

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: FEBRUARY 22 – MARCH 2, 2006

The U.S. says DR is corrupt and weak against drug trafficking Dominican Today March 2, 2006

WASHINGTON.- Corruption and weak institutions are the main obstacles to fight drug trafficking in Dominican Republic and Haiti, according to the U.S. Government's annual report on drug trafficking.

Once a year, State the Department complies with the legal requirement to brief the Congress on the fight against drugs and informs on the degree in which other countries cooperate with the U.S. authorities in that campaign.

The report is one of the elements to base the certification which the U.S. releases in September, on international cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and that influences in the economic and military assistance to other countries.

As to Dominican Republic, the State Department today informed that during 2005 seizures of large amounts of heroin, cocaine and éxtasis increased, as well as more extraditions of people wanted for drug trafficking crimes and improved its legal institutions, cooperation between the different agencies and the fight against fraud. Despite those accomplishments, corruption and weak government institutions are still the main stumbling blocks to control narcotics trafficking.

"The Dominican institutions continue being vulnerable to the influence of narcotics traffickers," stresses the annual report. In that regard, the study indicates that the country has not condemned any senior official for participating or for encouraging the illicit traffic of drugs or for money laundering.

The State Department also points out that Dominican Republic is an intermediate point for trafficking cocaine and heroin to the U.S. and for cocaine to Europe.

Haiti's Preval arrives in the Dominican capital
The Dominican Today
March 2, 2006

Will discuss a wide range of topics with president Fernandez

SANTO DOMINGO-. At 10:00 this morning, on schedule, Haiti's president elect René Préval arrived at the country, via the Las Américas International Airport, for a visit that has been defined as of good will.

Préval, who did not make a statement upon his arrival, will address with president Leonel Fernandez an agenda whose main point is border security and the need to heighten the monitoring to reduce the trafficking of drugs, persons and weapons.

The agenda includes another hot topic: the violent of the country, which has sparked an increase in repatriations.

Haiti's president elect will meet this Thursday afternoon with Haitian students who reside in the country, and will be Fernandez's guest of honor tonight for a dinner in the National Palace.

Preval's visit takes place after relations between both countries underwent days of tension resulting from Fernandez's interrupted visit to Port-au-Prince in December, as violent protesters rejected the Dominican chief executive's presence there.

Spain Shirks Haiti Troops Extension
Prensa Latina
March 2, 2006

Madrid, Spain did not respond to a request presented on Thursday by the UN Secretary General's special representative to extend the Spanish troops' presence in Haiti until the summer.

The Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministry issued a communiqué after its Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos's meeting with Kofi Annan's representative Gabriel Valdes, avoiding an explicit answer.

The text says the minister told the special envoy that even when the troops are withdrawn, Spain will keep committed to the UN Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTA), with cooperation for reconstruction and civil police works.

He added that Moratinos offered Spain as a venue of a Donor Conference for reconstruction in Haiti, and insisted that the promise to Haiti is long-termed and they will make the necessary changes, according to the circumstances.

Both officials analyzed the situation in that country after its presidential elections on February 7, and recognition by the competent authorities of Rene Preval's victory.

Valdes thanked Spain for its contribution to MINUSTAH and praised the work by Spanish military and police agents, the text says.

Haiti, arms trade are priorities as Argentina takes reins of UN Security Council
UN News Center
Amb. Cesar Mayoral
March 2, 2006

The United Nations Security Council will this month focus on the situations in Haiti, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Sudan and – possibly – Iran, the Ambassador of Argentina and incoming president of the 15-member body's said today.

"Haiti is a very important issue for Argentina, for Latin America and for the international community," Ambassador Cesar Mayoral told correspondents at a Headquarters press conference, reminding them that last time it had the presidency his country had organized a public meeting on the same subject.

"We're waiting to have a confirmation that President Préval can come because right now he is the President-elect and not in charge," he added, saying the meeting was currently scheduled for 27 March.

Mr. Mayoral said another of his priorities was the holding of an open debate on small arms smuggling on the 20th, with the aim of adopting a resolution on the control of the scourge.

He also highlighted public meetings scheduled for the 30th on the Middle East and the 14th on Afghanistan. Three possible meetings were on the calendar for the Sudan: on the 8th, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations would brief on events unfolding in the field; consultations would take place on the 13th; and on the 21st, there would be an open briefing.

In regard to Iran, Mr. Mayoral said "the door was open" to a briefing by Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Iran, who has been asked to report to the Council on the issue.

He said that the Iran situation could be discussed in consultations during the week of the 6th following the IAEA meeting on 6 March, which was expected to discuss a report on Iran.

Finally, he said the Council would welcome the participation of Africa's first elected female Head of State, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in an open briefing on the country on the 17th of the month.

U.S. Catholic bishops back preferential trade treatment for Haiti
3/2/2006
The Catholic Online

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The chairman of the U.S. bishops' international policy committee called on the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee to secure passage of meaningful trade preference legislation for Haiti.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, Fla., chairman of the Committee on International Policy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote in a Feb. 24, 2006, letter to Rep. William M. Thomas, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, that the U.S. bishops were disappointed that Congress was unable last year to bring "forward for floor consideration" trade preference legislation the poorest country in the hemisphere.

"We earnestly hope for a different outcome this spring," he said.

Bishop Wenski noted that earlier this month "the Haitian people took important electoral steps toward a more open and democratic society."

"In light of this significant development, we believe enacting meaningful trade legislation will offer Haiti genuine hope for economic recovery and political stability," he wrote. "Progress on the political front can be secured only if there is genuine progress in achieving a decent living for the masses of the Haitian people. And this in turn depends heavily on foreign investment so that the once vibrant apparel industry might return."

"Over these past few years, the people of Haiti have had to endure extraordinary civil unrest and violence. They have suffered as well the devastation of torrential rains and hurricanes. As a new government will shortly be installed, I hope that Congressional initiatives that offer trade preferences for Haiti will bring real encouragement to the long-suffering Haitian people."

