREZ-STABLE

Miami Herald

February 17, 2006

By the end of 2006, 12 countries in Latin America will have newly elected or re-elected presidents. Three have already settled their presidential elections: Honduras, where last November the opposition won; Chile, where the incumbent coalition's Michele Bachelet became the first woman in the region to gain the presidency on her own right; and Bolivia, where Evo Morales coasted into office. Election days in Costa Rica and Haiti did not immediately yield winners.

In Costa Rica, opinion polls badly misjudged voters' preferences. Though Oscar Arias was the 20-point favorite over Ottón Solís, Costa Ricans cast their ballots to a virtual tie on February 5: 40.51 percent for Arias and 40.28 percent for Solís. A recount is slowly under way. The winner would take office with a bare-bones plurality that dictates prudence.

Arias -- whose National Liberation Party (PLN) has alternated power with the incumbent Social Christian Unity Party -- cannot govern as if he'd just won another election. Solís -- whose maverick Citizen Action Party (PAC) would mean an end to the two-party monopoly on the presidency -- cannot take for granted that he has, in fact, buried traditional politics or that his anti-CAFTA campaign would doom the free-trade agreement which Costa Rica has yet to ratify. Arias' PLN captured 25 out of 57 seats in the legislature; Solís' PAC has 17 seats.

On Feb. 7, Haiti held its presidential election. Two years ago, Jean-Bertrand Aristide left office under pressure by an armed uprising, the United States and France. The United Nations sent peacekeeping forces and an interim government has been in place since then. Exiled in South Africa, Aristide remains the most popular politician.

At first, René Préval -- whose presidency (1996-2001) was marked by pragmatism -- seemed to have won a majority in the field of 35 candidates. Though allied with Aristide and his Lavalas Party in the past, Préval drew his distance by declaring the U.N. forces should stay in Haiti for as long as they are necessary. Préval rallied the votes of the poor and the destitute.

With 90 percent of the ballots tabulated, electoral authorities claimed that Préval had fallen short of a first-round victory with 48.7 percent of the votes. His closest rival was running well behind with 11.8 percent. Some 8 percent of the ballots tallied were reported missing or destroyed which raised cries of fraud from Préval himself. Tens of thousands of Haitians took to the streets and retreated only after Préval called for order.

Fortunately, all concerned heeded Organization of American States Secretary General José Miguel Insulza's sound advice to marshal "good will and cooperation." A political agreement was reached and René Préval is now president-elect. Haiti is sorely lacking in the public trust needed to have withstood a second-round election peacefully. In contrast, Costa Rican institutions -- recent corruption scandals notwithstanding -- still muster the allegiance of most citizens. Either candidate there will be accepted as legitimate.

Public trust is an imperative of democracy. Consolidated democracies gradually accumulated it by making politics more inclusive, distributing the benefits of growth and treating citizens equally under the law. Limited inclusion, widening inequalities and selective treatment by the judicial system constitute serious impediments to a culture of public trust in most Latin American democracies. The citizens of Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela have yet to cast their ballots.

In Mexico and Nicaragua, electoral outcomes might be called into question. Ecuadoreans have often taken to the streets to force the resignation of their presidents. Will the one elected in November complete his term? Though the conservative Lourdes Flores is now comfortably ahead, many Peruvians harbor an undercurrent of anger that may yet propel one of her radical opponents. Colombia and Brazil should not be problematic in terms of the citizenry accepting electoral results. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez has stacked the rules in his favor, the opposition is hopeless, and the common fabric is badly frayed.

Elections in Latin America are usually free and fair. Public trust, however, isn't just an electoral function. Good governance and an inclusive economy must also nurture the citizenry if Latin American democracy is to consolidate. That's the tall order that lies ahead.

Marifeli Pérez-Stable is vice president for democratic governance at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Préval wins Haiti's presidency

OUR OPINION: NEGOTIATION, COMPROMISE GOOD LESSON FOR HAITIAN POLITICS

Miami Herald

Feb. 17, 2006

Haiti's new president has his work cut out for him. René Préval was the clear choice of the Haitian people. Yes, a smoother election and vote count would have been preferable. But, ultimately, negotiation and compromise sealed Mr. Préval's victory. This ended an electoral crisis and the potential for violence.

For the first time in years, Haiti has reason for hope. While deep-rooted problems won't disappear overnight, a legitimate government, backed by the international community, could begin to address security, the economy and other challenges. Mr. Préval will stand a better chance of turning the nation around if he can rally Haiti's political and business leaders, even those who opposed him, to unify behind a common agenda. The electoral crisis provides a good lesson in how to resolve political differences for the sake of the greater good through negotiation and compromise.

A clear majority

Though exit polls appeared to show that Mr. Préval had won a clear majority, his margin fell below 50 percent as the count neared an end. Urgency mounted after thousands of ballots appeared in a Port-au-Prince dump, raising suspicions of vote fraud. Largely peaceful protests threatened to spiral out of control.

In fact, electoral authorities had found problems with large numbers of missing, invalidated and blank ballots. Negotiations ensued among officials from Haiti's interim government, its electoral council, the U.N. mission, Mr. Préval's party and international diplomats. The solution that assured Mr. Préval's win used an electoral loophole to proportionately allocate blank votes -- most of which were believed to be unused ballots mistakenly included in the count -- among the 33 candidates.

Sensible approach

A former president, Mr. Préval will have a chance to show how much better he can do now outside the shadow of his former ally, ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. One thorny issue involves disarming violent slum gangs, many of which appeared to support his candidacy, that terrorize much of Port-au-Prince and hurt commerce. In an earlier interview with The Miami Herald, Mr. Préval described a sensible approach combining police action along with "massive social investment" that would provide jobs and isolate the "criminals."

Mr. Préval will not lack issues to tackle. Haiti needs to clean up its police force and judiciary; to get tons of illegal weapons off the streets, with U.N. help; to rebuild all basic systems, from education and healthcare to utilities and roads. Haiti needs to heal its fractured society

**Boston Globe Editorial:
Making Haiti secure
February 17, 2006**

LAST WEEK'S presidential election in Haiti now has a winner, René Préval. If the people of the impoverished Caribbean nation are also to be winners, the international community will have to show more patience and persistence in providing assistance than it has in the past.

Préval will take office with two advantages. He has the overwhelming support of the country's extremely poor majority. He also has the experience of having served as president from 1996 to 2001, the only full, five-year term of a president in Haiti's modern history.

He will take office, however, under the cloud of a somewhat botched election. Unless the front-runner got more than 50 percent of the vote, there was supposed to be a runoff in March between him and the second finisher. Préval got just under 50 percent in the initial count, with the top also-ran getting less than 13 percent. But after large quantities of votes, many for Préval, were found in a dump, the election commission decided to declare him the winner.

Unlike the more charismatic but divisive Haitian leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Préval has few enemies. He is considered a better administrator than Aristide and gets credit for building up the country's schools and public health facilities during his years in office. His great failure -- and the failure of Aristide -- was in not creating a trained and professional police force in adequate numbers to provide security, a core requirement of government.

The UN contingent of 9,000 soldiers and police that has been in Haiti since Aristide was sent into exile two years ago has not won much praise for combating the country's endemic shootings and kidnappings from either pro- or anti-Aristide forces. But at this point, its units are the only protection against outbreaks of even greater violence that could impel desperate Haitians once again to launch rickety boats in flight to the United States. Recently, Préval asked the United Nations to stay on in Haiti. The US government should use its influence to aid Préval in this request, if only to protect Florida from a new wave of immigrants.

For the long term, Haiti should be able to provide its own police. Unfortunately, the country has no modern experience of fair, competent, and honest law enforcement. Training such officers will require the help of foreign instructors. In the mid-1990s, Aristide disbanded the country's anti-Aristide army and then built up a national police force of just 5,000 for a nation of 8 million. The police were no match for the better-armed rebels who rose up against Aristide in 2004. To preserve domestic order and protect against another such rebellion, Préval must make security his highest priority.

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COHA MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESS

Joy, but Most Likely Trepidation as well, Ahead for Haiti

Friday February 17, 2006

- Prével's victory is just the first step in a 1,000 mile journey for a difficult transition to democratic rule.
- Intolerable to consider that the woeful Latortue government will be allowed to rule until March 29.
- Comprehensive audit must be done to establish whether tens of millions of dollars have been systematically looted by Latortue authorities – including drug profits and contract shavings.
- Prével may consider indicting arch miscreant and Latortue's former Minister of Justice, Bernard Gousse.
- With Prével now president-elect, Latortue must release all political prisoners, nearly all of whom are being held on false pretenses.
- Prével not likely to play active foreign policy role in "pink tide" strategizing, but will look to CARICOM as a primary venue to make Haiti's imprint on the region.
- Prével expected to show his gratitude to those few CARICOM countries who stood by Haiti, while others supported U.S. policy making.

The February 16 deal, which appeared to end Haiti's election crisis by providing frontrunner Rene Prével with the necessary 50 percent plus one percent needed to avoid a runoff, brought what could later turn out to be only a glimmer of hope for the island. The reality, however, could be much darker. These elections, technically unconstitutional as they resulted from the Washington-orchestrated ouster of constitutionally elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February of 2004, now have come to a less than an airtight resolution. This could provide Prével's opponents with ample ammunition in the months to come, if and when they turn against him. Furthermore, the voting fiasco, which saw tens of thousands of ballots ending up in a dump, illustrated once again how unprofessional the UN stabilization mission (MINUSTAH) on the island has turned out to be when it comes to guaranteeing even the most basic requirements for stability and democracy. So while Haitians may celebrate today, the international community, lead by the U.S., France, Canada, the UN's Kofi Annan, and the OAS, are largely undeserving of even the most grudging praise for their role on the island. They all, to one degree or another, conspired in a well-constructed hoax to lay the groundwork for the ouster of Aristide, as well as to later help legitimize the U.S.-imposed corrupt and feckless Latortue regime.

Indeed, even many of Haiti's regional compatriots in CARICOM abandoned the nation in its time of need. Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados initially argued strenuously in favor of bringing the Latortue government back within the CARICOM fold even before free elections were held. Only St. Lucia, Dominica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, were among the stalwarts who resisted such efforts.

The agreement between members of the electoral council, Prével's Lespwa party and government ministers, arranged to discard enough of the highly suspicious blank ballots so that Prével's

percentage would surpass the 50% mark. The arrangement was reached after three days of negotiations between representatives from the countries and entities mentioned above along with Brazil and Chile, a group which in their earlier wheelings and dealings had proved no friend of Haiti. Indeed, Brazil and Chile have more than a bit of self-interest at play: as chief players in MINUSTAH they have powerful reasons to avoid any prolongations of their less than brilliant stay on the island.

Additional impetus for the possibly tinselled solution came when MINUSTAH troops found bags of burned and discarded ballots, many marked for Préval, in a dump outside of Port-au-Prince. These fueled the growing intensification of the protests by Préval's supporters. Such discoveries, along with other discrepancies in the vote count, led Préval to declare that a massive attempt was underway to deny him the presidency. This forceful denouncement of the electoral fraud, which Préval was now convinced had taken over the presidential vote count, persuaded him to do the unusual, given his retiring and conciliatory personality – to aggressively speak out against a now increasingly menacing status quo.

His fears were not unfounded: both the MINUSTAH mission and the wildly incompetent Gerard Latortue governing regime have proven not only incapable of assuring basic guarantees for the island's citizens, but have at times grievously misbehaved when dealing with pro-Aristide forces. These actions have more or less been sanctioned by a blithely uninvolved international community, which has not only failed to follow through on its financial obligations to the island, but has also failed to condemn gross human rights violations and Latortue's extreme ineptitude and misrule. This is graphically evidenced by the actions of now resigned Minister of Justice Bernard Gousse, a renegade to the law and order community. Gousse dragged such high-minded former collaborators of Aristide's rule as Préval's former Prime Minister Yvonne Neptune and the towering person of Father Jean Juste as well as scores of other officials into the penitentiary while not presenting any evidence to justify the actions. The international community must now redress their outrageous neglect by demanding that Latortue release all such figures from his jails immediately.

Thus it was MINUSTAH and Latortue, which failed to create adequate conditions for a free and fair ballot prior to February 5, and thus were in part responsible for the chaos that followed. Haitians simply had no reason to trust either the international peacekeepers who disgraced their rightful task, or a regime that lacked all legitimacy, and so when allegations of fraud emerged, they were lent credence by a history of failure and abuse. Speaking of fraud, concerned nations would be wise to call upon some authority to thoroughly audit the financial records of the Latortue regime's books, as rumors abound that millions of dollars in foreign assistance have been defalcated, including payoffs from the flourishing drug trade.

The current de facto agreement is perhaps the best possible solution to end the crisis, but it is far from a tenable long term answer. The total lack of regularity in the proceedings could provide Préval's opponents, both in Haiti and in Washington, with good reason to later undermine his government in the same way that those forces combined to topple Aristide. Sadly, this outcome would undoubtedly come to be tolerated, just as numerous past interventions have been, because after all, from Washington's, Ottawa's, and Paris' perspective, it's just Haiti.

This analysis was prepared by COHA Director Larry Birns and Research Fellow Michael Lettieri

Amorim: Brazil and the international community must help Haiti

Ana Paula Marra

Agência Brasil

February 17, 2006

Brasília - Now that René Préval has been proclaimed Haiti's new president, Brazil and the international community must help America's poorest country in the phase of consolidating its democracy. The Brazilian minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, announced that the Brazilian government, in conjunction with the international community and the World Bank, wants to implement a series of projects to help in the reconstruction of the country, which lacks government policies in the areas of education, health, transportation, and employment.

To discuss this matter, a meeting will be held in Brazil in the near future with representatives of the countries that are involved in Haiti. "This meeting will be important for reaffirming the international community's will and indicate to these countries that Brazilian cooperation, in addition to the military aspect, is also linked to social and economic issues," he explained.

In an interview with the press, the minister praised the performance of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which is under Brazilian command, in guaranteeing the security of the Haitian population throughout the electoral process.

Translation: David Silberstein

Haiti's elected president intends to visit Brazil
Ana Paula Marra
Agencia Brasil
February 17, 2006

Brasilia – Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, called Haiti's elected President, René Préval, this Thursday (16), to congratulate him for his victory, and for his efforts on trying to establish communication with the various political forces of that country. The information was released by the Press Service of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations.

During the call, Préval expressed gratitude for the Brazilian contribution for establishing peace and consolidating democracy in his country, and mentioned his desire to visit Brazil before his inauguration, scheduled for March 29th.

The Brazilian Chancellor evaluated that the decision by Haitian authorities to declare the victory of René Préval was an essential step for the institutional normalization of that country. Préval was proclaimed the winner after the Provisory Electoral Council (CEP) decided, based on Haitian legislation, to proportionally distribute blank votes among the candidates.

Translation: Andréa Alves

Brazil commends decision to proclaim Préval new president of Haiti

Ana Paula Marra

Agência Brasil

February 17, 2006

Brasília - The Brazilian government commended the way the Haitian general elections have been handled after charges of vote-counting irregularities were made. The Provisional Electoral Council (PEC) declared René Préval, of the Lespwa Party (which means "hope" in creole), the victor. Yesterday (15), the Brazilian presidential advisor on International Affairs, Marco Aurélio Garcia, argued that this decision represents the best way to control the protest demonstrations in Haiti.

The Brazilian minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, declared, yesterday, that the decision to proclaim Préval the new president was taken by the officials and members of that country's PEC and that the Brazilian government had nothing to do with the decision. "The proclamation was unanimously approved by all the members present at the PEC meeting," Amorim said, denying reports that the Brazilian government had participated in the negotiations that permitted Préval's victory.

Amorim emphasized that Préval was elected president after the PEC decided to allot the blank votes proportionally among the presidential candidates, thus permitting the favorite of the poor masses to attain a majority of the votes.

This decision was based on the Haitian Constitution, which allows blank votes to be included when calculating the candidates' percentages of the ballot. "This was the solution discovered by the Haitians. They simply adhered to the law," Amorim pointed out. "We didn't negotiate anything at all. All we did, throughout the process, was to state our desire for a speedy solution to calm the situation in the country."

Préval had been leading the vote count, with around 48% of the votes in the last preliminary result. But he needed 50% plus one to be elected in the first round. As a result of the decision to apportion the blank votes among all the presidential candidates, he was declared the winner, with 51.15%, eliminating the need for a runoff. Leslie Manigat came in second, with around 11% of the votes. Préval had previously been president of the country, between 1996 and 2001.

Translation: David Silberstein

General says demonstrations in Haiti are peaceful

Aloisio Milani

Agência Brasil

February 15, 2006

Brasília - In an interview with Radiobrás, the Brazilian general who is commanding the United Nations (UN) military forces in Haiti, José Elito Siqueira, said that the demonstrations in Haiti in favor of presidential front-runner, René Préval, are undesirable from the point of view of security but are unavoidable.

The general affirmed that the most important thing is to help maintain security in the country and keep the streets free of radicalism. "Radicalism from any quarter cannot be permitted. We must ensure that," he explained. He emphasized that Monday's (13) protests were peaceful and did not involve any serious incident anywhere in the country.

Demonstrators took to the streets of Port-au-Prince to protest on behalf of Préval. According to the official site of his party, Lespwa, the demonstration was peaceful. David Wimhurst, press adviser to the UN mission in Haiti, also judges the protests to be non-violent, and the military forces will confine themselves to ensuring the security of government officials so that the electoral process can be concluded.

Translation: David Silberstein

Haiti unrest reminded me of apartheid - Tutu
February 17 2006
By Dominique Herman
The Independent Online, South Africa

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has described how "apprehensive" he was as he faced down an angry crowd of over 5 000 Haitian demonstrators, saying it reminded him of "the bad old days of apartheid".

Tutu was airlifted from Haiti by military pilots from the Dominican Republic on Tuesday night - an evacuation he described as "uneventful".

And he revealed on Thursday that the United Nations had sent a helicopter to evacuate him on Monday after rumours swept the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince that he had suffered a heart attack.

"It was insane because I was as hale and hearty as you can be at 74," Tutu said from a seminary in Virginia, in the United States.

"I said, 'No, I'm not going away,'" upon being offered a ride out of Haiti.

Instead he stood on the balcony of the luxury Montana hotel and spoke to the crowd, and, according to international reports, his address visibly calmed the protesters.

"It resembled some of the times back in the bad old days but one was able to address them," he said.

The only difficulties were that he did not speak French and he did not have a loud hailer to make himself heard.

"You are apprehensive," he said, about the experience of confronting thousands of angry protesters, but he said many people were praying and "God looks after those doing good work".

"What was fantastic, what I can't get over, was that with over 5 000 people - and some stormed the hotel looking for members of the electoral commission - they didn't break or steal a single article.

"The people are good. They were angry and they could have gone on the rampage, but they left peacefully."

He said he sympathised with their anger as they had been waiting a long time for the election results.

"I'm feeling very sad just now that leaders can let their people be done by so badly," he said.

Protests in support of presidential candidate René Préval paralysed the city of Port-au-Prince on Tuesday. Angered by a slow vote count and indications that Préval had not gained enough votes for an outright win, his supporters took to the streets.

The mass unrest caused the cancellation of all commercial flights, which is why Tutu had to be airlifted out - an experience he described as "totally uneventful".

Blocking roads with car wrecks, rocks and flaming tires, Préval's supporters had stormed the gates of the Montana hotel where Tutu was staying.

Tutu remarked on the differences between the two countries that exist "cheek by jowl" on the island of Hispaniola - on Haiti's poverty and squalor and the prosperity of the Dominican Republic.

Tutu said he spoke to Préval on the phone and was very impressed that despite his overwhelming support in Haiti and in the international community, he was willing to go through with the process of the commission to look at the results.

"He could have dug his heels in," said Tutu.

Préval was declared the country's next president on Thursday after a deal was reached following charges of vote fraud. The deal gives Préval 50.9 percent of the vote and averts a run-off, which was scheduled for March.

Tutu arrived in Haiti on Saturday to urge reconciliation between the country's tiny elite and its mass of marginalised poor.

He said the Dominican Republic's President Leonel Fernandez had initially requested a meeting with him, but he had replied that he could not fit it in on this trip.

"But God has his own plans," Tutu said. Upon his arrival at 9pm on Tuesday after an hour-and-a-half flight, he did have an audience with Fernandez.

"He's a very impressive and good person," he said.

From there he flew to Miami and on to Washington. Tutu will return to South Africa on March 1.

UN Security Council congratulates new president-elect of Haiti
China View News
February 17, 2006

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 17 (Xinhuanet) -- The United Nations Security Council on Friday congratulated Rene Preval on his victory in the recent Haitian presidential election.

In a press statement read out by the council president for February, Ambassador John Bolton of the United States, the members of the council congratulate Preval on his victory and look forward to working with the new government to help Haitians build a better future for their country.

The council also urged Haitians to "redouble their efforts to promote political dialogue and national reconciliation, including participation in the second round of parliamentary elections and municipal and local elections."

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also congratulated Preval late Thursday during their conversation, and encouraged him to work on furthering national reconciliation, a UN spokesman said.

Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) on Thursday awarded Preval, the Hope Party candidate, an outright first-round victory in the Feb. 7 presidential election after updating the results of vote counting. Enditem

Getting elected may have been easy part for Préval
MARINA JIMÉNEZ
The Globe and Mail, Canada
Friday February 17, 2006

For René Préval, who was finally declared Haiti's next president yesterday after claims of voting fraud, getting elected was the easy part.

Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council announced Mr. Préval's victory yesterday in a move aimed at averting massive social unrest after several street protests this week demanding he be declared the winner.

"We have won. Now we are going to fight for parliament," Mr. Préval told the Haitian Press Agency, referring to the fact that electoral results for the 129-member parliament have not yet been announced.

The 63-year-old agronomist remained secluded for the rest of the day at his sister's hilltop home outside the capital, while below in the streets throngs of cheering supporters danced and chanted, "Victory, victory."

Mr. Préval, a mild-mannered man who was once an ally of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, now faces the difficult task of appeasing political opponents and bridging the gap between Haiti's many conflicting groups without alienating his support base, the same impoverished masses who support Mr. Aristide.