He said that the U.S. Catholic conference stands ready "to working with you in the future to explore further measures that offer hope for the long-term stability that Haiti's people so desperately need and truly deserve."

Two US Embassy guards killed in Haiti
ABC News
Mar 2, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Two Haitian men who worked as security guards for the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince were shot to death as they went home from work, the embassy said on Thursday.

Gary Michel Joseph and Ernst Polo were killed late on Wednesday and their bodies were found in a residential area of the capital on Thursday, the embassy said in a statement.

The killings came as Haitian police reported a drop in crime since the February 7 presidential and legislative elections, particularly in dangerous slums such as Cite Soleil.

Haiti had been plagued by political and gang violence and a spate of kidnappings for ransom in the months leading up to the vote.

Police said slum gangs opposed to the interim government that has run Haiti since ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed two years ago called a halt to the violence, allowing the elections to be held in relative safety.

"Measures taken at the political level have contributed to easing the security situation," said Jean St.-Fleur, director of Haiti's administrative police. "In places such as Cite Soleil, Bel-Air and other places reputed as dangerous, the number of kidnappings is practically zero."

The U.S. Embassy called the slain guards "devoted professionals" and said it was working with Haitian and U.N. police to find the killers.

Haiti's poor suffer as world looks elsewhere

02 Mar 2006

Source: Reuters

By Jim Loney

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, March 2 (Reuters) - The scars on the shoulder, neck and chin of little Laurencia Dieudonne are a constant reminder of the frightening night when bullets pierced the thin walls of her shanty-home in Haiti's Cite Soleil slum.

The sounds of gunfire on that day 14 months ago -- probably another fight between slum gangs and U.N. peacekeepers -- chased now 5-year-old Laurencia and her mother, Guilene Jean, under the bed.

But the walls of the rickety home, fashioned from rusted sheets of iron, offered little protection. Laurencia, a tiny child with an engaging smile and braided hair, was shot three times and became another forgotten victim of Haiti's immutable violence and poverty.

"She doesn't talk about it. But when people ask about the scars, she just says, 'I got shot,'" said Guilene, who at 26 is pregnant with her third child.

The poorest country in the Americas, Haiti is one of the world's forgotten crises -- overshadowed by the Asian tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands of people, Hurricane Katrina which swamped one of America's best known cities and a host of other global disasters.

The average Haitian lives on less than \$2 a day. The poor have stripped the land of trees for cooking charcoal. This has added catastrophic soil erosion to a long list of woes as the unstable Caribbean nation takes another stab at democracy after last month's presidential election, which followed decades of dictatorship, coups and turmoil.

Just under 50 percent of Haitians cannot read, more than two-thirds are unemployed, over half are malnourished.

Yet aside from the moments when its political upheavals make news, Haiti is a simmering crisis, not splashy enough to force the world to care, according to foreign aid groups working here.

"It's not spectacular. Sometimes, countries are not interesting," said Loris De Filippi, head of the Medecins Sans Frontieres mission in Haiti. "But when you have 48 years of life expectancy, and infant mortality rates are catastrophic, this is an ongoing disaster."

HEALTH CARE FOR THE POOR

Last year MSF revived the St. Catherine Laboure Hospital in Cite Soleil, a squalid, violent shantytown on the northern edge of Port-au-Prince.

In an inconspicuous walled compound abandoned by Haiti's authorities a year earlier, the group restored health care to a slum that had none. Doctors say they are seeing people in their 50s who have never had medical care before.

With 70 beds and an operating room, the volunteer doctors and nurses treat bruises, cuts, pregnancies, cancer, diabetes and in recent months, more than 200 gunshot victims, many caught in the cross-fire between slum gangs and U.N. troops.

Doctors say the use of high-powered weapons in Cite Soleil's cramped maze of concrete and iron shacks produce astonishing wounds among the slum's innocent bystanders.

"The speed of the bullets is very high and the damage is awful, terrible," said Dr. Carlo Belloni of Padua, Italy, who calls conditions in the slum "unbelievable."

"I have never seen anything like this. Nothing is working here. Everything is destroyed."

One night in January, gunshots ripped into the metal blinds of the hospital's pediatric ward, which is now protected by a wall of stacked steel drums filled with rocks and concrete. Bullet holes pock the doors of two small rooms where doctors used to take naps. Sleeping is no longer allowed there.

HELP ON THE WAY?

When a rebellion by a ragtag band of armed gangs and former Haitian army troops sent President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile two years ago, foreign nations pledged \$1.3 billion to rebuild Haiti. The United Nations says about 45 to 50 percent of the money has been disbursed.

"Disbursed means the contracts have been signed. That doesn't mean the money has actually arrived," said Carine Roenen, country director for Dublin-based Concern Worldwide, which has a yearly budget of about 4 million euros (\$4.8 million) for Haiti.

Shortly after the post-rebellion burst of goodwill toward Haiti, the tsunami struck Asia, Katrina hit New Orleans and Pakistan was crushed by an earthquake. Haiti was shoved to a back-burner again.

"We saw donations drop by about 30 percent after the tsunami," said Susie Krabacher, an American whose Mercy and Sharing Foundation runs three orphanages and six feeding programs in Haiti.

Aid organizations in Haiti face uphill battles against corruption and feeble government institutions, which slow and sometimes halt the flow of foreign money to badly needed projects supplying food, clean water and infrastructure.

"They virtually have no public administration. There has been a huge, huge brain drain," said Roenen. "Nobody wants to work for the government anymore because it is so weak."

Aid groups are hoping the Feb. 7 election of Rene Preval, an agronomist who served as president from 1996 to 2001, will stabilize Haiti in the eyes of the world and provide a platform to help the poor masses.

"People are interested in Haiti in a negative sense, like when we have to stop drugs from flowing through the country or we have to stop people from getting on boats," Roenen said.

NO WAY OUT

Guilene Jean says Laurencia's father was shot to death on his way home from work on the same day the girl was wounded.

Laurencia has had no follow-up care since her gunshot wounds healed, and psychological counseling is unheard of in Haiti. She often complains that her neck aches and rarely goes a few weeks without getting sick.

Their shanty sits on the edge of a fetid pond whose surface is tinged with an oily residue and a greenish scum. Pigs root through the tons of rotting trash that form its banks.

Jean said she would like to flee this place. Bullets often whiz over her leaky roof. But escape doesn't seem possible.

"I don't have any money to go anywhere else," she said. (Additional reporting by Joseph Guyler Delva)

Inauguration of new Haiti leader to be delayed

02 Mar 2006

Source: Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, March 2 (Reuters) - The inauguration of Haiti's new president, scheduled for March 29, will be postponed because the legislative assembly that administers the oath will not exist by then, officials said.

The chaotic Caribbean country's electoral council said on Thursday that a run-off election for senate and lower chamber seats would not take place as planned on March 19, delaying the installation of a Haiti's first elected government since former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in 2004.

"We are already behind schedule. It is clear that the run-off election can no longer take place on March 19," said the president of the nine-member council, Max Mathurin.

"So that situation will affect the date set for the inauguration of the new president, because there'll be no parliament."

Ex-president Rene Preval, a one-time protege of Aristide, won a general election on Feb. 7 after fears of violence and widespread suspicions of vote fraud persuaded the electoral authorities to change the way they counted blank ballots and give him a first-round victory.

Backed by the poor masses in the slums where Aristide also found most of his support, Preval is mistrusted by the same wealthy elite who helped send Aristide into exile.

The electoral council did not set a new date for the second round of the legislative ballot, in which the two leading candidates for each of 30 senate seats and 99 lower house seats will compete.

Council members blamed the delay partly on street protests by President-elect Preval's supporters in the week it took for authorities to announce the Feb. 7 election result.

Preval's political platform called "Lespwa," or Creole for Hope, leads in the legislative election. Based on first-round results, Lespwa seems likely to gain 16 senate seats and 34 seats in the lower chamber. The party that holds a majority in parliament will pick a prime minister and form a government.

Preval has begun negotiations with rival candidates to try and form a governing coalition in parliament.

Preval on Thursday visited the Dominican Republic, Haiti's neighbor on the island on Hispaniola.

Bilateral relations have long been strained by mistrust and racism. Up to a million Haitian illegal immigrants work on Dominican farms or construction sites in conditions that human rights workers say are not far removed from slavery.

Preval is also expected to travel to Chile, Argentina and Brazil whose countries have deployed troops under the United Nations to help stabilize Haiti.

Haiti: René Preval's Impossible Task
by Stephen Lendman
Center for Research on Globalization
March 2, 2006
GlobalResearch.ca

On February 7, 2006 (and with due homage to the great Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano) the people of Haiti were not to be denied. Few people anywhere have endured more oppression and human misery or for a longer period of time (with all too few periods of relief). In spite of an election process orchestrated, controlled and shamelessly rigged by an interim puppet government (the IGH) and an oppressive occupying force (UN Blue Helmets supposedly there to maintain order and protect them), they overcame overwhelming obstacles and elected Rene Preval for the second time as their President (his first time in office was from 1996-2000). It's no secret that the real power calling the shots in Haiti is not in Port-au-Prince. It's in Washington making policy, giving orders and letting its approved proxies do its bidding, which has been bloody and brutal since US Marines in the dead of night kidnapped and deposed democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide at gunpoint in February, 2004.

In a normal country with a tradition of stability and democracy (or any one for that matter) the election of the peoples' choice would be a cause for celebration. Indeed for the first time in the past 2 years the Haitian people are celebrating and hope finally for an end to the nightmare they've been through. But nothing is ever simple in Haiti, a country that for over 500 years has had very few periods of stability free from the oppressive heel of a foreign occupier or repressive dictatorship. They never had a real democracy until the election of Jean-Bertand Aristide in 1991. Two US led, directed or authorized coups later (both against President Aristide), they have one again at least in the office of president. But do they really have good reason to rejoice?

Before continuing I must point out that until February 7 Jean-Bertand Aristide was still Haiti's democratically elected President. It's a valid argument to say he's entitled to remain so for the remainder of the time he lost, but he graciously never requested it and now calls Rene Preval "my President." The benighted Haitian people loved Aristide, called him their President and want and expect him to return. They now have every reason to feel the oddest combination of joy and fear as they await future events to unfold without knowing what will haappen.

From behind the scenes, the Washington Chimeres, led by the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP), that is umbilically linked to the US State Department, and its former member and now acting US ambassador Timothy Carney are already sharpening their long knives and beginning their demonization and destabilization campaign to undermine the Preval administration even before it begins. They hope to render it stillborn or at least so falsely tarnished and weakened by a torrent of propaganda it will be unable to function effectively. And if doesn't, they'll blame it on him.

HDP works in conjunction with the so-called Democratic Convergence (DC) of about 200 Haitian political organizations. The DC, in turn, works cooperatively with The Group of 184

Civil Society Organizations (including Haiti's business elites) headed by Haiti's leading industrialist and sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid. These organizations are funded by the notorious US National Endowment of Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI - an arm of NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). These federally funded US organizations function to serve US interests in other countries. They're an arm of US foreign policy in those states not firmly established as reliable "clients" or "at risk" of ending that status. It's their job to support US-friendly regimes and try to undermine those that are not - like Lavalas, Aristide and Preval in Haiti.