All of these challenges will be made doubly difficult in a polarized country with a "winner-takes-all" political culture and no tradition of bringing opposition faces into cabinet in the spirit of reconciliation.

"There is no tradition of compromise or an ability to work with the opposition in Haiti," said Carlo Dade, an adviser with the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, an Ottawa think-tank. "We need a government of national unity and the international community -- Brazil, the U.S., Canada -- must push this."

Mr. Préval's government will also be saddled from the start with accusations that his electoral victory was rigged, much as Mr. Aristide's second term as president was undermined by disputed Senate elections in 2000.

Mr. Préval was declared a winner nine days after the Feb. 7 vote, after his accusation that "massive fraud" -- including the discovery of marked ballots in a garbage dump -- had cost him a victory on the first round.

In the initial tally, 85,000 unmarked ballots were included in the total, lowering the final percentage allocated to each candidate, and costing Mr. Préval a victory as he had only 48.7 per cent of the vote.

To resolve the impasse, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council distributed the 85,000 blanks proportionally among the 33 presidential candidates, pushing Mr. Préval's share of the vote to 50.9 per cent -- enough to avoid a second round.

Critics, including a United Nations official, have suggested that Mr. Préval's political enemies stuffed ballots boxes with blank votes as it is unlikely that Haitians who waited as long as six hours in the sun to vote would have cast blanks as a form of protest.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan yesterday defended the deal, which adhered to the Haitian constitution and was brokered by foreign diplomats, government officials and international observers.

However, Mr. Préval's leading rival, former president Leslie Manigat, denounced final election results as a "coup d'état through the ballots." Charles Baker, a businessman who ran a distant third, attracting support from the country's elite and some rural sectors, also questioned the electoral outcome.

The most pressing challenge for Mr. Préval will be to bring order and stability to the Western hemisphere's poorest country, which has been besieged by kidnappings and armed battles in slums where his supporters have clashed with UN troops sent to stabilize the country.

Many of Mr. Préval's supporters in shantytowns such as Cité Soleil have pressed for the return of Mr. Aristide, who was ousted Feb. 29, 2004, after a bloody uprising by thugs and ex-soldiers. While the two men were once close allies, Mr. Préval has tried to distance himself from the exiled leader.

"Préval is very much aware that Mr. Aristide's early return is unacceptable. It will bring chaos to Haiti," the political consultant in Port-au-Prince said.

In an interview with The Globe and Mail three days before the election, Mr. Préval said his priorities are to introduce free primary education, create jobs, encourage aid and investment and disarm gang members.

Full of Haitian promise

The Guardian Unlimited, UK

Haiti's new president is likely to have a tough time turning the hope invested in him into reality, writes Helen Spraos, Christian Aid

Friday February 17, 2006

For the first time in many years, there seems to be hope for Haiti.

After a few turbulent days, calm has returned to Port-au-Prince following the confirmation of victory for Rene Prével, the leading contender in the recent presidential elections. A huge wave of popular support for his party, Lespwa - which translates as hope in Creole - resulted in a political compromise that led to his being declared victor in the first round.

When the first results were released, Prével had 61% of the vote, but as counting continued he saw his lead shrink to just under the 50% he needed to avoid a run-off with his nearest rival. Growing suspicions that irregularities were responsible for this reverse in his fortunes brought tens of thousands of people out onto the streets to insist that their vote be respected.

Although the other 32 candidates lagged far behind - the nearest polling just 11% - key political figures were unwilling to make any concessions and acknowledge Prével's ascendancy. But the genie was out of the bottle. His support base in the poor neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince refused to let unrepresentative politicians block their best hope for change.

"We went through hell and high water to get our voter cards. We did it again to cast our vote, and now they want to take it away from us," said one labourer in the capital.

This conviction grew as various incidents seemed to give credence to the allegations of vote-rigging, and discrepancies on the official web site giving the latest figures, and exceptionally high numbers of blank and spoilt votes fuelled tensions further.

Crowds to the streets but were always peaceful, just as they had been during the long day of voting on February 7. On that day, people confounded predictions of a low turn out and showed tremendous patience and dignity - despite poor organisation and genuine frustrations - to show their determination to seize an opportunity they sense might provide them with a better future.

On Monday, people from squalid slum areas marched up the hill to the Montana, the luxury hotel where international journalists, election officials and even Desmond Tutu - who was in Haiti to bring a message of reconciliation - were staying. The eruption, accompanied by carnival chants and drums, was no doubt intimidating, but the thousands of people who stormed the gates simply lounged by the pool, ate what they could find and left on request after two hours.

Feelings rose to their greatest frenzy when thousands of apparently genuine but unexamined ballot papers were found on a rubbish dump on the outskirts of the capital. Most of the votes were for Prével and his party. A deliberate attempt to undermine his chances? A set-up? No one knows how they came to be there - the UN mission charged with transporting and storing the ballots has ordered an enquiry, and the top electoral official is no longer to be found. With the credibility of the process in shreds, there could be no question of a second round.

Intense diplomatic negotiations followed. A new formula was found for treating the blank votes that brought Préval's share up to 51.15%, and except for a few demonstrations of joy, people have returned to their normal activities - street vendors are back on the streets, public transport has resumed.

But the political compromise may not be enough to ensure that the new president will avoid future controversy. After all, not everyone was behind Préval and what smacks of mob rule. The middle classes remember the dark days of Aristide in 2002 and 2003 when armed thugs violently attacked the opposition - students, political parties, radio stations - while the police looked on. Préval must distance himself from his one-time mentor, if he is to overcome the misgivings of a substantial sector of the population.

"Haiti cannot always resolve its problems in this way," said one NGO director, condemning the resort to people-power. "We have to build up our institutions and start to introduce the rule of law."

This is undoubtedly true. State institutions are extremely weak. Various parts of the country have become no-go areas over the last two years and the government has only regained control of most of them with the support of UN troops. Basic services are out of the reach of much of the population, and the country has some of the worst indicators of poverty in the world. The justice system has singularly failed to prosecute people responsible for murder, kidnappings and corruption, fuelling a cycle of impunity that corrodes the authority of the state and its officials.

For almost 20 years, the 1987 constitution has been breached more than it has been observed. When Aristide was elected for the first time with huge popular backing in 1990, his government lasted only eight months before being ousted by a military-led coup during which his supporters were severely persecuted. His second mandate was brought to an end after three years by a combination of a civil protest and an armed paramilitary movement.

That uprising found little echo with the poorer sectors of the population who felt that the traditional politicians who led the movement failed to reflect their immediate concerns. Many of them scored a bare 2% in the current elections and their political future must now be in doubt.

Ti Rene, on the other hand, as Préval is affectionately known, seems to have struck a chord among much of the population. He talks plain language and seldom wears a tie. He has made a point of sitting down with people in far-flung rural areas that seldom attract the attention of politicians. His supporters feel that he alone can understand their desperate struggle to make ends meet and is likely to fulfil their aspirations rather than serve the elite who used government for their own ends.

They can point to the new schools, roads and irrigation systems that were built during his first term of office, a tentative land reform, and the Cuban health cooperation programme. and - for now at least - they are willing to overlook the fact that he failed to undertake more fundamental reforms and was prepared to implement IMF-driven stringency measures.

There are real difficulties with this populist approach. Once the euphoria has subsided, Préval will have to meet the tremendous level of popular expectations inflated by this latest political drama.

The controversial nature of his appointment will almost certainly come back to haunt him. The man whose challenge he beat off, Leslie Manigat, has vowed to contest the outcome as illegal. He could well exploit the divisions in parliament, where Préval is unlikely to have a majority, to block decision-making, and there are tough arguments to be held over questions of security, the fate of prisoners facing serious charges but not yet brought to trial, and just how to create jobs and end poverty in a country with so few resources.

Préval must strive to be the leader of all Haitians in a sharply polarised society, and build up a political culture where the opposition has more to gain by staying within the system than by straying outside it. There is hope, but it will take exceptional political skill to make it real.

- Helen Spraos is Christian Aid's representative in Haiti

U.N. Gives Nod to New Haiti Government

By EDITH M. LEDERER

The Associated Press

The Washington Post

Friday, February 17, 2006

UNITED NATIONS -- The U.N. Security Council said Friday it looks forward to working with Haiti's new government and called on all Haitians to redouble their efforts to promote political dialogue and national reconciliation.

A statement adopted by the 15 council members applauded the Haitian people "for their patience and continuing commitment to democracy" and welcomed Rene Preval's victory in the presidential race _ but not unequivocally.

A Brazilian U.N. peacekeeper stands guard at a burning roadblock in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006, more than a week after disputed presidential elections. U.N. police were ordered to recover election materials, including numbered bags apparently used to carry results and tally sheets, from a garbage dump near the Haitian capital amid charges that last week's presidential elections were marred by fraud. (AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos) (Ariana Cubillos - AP)

"Based on the announcement made by the Provisional Electoral Council," the statement said, "the members of the council congratulate Rene Preval on his victory in Haiti's presidential election and look forward to working with the new government to help Haitians build a better future for their country."

Preval had remained a hair short of an outright majority after 96 percent of the vote was tabulated. Haitian officials then decided to divide the 85,000 blank ballots cast among the candidates in proportion to the percentage they had already achieved _ giving Preval just over 51 percent. His victory was announced early Thursday by the Electoral Council.

The decision appears to have averted chaos in Haiti, where the masses loyal to Preval had said the elections were being rigged to deny him a first-round victory. The allegations gained weight with the discovery of thousands of ballots and other election material in a garbage dump.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters on Thursday that the Electoral Council's decision to redistribute the blank ballots, "I think given the circumstances and the situation ... was a reasonable way to attempt to resolve a conflict an impasse that could have led to conflict and violence in society."

The Security Council urged "all Haitians to redouble their efforts to promote political dialogue and national reconciliation, including participation in the second round of parliamentary elections and municipal and local elections."

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton, the current council president, said it was very important that the Haitian people "continue their active participation in the political process" in the second round of elections.

The council voted unanimously Tuesday to extend the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti for six months, until Aug. 15. Some 7,300 U.N. troops and 1,750 international police are in the country under

Brazilian command, helping Haitian national police maintain order and security during the electoral process.

The U.N. mission replaced a U.S.-led force that arrived after a three-week uprising toppled Aristide on Feb. 29, 2004. Hundreds of people have died since then in clashes involving pro- and anti-Aristide street gangs, police, peacekeepers and ex-soldiers who helped oust Aristide.

The Security Council asked Annan to report as soon as possible after the electoral process is concluded on whether to restructure the mandate of the U.N. mission after the new government takes office, including recommendations for ways it can support reform and strengthen key Haitian institutions.

Haiti almost gets it right
The Chicago Tribune
Editorial
February 17, 2006

In a field of 33 candidates for president of Haiti, Rene Preval was the undisputed leader of the pack. With 90 percent of the votes counted, he had 48.76 percent--just shy of the 50 percent-plus-one-vote needed by law to avoid a runoff.

With Preval supporters crying foul and threatening to riot, though, election officials decided close was good enough. They changed the rules, threw out enough ballots to cook the results and declared Preval the president.

There's little doubt Preval would have been the eventual winner, so maybe everyone will just accept what happened and move on. But there's little historical precedent for that in Haiti.

Only 20 years into this democracy business, Haitians have little experience with the electoral process and lots of experience with corrupt governments. When they want to change leaders, the usual solution still is to overthrow them.

Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, is the only Haitian president to have completed a full term. More common is the fate of former president Leslie Manigat, who was elected in 1988 in balloting that was rigged by the military, then was ousted by the military after five months. (Manigat finished a distant second in this latest balloting.) Haiti has been run by a U.S.-backed interim government for two years, since its last president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, fled a bloody rebellion.

The Feb. 7 election was supposed to set Haiti on track to becoming a stable democracy with a legitimately elected leader, but Thursday's compromise undermines that.

Going into the election, it was presumed there would be a March 19 runoff because there were so many candidates. But early returns showed Preval with close to half of the 2.2 million votes, and supporters began to believe he would win outright. As counting slowed and Preval's numbers slipped lower, the supporters began to suspect fraud. And probably with good reason: Thousands of marked ballots were discovered in a landfill north of the capital.

About 85,000 blank ballots were collected at polling places, and by law they're supposed to count in the total. Preval's supporters charge that they were illegally inserted to water down his vote percentage and force a runoff. After three days of angry protests, the interim government and Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council struck a deal: They subtracted the blank ballots from the total, nudging Preval to victory. With an asterisk.

Anything's possible in Haiti, but it's unlikely that Manigat, who got 12 percent in the first round, could have overtaken Preval on the next ballot. But that's an argument for following through with the runoff, not for skipping it.

A second-round victory would have cemented Preval's authority and instilled confidence in the electoral process.

Election officials, who postponed the vote four times for security reasons and still somehow didn't get it right, passed up their last chance to conduct an airtight election.

They opted instead to switch rules in the middle of the game. It will be hard for them to rebut the inevitable charge that this election, too, was rigged.

**Haiti celebrates election of Preval
Aristide protege declared president after deal brokered
Ginger Thompson,
The New York Times
February 17, 2006**

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti -- The protests that paralyzed cities across the country turned into celebrations on Thursday as Rene Preval, a former president with overwhelming support among this country's poor, was declared the next president.

Even as the news spread across the capital, Preval withdrew into the silence that characterized his past leadership, canceling a news conference and staying inside his de facto headquarters in his sister's house. And questions intensified over how he would resolve the country's myriad troubles and whether he would bring his old mentor, former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, back from exile.

In a hastily arranged news conference before dawn, the members of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council officially announced an agreement to change the way they had tabulated the results from last week's elections, giving Preval the 50 percent vote total he needed to become president without a runoff.

The agreement, forged during marathon negotiations Wednesday between the council, Haiti's interim government and Preval's Lespwa political party, came after Preval challenged results showing him below the 50 percent mark. Preval charged that the elections had been rigged against him, and throngs of his supporters paralyzed cities across the country with barricades of burning tires, stirring fears that the whole country might go up in smoke.

Foreign diplomats rushed to answer questions about the legitimacy of the back-room negotiations that brought Preval to power. The diplomats praised the process as respectful of the law and of the votes cast by the majority of the Haitian electorate.

Speaking at a congressional budget hearing on Thursday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hailed the announcement that Preval would be president. "We are going to work with the Preval government," she said. "We want this government to succeed."

Preval, a 63-year-old agronomist, was president from 1996 to 2001 and is a protege of Aristide, who was ousted two years ago by a violent uprising. As the recent election proved, Preval still commands overwhelming support from the same poor masses that hailed Aristide.

The biggest challenge Preval faces as Haiti's president played out across the capital on Thursday, illustrated in the wide and hostile gap between his supporters and his critics, including many among the country's wealthy minority, who have charged Preval with resorting to force to bully his way to power.

Supporters of Preval began to gather at sunrise in front of the national palace. Many, like Marie Suze, 30, said they had not slept all night.

"No one slept," she said, holding hands and dancing with two girlfriends. "We all got on the phone and talked to each other. We all felt such joy."

Samuel Janvier, 21, said he left his house at 4 a.m. to join the celebrations at the palace. "I feel he can help us," Janvier said of Preval. "I can just feel it."

Leslie Francois Manigat, another former president and the runner-up in last week's election, was the most outspoken critic of the agreement that brought Preval back to power.

Official results from the first round of voting gave Manigat less than 12 percent of the votes, making clear that he stood little chance of defeating Preval in a second round. Still, Manigat said, he looked forward to that chance, and his supporters deserved it.

He described the agreement to declare Preval the winner as a "Machiavellian maneuver" and an "electoral coup," comparing it to the military takeover that ended his 1988 presidency only four months after he was elected.

Haiti election deal brings hope
BBC News
Friday February 17, 2006

The US and other nations in the region have welcomed Thursday's proclamation of Rene Preval as president of Haiti.

Washington said it would see what it could do to help Haiti, a country plagued by instability and poverty.

The 7 February vote was marred by fraud claims, which led to days of protests demanding Mr Preval be declared winner.

He gained 51% of the vote after a change in the way blank ballots were allocated. Runner-up Leslie Manigat accused officials of staging a coup.

He called the deal "the imposition of a victor" and said it was "a reward for violence".

But UN Secretary General Kofi Annan described the deal as a "reasonable way to attempt to resolve a conflict, an impasse that could have led to conflict and violence".

Aid needed

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Mr Preval's proclamation gave Haiti a new chance.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Mr Preval seems like he's very capable of handling his country's business

Brazil and Chile - the two Latin American countries leading the UN mission in Haiti - also welcomed the election of a new president. Both countries warned that the international community had to continue to provide assistance.

Brazil is hosting a meeting next week about how to speed up donations to Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas.

In the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, jubilant crowds poured into the streets on Thursday to celebrate Mr Preval's victory.

UN peacekeepers are reported to have stepped up security to prevent any rioting by his opponents.

Rene Preval has support among the country's poor

Thursday's agreement followed days of demonstrations, fuelled by the apparent discovery of charred ballot papers at a dump near Port-au-Prince.

Mr Preval had warned of more protests if partial results - which suggested he was just short of the 50% needed to win outright - were published as final.

The candidate of the small L'Espwa (The Hope) party, Mr Preval was once an ally of ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and has inherited his following among the poor.

An agronomist who studied in Belgium, Mr Preval was active in the movement to oust military ruler Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier during the 1970s.

Mr Preval was prime minister for a brief period in Mr Aristide's first administration in the early 1990s.

He replaced Mr Aristide as president between 1996 and 2001

Haiti's New President Slow to Go Public

By ANDREW SELSKY

The Associated Press

Washington Post

Friday, February 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- President-elect Rene Preval, the man of the hour after his turbulent election victory, appeared before reporters and cameras at his sister's home Friday _ but would only say he will make a statement next week.

"Wednesday at 11, Wednesday at 11," Preval, speaking in Spanish, French, Creole and English, said to a crowd of reporters on the lawn of the house, his only response to questions at the photo opportunity.

His victory in a bitter election marred by fraud charges sent jubilant Haitians dancing and singing in the streets, many calling on the soft-spoken former agronomist to bring security and jobs to the impoverished Caribbean nation.

That's a tall order for Preval, who remained shuttered in his sister's house in Haiti's capital late Thursday, hours after electoral and government officials declared him the election winner in a move that eased the threat of rioting by his supporters.

"We have won, we thank God and the population," the shy, former president who is backed by the nation's poor majority told the Haitian Press Agency. "We will now fight for Parliament."

Preval, who led Haiti from 1996 to 2001, became the coup-prone nation's first elected president ever to finish his term when he left office five years ago.

This time around, he inherits a nation in worse shape than when he first assumed power. Heavily armed street gangs wage daily gunfights with U.N. peacekeepers, and seething mistrust and tension divides the rich and poor.

"I think that Mr. Preval has a very crucial role in inviting Haitians to participate in the future of the country and to have an open dialogue with all sectors," said U.N. special envoy to Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes.

Expectations among Haitians are running high.

On Thursday, people began dancing in the streets of Port-au-Prince as word spread that elections officials decided, eight days after the Feb. 7 vote, to redistribute blank ballots among the candidates, giving 63-year-old Preval just enough votes to avoid a runoff with second-place finisher Leslie Manigat.

"I'm so happy, because we have what we were looking for," said Elvia Pressoir, 36, as she waited outside the gate of the sister's house for him to appear. "With Preval, we'll have security, jobs and life will get back to normal."

Exultant Haitians waved ripped tree branches, which some say is a Voodoo gesture to sweep away bad spirits.

"Now we have hope," said Dabual Jean, a 24-year-old who sells fruit on the street in the capital. "The country is upside down. With Preval, hopefully we'll get on the right path."

But that won't come easy in Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Most people here live on less than \$2 per day and have no running water or access to doctors.

The son of a former government official, Preval has vowed to crack down on hardened criminals.

But he has been vague on whether he would welcome back ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who is in exile in South Africa. A former slum priest, Aristide fled Haiti as the United States withdrew support for his government amid an armed rebellion and accusations that he was corrupt and had encouraged his supporters to attack his opponents.

The U.S. government considers a possible return of Aristide to be a destabilizing factor, and has hinted that he should remain in exile.

On Thursday, the U.S. State Department congratulated Preval on his win, saying Washington looked forward to working with his government.

"We understand that the results of the elections respect Haitian laws and regulation," press officer Jan Edmonson said.

Preval had remained a hair short of an outright majority after 96 percent of the vote was tabulated. Haitian officials then decided to divide the 85,000 blank ballots cast among the candidates in proportion to the percentage they had already achieved _ giving Preval just over 51 percent, said Michel Brunache, chief of Cabinet for interim President Boniface Alexandre.

The decision appears to have averted chaos in Haiti, where the masses loyal to Preval had said the elections were being rigged to deny him a first-round victory.

The allegations gained weight with the discovery of thousands of ballots and other election material in a garbage dump.

Preval had vowed to challenge the results if officials insisted on a runoff, but meanwhile urged his supporters to demonstrate peacefully.

"Since last Tuesday, the government was looking for a solution out of the crisis," Brunache told The Associated Press. "It was obvious that the people had massively made a choice, and that we needed to make sure that choice was respected."

Brunache said redistributing the blank ballots was justified because the interim Haitian government also suspected fraud.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the ballot redistribution was "a reasonable way to attempt to resolve a conflict, an impasse that could have led to conflict and violence."

But Manigat accused election officials of breaking the rules to give Preval a first-round victory.

"We are not going to be sore losers but we are human beings," Manigat told reporters. He would not say if he would register a formal complaint.

Deal puts Preval in power
Compromise gives Haitian large enough majority to avoid runoff
Friday, February 17, 2006
Los Angeles Times
By Carol J. Williams

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – Conga lines of jubilant Haitians thronged the dusty, trash-filled streets of the capital Thursday to celebrate a negotiated conclusion to their troubled Feb. 7 presidential election that gave poor-man's idol Rene Preval a first-round victory.