It's a wonder Preval got to run at all or was even allowed to, as in the last 2 years the UN Blue Helmets (MINUSTAH) and brutal Haitian National Police (PNH) conducted a systematic reign of terror against the Lavalas party and everyone associated with it. They either murdered, imprisoned or forced into exile or hiding its members, effectively destroying it. There were some who believed that since Rene Preval escaped this fate, it meant he'd been co-opted and convinced to desert his former party and allies and join with those in the interim ruling junta. That suspicion (unproven, of course, and hopefully untrue) only grew as the most beloved and popular man still in Haiti, Father Gerard Jean-Juste, was falsely imprisoned without charge to prevent his inclusion in the election as the candidate the people most wanted. Father "Gerry", as he's affectionately known, did not run and while incarcerated was diagnosed with serious but still treatable leukemia, finally released after a long campaign on his behalf, and is now receiving medical care in Florida.

THE DISINFORMATION BEGINS WITH THE USUAL COMPLICITY OF THE CORPORATE MEDIA

We're only in the early stages of the US controlled anti-Preval campaign, but it's easy to know where it's going. It's already getting loud and vicious and is being echoed throughout the complicit corporate media. President Aristide endured a torrent of hate and vitriol during both his 2 terms as President because he dared to deviate from the US script that demanded his full obedience to its dictates. Aristide had more noble ideas. He was determined as best he could to help the 80% or more desperately poor and disadvantaged Haitians try to improve their lives. Because of this he was labeled the "fiery slum priest", a demonic and despotic one and much more. None of it was true, and despite all the US imposed obstacles and hostility he faced, Aristide sought to serve the interests of his people rather than those of his dominant northern neighbor. He did a splendid job of it with limited resources, which I documented in an earlier article.

But that policy by any nation in the Global South is always unacceptable to the US, the giant transnational corporations whose interests it serves, and in Haiti, its elite junior business partners. Their plan is to return this nation of 8.5 million people, the poorest in the Americas, to its pre-Aristide status of virtual serfdom and a de facto US colony permanently. And so far they've done it by turning the country into a killing field. But now with a new president who once before worked for the people, ordinary Haitians hope their nightmare will end, order will be restored along with their Lavalas instituted social gains that were ended after the 2004 coup, and they can get on with their lives.

The US iron grip over the country's politics will do everything possible to prevent that normalcy from ever returning to Haiti. And the US corporate media is playing its business as usual part to help guarantee it won't. It's unleashed a storm of anti-Preval propaganda, disinformation and demonization in the aftermath of the February 7 election. It began by playing the old game of "blame the victim." Although the US and its obedient proxies shamelessly controlled and rigged the election and still failed to have it come out their way, they're blaming Preval for the flawed process and electoral fraud. Neither he, any Lavalas remnants or ordinary poor Haitians had anything to do with burning ballots, hiding them, destroying tally sheets or stuffing ballot boxes with blank ballots. Nor did they decide to reduce the number of polling stations from 12,000 in 2000 to about 800 or less this year. And the ones they eliminated were where the majority of poor Haitians lived in rural areas as well as urban Lavalas/Aristide/Preval strongholds like Cite Soleil where they had NONE AT ALL.

SOME CHOICE EXAMPLES OF HOW THE CORPORATE MEDIA REPORTS THE NEWS

The inglorious New York Times always is the lead "attack dog" and echo chamber for US policy, and they began the assault by accusing Preval of causing "the devastating hostilities between the rich and the poor" and that he had to repair it. The NYT went on challenge Preval reporting that "he....faces questions about the legitimacy of the back-room deal brokered by foreign diplomats that ended the possibility of a runoff and made him the victor....." The Times failed to report that Aristide was reelected President in 2000 with 92% of the vote, and Rene Preval was elected President in 1996 with 88% of the vote - both elections judged free and fair. If anything close to a fair election had been held in February, Preval again would have easily won by an overwhelming landslide. Of course, the US knew that and had to assure it didn't happen.

The far right, one-sided, corporate America uber alles, often hate-spewing editorial page of the Wall Street Journal added their own special flavor of vitriol to the mix when they wrote about "armed gangs" and that "The pro-Aristide gangs began ginning up violence when it became apparent that Mr. Preval might not be installed without a run-off election." It hardly mattered to their editorial writer (the news sections of the paper are far more balanced and often credible) that their statement was false and reckless, and they knew it. They had to know as there wasn't a shred of evidence of any violence by Haiti's poor even by the 5,000 who went to the Montana hotel, swam in its pool, behaved peacefully and then left after making their point. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a guest at the hotel, saw what happened and said not one item was broken or stolen - pretty remarkable for a crowd of that size that had every reason to be very angry.

The Los Angeles Times was about as brazen quoting Lionel Delatour, a board member of the US connected Haiti Democracy Project and the notorious Group of 184 complicit in the 2004 coup, threatening Preval with his comment that "If he does try to bring Aristide back, Preval will NOT FINISH his presidency." The LA Times never reported that Haitian law guarantees the right of all its citizens to travel or live abroad and freely return to the country. It also failed to report that international law and major human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights all affirm the right of return.

More anti-Preval abuse was piled on by the Miami Herald that quoted Jacques Bernard, illegally appointed Executive Director (Haitian law recognizes no such position) of the Provisional Electoral Council or CEP by US appointed puppet interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, saying "the president elect and others manipulated ballot counting changes." The story never explained that the CEP was in charge of vote counting and while it was ongoing Preval was in Marmalade at his mountain home and had nothing to do with it or with the "tensions" that caused the Haitian people to take to the streets (peacefully) and demand their votes be counted by the CEP and not be thrown out at the CEP Tabulation Center in Port-au-Prince or put in the nearest dump site.

Even some in the so-called progressive media have lost their moorings and have now become as corrupted as the corporate media on some crucial issues. Witness the venerable Nation Magazine, the oldest continuously published magazine in the country which first came out in 1865, the year the Civil War ended. They were wrong and failed their readers when they supported the Afghan war after 9/11, and several of their regulars supported the Iraq war at least up to the time it began. They also ran a repugnant racist full page ad in their January 9/16, 2006 issue entitled "Arabian Fables" which outrageously implied Palestinians are prone to violence and deception, and there can be no peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In response to volumes of justifiable complaints, The Nation replied with an unacceptable weak-kneed op-ed piece claiming political advertising was protected by the First Amendment. Sound familiar? The recent demonizing "cartoons" in European newspapers portraying a blasphemous image of the Prophet Mohammed claimed the same right. Don't hatemongers always do that?

Now The Nation is at it again, this time on the Haiti election and its aftermath. In their March 13 issue in an article entitled The Fight for Haiti, author Kathie Klarreich writes about an "enigmatic" nation. "Guns had gone underground, kidnappings had stopped and Port-au-Prince streets that had resembled target practice became accessible....." I know much about Haitian history up to the present and find nothing about it "enigmatic", and her implication from the above quote is that the Haitian people had the guns and used them for target practice - a classic example of blame the victim journalism when the Haitian people themselves were the frequent targets and still are. The writing that follows is full of disgraceful innuendo, omissions of truth or outright lies - so many space won't allow to list them all. But I'll settle for the writer's failure to acknowledge the coup ousting Aristide in 2004, ignoring the flagrant CEP electoral rigging and vote counting fraud and then stating Preval was declared the winner by a "technical decision".....reigniting the celebratory pumping and gyrating." Is she implying the people are animals and acted as such? She also outrageously claimed Aristide although "wildly popular" is also "feared and despised." By whom outside the Haitian elite? Is the writer unaware he was reelected in 2000 with 92% of the vote in a fair election? She then claims it's up to Rene Preval to heal the breach he never opened and "negotiate a detente with an actively hostile opposition, a wary international community and armed supporters.....and demonstrate that he is no longer Aristide's twin" (read: abandon the people who elected him and surrender to the demands of the Haitian elite, the international lending agencies and their dominant neighbor from el norte).

Readers should take note of Ms. Klarreich's interesting credentials. She's written for the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor and continues writing about Haiti for the Miami Herald, Time Magazine and the CSM. She's also reported for NBC, CNN, ABC, CBC, PBS and NPR. Any of those names sound familiar? Is it clear what their agenda is? I'll get to NPR below (PBS is no different, but I didn't discuss their reporting).

There were many other delicious corporate media gems by other publications including those saying Preval's victory is compromised by his connection to the people of Haiti, Lavalas, Aristide, and that he champions the poor. Imagine the "audacity" of an elected president caring about the most desperate and disadvantaged people in his country. And it takes a leap of chutzpah for an AP reporter to write that "Opponents of Haiti's president-elect could use the country's disputed election result to try and weaken his government if he doesn't perform" (read once again: serve the interests of corporate America and Haiti and, of course, the dictates of the IMF and World Bank and not the people who elected him).

None of these accounts even hinted there'd been a 2004 coup, 7,000 democratically elected and appointed officials were forcibly removed from office, 10,000 Haitians were murdered by the combined forces of all US proxies (including UN Blue Helmets), 1,000 were imprisoned and are still in jail as political prisoners for the crime of freedom-fighting, 100,000 became internal refugees and 20,000 more went into exile while countless others tried to flee by sea but drowned in the attempt, Cite Soleil and Bel Air were turned into West Bank or Gaza type open air prisons, other prisons with walls and bars were established to house Haiti's poor, and the brutal and hated Haitian military was partly and unofficially reconstituted and given 10 years back pay while their victims suffer, starve and are denied any justice. They also never reported that after the 2004 coup the US puppet government looted the Presidential Palace, burned museums, shut down radio and TV stations and terrorized the whole country. I guess they thought all of the above was of no consequence.

Even at this early stage, there's almost no limit to the volume of anti-Preval rhetoric from the dominant and hostile US corporate media. But I've saved the best (in my judgment) for last. It's the case of Amelia Shaw, the Voice of America (VOA) propagandist now on the payroll and posing or assigned new duties as a "reporter" for National Public Radio (NPR). She also does double duty for the "venerable" BBC. Anyone with some knowledge of what's really happening in Haiti will have a hard time keeping down their breakfast listening to her reports. They ooze with a stream of deliberate and malicious lies and deceit from so-called "public" radio. NPR is nothing of the sort, of course, as they long ago abandoned us, the public, to become just another voice as a member in good standing in the corporate media. And they've got the big bucks corporate funding to prove it. Their current president and CEO Kevin Klose, in fact, is the former director of all the major worldwide US government broadcast media including VOA, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe and the anti-Castro Radio Marti. In other words, he was the head of all US worldwide propaganda making him an ideal choice for a comparable job at NPR, the "peoples' radio" that never met a US instigated war it didn't love.

Amelia's work is little more than a series of diatribes against President Aristide, Lavalas and past and now President-elect Rene Preval. In recent reports she falsely claimed Aristide as President ordered hired assassins to murder Preval's sister (the attempt failed). And in

another report she made the most breathtaking comment that the people of Haiti yearned for the days of Duvalier rule. The Duvaliers ("Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc") ruled the country as a reviled and hated brutal dictatorship. The people of Haiti rejoiced when their reign of terror finally ended. It's hard to believe even NPR would allow such "rot" on their airwaves when under Duvalier rule over 30 bloodstained years as many as 60,000 Haitians were murdered by the state. No one knows for sure the exact number, except maybe those still around associated with the killers. "Papa Doc" was once a practicing physician, but apparently he never learned or took seriously the implied message from the sacred Hippocratic Oath to do no harm.

RENE PREVAL'S IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

Governing Haiti under the best of conditions would be a task to challenge the patience of Job, require the wisdom of Solomon and have the luck of a "riverboat gambler" on his best day. But the way things are now as Rene Preval prepares to do it, he may be lucky just to stay alive and keep his sanity and blood pressure under control. On day one in office he'll be virtually alone trying to govern a country still run by criminals under the aegis and with full support of the US. The Haitian peoples' leaders and advocates are in exile, prison or are dead, the country is in desperate need of development, and at least 80% of the people are in an even more desperate state but hoping Rene will be their savior. Those people need everything including food for their next meal.