But the decision by Haitian electoral officials to remove 85,000 blank ballots from the equation, allowing Mr. Preval to clear the 50 percent hurdle and avoid a runoff, angered the candidates who trailed a distant second and third. Although both conceded that Mr. Preval had outpolled them, they lambasted the reconfigured tabulation as foreign-instigated capitulation to violence and said it was likely to cast a pall of illegitimacy over Mr. Preval's tenure.

The 3 a.m. announcement by the Provisional Electoral Council halted a 10-day escalation of tension among voters who watched Mr. Preval's share soar to more than 60 percent in early counting, then steadily dwindle as ballots arrived from far-flung regions with other preferences – and amid mounting indications of fraud and ballot-stuffing.

Mr. Preval was down to 48.7 percent early Monday when seething anger at what many perceived to be a conspiracy boiled over into violence. Preval supporters erected barricades of flaming tires and junked cars and brought the capital to a standstill. One protester was killed by gunfire, several were wounded, and the entire nation shuddered at the vision of a return to the deadly chaos that surrounded President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's flight to African exile in February 2004.

Mr. Preval appealed to his supporters Tuesday to demonstrate "peacefully and intelligently," and the menacing disruptions ceased. But the specter of uncontrolled violence if a first-round Preval victory was denied compelled U.N. officials, foreign diplomats and Haiti's appointed interim government to huddle at the National Palace for days in search of a compromise.

Mr. Preval ended up with 51 percent of the 2.2 million votes cast. His political party, Lespwa, which means hope in Creole, was poised to win several seats in a two-house legislature that will be widely divided, encouraging coalition-building and collaboration. His supporters are mindful of the issue of legitimacy in Haiti, which has been riven by political strife for decades.

Election officials had kept North Texas businessman Dumarsais Siméus off the ballot, saying his U.S. citizenship disqualified him. Some polls during the campaign had Mr. Siméus in second place behind Mr. Preval.

Mr. Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, is the only leader of this country in modern history to complete a full five-year term. Others, including his mentor, Mr. Aristide, have been toppled by a succession of coups.

The 63-year-old president-elect kept a low profile after the council's decision, celebrating with aides and family until dawn but declining to speak to supporters or reporters Thursday. Aides said he was planning a nationwide address today.

Haitians, neighbours welcome Préval's victory
Port-au-Prince
Mail and Guardian Online, South Africa
17 February 2006

Haitians and their neighbours welcomed Thursday's election of René Préval as president, amid signs aid was in the pipeline to help restore stability in the hemisphere's poorest country.

Haitians had celebrated in the streets after Préval was declared the winner of the February 7 presidential election early on Thursday following a reshuffling of blank ballots, in an internationally brokered deal over fraud claims.

His election closes a chapter on a United Nations-backed interim government installed after former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled the country two years ago in the face of an armed uprising.

Haiti's new president faces one of the toughest jobs in the world -- restoring democracy in a nation that is mired in severe economic, health and social problems.

Neighbouring countries offered their congratulations and encouragement.

United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, testifying on Thursday before the US Congress, welcomed the announcement of Haiti's new president and paved the way for more US aid to Haiti.

"As the government develops now, I think we will want to look at what we need to do to support Haiti," she said. "This is a chance for a country that has had too few chances."

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper congratulated Préval and called for "national reconciliation, political dialogue and fundamental reform" in Haiti.

"Canada looks forward to working with president-designate Préval, his government and all sectors of Haitian society to restore democracy and to support reconstruction in Haiti," Harper said in a statement.

Canada, which has a large Haitian expatriate community, is a major aid donor to the poverty-stricken Caribbean nation, pledging 180-million Canadian dollars (\$155 million) since 2004.

In New York, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday called Préval's victory a "reasonable way" to settle an impasse over vote fraud allegations that could have led to violence.

"Mr René Garcia Préval is credited with 51,15% of the votes, based on 96% of voting stations counted, and is declared the winner," electoral authorities said in statement.

The announcement followed five days of protests over earlier partial results that gave Préval 48,76% of the vote, short of the 50% majority needed to win outright.

Préval (63) a former president, had rejected the partial results, decrying what he said was "massive fraud or gross errors" and encouraging his supporters to demonstrate.

Under the internationally brokered deal, electoral authorities said blank votes from the February 7 election had been distributed on a pro-rata basis among the 32 candidates. This took Préval over the 50% mark.

While crowds danced and sang in the streets of Port-au-Prince, former president Leslie Manigat, the runner-up in the election, said Préval's victory was a "reward for violence" and that he was robbed of the right to face-off with Préval in a second round.

"As we did in the 1988 coup against us, we say good luck to the country," said Manigat (75) who was president for less than five months before he was ousted in 1988.

He accused the government of caving in to pressure from Préval and certain members of the international community.

Government officials insisted foreign diplomats never imposed a deal but helped find a solution to avert renewed turmoil in Haiti, which plunged into chaos in early 2004, when Aristide resigned and fled the country.

"The diplomats backed the government in its efforts to appease the situation," said Michel Brunache, chief of staff for interim Haitian President Boniface Alexandre.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said his government acted as "facilitator" in the discussions.

Brazil leads the 9 500-strong UN international peacekeeping force Minustah in Haiti and was among the first, with Chile and Canada, to congratulate Préval.

Préval was president from 1996 to 2001. He served as prime minister in Aristide's government in 1991, but his aides say the two men are no longer in contact. Aristide is currently living in exile in South Africa.

Like Aristide, Préval is considered a champion of the poor, who make up 77% of Haiti's 8,5-million population. - AFP

Deal on ballots hands Préval victory in Haiti

By Richard Lapper, Latin America Editor

Financial Times

Published: February 17 2006

Haiti's neighbours endorsed the presidential election victory of René Préval yesterday, easing political tensions after a week of protests in the western hemisphere's poorest country.

The contest had seemed to be heading for a potentially conflictive second round after Mr Préval's vote fell slightly short of the 50 per cent plus one vote required to win last Tuesday's first round. But early on Thursday Haiti's electoral council decided, by seven votes to two, to redistribute 85,000 blank ballots and ruled that Mr Préval had therefore won outright.

José Miguel Insulza, the secretary-general of the Organisation of the American States, said "we should all respect a decision" that marked a "a significant step towards building the country's future on democracy".

The US administration congratulated Mr Préval on his victory. A written statement from the State Department said: "Our understanding is that the results of these elections respect Haitian laws and regulation."

Mr Insulza, who arrived in Haiti yesterday, helped to broker a deal in negotiations that also involved the interim government, the head of the United Nations stabilisation mission, Juan Gabriel Valdés, and the ambassadors of the US, Brazil, Chile, Canada and France.

Mr Préval's supporters from the poor slums of Port-au-Prince had demonstrated for the best part of the past five days against what they alleged was electoral fraud that appeared to deprive Mr Préval of an immediate triumph, bringing life in the capital to a virtual halt.

Opposition politicians were unhappy at the electoral authorities' decision, which denied them the possibility of competing in a second-round run-off.

Leslie Manigat, like Mr Préval a former president and the best-performing of more than 30 other candidates, described it as "a Machiavellian comedy".

However, Mr Manigat won only 11.8 per cent of the vote and his position has been further undermined by the strength of international reaction in favour of Mr Préval. The stage is therefore set for greater political stability, after a chaotic two years following the ousting in February 2004 of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president. Mr Préval is a former close ally of Mr Aristide but during the campaign he distanced himself from the controversial former leader.

Mr Insulza said he understood that "the new president will invite his political opponents to engage in dialogue, so that together they can change Haiti's situation".

By Haitian standards, Mr Préval's five years as president between 1996 and 2001 constituted a relatively settled period, with the government building roads and public squares and successfully promoting a land reform scheme in the north.

An official with the United Nations stabilisation mission, which deploys 9,000 international troops and police officials in Haiti, said poorly trained electoral officials appeared to have deposited blank voting slips that had not been cast into the ballot boxes. Boxes of partially burned ballots - many of them apparently cast for Mr Préval - were found on Wednesday on rubbish tips in the capital. In addition, in some localities election officers ruled as invalid any vote that had not been marked precisely in the centre of the box printed on voting papers.

In a country marked by very high illiteracy, some voters had invalidated their ballots by marking a cross over the photograph of the candidate rather than in the adjacent box.

A UN official said a loophole in Haitian electoral law allowed the authorities to reapportion the very high number of blank votes. The law says simply that blank votes have to be "counted, tabulated and included" in the final result.

International criticism of the voting procedures in Mr Aristide's election in 2001 severely undermined the legitimacy of Haiti's last elected government.

Rice Says US Ready to Work With New Preval Government in Haiti

By David Gollust

Washington

VOA News

17 February 2006

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says the United States is ready to work with newly declared Haitian presidential election winner Rene Preval, and wants his government to succeed. In congressional testimony Thursday, she indicated the Bush administration will look for ways to provide additional aid to Haiti.

Officials here say the deal under which Preval was declared the election victor appears to uphold Haitian laws and regulations, and that the United States is ready to work with his government to help build a better future for the impoverished Caribbean state.

The internationally brokered arrangement ended an increasingly bitter dispute over whether Preval, a former Haitian president, had obtained enough votes in the February 7th elections to avoid a run-off.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice responded to the Haitian agreement in testimony to the House International Relations Committee, saying the United States wants Mr. Preval to succeed and will look into ways to provide further assistance: "We're going to work with the Preval government. We want this government to succeed. We have, as I said earlier, we're going to work to see what other resources we may need to support this government. Because it's in our interests that there be a democratic Haiti, and a Haiti that is stable and starting finally to move toward prosperity."

The Secretary's remarks came in response to critical questions by Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee of California, who suggested that U.S. officials and non-governmental organizations had worked against former Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who went into exile two years ago in the face of widespread unrest.

Rice said the United States had not tried to undermine Aristide, while asserting that the former Haitian leader reneged on a list of reform pledges made to the Clinton administration after it helped restore him to power in 1994 following a coup that unseated him three years earlier.

She also suggested that Aristide was a major contributor to the instability that led to his resignation and exile in South Africa in 2004.

She said his departure, in a U.S. provided aircraft, was a good thing for Haiti and that the United States has a good record of helping Haitians out of what she termed the "desperate circumstances" in which they live.

The United States has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Haiti in recent years including some 30 million dollars to underwrite the recent elections.

Lessons of Haiti's war
By Austin Bay
The Washington Times
February 17, 2006

The latest news from Haiti isn't good, particularly for Clinton administration legacy polishers. Haiti's failure, however, should have instructive resonance for the U.S. if it truly intends to fight and win the "long war" against tyranny and terror.

Haiti's current bout of living hell began two years ago, when a rebellion ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his corrupt government. Mr. Aristide's collapse solved nothing -- criminal and political violence continued.

This week, Jordanian peacekeepers serving with the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti fired on a crowd protesting the recent presidential election. The troops may have killed at least one protester. As I write this column, a U.N. spokesman disputes the charge.

The United Nations hoped the election would restore public confidence and calm. At best it was a temporary palliative.

And that's the damning word: "temporary." Add a synonym like "short-term" or the phrase "sitcom attention span," and you'll finger the strategic error and what is definitely a U.S. strategic weakness. In domestic political terms, "the next election" and sometimes "the next news cycle" too often define the length of commitment to a policy or a program.

Haiti is a political and ecological wreck -- its corrupt, tyrannical and often psychopathic leaders deserve the harshest historical blame. However, the United States -- given the Clinton administration's 1994 invasion -- now bears significant responsibility for the continuing failure.

Here's a quote from a column I wrote in September 1994, just before the Clinton administration overthrew the Haitian junta led by Gen. Raoul Cedras: "The [Clinton] administration has not prepared the American people for intervention; the costly decades of economic and political reclamation Haiti requires seem to rate, at most, a whisper in the Oval Office."

The column concluded: "The idea that an international force of 6,000 peacekeepers will replace U.S. forces is a Clintonite fig leaf. Pray that threat and bluster cause the generals to grab their money and run, for the long-suffering Haitian people deserve another shot at democracy. If the U.S. invades, however, resolving Haiti's political, ecological and economic problems becomes a lengthy -- and bloody -- American chore."

In July 1995, I wrote "winning" in Haiti required at least three decades of sustained effort. A friend who had just visited the country said Haitians believed five decades was more accurate.

The Clinton administration did not "sell" Haiti as the "long, hard slog" those of us who know that nation understood it would be. I give President Clinton credit for having -- at the intellectual level -- a clear understanding of Haiti's embedded problems.

However, he merely talked solutions, he did not craft the long-term, sustaining "policy structure" required to achieve those goals. For Mr. Clinton, Haiti was a photo-op war.

In its September 2002 National Security Strategy statement, the Bush administration made economic and political development one of the three "strategic areas of emphasis." The other two were defense and diplomacy. The three D's -- defense, diplomacy and development -- are strategically complementary, as well as rhetorically consonant.

Haiti the focus of aviation ministry as new president is elected
February 17, 2006
Mission Network News

Haiti (MNN) -- Haiti declared Rene Preval, a one-time ally of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the country's next president on Thursday after reaching a deal on vote fraud claims that averted a feared outbreak of violence.

Protesters had taken to the streets prior to the announcement. Mission Aviation Fellowship works in Haiti. MAF's President Kevin Swanson says those protests did have an impact on their work. "Our staff (is) fine and we have not gotten to the point of considering doing an evacuation. There have been a couple of days when our pilots have not been able to get to the airport, so we have had to cancel flights, but it's been temporary. So, we're just grateful to God that we have been able to continue ministering through this time of unrest in Haiti."

The needs in Haiti are incredible, says Swanson. "The country of Haiti, because of the extreme poverty, there is literally no infrastructure once you get outside of the capital. And so, the MAF planes become the only safe and reliable means of transportation for literally hundreds of missionaries, church workers and aid workers." MAF is currently servicing about 46 different organizations

Swanson says they've made Haiti a top priority in 2006 for a very good reason. "What we're finding there is that the doors are opening pretty wide for ministry right now. When that happens we want to be responsive. I can remember a just a few years when most of the small airstrips in the interior of Haiti were closed. The government has now relaxed that."

Swanson says they hope to add another plane to the field, but at a cost of \$300,000.

As MAF is able to provide supplies, teachers, and other good things, Swanson says, it makes their ministry more effective. "When the plane brings in a team with the Jesus Film and shares Christ with them, there's a ready acceptance on the part of the people to listen and to take part in this and not be suspicious because MAF has proven in the past that they bring good and helpful things into these villages."

Pray that MAF will be able to secure the funding needed to purchase this new aircraft.

Organizations featured in this article:

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**Preval declared winner of Haiti vote
Thousands of supporters cheer as ex-president avoids runoff
CNN.com
Friday, February 17, 2006**

Rene Preval faces a daunting task in impoverished Haiti after winning the presidential election.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CNN) -- Crowds of supporters celebrated in the streets of Haiti's capital Thursday after the country's electoral council declared former President Rene Preval the winner of last week's presidential election.

Preval had 51.5 percent of the votes counted Thursday after electoral council members decided not to count large numbers of blank ballots. With those votes included in the total number of ballots cast, Preval -- who had a strong lead in early returns -- had fallen short of the majority needed to avoid a runoff.

Preval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, is the only leader since the country's founding in 1803 to have won a democratic election, served a full term and peacefully handed over power.

Both the Organization of American States and the United Nations, which has a 9,000-member peacekeeping mission in Haiti, have announced their support for the electoral council's decision. There was no immediate comment from the president-elect.

At the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan said the electoral council made its decision after negotiations among the government, Preval's supporters and his opponents.

"It was a reasonable way to attempt to resolve a conflict and an impasse that could have led to serious conflict and violence in the society," he said.

OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza arrived in Port-au-Prince Wednesday to help seek an election settlement and called Thursday's result "a significant step towards building the country's future on democracy," the group said in a written statement.

A U.N. statement said neither Insulza nor U.N. representative Juan Gabriel Valdes "had taken part in the council's discussions leading to the declaration," which the OAS said was reached in a 7-2 vote by the electoral council.

The U.N. statement said Preval supporters in Port-au-Prince began celebrating election results in the early morning, with crowds reaching an estimated 20,000 people by the afternoon.

"I'm so happy, because we have what we were looking for," supporter Elvia Pressoir, 36, told The Associated Press as she held Preval campaign leaflets and waited outside his sister's Port-au-Prince home for him to appear. "With Preval, we'll have security, jobs and life will get back to normal."

The February 7 vote was the first election in Haiti since the 2004 uprising that ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, now in exile in South Africa. Preval, 63, is a longtime Aristide ally, but he distanced himself from the former president during his campaign.

With 96 percent of precincts reporting, his nearest rival, Leslie Manigat, had 12 percent of the vote. Manigat led the impoverished Caribbean country briefly in 1988 before being ousted in a military coup.

Manigat on Thursday accused election officials of breaking the rules to benefit Preval, telling the AP: "We are not going to be sore losers but we are human beings."

Aristide ties

An agronomist before entering politics, Preval was previously president between Aristide's two terms, which were cut short by military coups and upheaval. He won the support of much of Haiti's poor by achieving some land reform and running a government seen as relatively free of corruption.

Preval says he wants to extend free elementary education during his second term for everyone in the Caribbean nation, which has been wracked with political instability and corruption. Haiti is one of the poorest, most densely populated and least developed countries in the Western Hemisphere.

The elections had been postponed four times because of continuing unrest across Haiti, particularly in the Port-au-Prince slum of Cite Soleil.

Two Jordanian troops from the U.N. peacekeeping mission died in a January skirmish with armed gang members in Cite Soleil, where support for Aristide remains strong, and six members from the U.N. mission were killed in 2005.

Haiti's wealthy minority opposed Preval, fearing he will allow Aristide -- a leftist former priest whose administration was accused of widespread corruption -- to return.

Preval supporters had claimed fraud when the count indicated a runoff would be needed. They set up roadblocks around Port-au-Prince and stormed a hotel where electoral officials had been staying.

"Preval president!" they chanted. "No Preval, no Haiti!"

Preval himself declared the results flawed on Tuesday, though he urged his supporters to demonstrate peacefully.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said claims of fraud were bolstered by the discovery in a garbage dump of "a large number" of discarded ballots, most of which appeared to have been marked for Preval.

"Naturally, the discovery of this material inflamed passions on the street," Wimhurst said Wednesday

He said the United Nations is likely to keep the peacekeeping mission in Haiti "for many years to come, to help the country not fall back into the abyss that so many times has happened after recent elections."

Under Haitian law, the president serves as head of state, serves a five-year term and appoints a prime minister to lead the government.

Valdes is now prepared to assist with the legislative elections, according to the U.N. statement, which said Preval would be sworn in March 29.

In Washington on Thursday, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told the House Committee on International Relations that Haiti's elections "were largely free and fair" and said "there appears now to be a chance for movement forward."

Haiti election seen as victory for Aristide

16 Feb 2006

Source: Reuters

By Tom Brown

MIAMI, Feb 16 (Reuters) - Rene Preval's election as Haiti's new president is seen by some as a clear victory for Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who many Haiti experts say was undermined by Washington before he was toppled in an armed revolt two years ago.

Preval was declared the winner of Haiti's presidential election on Thursday, after an agreement between the U.S.-backed interim government and election officials over disputed results that defused a potentially explosive crisis over last week's vote.

Washington welcomed Preval's victory, saying it hoped to help build a new future in one of the world's most impoverished countries.

"We are going to work with the Preval government. We want this government to succeed," said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "This is a chance for a country that has had too few chances," she said at a congressional budget hearing.

Preval, a former president and one-time Aristide ally, is the latest in a series of populist leaders in the Western Hemisphere -- elected since Hugo Chavez won the presidency in Venezuela in 1998 -- who could pose a challenge to U.S. policy.

And despite Washington's public endorsement, his victory may not go down well with the U.S. government.

Along with polls pointing to a win by staunch leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador when Mexico holds its presidential elections in July, Preval's victory highlights a fading U.S. influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region Washington once controlled like its personal fiefdom, political analysts said.

Larry Birns, who heads the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs think tank, said the United States is more isolated in Latin America than Cuba, a country it has tried to marginalize for more than 50 years.

'PUTATIVE VICTORY'

Birns called Preval's election "a putative victory for Aristide," since the new president shares many of Aristide's political philosophies and beliefs, and said Preval represented "Aristidism without Aristide.'

That is something the United States, along with France and Canada, had very much wanted to avoid, according to Haiti experts.

The problem is that populist appeals are a powerful force in places like Haiti, where most people live on less than \$2 a day. Preval found his strongest voter support in the same slums that formed Aristide's power base.

"It's almost ridiculous to think that somebody could have won the election that hadn't had something to do with Aristide," said Eduardo Gamarra, director of the Latin American and Caribbean center at Florida International University.

Critics have described Aristide as a tyrant who relied on violent street gangs to enforce his rule. But Gamarra said he was still a very popular figure in Haiti.

The irony, according to Gamarra, is that U.S. troops were sent into Haiti when Aristide was deposed in a bloody rebellion in February 2004. Now a man some see as Aristide's crony comes to power, not by bullets, but through the ballot box.

"We invaded to get him (Aristide) out. Now we've got the guy who succeeded Aristide as the president," Gamarra said.

Preval served as president from 1996 to 2001 and was Aristide's hand-picked successor.

Washington's overwhelming concern with Haiti is to maintain enough stability to avoid a repeat of the mass 1990s exodus of boat people triggered by death squads and a surge in political bloodletting in the Caribbean nation.

But setting the stage for possibly difficult ties with Preval, Washington has already urged him to oppose any return by Aristide from his exile in South Africa.

Cuba is among those who have blamed the United States for the "overthrow" of Aristide.

"We hope he will be allowed to govern and that outside interference in Haiti's internal affairs ceases," Ricardo Alarcon, speaker of Cuba's National Assembly, said of Preval on Thursday.

Joy greets Preval victory in violent Haiti slum

16 Feb 2006

Source: Reuters

By Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb 16 (Reuters) - U.N. peacekeepers shed their combat helmets and a gang leader talked peace in a burst of revelry in Haiti's violent Cite Soleil slum following Rene Preval's victory in the presidential election.

With poor residents caught in the cross-fire, the sprawling seaside warren of flimsy shacks, open sewers and barefoot children has been the flash point for months with armed gangs loyal to Preval and deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on one side and Haitian police and U.N. troops on the other.