The knowledgeable, thoughtful and keen observer of events in Haiti for many years, John Maxwell, wrote just before the 2004 coup how abused this small country (3 times the size of Los Angeles) and its people have been for so many years. Referring only to the 20th century (he might have included 4 others) he wrote: "The.....story of Haiti is one of economic and social strip-mining, of rapacious exploitation on a scale that is almost incomprehensible (the crime of genocide in slow motion).....Haiti is an international crime scene.....For decades Haitians have been driven abroad for some sort of dignity, livelihood and an end to suffering. The brightest, including journalists, have been murdered or are in voluntary or involuntary exile.....Haiti is a war zone, where the rich (from the US and Haiti mainly) have scorched the earth so thoroughly....." Powerful words, all true and all ignored by the corporate media.

The world community of nations has stood by and watched it all, unmoved, uncaring and eager when possible to join in the plundering. The renown doctor and humanitarian Paul Farmer, Haiti's Albert Schweitzer, has also watched and tried to help through his non-profit Partners in Health. His philosophy is that "the only real nation is humanity", and he observed that "The international community has acted recklessly in Haiti for years without any accountability."

Maxwell, Farmer and others like dedicated lawyer Marguerite Laurent, Esq. (founder and chair of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network - HLLN, dedicated to promoting Haitian civil, human and cultural rights) have now observed that today little has changed since the above comments were written. Maxwell equates Preval's task to be like trying to carry water in a basket. So well said. I titled this article Preval's impossible mission. The US and Haitian power elite are still there and in control and have no intention of ending their rapacious

policies and trying to help the Haitian people as Aristide and Preval both did during their previous tenures. Also, Prime Minister Yvon Neptune is still in jail where at times during his incarceration he's been close to death from a hunger strike. This writer has no information on his current condition or any possible change in his status. Rene Preval's first order of business - on his first day in office - should be to free him and all the other political prisoners.

COPING WITH THE IMF AND WORLD BANK

The IMF and World Bank are always at the head of the queue in demanding developing states adhere to their neoliberal structural adjustment policies of privatizations, debt servicing and cuts in vital and desperately needed social services. Rene Preval knows the message but is no doubt hearing it again even more forcefully as he prepares to assume office. It remains to be seen how he'll respond, but it's easy to know what will happen if he doesn't. Haiti is in critical need of funding for programs to help its 80% or more desperately poor, but it won't get it from either of these international lending agencies or all the others the US controls. What he'll do and how he'll cope will likely decide his fate. The US and IMF and World Bank they control don't take "no" for an answer. But what's the worse choice - going along with them and allowing the extreme suffering and deprivation of Haiti's poor to get even worse or rejecting them and facing the likelihood of another coup which is certainly already planned if Preval won't play ball.

Under these conditions, who would trade places with this man who now has the most challenging and unenviable job I know - to govern his people as President surrounded by the most powerful and hostile forces out to do him in unless he surrenders to their will. I doubt very many are that courageous if they intended to serve their people and defy the dictates of a ruthless "Godfather" that never tolerates disobedience. The long knives are razor sharpened, poised and at the ready in Washington and Haiti and Rene have few if any allies to turn to. But about 7 million desperately poor Haitians are armed with hope and faith in this man to deliver them out of the maws and bowels of hell just like the Book of Exodus tells us Moses tried to lead the Jews to the promised land. Moses never made it there. Will Rene Preval have better luck? We should all hope he will.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. Also visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com.

**Turning Haiti Around: Statement of National Coalition for Haitian Rights on Challenges
Before President-Elect Rene Preval
US Newswire
3/2/2006**

**To: National and International Desk
Contact: Jocelyn McCalla, 212-337-0005 or jmccalla@nchr.org**

NEW YORK, Following is a statement of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights on the challenges before President-elect Rene Preval:

On February 7, 2006, more than 2 million Haitian voters went to the polls to choose a new President and new Senators and Assemblymen. They came undeterred by disabilities, hardships or illiteracy, and waited patiently and calmly in long lines to cast their vote despite the slow, frustrating and chaotic process. When the polls closed, national and international observers hailed the vote as free and fair. We salute the people of Haiti whose dignified and exemplary behavior on election-day commands all of us to seek progress and build a viable democracy in Haiti through non-violent means.

Rene Preval won the presidential contest by a four-to-one margin, but it appears that none of the leading candidates for the legislature garnered enough votes to avoid a second-round runoff. The people of Haiti will have to go again to the polls and decide on the composition of the legislature. And hopefully Haiti will have a functioning government in the near future. Meanwhile we congratulate the President-elect and look forward to working with his office to uphold the human rights of Haitians everywhere.

The majority of Haitian voters have decided that Preval is Haiti's best hope and placed their faith in his capacity to turn Haiti around. During the campaign, Preval cast himself as someone who would be able to be a bridge between the poor and the wealthy, and bring peace, stability and capital investment back to Haiti. Since the vote, international donors, including the US have praised the elections and indicated their readiness to continue providing support to the President-elect and the new government that will emerge from this process. It is incumbent on Mr. Preval to assemble from the start a solid team of respected, competent and non-partisan advisors to help craft policies and programs susceptible to meeting the hopes and dreams expressed on election-day.

Nonetheless turning Haiti around will not be easy. The Haitian economy is all but destroyed. Thousands of young men and women are idled by joblessness, and lack of opportunities and education. Programs that put them to work repairing and building the infrastructure, improving sanitation and developing a clean and inviting environment ought to be implemented without a minute's delay. And international donors should speed up their assistance to the new government in line with their recently reaffirmed commitment to stay the course in Haiti.

Until Haitian security forces are strong, large and sufficiently law-abiding to maintain peace and tranquility on their own, UN security forces should remain in Haiti long enough to effectively build peace. However, the international security force composition should tip towards more police officers rather than troops. Together with Haitian leaders, the international community must share full responsibility for progress or the lack thereof in establishing the rule of law, and eliminating corruption and immunity from prosecution. In this regard, we hope that the new government will revive long-dormant investigations into political crimes, such as the murder of Radio Haiti Director Jean Dominique, and prosecute these crimes successfully.

Haiti and its international allies should tap the Haitian Diaspora's wealth of skills and resources to help with restoring basic government functions. We note that the President-elect will be visiting with North American, Caribbean and Latin American leaders to secure their support. We urge Mr. Preval to use these opportunities to begin laying the foundations of a comprehensive solution to Haitian migration.

We also note that President Bush has personally extended his congratulations to President-elect Preval and indicated that the United States was looking forward to mutually beneficial cooperation. We have but one immediate suggestion for President Bush: establish Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for out-of- status Haitians in the US, like it has been done for nationals of Central America who needed temporary safe haven because of political or natural disasters, and you'll give Haiti the time and space it needs to provide a decent and sustaining environment for its noble citizens.

For further information, contact:

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The National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) is a non- governmental organization based in New York City dedicated since 1982 to championing the rights of Haitian immigrants and refugees in the Americas and democracy and human rights in Haiti.

Haitians in Dominican Republic seek return

JONATHAN M. KATZ

Associated Press

San Jose Mercury News

March 2, 2006

DAJABON, Dominican Republic - As many as 1 million Haitians have fled across the border with the Dominican Republic, braving harassment, deportation threats and attacks by their uneasy neighbors. Many now hope Haitian President-elect Rene Preval can work miracles and bring them home.

The Haitians hope Preval, who began a two-day visit to the Dominican Republic on Thursday, will create enough jobs and peace so they can again imagine a future for themselves in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

"Here I have no value," said Milenia Fis Pie, 20, a Haitian student born in the Dominican Republic. "If there was light, water, work and respect for youth in Haiti, I would go there to live."

Haiti and the Dominican Republic share a 243-mile border on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, but the countries have long had an uneasy coexistence. Independence Day here celebrates not liberation from colonial ruler Spain, but the end of two decades of Haitian occupation in the 19th century.

And with the Dominican economy estimated to be more than 4 times larger than its neighbor, many Haitians pay smugglers to cross the border illegally in search of work.

The bloody rebellion that ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide two years ago was fomented in part by Haitians plotting across the border. And with Aristide gone, still more Haitians fled to the Dominican Republic, worsening tensions.

When Dominican President Leonel Fernandez visited Haiti in December, protesters angry over the Dominicans' treatment of Haitian migrants started rioting. At least three people were wounded by gunfire during clashes with police in Haiti's capital.

The protests came amid a rash of violence between Dominicans and Haitians:

_ In January, Dominican mobs enraged by reports a Haitian worker sexually assaulted a toddler torched at least four Haitian homes in Monte La Jagua, a central Dominican mountain town.

_ In December, villagers in Villa Trina - about 81 miles north of the capital, Santo Domingo - burned about 20 shacks occupied by Haitian migrants in retaliation for their alleged involvement in the killing of a businessman.

_ In May, Dominicans beheaded two Haitian migrants in the northwestern town of Hatillo Palma after a Dominican woman was killed. The government then deported at least 2,000 Haitians in response to the violence.

Dominicans are not prejudiced or xenophobic, said Inocencia Garcia, the Dominican Foreign Ministry's head of relations with Haiti. She insisted that authorities adhere to immigration law when they deport illegal residents.

A visit to Dajabon, a border town on the Massacre River, shows just how porous the frontier is.

The river was named for a 17th-century battle between the Spanish and French. But today most remember it as one of the places where at least 20,000 Haitians were killed in 1937 by the forces of Dominican dictator Gen. Rafael Trujillo.

Thousands of Haitians flowed across the concrete bridge or waded through the shallow river's gray waters one recent day to attend a market in Dajabon. Several wore Preval hats and shirts.

Some later tried to penetrate the market-day immigration controls at the far end of town to look for work farther inside the country.

Luis Cabrera makes the five-hour round trip from the Dominican town of Santiago twice a week to sell clothes at a blue tarp-covered booth. Haitians are a huge part of his \$725 market-day take, but he said the market gives too many an opportunity to cross deeper into Dominican territory.

"They are invading the country, sometimes without papers," Cabrera said. Haitians often come for menial jobs at coffee plantations in the country's interior to houses in Santo Domingo. They soon find themselves caught between the Dominican need for labor and a Dominican nationalism that wants them out.

Some establish homes and have children, but the next generation's lives are little better. A Dominican Supreme Court ruling in December barred children of illegal immigrants from becoming Dominican citizens.

"The Haitians are good when we need them and they're bad when we have to give them their rights," said the Rev. Regino Martinez, a Dominican who heads the Jesuit Refugee and Migration Service in Dajabon, where he has lived for 32 years.

Fis Pie, who lives in Esperanza, a town between Santiago and the border at Dajabon, hopes Preval will be able to fulfill his campaign pledges to help the poor and bring peace to Haiti.

"I want God to help the president, because it will help all of us if there is calm," Fis Pie said

Préval to travel abroad
SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic - (AP)
Miami Herald
March 1, 2006

-- Haiti's newly elected president will visit the Dominican Republic on Thursday in what will be his first official visit abroad, a foreign ministry spokeswoman said.

President-elect René Préval will meet with Dominican President Leonel Fernández to discuss reactivating a commission on immigration, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Veri Candelario said Tuesday.

Préval's two-day visit to the Dominican Republic comes amid rising tensions between the two countries over border security and immigration.
An estimated one million Haitian workers live here, many illegally.

Lessons from Haiti and other places

David Strand

Columnist

Aitkin Independent Age

March 2, 2006

My first international business trip took me to Mexico City in 1970. There I met Tony Barbosa, my first Mexican friend.

Tony and I planned the construction of a factory for our Mexican subsidiary. It was an interesting experience and for two years I was there every other month.