But on Thursday it was a scene of spontaneous celebration after election officials, pressured by foreign diplomats, settled the impoverished Caribbean nation's disputed Feb. 7 vote and named Preval, a one-time Aristide ally and champion of the poor, the winner.

Jordanian U.N. troops, usually holed up in a sandbag-fortified headquarters or hidden away in menacing armored personnel-carriers on patrol in the streets, took off their helmets and let themselves be seen in what a commander said was a reaction to "conditions in the streets."

Preval supporters poured into those streets in the dark -- the agreement was announced in the middle of the night -- in a cacophony of honking car horns and beating drums.

"This gives us hope again," said Dorcelly Jean-Claude, 39, celebrating near the U.N. base. "Now there is no more violence."

In the upscale suburb of Peguy-Ville, several hundred revelers marched past the home of Preval's sister, where the president-elect was sleeping, chanting "Preval is president, Preval is president!" and dancing to a rara beat.

SIX-FOOT SNAKES

They carried two six-foot (two-metre) snakes, powerful symbols in the voodoo religion practiced by about half of Haiti's 8.5 million people.

"God sent Preval for us," one man shouted.

"Tell U.N. they can leave now, we have our president," a woman said.

Cite Soleil, home to between 300,000 and 600,000 of Haiti's poor, had been under siege as the turbulent capital was hit by a wave of kidnappings and crime in the run-up to the election.

Gangs loyal to Aristide, accused of despotism and pushed from office two years ago, said U.N. troops and Haitian police were killing women, children and old people in the slum while the interim authorities accused the gangs of trying to destabilize the country.

The violence dropped sharply a week before the election when the gangs called a cease-fire to allow voting to take place safely.

Amaral Duclona, a leader of the well-armed gangs and one of Haiti's most wanted men, said on Thursday that Preval's election would probably end the violence.

"We want peace and we are not taking up weapons against anybody in Cite Soleil," said Duclona, who roared through the slum on a motorcycle without his usual complement of bodyguards and did not appear to be carrying a weapon.

"We'll open the doors of Cite Soleil to anyone who wants to help Cite Soleil out of its misery," he told Reuters. "We are going to work with the government to save Cite Soleil."

But when asked whether the gangs would lay down their arms, Duclona was more cautious than a fellow gang leader, Augudson Nicolas, who said last week that the gangs would hand over their weapons to Preval in a ceremony at the National Palace.

"The disarmament program should be done throughout the country, not only within Cite Soleil," Duclona said, a reference to the former soldiers and gangs who opposed Aristide and still hold sway in parts of Haiti. (Additional reporting by Joseph Guyler Delva)

Haiti names Preval president

Thu Feb 16, 2006

By Joseph Guylor Delva and Jim Loney

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haiti declared Rene Preval, a one-time ally of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the country's next president on Thursday after reaching a deal on vote fraud claims that averted a feared outbreak of violence.

Preval, a former president opposed by the same wealthy elite who helped drive Aristide from power two years ago but passionately supported by the Caribbean country's poor, claimed "massive fraud" in the February 7 election had deprived him of a first-round victory in one of the world's poorest countries.

"We have won. Now we are going to fight for parliament," Preval told the Haitian Press Agency. After that, he secluded himself in his sister's hilltop house outside Port-au-Prince and aides said he was unlikely to make any further comment.

Jubilant supporters poured into the streets, dancing and chanting "victory, victory," after the embattled Provisional Electoral Council issued a statement on Haitian radio in the middle of the night announcing the deal.

Eight of the council's nine members signed the agreement.

"Rene Preval has been declared the winner with 51 percent," electoral council President Max Mathurin said in the statement, setting the country of 8.5 million off on the next chapter in a turbulent political history marked by instability, dictatorships and bloodshed.

The United States -- the key foreign player in Haiti -- welcomed Preval's victory and the Organization of American States' secretary general, Jose Miguel Insulza, said it was "a significant step toward building the country's future on democracy."

Preval's leading rival in the election, former President Leslie Manigat, however, angrily denounced what he called a "coup d'etat through the ballots."

FIRST SINCE REVOLT

Last week's election was the first since Aristide fled into exile in 2004, facing an armed revolt and international pressure to quit after his image as a hero of Haitian democracy was stained by accusations of despotism and corruption.

Preval's supporters warned they would not allow him to suffer the same fate as Aristide, who was twice elected and twice ousted, first by a military coup and then by the revolt.

Preval, 63, was president from 1996-2001, between Aristide's two terms, and is the only leader in Haiti's 202-year history to win a democratic election, serve a full term and peacefully hand power to a successor.

"For us, Preval means hope, respect and progress," said Jonas Lundi, 28, as he celebrated in the Canape Vert district.

Smiling Preval supporters clogged streets in the chaotic capital, waved posters of their candidate, drove in ecstatic, honking convoys and congregated near the National Palace, where Preval will take office on March 29.

Under the deal, the electoral council distributed 85,000 ballots that were left blank proportionately among the 33 candidates, Mathurin said.

The blanks, amounting to 4.7 percent of the total, had been included in the total number of votes, in accordance with the law, reducing the final percentage allocated to each candidate. That helped keep Preval's share at 48.7 percent -- below the simple majority he needed to avoid a March 19 runoff.

But many Haitians suspected the blank votes had been stuffed into ballot boxes to force Preval into a second round and outraged supporters on Monday brought Port-au-Prince to a standstill, erecting roadblocks and storming a luxury hotel.

The agreement over the blank votes lifted Preval's share to 50.9 percent.

Manigat, who trailed far behind Preval at 11.8 percent, said the declaration of Preval's victory was illegal.

"We thought we were in a democratic process and everybody would observe the rules," said industrialist Charles Baker, considered the main candidate of the wealthy elite and a distant third with 7.9 percent of the vote.

Poor Haitians warned foes not to destabilize Preval.

"We have elected Preval for five years," said Jean-Marie Theodore, 25, a student. "We won't accept that he misses one minute of his five-year mandate."

(Additional reporting by Michael Christie in Port-au-Prince, Saul Hudson in Washington and Fiona Ortiz in Santiago)

Challenges ahead for Haiti's Preval

By Nick Caistor

BBC regional analyst

February 16, 2006

Now that he has been confirmed as the victor in Haiti's presidential elections, the challenges for Rene Preval start in earnest.

Rene Preval is under pressure to bring Mr Aristide back from exile

He must first make sure the political opposition accepts his appointment, and does not immediately boycott Haiti's political life, as it did from 2001 following disputed elections.

This move brought about political paralysis, which eventually ended in the violence that led to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's removal in February 2004.

As well as establishing a dialogue with the fragmented opposition, the president-elect must also make sure an atmosphere of calm and security returns to the country. For this he will need the support of the 9,500 United Nations troops and police.

The fact that the mission has just been given a further six months in Haiti should allow him a breathing space, although this will probably not be enough to restore any faith in Haiti's police force, which proved unable to deal with the increasing violence two years ago, is badly trained and equipped, and is very thin on the ground in many areas.

At the same time, the new president-elect will hope to convince the international community, and in particular the United States, that he is the legitimately-elected leader of Haiti, and as such deserves their support.

Aristide's shadow

International lending agencies withdrew their co-operation with President Aristide after the disputed 2001 elections, but Haiti desperately needs institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank to help with aid.

If Mr Preval is to make any impact, he needs his predecessor's blessing and support, but not his interference

It also needs the more than \$1bn promised by international donors to quickly be made available if the 63-year-old former president is to make good his promise to revive Haiti's parlous economy, boost exports and create new jobs.

But perhaps the greatest problem the newly-elected president will need to resolve is what to do with his predecessor.

Ousted in a controversial manner two years ago, Mr Aristide called for a boycott of the recent elections, but this seems to have had little effect, as voters turned out in record numbers.

In fact, many of these voters appear to have supported Mr Preval because they see him as a loyal follower of Mr Aristide.

Healing

Mr Preval was prime minister during his first short months in power in 1991. When Mr Preval took over from him as president from 1996-2001, this was also seen by many Haitians as a continuation of the same policies espoused by Mr Aristide.

In the election campaign this time, Mr Preval created his own movement, L'Espwa (Hope), separate from Mr Aristide's Lavalas movement. But he is now under considerable pressure to bring Mr Aristide back from exile in South Africa.

Haiti's new leader is not likely to be in any hurry to do so.

Mr Aristide's presence in Haiti would make it very difficult for him to rule effectively: the former president is a highly divisive figure, and what his successor most needs at the moment is the chance to heal the wounds that have made political or economic progress in this poorest country of the Western hemisphere almost impossible for the past five years.

If Mr Preval is to make any impact, he needs his predecessor's blessing and support, but not his interference.

US welcomes Preval's presidential win in Haiti

Reuters

Washington Post

Thursday, February 16, 2006

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Washington on Thursday welcomed Rene Preval's presidential election win in Haiti, putting the key diplomatic power's seal of approval on the election of the one-time ally of ex-leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide who resigned under U.S. pressure.

"We congratulate Mr. Preval on his victory and we look forward to working with the new government to help the Haitian people build a better future for themselves," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said in a written answer to a question. "Our understanding is that the results of these elections respect Haitian laws and regulation."

'We need peace more than we need aid'
BBC News
February 16, 2006

Days of protests have turned to celebration for Preval supporters
Rene Preval has been declared president of Haiti, after days of protests following last week's election vote, which was marred by claims of irregularities.
The BBC News website spoke to one Haitian for his reaction to the result.

Smarth Clement, 42, is from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He says he is "optimistic, but cautious" about the outcome.

It's good that a result has finally been announced and that we have a new president.

People are now celebrating peacefully, which is good to see after days of protests - which I witnessed - that could have turned a lot more violent.

But all people wanted was a result.

We must celebrate today, but tomorrow the hard work really starts.

Because Rene Preval has not been elected by a majority, he must now sit down with other political leaders and come to a compromise.

Tackling the gangs

He must take action against the gang leaders that are the cause of so much violence here in Haiti. He must disarm them and put them behind bars.

[Former president Jean-Bertrand] Aristide used gangs to maintain power. Kidnappings became common and areas of Port-au-Prince became a haven for these gangs.

This has not been tackled since Aristide's reign, and now it must so we can become a peaceful nation again.

Smarth Clement says Haitians are "tired of failure"

This can only be achieved by our own police. The UN forces provide only a passive presence here.

There have been allegations of corruption against the police but we also have a new police chief and I believe he can make a difference as well.

I believe that to cut out corruption, police officers need to be better paid, or at least given better benefits.

It is uncertain whether Preval will allow Aristide to return.

If Preval is smart, he will not allow Aristide to come back. But if he does, Aristide should face charges for his crimes.

Tired of failure

We have not known peace here for 20 years and there has been no proper job creation in 10 years.

We want to see stability for our currency, more infrastructure, better redistribution of wealth among the people and an end to violence

We need peace more than we need aid.

Without peace, there will be no investors coming into the country, without investors there will be no jobs, and without jobs there will only be more violence.

There is an expression here: "Peace in the belly, peace in the street."

So overall, I am optimistic, but cautious.

Yes, Preval was president before, and he did not achieve much, but we can't blame him for not doing anything during those five years.

He was hampered by the mistakes of Aristide before him and the devaluation of the currency.

We don't know if he can perform miracles this time but we hope things can get better.

People need jobs and money. We want to see stability for our currency, more infrastructure, better redistribution of wealth among the people and an end to violence.

It's a huge responsibility but Mr Preval must not fail. He must succeed because we are tired of failure.

Haiti election 'like a coup'
News24, South Africa
16/02/2006

Port-Au-Prince - Runner-up Leslie Manigat said on Thursday that violence had been rewarded when Rene Preval was declared the winner of Haiti's presidential election, comparing the decision to a coup.

He said the decision to declare Preval elected was "the imposition of a victor", which he blamed on "national and international forces."

"Violence has just been rewarded," he said after electoral authorities changed the way ballots were counted and declared that Preval had won 51.15% of the vote in the February 7 election.

He dismissed Preval as "this candidate who has imposed his will" and called the decision to declare him president "an electoral coup d'etat".

Manigat, 75, who came a distant second in the election, claimed he had been robbed of the chance to face-off with Preval in a second round of voting, and emphasised that he reserved the right to contest the decision.

Blank votes were distributed

"As we did in the 1988 coup against us, we say good luck to the country," said Manigat, who was president for less than five months before he was ousted in 1988.

Electoral authorities announced on Thursday that Preval had been elected with 51.15%, a result reached after blank votes were distributed on a pro-rata basis among the 32 candidates.

The decision to change the rules followed a flurry of diplomatic activity by the international community.

This was aimed at averting a renewed explosion of violence as Preval and his supporters claimed fraud was preventing an outright win.

Partial results announced earlier gave Preval 48.76% of the vote, short of the majority needed to avoid a second round.

Haiti's Preval a 'champion for the poor'
February 16 2006
By Patrick Moser
The Independent Online, South Africa

Port-Au-Prince - Rene Preval, 63, who won Haiti's presidential election, is seen as a champion of the poor like his former ally Jean Bertrand Aristide who quit the presidency and fled the country in 2004.

Preval, a former president, was declared elected nine days after the February 7 election and after five days of protests by his supporters about earlier partial results that showed he failed to win the majority needed to avert a second round.

His victory was declared after blank ballots that were initially included in the total count were distributed on a pro-rata basis among the candidates, giving him 51,15 percent and an outright victory.

'The rich are cloistered in their walled villas and the poor are crammed into slums'
He had a massive lead over his 31 rivals.

Preval had earlier blamed what he termed "massive fraud or gross errors" for partial results that did not give him immediate victory.

A former leader of Aristide's Lavalas Family party, the left-leaning Preval, 63, ran for the small L'Espwa (Hope) party, a decision that may have helped widen his support base.

Aides insist he has not had any contact with Aristide since his former ally resigned and fled on February 29, 2004 as the country plunged into chaos and insurgents closed in on the capital.

Like Aristide before him, Preval is seen as a champion of the poor, who make up 77 percent of the 8,5 million population.

He has pledged to create jobs, improve education and battle social inequalities in Haiti, the poorest and one of the most violent nations in the western hemisphere.

"Children must be taken off the streets. Weapons must be taken from the hands of children and replaced with pens and books," he told AFP recently.

"The rich are cloistered in their walled villas and the poor are crammed into slums and own nothing. The gap is too big," he said.

He stressed that he opposed "a military solution" to the violence in Haiti's notorious slums, where he enjoys widespread support.

He said the 9 500-strong UN military and police force deployed after Aristide's departure should leave as soon as possible, but not until Haitian forces can provide stability.

Preval led Haiti from 1996 to 2001, after Aristide's first term. He was the second democratically elected president in Haiti's 200-year history, winning 89 percent of the vote in elections boycotted by several parties.

He was praised by some as an honest and efficient administrator, but critics said he merely kept the seat warm for Aristide, who was prevented by the constitution from seeking a second consecutive term.

In February 2001, Preval handed back the sash of office to Aristide, who had won another term in office at the ballot box.

Preval had served as prime minister in Aristide's first administration, from February 1991 until the government was toppled in September that year.

After the coup he sought refuge at the French and Mexican embassies in Port-au-Prince, and eventually joined Aristide in Washington, where he stayed until 1994.

Born on January 17, 1943 in Port-au-Prince, Preval studied agronomy in Belgium. He lived for five years in Brooklyn, New York in the 1970s.

After he returned to Haiti in 1975, he got a job with the National Institute for Mineral Resources.

He later became active in humanitarian work, including at an orphanage in Port-au-Prince run by Aristide who was then a Roman Catholic priest. He played a key role in Aristide's first electoral campaign.

In addition to Creole and French, Haiti's official languages, Preval speaks English and Spanish.

A diminutive, bearded man with often unconventional manners, Preval is divorced and has two daughters. - Sapa-AFP

Haiti president gets new chance to prove mettle
Thu Feb 16, 2006
Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Given Haiti's history of dictatorship, violence and perpetual political chaos, it could be seen as high praise that Rene Preval's first term as president was relatively peaceful.

Preval was declared the country's next president on Thursday after a deal was reached over charges of vote fraud. The deal gives Preval 50.9 percent of the vote and averts a runoff.

During his 1996-2001 presidency, Preval, 63, managed to build some roads and public squares, worked with peasants on land reform, and was not accused of massive human rights violations, despotism or theft.

He is the only leader in Haiti's 202-year history to win a democratic election, serve a full term and peacefully hand power to a successor.

But that first term was marred by a political crisis that damaged his administration's credibility, paralyzed the government and alienated international donors.

Preval is also seen as close to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was deposed in a bloody 2004 revolt. Preval was the hand-picked successor to the fiery former Roman Catholic priest and was viewed in some quarters as a puppet, patiently holding the presidency for his mentor.

Supporters in Aristide's slum strongholds adopted Preval as their candidate. "Preval and Aristide are twins!" they shouted at election rallies.

The wealthy elite who campaigned to send Aristide packing turned their hostility on Preval, fearing his victory would lead the way for the return of Aristide, accused of corruption and despotism.

Preval has distanced himself from his one-time ally but not by much. He referred to Haiti's first freely elected leader as "President Aristide" in a recent interview and has said there is nothing to stop him from returning from South Africa.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CRISES

An agronomist, Preval is credited with ending a battle between peasants and the "grand dons," powerful landholders in Haiti's northern Artibonite farming region. He gave poor farmers government land the landholders said they owned.

He helped introduce Haitian Bleu, a high-end coffee grown near Jacmel in the south, creating a new industry.

"While in office, Preval was not as bad a head of state as others Haiti has had," said Jean-Germain Gros, a Haiti analyst at the University of Missouri. "He does have a record of some accomplishment, which is important."

In a country terrorized by a brutal, now disbanded, army and the dreaded Tontons Macoute -- the Duvalier family dictatorship's thugs -- Preval's presidency was notably free of widespread accusations of murder and corruption.

During his tenure, Haiti was without a prime minister for 21 months and his administration failed to hold elections for 18 Senate seats, crippling the legislature.

Preval was also accused of startling insensitivity when in 2000, he said Haiti's economic situation was dire and advised Haitians to "swim to get out."

The phrase seeped into the lexicon of a nation where tens of thousands of people have boarded rickety boats for a dangerous journey to the United States. Many die at sea.

When he handed the National Palace back to Aristide in 2001, Preval retreated to his hometown of Marmelade, where he continued a program to grow bamboo used in art and furniture.

A low-key campaigner, Preval said in an interview with Reuters television that he wants to decentralize government, strengthen the judiciary and police, and achieve the "great dream" of primary education for all.

"Five years will not be enough to finish the work," he said.

Trash find spurs cries of fraud
Landfill in Haiti yields ballot boxes
By Tim Collie
Tribune Newspapers: South Florida Sun-Sentinel
Published February 16, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Haiti's troubled elections were dealt another blow Wednesday with the discovery of dozens of ballot boxes and polling materials scattered across a landfill just outside the capital city.

The discovery seemed to back charges by front-runner Rene Preval that fraud and "gross errors" plagued the Feb. 7 presidential contest, though it was impossible to tell just how many votes for Preval ended up in the garbage.

"Just look at this -- this is what the rich of this country think of our votes," said Renel Duqueres, a landfill worker who said he began noticing the ballot boxes being dumped last week. "They just kept coming and coming, and we burned a lot of them. But then it just became too much."

As pigs and goats rooted through huge mounds of smoldering garbage covering dozens of acres, Haitians from nearby villages waved discarded ballots Wednesday that showed Preval's box checked. But some ballots showed markings for other candidates; others had no marks at all.

"This is really quite disturbing, and it looks like it's going to mess up things quite a bit," said David Wimhurst, spokesman for the United Nations, which has backed this country's interim government with a 9,000-man military force since a 2004 rebellion ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Preval has 48.7% of vote

With 90 percent of ballots counted in the presidential race, Preval leads with 48.7 percent of the vote, followed by former President Leslie Manigat with 11.8 percent. Preval needs a simple majority to avoid a runoff, and he contends that the vote was sabotaged to shrink his lead.

Michel Brunache, chief of staff for President Boniface Alexandre, said on Haitian radio Wednesday that the interim government is forming a commission with election officials and Preval's aides to review allegations of vote fraud.

But no authority could say when the panel would meet or how long its inquiry would last. Behind the scenes, UN diplomats continued to huddle with Haitian leaders and ambassadors from the United States and other countries to find a way out of the mess. Brazil, whose military leads the UN peacekeeping force in Haiti, was pushing a plan to declare Preval the winner in an effort to avoid another nationwide rebellion.

Meanwhile, the United Nations and Haiti's election council hurled charges back and forth over who had custody of the ballots.

"We were in charge of security for the votes and we did our job. The votes under our control were handed over" to the Haitian Provisional Electoral Council, Wimhurst said.

Both Wimhurst and Brunache said the ballots in the landfill could have come from nine polling places that were ransacked on Election Day. Or, they said, they could be blank ballots dumped in an effort to sabotage the elections by discrediting them in the eyes of the Haitian public. All ballots and election materials, including unmarked ballots, were to be sealed and taken to the election tabulation center.

Among the materials discovered at the landfill by the South Florida Sun-Sentinel was a Senate tally sheet for a polling place in Carrefour, a Port-au-Prince suburb where no irregularities were reported. It was one of several tally sheets found by reporters Wednesday.

One of the names on the tally sheet was that of Jean-Herlin Beaublanc, who was an election observer for Preval's party at the polling place.

"Yes, that's the tally sheet, but I don't have any idea what happened to the votes," Beaublanc said. "The whole place was a mess. It opened up five hours late, and they kicked us out in the afternoon because it was so disorganized. I didn't see what they did with the votes."

One way out of the crisis may be to discard so-called blank ballots -- under Haitian law they must be included in the total votes cast -- that were tabulated during the past week, an idea being floated by some diplomats.

Envoys float possible way out

Eliminating the blank ballots would reduce the total number of ballots counted, giving each candidate a larger share of the vote. If all the blanks are discarded, then Preval would win with about 51 percent of the vote, one diplomat said.

A large proportion of votes, about 4.7 percent, were blank, showing no choice for president among the 33 candidates.

Though some Caribbean and Latin American countries have a tradition of submitting blank ballots as protest votes, "this was a pretty high number, and it does look suspicious on its face," said an international diplomat closely involved with the elections process. "It's hard to believe that people woke up at 3 a.m., walked 5 miles and stood in lines for hours to submit blank ballots."

"What we think happened is that at some polling stations the workers just tossed in unused ballots with everything else and they got counted," said the diplomat, who didn't want his name used because of the sensitivity of the situation. "That's going to be one of the negotiating points, like everything else here. Who knows how long this could last. Nothing is ever simple in Haiti, especially at election time."

Blank Ballots Should Be Counted As Per the Law

James R. Morrell, Haiti Democracy Project

Feb. 16, 2006

Haiti Democracy Project web page item #3461 (<http://www.haitipolicy.org>)

The blank ballots should be counted as part of the total number of votes cast for the simple reason that this is the law. No political deal should be made to discard these ballots from the count. This issue of the blank ballots bedeviled the 1997 elections which led to parliamentary deadlock, resignation of the prime minister, and eventually dissolution of the parliament without a new one being elected.

"Quelque 85.000 bulletins blancs jugés suspects ont été finalement ignorés dans le décompte des suffrages, permettant à M. Préval d'éviter un deuxième tour de scrutin prévu au départ le 19 mars." Radio Metropole reports.

The grounds on which they were judged suspect must be firmly established. Below we briefly discuss the procedures by which blank ballots and all ballots are counted.

The electoral council's announcement stated that it had, "décidé de répartir les votes blancs au prorata des votes exprimés en faveur des candidats dans la compilation des résultats ». We are not aware of any provision for this in the electoral law.

This would be the position of the Haiti Democracy Project no matter which candidate or faction were to benefit. Such benefits to a particular party are purely temporary. Haiti benefits as a whole when the rule of law is upheld, and most of its problems can be traced to the failure to uphold the law.

As noted by one of our most highly-qualified observers,

The practice of counting unmarked ballots as part of the total ballots in the presidential election is a long-established practice in Haiti. It was not invented to frustrate Preval's bid for a first-round victory. This applies to ballots that reflected other choices (total of persons voting at Site X minus total ballots not reflecting a presidential choice). This is distinguished from unused ballots printed for people who chose not to vote at all. As of now, 85,000 or 4.67% of the ballots counted from last week's election did not reflect a choice for president.

If those 85,000 ballots were subtracted from the total number of voters, Preval would have 51% of the presidential vote. However, that would represent election manipulation based on past practice. Unmarked ballots are counted as simply one of the options presented to voters (Candidate X, Candidate Y, No Candidate) and consequently lower the percentage of the vote for all candidates, not just Preval.

Preval's concern, apart from giving his opponents an opportunity to form a coalition against him, is that the CEP is the arbiter of electoral disputes (Haitian Constitution, Title VI, Article 197).

As Haiti's success on February 7, 2006 shows, it is essential not to underestimate or attempt to circumvent the procedures contained in Haitian electoral law and practice to protect the integrity of the vote. Incendiary media reports of ballots on the ground overlook the fact that each and every polling

place followed a strict regime of counting the total ballots, the unused ballots, the blank ballots, and the spoiled ballots, as well as the valid ballots. Pollwatchers from the various parties were present during the count by the polling-place officials. So were independent electoral observers in a great number of polling places. The electoral officials showed each and every ballot to all the pollwatchers and observers. Each of these kept their own manual count. At the conclusion of the count, the results were tabulated on a tally sheet. They were also recorded on an electoral return (proces-verbal) All of Haiti's procedures in this regard are consistent with, and based on, similar procedures in other countries. The returns from every polling center were checked by the pollwatchers and observers, so they do not depend on electoral officials alone.

In each and every case in which there is a dispute about the vote in any of the more than ten thousand voting places in Haiti, there exist six to eight independent manual counts. They are in the hands of the local party coordinators and the headquarters of the independent observers. Ballots may be found on the ground, but once ballots have been counted in front of these many witnesses, the integrity of the count is preserved.

A deliberate decision to circumvent any part of this process, such as not counting blank ballots, would throw Haiti into turmoil just as surely as would some manipulation intended to deny a legitimate win by Preval or any other candidate.

Haiti's Rene Preval Is Declared Winner of Election (Update1)

Feb. 16, 2006

Bloomberg News

Rene Preval, a former ally of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was today declared winner of Haiti's presidential elections after taking more than half the vote, following days of demonstrations by his supporters.

Preval won 51.15 percent of the votes after ballots from 96 percent of polling stations were counted, Jean Junior Joseph, a spokesman for interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, said in a telephone interview from the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince. The announcement was made by Max Mathurin, head of the Provisional Electoral Council, shortly after 3 a.m. local time, Joseph said.

``By tomorrow, many people will be chanting in the streets of Port-au-Prince," Joseph said. ``Monsieur Preval is very popular" in the capital. Many people were on the streets prior to the announcement, Joseph said.

The declaration followed five days of protests by Preval's supporters who called for him to be declared winner. Early voting tallies had shown him securing more than 60 percent of the vote, though as counting progressed, his proportion slipped below the 50 percent-plus-one-vote threshold needed to win in the first round of elections and avoid a runoff. Preval himself said there had been ``massive fraud and gross errors" in the counting, according to the Web site of his Lespwa (Hope) party.

A full breakdown of results hadn't yet been announced, Joseph said. Preval's victory came after changes were made to the way blank votes were counted, Joseph said. Where previously the blank votes were accorded their own separate proportion of the overall ballot, they have now been divided on a pro-rata basis between all the candidates, according to Joseph.

The new government is scheduled to take office on March 29, and local elections are set to be held on April 13.

Burnt Ballot Boxes

Partial results published Feb. 13 on the electoral council's Web site showed that Preval, a former president and prime minister, had 48.76 percent of the vote. Lesly Manigat, another former president, had 11.83 percent of the vote, and Charles Henry Baker, a businessman, had 7.93 percent. Guy Philippe, who led the rebellion in 2004 that culminated in Aristide's ouster, was ninth of the 35 candidates, with less than 2 percent of votes.

A total of 85,290 votes, or 4.67 percent of the Feb. 13 total, were declared blank. Distributing them among the candidates according to their proportion of the vote boosts Preval's share to 51.15 percent.

While U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan said last week that the vote was fair, it later emerged that some ballot boxes had been dumped in garbage tips and burned.

Investigation

MINUSTAH, the United Nations mission in Haiti yesterday called for authorities to "investigate fully" the incident.

"MINUSTAH wishes to express its deep concern at the media reports of ballot papers being deposited and burnt on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince," the mission said late yesterday in an e-mailed statement. The UN "urges the Haitian authorities to investigate fully and prosecute anyone found guilty of this apparent grave breach of the electoral process."

On election day, Feb. 7, nine voting centers were attacked and election materials were destroyed, the mission said, adding: "it is not possible at this stage to rule out the possibility that the materials discovered yesterday originated in these voting centers," a reference to the burnt ballot boxes.

The UN's Brazilian-led peacekeeping force in Haiti numbers more than 9,000. They will remain in Haiti "for the long haul," Hedi Anabi, UN assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping, told reporters in New York on Feb. 6. Successful presidential and subsequent local elections could lead to a gradual shift in personnel from soldiers to civilian police, he said.

More than 3.5 million Haitians were registered to vote in the Feb. 7 election, the first since Aristide in February 2004 was forced to flee the country amid escalating protests against his rule. Preval, 63, served as prime minister under Aristide during the latter's first period as president in 1991. Preval was president from 1996 to 2001.

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**Preval Declared Victor in Haitian Election
Talks Yield Clear Win For Quiet Ex-Protege Of the Fiery Aristide
By Manuel Roig-Franzia
Washington Post
Friday, February 17, 2006**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 16 -- Bread brought Rene Preval to politics. Piles and piles of it.

While running a bakery in the capital, he donated loaves to the church of a charismatic Catholic priest named Jean-Bertrand Aristide. As Aristide became Haiti's preeminent political figure, he set Preval on a tumultuous course that -- many years later -- culminated in an election Feb. 7, unrest following charges of electoral fraud and a compromise early Thursday that declared Preval the next president.

Aristide and Preval -- the first a master of soaring, pulpit-pounding oratory, the second a reserved enigma who prefers not to speak -- are entwined in the minds of Haitians. Even now, as he ascends at age 63 to his second presidency, Preval remains in the shadow of the younger, exiled Aristide, while international observers watch intently to see whether he will finally establish his own identity.

Tens of thousands of Haitians marched boisterously through Port-au-Prince after Preval's victory was announced, blowing homemade plastic horns and waving leafy branches in an homage to the three-leaf symbol of Preval's party, Lespwa, which means "hope" in Haitian Creole.

"Preval is hope," said Pierre Romin, a 39-year-old construction worker, as he climbed a steep slope leading to the home of Preval's sister, where the president-elect is staying.

Behind Romin, the crowd sang, "Oh Preval, we have been waiting for you," as overloaded tap-taps -- this country's splashily painted truck-taxis -- groaned up the hill.

Preval was named president after days of negotiations involving his campaign advisers, Haiti's interim government, the United Nations and international diplomats, including Brazil's ambassador and the top U.S. envoy here.

The talks were aimed at finding a way to end the protests that roiled this impoverished seaside capital, leaving roads barricaded by upended cars and burning tires, following allegations of electoral fraud.

Haiti's electoral council voted 7 to 2 early Thursday to disqualify more than 80,000 blank ballots cast, a decision that pushed Preval from just under a majority of votes counted to 51 percent, enough to avert a runoff. The second-place finisher, former president Leslie Manigat, who got 11 percent of the vote, called the decision "illegal" and said he would challenge it, but he urged his followers not to respond with violence.

Despite Preval's impassioned support among Haiti's poor, his closest friends find him a mystery. He prefers to be alone, shies from public speaking and is ill at ease in the spotlight, often holding his face in his hands during news briefings.

"He has said, 'Aristide is Aristide and I am myself,' " said Michele Pierre-Louis, Preval's longtime partner in the bakery. "But that is not sufficient. He must have reasons not to want to take a stronger public stance."

Preval was born to a prosperous farming family from the village of Marmelade, high in the breathtaking northern mountains. He studied in Belgium, then trained as an agronomist. By his thirties he had drifted away from agriculture and become a supervisor at a garment factory. No one recalls him exhibiting any great promise as a leader -- and certainly not as president of his troubled nation. "It's really an accident of history," Pierre-Louis said.

Preval hated the factory job, so Pierre-Louis hired him as an assistant at the Port-au-Prince airport. Together they developed a national airport authority, but were fired in the mid-1980s when an official who had helped them fell out of favor.

Suddenly jobless, the two decided to buy a city bakery. Sometimes they attended Mass at nearby St. John Bosco Church, where Aristide's afternoon youth Masses were drawing huge crowds.

"It was like he came under Aristide's spell," a friend recalled of Preval.

The relationship deepened when Aristide came under threat of being removed by the Catholic hierarchy, which was uneasy with his controversial sermons. Preval quietly helped to organize a hunger strike to protest Aristide's removal. Their friendship was sealed.

In 1990, Aristide won an unlikely victory in the presidential race, backed by his Lavalas party. He eventually chose Preval to be his prime minister. The two were forced into exile after Aristide had been in office only seven months, but returned to Haiti three years later with the help of the United States.

Preval was elected president after Aristide's term ended and took office in 1996. In the early days, few doubted Aristide was the real power. Visiting diplomats and elected officials often bypassed the National Palace to be received by Aristide.

"He was simply under Aristide's thumb," said one Haitian who observed both men.

The relationship with Aristide began to fray, and another picture of Preval began to emerge. Somehow, observers say, his quiet, nonconfrontational style allowed him to navigate Haiti's often violent political world, where more than 100 political parties jockey for power. He was finding a middle ground.

"Nobody understands him; he does not reveal himself," said Gerald Gilles, who was a Lavalas senator when Preval was president. "But he's a pragmatist."

As president, Preval built schools and improved social services, but later acknowledged he had not been successful. He disbanded parliament after tussling about appointments, a move that he asserted was legal but was widely condemned outside Haiti as a gross misuse of power.

Preval fell from the public eye during Aristide's turbulent return to the presidency in 2001, a tenure that ended with an uprising and his flight to exile on a U.S. plane in 2004, leaving Haiti in the hands of an

ineffectual interim government. Preval lived in quiet retirement in Marmelade. He became fascinated with bamboo, encouraging farmers to plant it to stabilize eroding soil.

What he now talks about trying to achieve is political stability. And nothing could disrupt any chance of stability faster, many here say, than Aristide returning from exile, even as the people in the streets cry for him to come back. "The crowds could go to the presidential palace and say, 'Preval get out, Aristide is in. He's the only person in Haiti who people will die for,'" Gilles said.

Preval has purposely lowered expectations for his second presidency, won under the Lespwa banner after he broke with Lavalas and its Aristide ties, repeatedly saying during his campaign that Haiti's problems -- 80 percent living in poverty, a corrupt legal system, one in 20 infected with HIV -- cannot be solved quickly.

At times, this champion of the poor places the classes against each other, sounding a bit like Aristide. "The country is upside down," he said.

But sometimes, Preval sounds like an ardent capitalist. He talks glowingly about private companies reviving failing state-run mills. He looks enviously at his neighbors in the Dominican Republic, who lure billions of dollars a year in foreign investments while Haiti gets only \$7 million.

The crowds on the streets wonder whether Aristide will play a role, whether Preval will encourage his mentor to return from South Africa to help revive the country. Preval, at ease with prolonged silences, doesn't want to talk about it.

But in Marmelade, he stroked his gray beard and spoke of a less powerful presidency, a presidency unlike his former mentor's. "We will not," he said, "have anymore a president that comes after God."

Profile: Rene Preval
BBC News
Feb. 16, 2006

Mr Preval's government was marred by a political deadlock
The winner of the controversial elections in Haiti, Rene Preval, is a former ally of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and has inherited his following among the poor.

The elected president - of the small L'Espwa (The Hope) party - enjoys strong popularity particularly in the slums of the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, thanks to his association with the leader who remains exiled in South Africa.

An agronomist who studied in Belgium, Mr Preval, 63, was active in the movement to oust military ruler Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier during the 1970s.

He was prime minister for a brief period in Mr Aristide's first administration, which was forced out of power in a 1991 military coup.

Mr Preval later replaced Mr Aristide as president between 1996 and 2001.

His government was marred by political deadlock. In 1999, following a series of disagreements with deputies, he declared that parliament's term had expired and began ruling by decree.

By the end of his term the political situation had further deteriorated.

The crisis eventually culminated in an armed uprising that forced Mr Aristide's second administration out of power in February 2004.

Analysts say the biggest unanswered question of the 7 February elections is how many people voted for Mr Preval in the hope that he would bring back the ousted leader.

Mr Preval has told the BBC that Mr Aristide may return if he wishes, but that he will not tolerate the violent groups that pledge him allegiance.

Haiti declares Preval president
Thu Feb 16, 2006 10:00 AM GMT
By Joseph Guylor Delva
Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haiti declared Rene Preval, a one-time ally of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, president on Thursday after authorities agreed to throw out 85,000 "blank" votes from last week's election.

The Brazilian-brokered deal averted possible widespread violence after Preval had condemned "massive fraud" in the February 7 election and thousands of angry supporters had poured out of Haiti's teeming slums to demand he be given a first-round victory.

The deal over the blank ballots, which showed no choice for president among the 33 candidates and which were suspected of being tainted by fraud, lifted Preval's share of the vote to 51.15 percent, above the simple majority he needed to avoid a March 19 runoff.

"Rene Preval has been declared the winner with 51 percent," said Max Mathurin, president of the embattled Provisional Electoral Council, in a statement read on Haitian radio in the middle of the night.

Opposed by the wealthy elite who helped drive Aristide from power in February 2004 but passionately supported by the Caribbean country's poor masses, Preval will take office on March 29.

The blanks, amounting to 4.7 percent of the total, were included in accordance with the law and reduced the final percentage allocated to each candidate. With 90 percent of the ballots counted, Preval had been at 48.7 percent.

While blank votes are a common way to register a protest vote in established democracies, few Haitians were able to believe that so many of their countrymen had decided not to make a choice in the first election since Aristide was deposed, and the blank votes have come under enormous suspicion.

Pressure builds to resolve Haiti election impasse

Feb. 16, 2006

By Joseph Guylor Delva and Jim Loney

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Brazil has led a push to avert violence in Haiti by urging election officials to discard ballots possibly tainted by fraud and declare former President Rene Preval the winner, diplomats and officials said.

A diplomatic source and an aide to the one-time ally of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide said 85,000 "blank votes," in which no choice was made among the 33 candidates competing in the February 7 election, had become the focus of efforts to resolve the disputed election.

The blanks, amounting to 4.7 per cent of the total, were included in accordance with the law and reduced the final percentage allocated to each candidate, helping to keep Preval below the simple majority he needed for a first-round win.

Preval's share of the vote so far stood at 48.7 per cent, triggering angry protests by his supporters and a claim by Preval of "massive fraud." Preval, opposed by the same wealthy elite that helped drive Aristide into exile two years ago, would have 51 per cent of the vote if the blanks were discarded.

"We are asking the authorities not to consider the blank votes because they are evidence of fraud," said Jacques Edouard Alexis, who served as prime minister for a time when Preval was president between 1996 and 2000.

Blank votes are a common way to register a protest vote in established democracies.

Haitians doubt so many of their countrymen really walked miles to a polling station and then waited for hours simply to cast an unmarked ballot. The United Nations, which helped oversee the election, has also acknowledged that ballot boxes could easily have been stuffed with blanks.

"The focus now is on the blank votes because nobody believes that these blank votes are real," the diplomatic source said, asking not to be identified.

The source said Brazil, which is leading the UN peacekeeping force in Haiti, and Chile were leading efforts to resolve the impasse.

- REUTERS

Haiti Officials Scrap Blank Ballots, to Declare Preval Winner of Election

The agreement today resolving allegations of fraud in the presidential vote may defuse protests.

By Carol J. Williams

Los Angeles Times

Feb. 16, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Under pressure to resolve accusations of fraud, Haitian election officials said early today that they have agreed to set aside tens of thousands of suspect ballots and declare presidential front-runner Rene Preval the winner.

The compromise drafted by the Provisional Electoral Council with Preval's campaign and Haiti's interim government was announced over Radio Tropic FM and was expected to end days of angry protests and accusations of fraud in tabulating results of the Feb. 7 election.

Preval's supporters rampaged through the streets of this debris-strewn capital Monday and Tuesday, protesting his declining vote share as counting neared an end and the number of disqualified, blank and missing ballots rose to keep Preval's total just below the necessary 50% plus one for a first-round victory.

On Wednesday, U.N. peacekeepers recovered thousands of marked ballots and other election materials from a landfill north of the capital, raising the ire of Preval supporters and fears of another outbreak of violence.

Discovery of the crumpled ballots and smashed plastic boxes, on top of previous reports that 85,000 votes were cast without a choice for president and an additional 125,000 were invalidated, prompted authorities to order an investigation.

With Preval the uncontested leader of the 33-candidate pack, holding 48.76% of the 2.2 million votes cast with 90% counted, his backers had cried foul and refused to submit to a March 19 runoff.

The six-member investigative commission looking into the reported irregularities decided late Wednesday to remove the 85,000 blank ballots from the total, which allows Preval's share to clear the 50% hurdle, election council chief Max Mathurin told the radio station and other media.

Haitian electoral law recognizes a blank ballot as a citizen's right to protest by choosing none of the candidates. But with 33 candidates for the presidency representing every ideological shade, suspicion has intensified that many of the blanks were illegally inserted to reduce Preval's percentage. Without the blanks, Preval would have exceeded 50% of valid votes and avoided a runoff.

"People didn't walk miles and wait for hours in line to cast empty ballots," said one young worker at the now-idle vote tabulation center. He declined to identify himself, saying he would lose his job.

Word of the compromise came too late for public reaction but it was expected to ignite jubilation across this desperately poor and politically troubled country of 8.5 million.

Even before a formal announcement of final results was made, Preval's campaign team was celebrating into the wee hours after being informed of the compromise, said Liszt Quitel, an advisor and veteran of Preval's Cabinet during his first presidential term, 1996 to 2001.

Haitians had been outraged by the discovery in the landfill.

"We are shocked by this incident," said Jean Chavannes Jeune, another presidential contender. "It reinforces my conviction that the results are being manipulated."

Preval supporters marched through the streets chanting, "Give us our president!" Although they heeded Preval's appeal on Tuesday to keep their protests peaceful, anger infused the marchers and spurred shopkeepers to shutter their businesses.

"They threw away our ballots! They dumped them and burned them to get rid of them!" cried Kenny Paul, 20. "We voted for Preval, and all we want is for them to give us our president."

Preval is backed by many of the poor and illiterate still smarting from the forced departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

A former priest and fiery champion of liberation theology who threatened Haiti's small clique of wealthy businesspeople, Aristide fled an armed rebellion two years ago and now lives in South African exile. Preval served as president between Aristide's two terms and is considered his protege.

On Wednesday, a harried U.N. official estimated that about 3% of the ballots cast seemed to have gone missing.

"The tragedy here is that we had a relatively clean election but it could still be ruined," he said, suggesting that the discarded ballots might have been dumped by those who didn't like an apparent Preval victory outcome and wanted to discredit the process.

David Wimhurst, spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission charged with providing security for the election, noted that isolated incidents left nine polling places ransacked, possibly accounting for the dumped election materials.

All materials handed over to the U.N. mission "are under lock and key and armed guard," Wimhurst said.

Interim President Boniface Alexandre's office announced a formal probe of the discrepancies and said release of final vote tallies would be delayed.

"There have been some difficulties, but we are very optimistic about a solution soon that will reflect the will of the people," said Interior Minister Paul Magloire, just hours before the reported compromise.

The center hasn't posted new figures since early Monday, when it reported that Preval had slipped below 50%.

The compromise allows Haiti to avoid a costly and volatile runoff with distant second-place contender Leslie Manigat.

Tutu airlifted out of Haiti amid violence

February 16 2006

By Patrick Moser

The Independent Online, South Africa

Port-au-Prince - South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who spent four days in Haiti where he preached reconciliation, was airlifted to the neighbouring Dominican Republic in a military helicopter after protesters stormed his hotel.

New demonstrations were held in the Haitian capital on Wednesday as the painfully slow vote count from the February 7 presidential election was bogged down by fraud claims.

Several barricades of rocks, trees and trash still blocked some major avenues, following a mass demonstration on Tuesday night. Many businesses remained shuttered, and schools were closed.

'We are convinced that we will win'

New protests were held and demonstrators in the Cite Soleil shantytown waved ballots and ballot boxes apparently found at a garbage dump.

Ripped ballot boxes and ballots, both marked and blank, were found in a Port-au-Prince dump, fuelling the anger of Preval supporters.

Huge crowds took to the streets of Port-au-Prince for the fourth consecutive day late on Tuesday, setting tires alight, marching, jogging and chanting Preval's name.

Authorities indicated the final outcome of the election would not be announced until completion of the probe to be conducted by Preval's party and the electoral council with the government acting as referee.

Speaking after the UN Security Council as well as the US and French governments urged Haitians to respect the outcome, Preval said he had explained his position to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan over the telephone.

"We are convinced that we will win in the first round," said Preval, 63, who was president from 1996 to 2001 and who enjoys strong support among the millions of impoverished Haitians.

Preval encouraged his supporters to continue demonstrating their rejection of the partial results, but urged them to do so peacefully and within the law.

On Monday, a protester was shot dead during a protest. A spokesperson for the UN Stabilisation Force in Haiti said the death occurred after the UN troops drove through the area, firing in the air but not at the protesters. - Sapa-AFP

U.S. AID

Rice: Not slighting Americas

The Bush administration said it is redirecting money to new programs, not cutting aid to Latin America.

BY PABLO BACHELET

Miami Herald

Feb. 16, 2006

WASHINGTON - The administration is keeping the overall amount of aid to Latin America practically unchanged but is favoring programs that have more strings attached, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told lawmakers Wednesday.

The idea is to use initiatives like the Millennium Challenge Account, which aims to gradually wean nations off U.S. aid by encouraging them to root out corruption and promote investment, Rice said. She was testifying on the State Department's 2007 fiscal year budget request before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"It is also our goal to make our foreign assistance something that is not permanent for countries as they transition to well-managed countries that fight corruption, that govern wisely, that make investments in their people," she said.

The policy is making an impact in Latin America, where the State Department wants to cut funding for two of the three big programs managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Child Survival and Health Program Fund would be cut 9 percent to \$128 million and Development Assistance would drop 29 percent to \$182 million.

However, other programs like the Economic Support Fund, which is also managed by USAID and is designed to support nations in which the United States has a security interest, would get more.

REWARDS THE POOR

Launched in 2004, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) rewards poor nations with big aid packages if they comply with a set of standards that range from governing more transparently to promoting more business investment.

Florida Sen. Bill Nelson, a Democrat, said the United States faces serious challenges in Latin America and cutting assistance was ``a wrongheaded policy."

"I would like to give you the forum to explain, for example, what is the reason for the cuts in the assistance program to El Salvador from \$22 million to \$7 million," he asked, citing cuts in USAID Development Assistance.

Rice said El Salvador would receive "a substantial increase" in U.S. assistance after it signs an MCA deal.

Asked what happened to countries that did not qualify for the MCA but would nonetheless be hurt by the cuts, Rice said there were "different explanations in many of these cases," and that "it is also the case that we have had to refocus some of the assistance on places where we think there is greater relative need."

Overall, the requested budget includes a 3 percent decrease in aid, from \$1.52 billion to \$1.47 billion, according to the Center for International Policy, a group that tracks U.S. government spending in Latin America and is generally critical of the Bush administration.

Budget analysis done by CIP and others show that the policy of using more targeted, country-specific programs appears to favor Haiti, some nations in Central America like Nicaragua and Honduras and a few South American nations such as Paraguay.

Though Haiti is suffering some cuts, it will benefit by an \$88 million allotment to fight HIV/AIDS in Latin America, a one-third increase over the 2006 allotment. Rice said the overall funding level for Haiti was "level."

But the CIP numbers do not include outlays under the MCA. The administration has already clinched deals with Honduras (\$215 million), Nicaragua (\$175 million) and Paraguay (\$35 million) and is in the process of negotiating packages for Bolivia and El Salvador. Some of this money would be disbursed in 2007.

FLEXIBILITY

Adam Isacson, the Latin America analyst for CIP, said the administration is putting a premium on flexibility. The Economic Support Fund, which would rise 26 percent to \$152 million if the administration's request is approved, allows cash transfers for countries in balance of payment troubles. The Economic Support Fund winners include the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. But to get this money, countries must sign what are called bilateral Article 98 agreements with the United States, which exempt U.S. nationals from jurisdiction of the Hague-based International Criminal Court. Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and a handful of other Latin American nations have refused to sign.

Préval's victory eases week of tension

BY JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

February 16, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE - The tension and burgeoning sense of doom that gripped Haiti this week broke on Thursday with the pre-dawn announcement that René Préval had been elected president. The decision came after Haitian officials met day and night under pressure from foreign diplomats.

Supporters of the quiet 63-year-old agronomist and former President filled the streets soon after the official 3 a.m. announcement, dancing and chanting to the tin warbling of carnival trumpets. The news came after a day of closed-door meetings between Préval, foreign diplomats, the U.S.-backed interim Haitian government and the nation's electoral council, according to Haitians and foreigners who participated in the meetings.

Diplomats from the half dozen countries that give heavy financial and military assistance to Haiti -- and largely funded the \$60 million election -- were desperate to find a way to resolve an impasse in the vote-counting that left Préval just short of the outright majority he needed to avert a runoff.

Ambassadors from Brazil and Chile led a push to change the way blank votes were tabulated, something first suggested by U.N. electoral advisors, according to persons in the meetings. Canada and France, two countries with long-standing traditional ties to Haiti, initially insisted the council stick to a count that would have forced a runoff, but agreed that significant flaws in the election process would make it impossible to declare the results with precision.

They met with Préval at a U.N. base Monday afternoon, and then flew him to the National Palace, where President Boniface Alexandre promised to work with the electoral council to resolve the crisis. On Tuesday morning, as he promised, Préval went on Haitian radio to tell his supporters to remain peaceful while the dispute was hashed out. He said he suspected "massive fraud."

That evening, diplomats from the U.S., Brazil, Chile, Canada, France and the U.N. met with Préval again. Brazilian Ambassador Paulo Cordeiro de Andrade Pinto offered up the notion of allocating the blank votes to candidates according to the percentage of the votes they had received until then.

"This was the technicians' choice," Cordeiro told The Miami Herald.

And the early 2005 electoral decree that laid out the rules of the election was ambiguous, only requiring that the blank votes be included in the total, not explaining how they would be counted. U.N. advisors, council members and observers agreed that the stunningly high number of blank votes cast -- one out of every 20 votes -- could be a result of poorly trained pollworkers dumping unused ballots into ballot boxes.

In a meeting that began Wednesday morning and lasted well past midnight, the council ultimately decided to allocate those blank votes to candidates in proportion to the share of valid votes they

received. While this move pumped up everyone's share of the vote, it put Préval over the 50 percent he needed to avoid a runoff. They declared him the winner after 3 a.m.

The second place candidate, 73-year-old former President Leslie Manigat, vented at his estate in the Port-au-Prince suburb of La Plain on Thursday, calling the decision a "tragic experience for the Haitian people," but did not say he would contest the results.

"We are not duped by this Machiavellian comedy of imposing a winner," said Manigat, who had less than 12 percent of the vote before the late night decision. "This right to a second round was confiscated by a manipulation of statistics ... The ones who did it have a grave responsibility."

The first round of national elections on Feb. 7 was supposed to be a model of high-tech precision and efficiency for a country accustomed to fraudulent and violent balloting.

Minimizing potential fraud was crucial to calm the highly charged political atmosphere that followed the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Washington and other foreign donors said credible elections were the only way to restore democracy to the troubled and desperately impoverished nation.

But poor preparation led to a range of problems that soon brought the tabulation of results to a virtual halt. Out of some 2 million votes cast, 147,000 either disappeared or were nullified, and 85,290 were blank.

The uncertainty was large enough to muddle whether Préval, who had 48.76 percent with more than 90 percent of polling stations accounted for, had won an outright majority or needed to face a runoff. Suspicions of fraud deepened when television footage showed hundreds if not thousands of ballots and boxes found at the municipal dump. This set off Préval supporters again, and flaming barricades lit the night.

Haitian interim President Boniface Alexandre implored the nine-member electoral council to resolve the crisis.

"We had to do something," said council member Patrick Féquiere. "We could have just told Préval he got 48.76 percent, but when he contests the results all of this mess is going to come out -- the blank votes, the missing votes."

On Wednesday, seven members of the council set out to end the crisis. They holed up in a mansion in the hills above Port-au-Prince with Alexandre's chief of staff, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice. They debated various options, from simply throwing the blank votes out to setting a limit to the number of blank votes gathered from any one polling station. By early evening, they had tentatively agreed to distribute the vote pro rata.

The U.N. envoy in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, and OAS Secretary General Jose Insulza informed Préval.

But before the council declared Préal indeed the winner, they had to run numerous simulations to make sure issues with the missing votes would not bring him below 50 percent again. The other two members meanwhile joined the meeting.

Finally, long after midnight, eight of the nine members signed an agreement declaring Préal the winner.

Eric Joseph, 30, celebrated with a Prestige beer in front of the National Palace in the afternoon, after three days on the streets in protest.

"We will never be tired," he said. ``For two years we have been suffering. Today is a day of deliverance."

Haitians Dance for Joy as Préval Is Declared Winner

By GINGER THOMPSON

New York Times

February 17, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Feb. 16 — The protests that paralyzed cities across the country turned into celebrations on Thursday as news spread that René Préval, a former president with overwhelming support among this country's poor, had been declared the next president.

René Préval, 63, the front-runner in Haiti's presidential election, was declared the winner today. Even as the news spread across the capital, Mr. Préval withdrew into the silence that characterized his past leadership, canceling a news conference and staying inside his de facto headquarters in his sister's house. And questions intensified over how he would resolve the country's many troubles and whether he would bring his old mentor, former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, back out of exile.

In a hastily arranged news conference at 3 a.m., the members of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council officially announced an agreement to change the way they had tabulated the results from last week's elections, giving Mr. Préval the 50 percent vote total he needed to become president without a run-off.

The agreement, forged during marathon negotiations on Wednesday between the council, Haiti's interim government and Mr. Préval's Lespwa political party, came after Mr. Préval challenged results showing him below the 50 percent mark.

Mr. Préval had charged that the elections were rigged against him, and throngs of his supporters paralyzed cities across the country with barricades of burning tires, stirring fears that the whole country might go up in smoke.

Foreign diplomats rushed to answer questions about the legitimacy of the back-room negotiations that brought Mr. Préval to power, trying to save the credibility of an election they consider crucial to stabilizing the troubled country. The diplomats praised the process as respectful of the law and of the votes cast by the majority of the Haitian electorate.

Speaking at a Congressional budget hearing on Thursday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hailed the announcement that Mr. Préval would be president. "We are going to work with the Préval government," she said. "We want this government to succeed."

Mr. Préval, a 63-year-old agronomist, was president from 1996 to 2001 and is a protégé of Mr. Aristide, who was ousted two years ago by a violent uprising. As the recent election proved, Mr. Préval still commands overwhelming support from the same poor masses that hailed Mr. Aristide.

Now, the biggest challenge Mr. Préval faces as Haiti's president played out across the capital on Thursday, illustrated in the wide and hostile gap between his supporters and his critics, including many among the country's wealthy minority, who have charged Mr. Préval with resorting to force to bully his way to power.

Supporters of Mr. Préval began to gather at sunrise in front of the national palace. Many, like Marie Suze, 30, said they had not slept all night.

"No one slept," she said, holding hands and dancing with two girlfriends. "We all got on the phone and talked to each other. We all felt such joy."

Samuel Janvier, 21, said he left his house at 4 a.m. to join the celebrations at the palace. "I feel he can help us," Mr. Janvier said of Mr. Préval. "I can just feel it."

Up the mountain in the well-to-do suburb of Pétionville, a radio station owner, Anne Marie Issa, expressed the reservations of many of her peers. She wondered whether Mr. Préval would resolve all of his political challenges by summoning angry crowds out into the streets — a favorite tactic, she said, of Mr. Aristide. And she voiced the question that has seemed to dominate Haitian discourse: whether Mr. Préval would invite Mr. Aristide to return home.

"The way he has risen to power," Mrs. Issa said of Mr. Préval, "creates concerns among those of us who have lived a long history of intimidation, where leaders use the masses to impose their will."

Leslie Manigat, another former president and the runner-up in last week's election, was the most outspoken critic of the agreement that brought Mr. Préval back to power.

Official results from the first round of voting gave Mr. Manigat less than 12 percent of the votes, making clear that he stood little chance of defeating Mr. Préval in a second round. Still, Mr. Manigat said, he looked forward to that chance, and his supporters deserved it.

He described the agreement to declare Mr. Préval the winner as a "Machiavellian maneuver," and an "electoral coup," comparing it to the military takeover that ended his 1988 presidency only four months after he was elected.

Mr. Manigat said that he would not stand in the way of Mr. Préval's rise to power. But he added that Mr. Préval's presidency would be tarnished by a stain of illegitimacy.

"Violence has been rewarded," Mr. Manigat said during a news conference at his home Thursday morning. "As we did in the 1988 coup against us, we say good luck to the country."

A Deal Is Reached to Name a Victor in Haiti's Election
By GINGER THOMPSON
Published: February 16, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 16 — The front-runner in last week's presidential election, René Préval, was declared the winner today as part of an agreement by leaders of Haiti's interim government to retabulate the votes.

René Préval, 63, the front-runner in Haiti's presidential election, was declared the winner today. The Provisional Electoral Council announced the victory, which was followed by celebrations and demonstrations in front of the national palace, this morning. The agreement is a result of negotiations by Mr. Préval, government officials, foreign diplomats and international observers, including the Organization of American States.

A high-ranking official from the Organization of American States, who insisted on anonymity because of the fragile nature of the agreement, said on Wednesday night that loopholes in Haitian electoral law allow the government to discard an estimated 85,000 blank ballots included in the original tally. By excluding them, Mr. Préval's lead would increase from 48.7 percent of the votes to slightly more than 51 percent.

Under election rules, the winner needs 50 percent plus one vote to avoid a run-off.

An adviser to Mr. Préval, who confirmed the agreement, said on Wednesday that electoral authorities had indicated they began recovering a large number of missing ballots that were believed destroyed or stolen, and that those ballots, estimated at 8 percent of all ballots cast, were overwhelmingly in Mr. Préval's favor.

Mr. Préval, 63, an agronomist, previously served as president from 1996 to 2001.

"Considering the fact that the remaining tally sheets will not influence the outcome of the result, René Préval has been declared president of the republic," said the president of the electoral council, Max Mathurin.

A former senator, Prince Pierre Sonson, said in response: "The entire political class should give their support to René Préval. We must work for a society without exclusions."

The agreement was forged after marathon negotiations among leaders of Mr. Préval's Lespwa Party, the interim government, the Provisional Electoral Council, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, the O.A.S. and ambassadors from the United States, France, Canada, Brazil and Chile. The talks started Monday, after early tallies indicated Mr. Préval would not win enough votes to avoid a runoff and his supporters paralyzed cities across the country with protests and flaming barricades.

Mr. Préval, who had been waiting for election results in his hometown, Marmelade, was rushed back to the capital on a United Nations helicopter Monday afternoon. On Tuesday morning, he delivered an address to the nation, charging that the tabulation had been rigged against him and demanding that final results be withheld pending a review.

"This is a political solution to a political problem that was necessary because of the widespread fraud that threatened to undermine the election and the will of the people."

Fritz Jean, a supporter of Mr. Préval's and former president of the Central Bank, said, "This is a political solution to a political problem that was necessary because of the widespread fraud that threatened to undermine the election and the will of the people."

"Those blank votes go beyond logical explanation," he said. "To believe that people walked hours to vote, and then waited in line for hours to cast blank ballots, it defies logic."

Voicing the sentiments of many people worries about the precarious state of Haiti's government, he added: "The country could not have withstood the pressure of waiting for a second round. We need to move as quickly as possible to reconciliation."

Others, speaking before the agreement, saw it differently.

"All the efforts we made for a democratic transition could be lost," said a human rights advocate, Jean-Claude Bajeux. "We are going right back to where we have always been where the crowds on the street, not elections, have the last say. We are close to losing an historic opportunity."

The deal was worked out as allegations of irregularities grew.

On Tuesday night, dozens of boxes containing thousands of ballots were found in a dump a few miles north of the capital.

Many of the ballots had not been marked. Some, though, had been marked for Mr. Préval, leading organizers of his campaign to suggest they were proof of an effort to steal victory from their candidate.

Back Channels vs. Democracy Opponents of Mr. Préval, along with several international election observers, wondered though whether his campaign workers had planted the boxes of ballots. They said it might be part of an effort to incite the crowds of Préval supporters whose protests in recent days have paralyzed cities across Haiti, using bullying to put him in power.

Whether the ballots were dumped or planted, the discovery added to questions here and abroad about the credibility of elections considered crucial to setting Haiti back on the road to democracy.

"Unimaginable! Unbelievable!" said Charles-Poisset Romain, a sociology professor and university rector who was one of the 33 candidates in last week's presidential race, referring to the discovery at the dump in an address on national radio. "A speedy investigation must be conducted."

But Mr. Préval's accusations of fraud halted the tabulation of votes before it was finished.

Furthermore, though the Provisional Electoral Council vowed there had been no manipulation or serious irregularities, the discovery at Trutier struck a blow to the confidence in the election and to the peace it had brought to this troubled nation. International electoral officials said an estimated 8 percent

of the ballots cast were missing, at least half of them believed to be stolen or destroyed. Another 7 percent were voided because they were illegible.

But most of the challenges to the vote tally have focused on the estimated 85,000 blank ballots, about 4 percent of the 2.2 million votes cast.

According to Haitian electoral law, blank ballots are counted as part of the total number of votes. If they were not counted, electoral officials report, Mr. Préval would probably win more than 51 percent of the completed votes.

International electoral officials acknowledged that poll workers could have improperly recorded unused ballots as blank ballots. In at least two polling places, said one such official, nearly 100 percent of the ballots were recorded as blank.

But the international officials also said they suspected some cases of fraud, saying they found it hard to believe that peasant farmers in rural areas would walk for hours, then stand in line for hours, to cast blank ballots.

Brazil led a push by Latin American diplomats on Wednesday to discard the blank ballots and declare Mr. Préval president, diplomats said.

The former president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who went into exile in February 2004 and has lived in South Africa since May of that year, may make a statement on the Haiti elections on Friday, a spokesman for the South African Foreign Ministry said today.

Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said last week that the South African government would monitor the political climate in Haiti to gauge whether it would be safe for Mr. Aristide to return, but left no doubt that it would support such a move.

"When he arrived in South Africa we said he will be a guest as long as it is necessary," the minister said at a Feb. 9 briefing, "but as far as we are concerned he is not here for life, and as far as he is concerned he is not here for life."

Mr. Aristide has spent his exile in Pretoria, the capital, where he has been a research fellow and lecturer at the University of South Africa.

Amy Bracken contributed reporting from Port-au-Prince for this article, and Michael Wines from Johannesburg.

Haiti's Préval vows to tackle poverty
Clarens Renois | Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Mail and Guardian Online, South Africa
16 February 2006

René Préval, who was declared Haiti's new President on Thursday, has pledged to tackle the Caribbean country's rampant poverty and seek a national dialogue, though he was yet to announce a clear programme.

During his electoral campaign, Préval had asked voters to judge him on his performance during his 1996 to 2001 presidency, when he built schools, roads and public squares.

Like his former ally Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who resigned the presidency and fled the country in 2004, Préval enjoys widespread support among the poor, who make up 77% of the 8,5-million population.

He has said that he would launch a national programme to combat poverty and social marginalisation.

"If those who have, begin to invest in the education of the weakest among us, they would be grateful," he said in a recent Agence France-Presse interview.

"Children must be taken off the streets. Weapons must be taken from the hands of children and replaced with pens and books," he said.

"That is how we will harmonise relations between the rich and the poor," he said, calling for "social and economic reconciliation".

"The rich are cloistered in their walled villas and the poor are crammed into slums and own nothing. The gap is too big," he said.

He has called for "national dialogue and permanent consultation".

Préval (63) has also said he wants to set up modern democratic institutions, strengthen the state of law and battle corruption.

On the economic front, Préval plans to promote agricultural reforms and investments to boost production in the countryside.

He also wants to reform judicial institutions, and boost the capacity of the ill-equipped and understaffed police force which is currently struggling to battle organised crime and political violence. There are about 5 000 police officers for a population of 8,5-million.

Préval has acknowledged the United Nations Stabilisation Mission for Haiti (Minustah) will need to remain in Haiti for a while.

The international force was deployed in 2004 after Aristide fled the country amid mounting turmoil, and now comprises 6 500 military and 2 000 police. Minustah's mandate was extended this week for another six months.

"There are too many military in this mission. We need more police," Préval said.

He has said he would launch a national disarmament programme. Aid agencies say there are 210 000 illegal weapons alone in Port-au-Prince, where 270 hijackings were reported in December and January, and where gun battles were frequent.

Chronology

1804: Haiti gains independence from France.

1915-1934: The United States marine corps occupies Haiti.

1957: Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier wins elections. He eventually turned his administration into a brutal dictatorship.

1971: Francois Duvalier dies, his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier takes over the dictatorship.

1986: Popular protests end the dictatorship. Duvalier flees to France.

1986-1990: Military rule with brief attempts at civilian democracy.

December 16, 1990: Leftist Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide is elected president by a landslide.

September 30, 1991: Aristide is toppled. His army chief Raul Cedras takes over as the head of a military junta.

October 15, 1994: Aristide returns with US military assistance, resumes his mandate.

February 6, 1995: Aristide disbands the army.

December 17, 1995: René Préval is elected to replace Aristide.

November 25, 2000: Aristide is elected again, with 91,7% of the vote, amid claims of irregularities and a widespread boycott of the vote.

February 7, 2001 - Aristide succeeds Préval.

December 17, 2001: Gunmen attack the National Palace, in what appears to be a failed coup attempt.

February 5, 2004: Armed rebels take control of the Gonaives police station. Within days the insurgency has become a major force.

February 23, 2004: US marines are deployed to Haiti.

February 28, 2004: The White House urges Aristide to resign.

February 29, 2004: Aristide steps down and leaves Haiti for eventual exile in South Africa.

March 8, 2004: Supreme court chief Boniface Alexandre is named interim president.

March 9, 2004: Gerard Latortue is named interim prime minister.

April 30, 2004: The United Nations Security Council votes to approve a UN "stabilisation" force.

February 7, 2006: Presidential and legislative elections are held after being postponed four times.

February 14, 2006: Frontrunner Préval blames "massive fraud or gross errors" for partial results that put him short of the majority he needs to avoid a runoff presidential election.

February 16, 2006: Préval is declared the winner after changes in the way blank ballots are counted and following five days of protests by his supporters. - AFP

Rays of hope for Haiti's future

BY ROGER NORIEGA

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Miami Herald

February 16, 2006

Whoever is inaugurated president of Haiti on March 29 will face daunting challenges in a country flattened by poverty, exhausted by turmoil and bedeviled by a legacy of discredited leadership. No man alive could hope to govern Haiti without the legitimacy conferred by honest elections. The matter is so important that Haitians voted in great numbers, surpassing expectations, slowing the final vote count and producing a close result. Under the rules, the top two contenders may have to face each other in a runoff. How these candidates and their supporters conduct themselves in this electoral crisis is a lesson in how they might govern.

Based on unofficial and impartial results in Haiti's Feb. 7 national elections, many observers concluded that René Préval, former president and ally of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, had scored a first-round victory on the strength of impressive margins won in Port-au-Prince. But Haitians are not finished having their say. As the votes from outside the capital are added to the national tally, it appears that Préval may fall short of the 50 percent plus one vote required to win outright. If these results are certified after alleged irregularities are resolved, Préval would have to face a fellow former president, Leslie Manigat, in a second-round vote scheduled for March 19.

On Monday, agitated Préval supporters mobbed the tabulation center demanding victory, even as the votes were still being counted. The unofficial numbers -- posted at www.cepht.org -- seem to paint a picture of a country divided. It appears that Préval simply does not have the overwhelming support in the north to sustain a national majority.

It is not insignificant that Préval's nearest competitor trails him by around 35 points. But it is no less important that a majority of Haitian voters cast their ballots for someone else or left their ballots blank. Haiti's electoral law contemplated just such an eventuality, and it requires a runoff so that the majority's voice can be heard clearly.

Haitians have suffered the consequences when, not too long ago, they were denied legitimate government because outsiders pronounced slipshod elections as "good enough" for Haiti. Now, violent mobs may be trying to convince those tallying the ballots that 49 percent is "good enough."

To be sure, Préval must be allowed to present any evidence of irregularities. Although Haiti's electoral law is fairly clear, no one can predict whether the country's electoral machinery will be able to sort through lost ballots and illegible tally sheets to sort out a razor-thin electoral result. But that is at the very least, a more sound approach than shaving the rules to avoid a riot. After all, Préval's opponents -- roughly half the population -- will have every reason to reject the legitimacy of a leader who counted on a mob to seal his victory. Haitians have had enough of that, and peaceful elections are intended to be a step away from such violent methods.

Patience and faith needed

In these tough times, multilateral organizations prove their true worth. United Nations and Organization of American States advisors helped deliver a triumphant day for Haitian voters, defying the skeptics. Now these same U.N. and OAS diplomats are helping Haitian politicians sort out their options and providing valuable technical assistance to certify the final results of the election.

All candidates should be appealing to their followers to have patience and faith in their fellow Haitians as this electoral crisis is overcome. Patience and faith are going to be needed in large measure in the years ahead, no matter who is finally elected.

In the meantime, René Préval and Leslie Manigat are both capable men who could help lead their country to a much better future. Manigat is a wise elder statesman, historian and academic who held office for about four months before being toppled by a military coup in 1988. And, while history will record that this is Préval's second chance to govern Haiti, the political reality is that it is his first. Indeed, Haiti watchers know that Préval spent much of his term looking over his shoulder for his volatile and violent predecessor.

An early test for Haiti's next president will be whom he chooses as prime minister to form a government and whether he respects the constitutional rules that strictly limit the president's power. Other tests will be whether he welcomes qualified and honest opposition figures in his cabinet and encourages his national police to fight crime and corruption. To be sure, international donors will insist on transparency and accountability as a condition of continued support. And U.N. peacekeepers cannot be expected to stand guard as a new government coddles the type of gangsters that Aristide employed to terrorize his opponents before they turned on him.

Not too many men in Haiti's bloody history have had more than one chance to be president. Manigat and Préval are obviously willing to try. If they put their country first and look to the future, they will get through these elections having earned the support of friends of Haiti everywhere.

Roger Noriega was U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs from 2003 to 2005. He is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a director of the Miami-based law firm Tew Cardenas, LLP.

Haiti election turmoil deepens after ballots discovered in dump

By Tim Collie

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Seattle Times

February 16, 2006

Haitian men walk through mounds of smoldering garbage where dozens of ballot boxes and polling materials from the recent presidential election were found in this landfill just outside the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haiti's troubled elections were dealt another blow Wednesday with the discovery of dozens of ballot boxes and polling materials scattered across a landfill just outside the capital city.

The discovery seemed to back charges by front-runner René Préval that fraud and "gross errors" plagued the Feb. 7 presidential contest.

"Just look at this — this is what the rich of this country think of our votes," said Renel Duqueres, a landfill worker who said he began noticing the ballot boxes being dumped last week. "They just kept coming and coming, and we burned a lot of them. But then it just became too much."

Discarded ballots

As pigs and goats rooted through huge mounds of smoldering garbage covering dozens of acres, Haitians from nearby villages waved discarded ballots Wednesday that showed Préval's box checked as an apparent vote. But some ballots showed markings for other candidates; others had no marks at all.

"This is really quite disturbing, and it looks like it's going to mess up things quite a bit," said David Wimhurst, spokesman for the United Nations, which has backed this country's interim government with a 9,000-man military force since a 2004 rebellion ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

With 90 percent of ballots counted, Préval leads with 48.7 percent of the vote, followed by former President Leslie Manigat with 11.8 percent. Préval needs a simple majority to avoid a runoff, and he contends that the vote was sabotaged to shrink his lead.

Michel Brunache, chief of staff for President Boniface Alexandre, said on Haitian radio Wednesday that the interim government is forming a commission with election officials and Préval's aides to review allegations of vote fraud.

Behind the scenes, U.N. diplomats continued to confer with Haitian leaders and ambassadors from the United States and other countries. Brazil, whose military leads the U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, was pushing a plan to declare Préval the winner to avoid another nationwide rebellion.

Meanwhile, the United Nations and Haiti's election council hurled charges over custody of the ballots.

"We were in charge of security for the votes, and we did our job. The votes under our control were handed over" to the Haitian Provisional Electoral Council, Wimhurst said.

Polling places ransacked

Both Wimhurst and Brunache said that the ballots in the landfill could have come from nine polling places that were ransacked on Election Day.

Or, they said, they could be blank ballots dumped in an effort to sabotage the elections by discrediting them in the eyes of the Haitian public.

A large proportion of votes, about 4.7 percent, were blank.

Haitian electoral law recognizes a blank ballot as a citizen's right to protest by choosing none of the candidates. But with 33 candidates for the presidency representing every ideological shade, suspicion has intensified that many of the blanks were illegally inserted to reduce Préval's percentage.

Without the blanks, Préval would have exceeded 50 percent of valid votes, and avoided a runoff.

"People didn't walk miles and wait for hours in line to cast empty ballots," said one young worker at the vote-tabulation center. He declined to identify himself, saying he would lose his job for casting aspersions on the process.

Préval supporters marched through the streets chanting "Give us our president!" While they heeded Préval's appeal Tuesday to keep their protests peaceful, anger infused the marchers and spurred shopkeepers to shutter their businesses.

Préval is backed by many of the poor and illiterate still smarting from the forced departure of Aristide. They consider Aristide their champion. Aristide fled an armed rebellion two years ago and now lives in South African exile. Préval served as president between Aristide's two terms, and is considered his protégé.

Additional material from Los Angeles Times

Winner declared in Haiti

By Joe Mozingo

Knight Ridder

San Jose Mercury News

February 16, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Officials of Haiti's interim government and electoral council announced early today that they had reached agreement to declare front-runner René Préval the winner of Haiti's presidential elections.

“We have reached a solution to the problem,” said Max Mathurin, president of the Provisional Electoral Council. “We feel a huge satisfaction at having liberated the country from a truly difficult situation.”

“We acknowledge the final decision of the electoral council and salute the election of Mr. René Préval as president of the republic of Haiti,” Prime Minister Gerard Latortue told the Associated Press.

Former President Préval was just a hair short of the 50 percent-plus-one majority he needed to win the Feb. 7 vote without a runoff, and the discovery of thousands of crumpled ballots at the municipal dump diminished hope that a vote recount would offer Haitians any greater confidence in the electoral process. Only political negotiations, foreign experts said, could resolve the situation.

“The margin of uncertainty is larger than the margin of victory and defeat,” said a fraud specialist for the International Mission of Evaluation of Elections in Haiti, who asked to remain anonymous because the group leaders have been prohibited from speaking publicly about the balloting.

“The only solution now is a political solution,” the specialist told a Knight Ridder reporter who went to the city dump Wednesday morning.

Foreign diplomats here and in Haiti's interim government have been meeting frequently with Préval and the runner-up, former President Leslie Manigat, to negotiate such a solution. But Manigat, with less than 12 percent of the vote, had said he was unwilling to negotiate a deal outside the election returns.

When television footage of ballots at the city dump was first broadcast Tuesday night, it confirmed the suspicions of fraud for many Préval supporters. Within an hour, thousands had taken to the streets for the fourth time in three days, erecting fiery barricades across roads and shutting down all movement in the city.

U.N. advisers and observers downplayed the footage, speculating that the ballots were probably unused leftovers, put there solely to stir up disorder and spoil the election.

But when Knight Ridder visited the dump Wednesday it found, among the electoral materials, five numbered bags meant to carry vote tally sheets from a polling station to the tabulation center in Port-au-Prince. U.N. electoral advisers later confirmed that votes from one of the bags -- thick plastic, the size of kitchen trash bags and reportedly tamperproof once taped shut -- had indeed disappeared.

“That is very disturbing,” said the fraud specialist.

He said the bag indicates that the electoral process was intentionally breached in at least that instance. In the capital alone, bags from about 240 polling stations are missing, accounting for an estimated 51,400 votes.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Pressure grows for Préval to be named Haiti president
Duncan Campbell and agencies
Thursday February 16, 2006
The Guardian, UK

What were described as "feverish" discussions were under way in Haiti yesterday to find a peaceful solution to the presidential election deadlock. René Préval, the former president and leading candidate by a very wide margin, declared yesterday that he should be acknowledged as the rightful winner without recourse to a run-off election.

Brazil, whose military leads the UN peacekeeping force in the country, also called for Mr Préval to be declared the winner. "Considering the existing climate in the country, that would be the best solution," President Lula da Silva's chief foreign relations adviser, Marco Aurelio Garcia, told reporters in Brasilia. The move would enjoy the unanimous support of the international community, he said.

With more than 90% of votes from the February 7 election counted, Mr Préval has 48.7% of the total, well ahead of the next candidates, Leslie Manigat, with 11.8%, and Charlito Baker on 7.9%, but just short of the total needed to avoid a run-off. Mr Préval's supporters have blocked roads, claiming the Haitian elite was trying to defraud their candidate of victory after it emerged there were 120,000 void ballots and 85,000 blank ones.

Frantic discussions at a number of levels between candidates, the UN, foreign embassies and Haitian election officials were taking place yesterday to resolve the issue. The UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, and the US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, have both been contacted. Most neutral parties accept Mr Préval has won and are anxious to avoid further angry demonstrations if it is deemed that he has not passed the 50% mark

Mr Préval claimed he had been the victim of fraud but called on supporters to halt their street blockades. "Continue to protest according to the constitution," he said, "but with respect for the rights of others to go to work, to take care of their business." He added: "Do not fall in the trap set by those people. Watch for agitators, infiltrators. Continue to protest, but with intelligence, legally, with respect. Do not attack people, respect the property of others, respect private property. Do all that so we can win the political battle."

Some of the losing 32 candidates have already called for Mr Préval to be accepted as president. There are fears that if he is denied victory now, many of his supporters would boycott a run-off election.

Counting of the remaining 8% of votes still not completed has been halted because of the unrest. Election officials have agreed to delay announcing a final result while the fraud claims are investigated.

Discovery of ballots in dump draws ire, questions in Haiti

BY LETTA TAYLER

Newsday.com

February 15, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- The charred, crumpled ballots sat in heaps in the stinking garbage dump. Stray pigs and goats nibbled some of them, chomping the face of front-runner René Préval. Slum dwellers carted away hundreds of others as mementos or to use as toilet paper.

The discovery of thousands of stolen ballots in a dump on the outskirts of this capital city is the latest blow to Feb. 7 presidential elections that had been touted as a milestone in bringing democracy to volatile Haiti.

Many ballots at the dump were blank or were filled out as votes for Préval, considered a champion of Haiti's poor, who in the latest returns was just shy of the majority he would need to avoid a runoff. But international election monitors said some may have been unused ballots that were fraudulently marked.

"This is sabotage on the part of provocateurs," said Gérard Le Chevalier, who heads a United Nations electoral team overseeing the vote. "But as to which side they are from, I don't know."

Several international observers said the ballots might have been deliberately dumped where they would be found to incite violence among Préval supporters and thwart a transfer of power. Some observers didn't rule out the possibility that hard-core Préval supporters had planted the ballots to support their claims of fraud.

The stolen ballots -- which were discovered Tuesday night and lay unguarded until mid-morning yesterday -- spurred thousands of Préval supporters to paralyze Port-au-Prince for a third straight day of demonstrations. "Thieves and cheaters! Give us our president!" the protesters shouted, but they remained peaceful.

A 9,300-member UN peacekeeping force has been struggling to maintain order in Haiti since armed rebels ousted leftist firebrand President Jean-Bertrand Aristide two years ago.

Préval, a former president and onetime Aristide protege, initially was leading by nearly two-thirds of the vote in the 33-way race.

He accused Haiti's electoral council of fraud, prompting a government pledge to investigate the vote count, after his lead slipped to 48.7 percent with 90 percent of votes counted. Leslie Manigat, another former president, was in second place with 11.8 percent.

Diplomats, electoral council members and government officials continued tense negotiations yesterday over salvaging an election in which more than one-sixth of the ballots have been lost, stolen, improperly marked or misfiled.

An additional 4.7 percent of ballots were added to the total even though they were blank, further diluting Préval's lead. Haiti's latest election law calls for including blank votes in totals, treating them as protest votes.

One proposal being discussed was to cap the blank votes that could be included from any one polling center at 3 percent. Another option was to distribute blank ballots among the candidates based on the percentage of votes each received. Either plan would push Préval's lead above 50 percent.

Justifying such maneuvers, one source close to the talks said it was impossible that Haitians, who have no tradition of casting blank protest votes, had walked miles and waited hours in line to cast that many unmarked ballots. "Even the Swiss don't cast blanks like that," said the source, who noted that one box of 400 ballots contained 220 blanks.

An aide said Préval had rebuffed another proposal under which he would accept the current tally if the other top candidates declared him the winner. The aide said Préval wants the record straight that he won on the first round.

Left, Right, Left, Right: Running off With Haiti's Democracy
by Anthony Fenton
ZNet Magazine
February 15, 2006

If Haiti's elites and their foreign backers are able to "sell" the Haiti election runoff to the international public, a significant milestone will have been achieved. Every Presidential election since the fall of 'baby Doc' has been won in a landslide victory for either Jean Bertrand Aristide or Rene Preval, with support from Haiti's popular Lavalas movement. By many accounts, Haiti's most recent elections, held after four postponements on February 7th, produced another landslide winner in Rene Preval. However, the same forces inside and outside of Haiti that coalesced to bring down Aristide and the Lavalas Party in 2004, are now coordinating intense efforts to force Haiti's first run-off where they believe they can produce Haiti's first democratically elected elite President.

It remains quite possible, however, that Preval will be 'given' the Presidency and avoid a runoff, after massive popular demonstrations calling for the overwhelming vote for Preval to be respected, public statements by two CEP officials claiming ballot 'manipulation' and other serious irregularities, and intense negotiations between Preval, foreign diplomats, the UN, Haitian elites, and popular organizers. Preval himself has said that he will contest the election results should they go through as they now stand, citing "massive fraud or gross errors" in the ballot counting. As it stands one week after the elections, Preval 'officially' has just under 49 per cent of the vote, still more than the rest of the candidates behind him combined.

If the Presidential runoff elections do go ahead, the elite candidate, Leslie Manigat, will square off against Preval, who, even with the skewed results, got four times the votes that Manigat did in the initial round. However, we have to recall an agreement "for modernity and democracy" that was signed by Manigat and seven other Presidential candidates last November. Here is what AHP reported on the agreement, on November 28, 2005:

"The signatories are the Fusion of Social Democrats, the Great Front of the Center Right, the Allyans party, MOCHRENA, the Alliance of National Progressive Democrats, the Organization of the People in Struggle (OPL), the Union of Chavannes Jeune, and Charles Henri Baker's grouping called RESPE/KONBA. These political organizations, who said they consider themselves to be the most significant political organizations, announced that in the event that a second round is necessary to decide the presidential elections, and a candidate from one of the organizations that signed the agreement makes it to the second round, all the other signatories to the agreement will unite behind that candidate on the second round....Several of the parties that signed this agreement recently called for the parties to unite behind a single candidate to thwart the presidential prospects of the candidate from the Platform of Hope, former President René Préval."

We already know, thanks to the FOIA's that [Sprague received <http://freehaiti.net>], that the International Republican Institute (IRI) helped to foster the development of a 'socialist coalition,'culminating in the creation of the "Fusion of Social Democrats":

"From July 31 to August 1, 2004, leaders of left of center parties, Ayiti Kapab, KONAKOM, OPL, and PANPRA met to discuss ways to accelerate a merge and the various techniques needed to advance the

goal at the municipal level. At the end of the session, they put in place a work plan for the departments and municipalities to implement the merger of the four parties, now called the Groupe Socialiste. . ."

Indeed, a central component of the IRI's pre and post-Aristide strategy in Haiti is "political party building" and "coalition building." This much can be gleaned from the [two quarterly reports pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDACF866.pdf] from 2005 made available online by [USAID <http://dec.org>], and was made clearer through several interviews with individuals working for or with IRI in Haiti, as well as grantees and individuals participating in IRI training sessions.

Further insight into the 'socialist coalition' is found in IRI reports from 2000 and 2001 for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), obtained through FOIA by journalist Jeremy Bigwood. These reports describe how prominent members of opposition parties OPL and KONAKOM, Irvelt Cherie and Victor Benoit respectively, attended meetings with the IRI and U.S. officials in Washington, along with other prominent Haitians including Rudy Boulos, a wealthy business elite who would later help found the Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project, an anti-Aristide lobby group and think tank, and the foreign public relations arm of the Group of 184 and Democratic Convergence opposition bloc. Interestingly, Boulos resigned from his seat on the Board of the HDP in order to run for Senate in the NorthEast department with the Fusion, the party which comprise part of the "socialist coalition" and "agreement for modernity and democracy" signed with Haiti's right-wing parties in November.

We should also recall that another Haiti Democracy Project Board member, Timothy Carney, also resigned in order to take over as interim Ambassador to Haiti. Carney has long been a fierce defender of the IRI's activities in Haiti and an ally of Haiti's elite. It was while he was U.S. Ambassador to Haiti in 1998-99 under Clinton that the IRI was forced to shut down its operations there, and set up shop in the Dominican Republic under the leadership of IRI Program Officer Stanley Lucas. In a recent NYT article, the IRI and Stanley Lucas were singled out as, in effect, 'rogue elements' straying from an otherwise benign U.S. 'democracy promotion' program for Haiti. Nowhere in the extensive NYT piece, nor in the IRI-led propaganda melee that has ensued, is there mention of an across-the-board strategy coordinated by the State Department, the NED, USAID, among other foreign actors, to collectively foster the conditions for elite rule in Haiti in strict accordance with the dictates of neoliberal globalization.

One example of the coordinated effort to help build and consolidate an opposition to Aristide and Lavalas came from a current program officer for the National Endowment for Democracy. I spoke to Fabiola Cordova in December, 2005. She had just recently taken over at the NED's Washington office after some staff turnover in the Latin American and Caribbean division. Her experience in Haiti came from a six month job as an in-country program officer for the National Democratic Institute (NDI), one of the four core grantees of the NED. With combined grants coming from NED, the State Department, and USAID, NDI's budget for "democracy promotion" is over \$100 million a year.

Characterizing Aristide and the elite opposition from the perspective of her work with "democracy promotion" agencies, Cordova told me:

"When I was in Haiti when Aristide was still there, he had obviously a prominent presence both in Congress and local government and everywhere else in public life. There were a lot of lines being drawn between Haiti and Venezuela, that, basically, Venezuela could become a Haiti where you have,

well, a democratically elected leader but that's slowly taking over all the branches of government and then arming their own people and the opposition is getting armed..."

Cordova went further:

"What happened in Venezuela had been happening in Haiti for a long time. The opposition party had been boycotting elections for a long time, because they kept saying 'well we don't have the minimal conditions for running a competitive process, or participating in a competitive process,' but they kind of withdrew from this and by doing this they kind of consolidated Aristide's power, and they also weakened their own organizations. I mean, I think one of the main problems in Haiti has been a very weak opposition, a very fragmented opposition with no platform, unwilling to come together and form some sort of coalition by ideology or program or anything, so you have, I think when I was there, 120 registered parties; it's impossible to have a serious competitive process when you have that kind of diversity and then very few of them really carry any weight when it comes to an electoral competition. So, it's a challenge."

On the question of the November 25th "agreement for modernity and democracy" Cordova said:

"I think it's a good, positive development in general and that's where I think a lot of people see Haiti moving toward, fewer, fewer political parties, and just more serious competition so you don't have the kind of situation where you have, you know, Aristide really had 70% of the popular support and then the 120 other parties had the thirty per cent split in one hundred and twenty different ways, which is basically impossible to compete [with]." (Note: Cordova later sent me the NED's approved grants FY2005 for Latin America and the Caribbean. These 'declassified' documents are now online at <http://www.inthenameofdemocracy.org>)

Just a couple of weeks before the elections, a Senate candidate from Lespwa, Frantz Large warned of the manipulations of the elite "civil society" sector. AHP reported:

"The former president of the Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast and candidate for Senate from the Platform of Hope in the Southeast department, Dr. Frantz Large, expressed concern Tuesday at what he called the presence of individuals at the heart of the electoral system who claim to be representatives of civil society...Dr. Large said that these individuals, presented as election observers or officials of polling stations, were recommended deliberately for the purpose of imposing their will on the electoral machinery to the detriment of the Platform of Hope...Either one is part of civil society or one openly declares that one is engaging in politics", declared Frantz Large. he criticized what he called "the arrogance of a supposed civil society that is becoming increasingly monopolistic, greedy for political power to the point of contempt for any ethical standard."...Frantz Large mentioned by name "the Group of 184 and the Chamber of Commerce of Port-au-Prince", whose legitimacy as part of civil society he disputes. He warned them against any attempt during the upcoming elections to carry out fraud with contempt for the interests of the Haitian people....The members of that civil society would bear sole responsibility for the chaos that could result from rigged elections, insisted Dr. Large."

The head of the Haitian National Observation Council (CNO), Leopold Berlangier, explained to me how the Canadian government was paying for training and presence of 3,500 of the 8,000 observers

that the CNO would be deploying on election day. Berlangier is also co-owner of RadioVision2000 with Reginald Boulos, and director of Fondation Nouvelle Haiti (FNH). Between Boulos and Berlangier, tens of millions of dollars in foreign "democracy promotion" funds have been funneled to their organizations in Haiti. Of the 3,500 election observers that Canada was to pay for, 1,500 of them would be provided by the Civil Society Initiative (ISC), an organization headed by former Duvalierist Rosny Desroches, and key to the creation of the Group of 184. Just a couple of days after the February 7th election, Berlangier confirmed that Andy Apaid, the Group of 184 leader, sweatshop owner and U.S. citizen was part of the "civil society" election observation team.

On February 12th, amidst increasing signs of the "rigged elections" that Large warned about, he posted a document on his website [<http://frantzlarge.com/>] titled the "Plan." This details how he thinks "civil society" intends to hijack Haiti's democratic process. Large refers to "massive falsification of the first results from the polls results that have been posted in each polling station." This is part of specific objectives of the force a runoff election and "to push the popular masses who have a legitimate beef, into the streets, inciting them to vent blind rage onto the "bord de mer" (docks) in Port-au-Prince which houses stores and offices of all kinds, small businesses, fine victims making up the country's working middle class. This would certainly lead to creating hate and resentment against President Préval, and a desire to find refuge in choking policies that border on fascism."

Bitingly and unrestrained, Large ended with another prediction:

"And for all who would prefer calling for an occupation by foreign powers, thinking that the interests of these foreign powers will coincide with their own fascistic ideas, not so fast! Of course, they will need more courage than they are normally capable of to dare show themselves as the complete champions of the new INTERNATIONAL APARTHEID. This is the spectre that now haunts Haiti!"

Today, the Florida Sun-Sentinel <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/caribbean/sfl-214haiti,0,3574802.story?coll=sfla-news-caribbean>] reported that "Communist Cuba accused Washington Tuesday of helping manipulate the results in Haiti's presidential elections." Granma newspaper wrote "What is happening in Haiti shouldn't be surprising...It isn't the first time that the United States has intervened on a whim over the destiny of this nation, nor is it the first time it has shamelessly manipulated another country's electoral results to its benefit."

Indeed, at the front of the public relations pack calling for the media to temper the enthusiasm over a Préval victory, was the Haiti Democracy Project, who sent an [election observer mission <http://haitipolicy.org/content/3459.htm>] to Haiti which included the U.S. government's official observer, John Merrill, the head of Western Hemisphere programs for the Defense Department. In the HDP's first communique, apparently issued before the polls even closed, they boldly stated, "All signs suggest that for the Presidential and Legislative races, the majority of the candidates will have to prepare for a runoff." The HDP's 'corrective action' should be seen as among the clearest representations of U.S. and elite interests for Haiti; it is a sign of their influence over the media machine that the runoff elections should be accepted as a serious possibility.

Both the Miami Herald's Joe Mozingo and Jacqueline Chalres and the New York Times' Ginger Thompson joined the HDP and lent credibility to the runoff possibility in recent articles. The Herald in particular presented former Group of 184 leader turned Presidential candidate Charles Henri Baker

(member of the "agreement for modernity and democracy") as a reliable source to be quoted. The Baker campaign had sent a letter to the CEP stating that votes should be nullified, 'where there were too many irregularities.' Baker's spokesperson, Hans Tippenhauer said, 'People voted two, three and four times.' The Herald neglected to mention that Tippenhauer's organization, Fondation Espoir (The Hope Foundation), has received at least \$182,970 from the NED since Aristide's overthrow "To increase the political awareness and participation of Haitian youth," and approximately \$40,000 from the IRI for work with young political candidates. Tippenhauer also helped set up a \$33,271 grant for GRAFNEH to "conduct a civic education campaign to educate Haitians about the political parties, candidates, and issues being presented during the electoral season ." Members of GRAFNEH are often seen in the offices of Charles Baker. GRAFNEH even conducted a poll for the NED in mid-January which showed that Haitian students overwhelmingly favored both Baker and Manigat over Preval as Presidential candidates.

Lastly, there is another striking omission from most mainstream coverage of Haiti's "demonstration elections." Whereas almost all of the focus has been centered on the Presidential elections, very little has looked at what lines Haiti's legislature will be formed on. On February 7th, in addition to a new President, Haitians were supposed to vote for 30 Senators and 99 deputies; many of these seats would also be subject to potential run-off elections, not to mention vote-tampering. Importantly, it is those who control the legislature that will approve Haiti's next Prime Minister. And, also not to be overlooked, much of the foreign intervention in Haiti's election process has focused on the campaigns of the political parties that signed the "agreement for modernity and democracy." The USAID-UNOPS program unveiled through Sprague's FOIA's made significant contributions, some \$3 million, to the campaigns of non-Lespwa (Preval) parties, providing election materials, television and radio advertising credits, leaflets, posters, several campaign offices, vehicles, computers; in short, all the means to conduct a "fair and democratic" election campaign designed to allow Haiti's elites to finally obtain power through "democratic" means. So we need to be mindful of both the important omitted context where the elections are concerned, but also the broader picture of "democracy promotion" strategy that is seeking to consolidate a system of polyarchy in Haiti. Social and political theorist William Robnson describes what polyarchy is, in his "Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization,":

"Developing the social control systems and political institutions most propitious for achieving a stable world environment revolved around the promotion of "democracy," or what is more accurately called polyarchy. This refers to a system in which a small group actually rules, and participation in decision-making by the majority is confined to choosing among competing elites in tightly controlled electoral processes. This type of "low intensity democracy" does not involve power (cratos) of the people (demos), much less an end to class domination or to the substantive inequality that has grown exponentially under the global economy."

Haiti's impoverished majority knows full well the brutal reality of international efforts at "promoting democracy." This program has resulted in the overthrow of the same President twice, and is in the midst of trying to once again undermine the popular will by tampering with their most recent vote. The massive support for Preval and the need for Haiti's elite to resort to "massive fraud" to counter that support are indications of the failure of the "democracy promoters" to impose their polyarchy on Haiti. We should not kid ourselves though. In the two years since Aristide's ouster, much of the neoliberal structural adjustments that were not adhered to by Aristide or Preval have since been set in motion.

Whoever forms Haiti's next government will be confronted by deep foreign penetration of Haiti on every level: economically, politically, and socially.

Fenton is an independent journalist/researcher, a member of In the Name of Democracy (www.inthenameofdemocracy.org), and co-author of "Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority. Feedback is welcome at fentona@shaw.ca.

Inter-American Leader To Probe Post-Election Problems in Haiti
United Nations extends its stabilization mission in Haiti another six months
By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer
US State Dept
Feb. 15, 2006

Washington -- The leader of the Organization of American States (OAS) is making an inspection trip to Haiti to learn about the problems that have developed in the days following the Caribbean nation's February 7 elections.

The OAS said its secretary-general, José Miguel Insulza, was traveling to Haiti February 15 to seek "peaceful and democratic solutions to the situation that has developed in these last few days."

In a February 14 statement, the OAS said Insulza will meet with officials from Haiti's interim government, leaders of various Haitian political parties and civil society, diplomatic representatives of countries that closely have followed the situation in Haiti and the U.N. representative in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdés.

The OAS said Insulza called on the Haitian people "to remain calm, recalling the peaceful, civic spirit with which they went to the polls" February 7 to elect a new president and legislative assembly.

The OAS Permanent Council said in a February 10 statement that "free and fair elections are but a first step towards strengthening democracy and the rule of law and promoting economic development in Haiti." (See related article.)

John Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations who is serving as U.N. Security Council president for February, issued a statement February 14 strongly urging all parties in Haiti to respect the results of the election and refrain from violence. (See related article.)

Bolton was alluding to protests in the Haitian capital city of Port-au-Prince by supporters of presidential candidate Rene Preval, who was ahead in the balloting but had not been declared the victor.

"The members of the council call on Haitian political leaders to live up to the high expectations of their people at this critical juncture by demonstrating statesmanship and moderation, and remaining engaged in a process of national reconciliation," said Bolton.

For additional information on U.S. policy, see Haiti.

The U.N. Security Council unanimously voted February 14 to extend its stabilization mission in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH, for another six months, until August 15, a Security Council spokeswoman said.

The mission would have expired February 15 if the Security Council had not voted on the extension. More information about MINUSTAH is available on the U.N. Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

Annan Pleased with Preval Victory
Prensa Latina
February 16, 2006

United Nations, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan gladly accepted the electoral triumph of presidential candidate Rene Preval as a reasonable way to handle the current crisis in Haiti.

The Provisional Electoral Council officially declared Thursday that Preval had won the February 7 election, after blank votes were distributed on a pro-rata basis among the 32 candidates. This took Preval over the 50 percent mark needed for an outright victory.

"I think it was a reasonable way to settle an impasse over voting fraud allegations that could have led to violence", Annan told the press after a working-dinner with the 15 Security Council members.

Until last weekend, Preval had a clear lead above the 50 percent of votes needed to win the poll, but on Monday partial results gave him 48.76 percent, which resulted in violent protests with a tally of one dead people and several wounded.

Preval, a one time ally of ousted president Jearn Bertrand Aristide denounced electoral fraud, particularly after hundreds of ballots marked for Preval were found charred in a city trash can, an evidence of a plot to illegally manipulate the polling outcome.

Haiti's anguish
By Kevin Cavanagh
The Hamilton Spectator, Canada
(Feb 16, 2006)

There's a strong stink coming from Haiti, and it's not just the piles of garbage rotting in the slums around Port-au-Prince.

Ever since former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was exiled two years ago, Canada and several other countries have given a lot of time, money and blood trying to help the impoverished nation trade its history of corruption for the fledgling starting points of a new democracy.

But now, more than a week after citizens finally went to the polls in a vote that had been postponed several times, the results have still not been released. As ballot boxes and other election materials are being discovered in rural dumps, the ugliness of election fraud has pushed the shattered nation back to the brink of civil war.

The conundrum is that democracy may have produced a verdict that doesn't sit well with Aristide's old enemies or, more disturbingly, with the United Nations-backed interim administration. Though nobody can get a straight answer on the result, it seems Haitians have elected Rene Preval, hero of the poor and former aide to the corrupt president.

Democracy means a peoples' right to choose, regardless of how outside interests feel about the result.

Canada spent more than \$30 million helping stage this election. Our officials should be urgently demanding that UN officials dispense with the confusion, declare the legitimate winner, and do what it takes to end the hopelessness and corruption that continues to choke Haiti, two years after the previous dishonest broker was sent packing.

Analysis: Democracy cited in Haiti appeal

By WILLIAM M. REILLY

UPI U.N. Correspondent

February 15, 2006

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 15 (UPI) -- In issuing an appeal to Haiti's poor to calm down and allow the vote count continue, the United Nations Wednesday cited the commitment to democracy voters made when they cast ballots in last week's presidential election.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton, this month's president of the U.N. Security Council, said the people of Haiti can uphold that commitment "by refraining from violence as the results of the election are tabulated and reviewed."

Charges of fraud in the balloting last week led to violent demonstrations Tuesday in the capital of Port-au-Prince and other urban centers.

Council members urged "all Haitians with concerns or questions about the 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."

"Members of the council reiterate their call for all Haitians to respect the results of the election when they are announced and to remain engaged in the political process," Bolton said.

This was the second statement on the demonstrations from the 15-member body in as many days.

Tuesday, the council recognized the elections as a major step towards re-establishing representative governance but urged all parties to remain calm while the final results of the election were being certified.

Haitian radio reported Wednesday the nation's interim leadership had called for a fraud investigation into the balloting. The decision followed accusations by presidential front-runner Rene Preval of widespread ballot tampering. He was heavily supported by the nation's poor.

Preval, a former president, said Haitians would not tolerate an election marred by fraud.

He appeared to be the clear winner immediately following the balloting. However, as the vote count progressed, election officials began reporting he had failed to garner the 50 percent plus one vote majority needed to avoid a second round next month.

Official results were expected to be announced Tuesday but were withheld because of fraud allegations.

Earlier Wednesday, before the council statement was issued, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hedi Annabi gave the council a briefing, which included developments in the impoverished Caribbean nation of some 8.3 million people.

The turnout of eligible voters was put at a relatively high 60 percent of eligible voters, with many of them waiting for hours to cast their ballots. But there were reports of tens of thousands of blank, trashed and more than 100,000 voided ballots out of an estimated 2.2 million votes cast.

An early sampling of the voting showed Preval, a protégé of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in an armed uprising two years ago, was leading by well over 50 percent. A transitional government was installed by Washington after Aristide fled to Africa.

According to the chief U.N. spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, Annabi said vote tabulation had not resumed Wednesday because tabulation center employees had been reluctant to brave expected protests.

The assistant secretary-general also told the panel of 15 at the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by its French acronym MINUSTAH, that Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council would take steps to ensure the center resumed its work, depending on the security situation. It has a force of 9,000 peacekeeping troops.

Annabi also said that the secretary-general of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, was going to Haiti to work with the international community in helping Haiti move forward.

At the same time, it was also reported MINUSTAH engineer units had been clearing away roadblocks set up by demonstrators in recent days.

Asked if the U.N. would step in to help Haiti with its contested elections, the spokesman said a special commission had been created by the Haitian government to look at the results of the election.

He added that the special envoy of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Juan Gabriel Valdes, and interested ambassadors in Port-au-Prince, were working hard to help Haitians find a political solution to the current crisis.

Asked about complaints about voting irregularities, Dujarric said the U.N. would assist in any way it could, but any complaints about the elections should be addressed to Haiti's electoral commission.

When asked whether the secretary-general would be willing to accept the Brazilian proposal that the best way to avoid violence was to declare the leading presidential candidate, Preval, the winner even if he falls short of an outright winning majority, the spokesman said it was not up to the secretary-general to decide.

"We are not the ones to crown the winner of any election," Dujarric replied

Haiti Shamocracy Project has a U.S. Defense Dept Chief as an "election observer"
Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2006
Bay Area Indymedia

Haiti Democracy Project has a U.S. Defense Department Chief as "election observers"

Port-au-Prince, Haiti- Two of the members of the Electoral Council have exposed tampering with the vote count. Pierre Richard Duchemin, representative of the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church on the electoral body, informed a Haitian radio station that "there has been an insane manipulation of the data, there is no transparency."

Another of the electoral judges, Patrick Requière, publicly criticized Jacques Bernard, CEP general director, for not consulting with the other members of that agency or of disclosing where he was obtaining the results that he has announced to the press.

Meanwhile, the Haiti Democracy Project (a Haitian elite funded lobbyist group based out of Washington D.C.) on it's website continues to play down the importance of the vote manipulation while promoting a possible run off.

The runoff charge has been engineered by Washington's Haiti Democracy Project (<http://www.haitipolicy.org>)

Most importantly, the Haiti Democracy Project's "observation mission" included official US government observer, John Merrill, chief of Western Hemisphere programs for the Defense Department. Merrill's assesment of the situation in Haiti was echoed by the IRI/NED's main candidate, Charles Henri Baker.

Multiple backer's and officials involved in the ousting of the elected government in Feb. 2000Port-au-Prince, Haiti- Two of the members of the Electoral Council have exposed tampering with the vote count. Pierre Richard Duchemin, representative of the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church on the electoral body, informed a Haitian radio station that "there has been an insane Manipulation of the data, there is no transparency."

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Department. Merrill's assessment of the situation in Haiti was echoed by the IRI/NED's main candidate, Charles Henri Baker.

Multiple backer's and officials involved in the ousting of the elected government in Feb. 2004, both from the Haitian elite and the U.S. State Department, work as key members of the Haiti Democracy Project. Ironically, now they are "election observers".

US Twisting Haiti Elections
Prensa Latina
February 14, 2006

Havana, Haiti's election results have been obviously and shamelessly manipulated, "amid an evident attempt to conceal candidate Rene Preval's win in the February 7 elections," Cuba's Granma daily denounced Tuesday.

In its editorial "Yankee Government Has Ordered a Second Round: Blue Helmets Suppress the Haitian People," Granma sustains that two of the Electoral Council (EC) members have condemned the manipulation of the vote counting.

Pierre Richard Duchemin, representative of Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference in the EC told a local radio station "there has been an ill-natured maneuvering of data."

Meanwhile, Patrick Requier, another electoral judge, censured EC general director Jacques Bernard for not having discussed the results with the rest of the EC members, nor revealed where he had been taking the announced ones from, Granma noted.

"Everybody notes something clear: Bernard is complying with the US order of compelling a second round," the daily stressed.

There have been many analysts who have recalled the White House is not pleased with Preval, due to his previous links with overthrown President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

"What is happening in Haiti surprises no one. It is not the first time the US interferes in this country, nor the first time it shamelessly uses election results in other countries for its own interest," Granma denounced.

The international community must demand respect for the will of the Haitian people expressed in the polls, the editorial reads.

Deposed Haitian leader settles into life of exile in SA
Jean-Jacques Cornish | Pretoria, South Africa
Mail & Guardian Online, South Africa
07 February 2006

A continent away from the millions of Haitians voting on Tuesday, deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide is settling into quiet exile in South Africa, keeping mum about the elections in his troubled Caribbean country.

Aristide last June said he was ready to return to Haiti at the appropriate time as he lobbied African governments for support for his claim that he was driven from office under United States and French pressure.

But the 52-year-old former president who fled Haiti in February 2004 amid a popular revolt made no public statements about the fate of his nation in the run-up to the election.

He refused an interview request to discuss developments in Haiti.

"It's not going to happen now," his private secretary Sandy Ramnaidoo told Agence France-Presse last week.

Aristide's media appearances have all been organised by the South African foreign affairs department. "That is still the case," said Ramnaidoo.

Since he arrived to a red-carpet welcome in South Africa in May 2004, Aristide, his wife and two daughters have moved into a government-provided home in Pretoria. The government also provides him with security and a vehicle.

Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma defended the decision to grant the Haitian leader refuge in the face of criticism from the opposition, which said Aristide was a despot with blood on his hands.

The government countered that it was sheltering him with the approval of the government of France and the United States, the African Union and Caricom, the Caribbean Community.

"Everyone is working towards Haiti becoming a normal country. We have faith that things will stabilise in Haiti and he will be able to go back," Dlamini Zuma said shortly after Aristide's arrival.

Aristide swept to power in Haiti in 1990, only to be overthrown in a coup eight months later. With backing from the United States, he returned to power in 1994 but fell out of favour with Washington amid claims of vote-rigging in the 2000 elections.

Face with an armed insurrection and large street protests, Aristide bowed to pressure from the United States and France and fled Haiti on February 29, 2004.

The former Catholic priest has said during interviews and press conferences that he spends his time in South Africa writing his memoirs and staying abreast of developments in Haiti.

"Far from home, I am living here, but always in deep communion with my people," Aristide said in an interview after arriving in South Africa.

Aristide, who has written seven books, said more than a year ago he had nearly completed writing an account of his removal from Haiti.

He has repeatedly blamed the US and French governments for being complicit in what he characterises as a kidnapping. Both he and his wife Mildred work as researchers at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, which claims to be the world's largest distance learning university.

Aristide is regularly seen at national day celebrations of African countries. For the most part, he keeps a low profile.

The African Union maintains its desire to assist in mediating a solution in Haiti, which it regards as a member of the African diaspora.

Speaking on a platform in Pretoria last year with President Thabo Mbeki and Aristide, African Union commission President Alpha Oumar Konare said all the major political players in Haiti wanted the AU to become involved in the troubled island's transition to peace, stability and democracy.

"Haiti is an African country outside of Africa. The AU wants to help create conditions in which a new government can be democratically elected in Haiti," said Konare. - Sapa-AFP