The delightful Tony taught me about his native Mexico. Once he asked, "do you know why Mexico is so poor?" No, why is that? "Because we are so far from God and so close to the United States." Then he exploded in boisterous laughter.

Once I asked Tony if he would like America to give Texas back to Mexico. No, he said, having California returned would be just fine.

That exchange made me think about our external relations in this hemisphere. We certainly have had troubles with some neighbors; Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile and currently Venezuela. Haiti is another story. It is sad to realize that a country so close to our shores is the poorest country in the entire hemisphere. Haitians have suffered greatly from colonial plundering and corrupt leaders.

They just had a presidential election, one thankfully not disrupted by widespread violence. There was however, a controversy following the election. It concerned something that must have puzzled some Americans. Candidate Rene Preval received 49 percent of the vote in an election featuring 30 candidates. Leslie Manigat was a distant second with 12 percent. Like many countries, to win a candidate must get 50 percent plus one vote, otherwise there is a runoff between the top two candidates.

Supporters of Preval demonstrated, demanding their candidate was cheated out of votes. Finally, the election officials settled the dispute when they threw out 85,000 blank ballots, giving Preval a 51 percent victory.

Last month, Finland conducted a presidential election. In the first phase, incumbent President Tarja Halonen fell just short of 50 percent and then two weeks later she won re-election against the first ballot's second place vote getter.

Why is this important? Why not declare the one getting the most votes the winner as was the case in the last two Minnesota gubernatorial elections? There is a very good reason why Haiti, Finland and most other democracies require the head of state be elected by a majority of votes cast. It is because the president or governor serves all the people, not just those of his or her political party. This matters to the citizens of a democracy, but even more to the

one elected. A majority of the vote is the credibility that allows the head of state to conduct the peoples business fairly and without ambiguity.

And it is the reason why Minnesota should adopt instant runoff voting. In 1998 Jesse Ventura won with a 37 percent plurality. Would he have won a two-person run off with Norm Coleman, the second highest vote getter? That's a good question, one that has some doubt. In 2002, Tim Pawlenty led a four-person race with 45 percent, followed by Roger Moe (36), Tim Penney (16), and Ken Pentel (2). It is perhaps unlikely that Moe could have defeated the governor in a runoff, but one doesn't know for sure.

Instant runoff voting would solve the problem. Used extensively in Australia, San Francisco and some cities in Michigan and Vermont, each voter ranks the candidates in order of preference. If the top vote getter falls short of a majority, the second choices of the lowest vote-getter are tallied to see if any candidate crosses 50 percent. This calculation continues until someone gets a clear majority.

Instant runoff voting would also help third parties. The present system has a disadvantage because people who would ordinarily support a third party candidate, often vote for a democrat or republican out of fear that their vote amounts to a vote for the candidate they least prefer.

Wouldn't it be nice to select governors who didn't reach office with more than half the voters choosing other candidates?

We need to strengthen democracy in the face of enormous influence money dragging it down. I believe citizens would feel better about their leaders when no doubt remained about the winners getting a clear majority in elections. Runoff voting, either the way it's done in the rest of the world or via instant runoff, is a good idea.

David Strand is a director for the county DFL party. After hacking around the front nine of life, he tells stories to his grandchildren en route back to the clubhouse.

Madison man witnesses Haiti's `Day of Hope'

By AISHA A. TALLEY

03/01/2006

Madison Daily Ledger, South Dakota

When Jay Niedert volunteered to go on a 15-day mission trip to Haiti in late January, he was prepared to see extreme poverty and malnutrition. What the Madison resident didn't expect was a country whose people, despite their economic hardships, maintained a level of hope that a new president would help the island nation.

On Feb. 7, Niedert -- who was in Haiti with eight other South Dakotans as part of the Solar Oven Partners program of the United Methodist Church's Dakota Conference -- watched as hundreds of Haitians lined up to vote next to their compound in Petionville, a suburb of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince.

The moment would be unforgettable.

"The morning of the election I woke up at 5:30 a.m. (and) we're in this compound that's about a block and a half and I hear this sound," Niedert recalls. "I said (to the group's leader) `Can you hear that? That sounds like a hornet's nest'. And what it was was hundreds and hundreds of people were surrounding our compound lined up to vote.

``These people lined up really early in the morning."

Niedert said that in the past, Haiti's elections came with riots, and people heading to the polls were often gunned down. But this time, Haitians braved any danger and called it "their `Day of Hope'," he said.

Niedert said that in the days leading up to the election, many Haitians would passionately talk of their candidate.

On a tour of the countryside, the group came across about 50 young men lined up across a road to show their support of their candidate, Rene Preval. And on the first night the group was in Haiti, they met a man who got emotional when talking about his choices for president.

"His biggest beef, and what seems to be the biggest beef there, is that when money comes from the U.N. (United Nations) or from America or comes from the European Union, it's going to the government (and) it's getting distributed to relatives and friends," he said. "It never trickles down to the people."

That level of mistrust toward the Haitian government prompted the ousting two years ago of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide was forced into exile following the violent rebellion in 2004.

Some of the mistrust continued as elections officials began reviewing ballots, and the lead held by Preval dwindled.

Preval, who served as president from 1996-2001, was eventually declared the winner on Feb. 17. He 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.

"About 10 percent of the votes were being dumped because they (officials) wanted to count all votes cast even though they weren't being counted," said Niedert. "Suddenly his majority became diluted and it looked as if there would be a second election."

The day the group left, Preval supporters began forming at the Montana Hotel, a luxury hotel in which Nobel Peace Prize laureate and South African archbishop Desmond Tutu had been staying and where ballots were being counted.

"The crowd rushed the elections officials that were at the Montana, but they didn't take anything. They didn't damage anything. They just wanted to be heard," said Niedert. "They wanted to be heard. They wanted those elections officials to know they were paying attention."

While most in the United States only see the "riots," which Niedert prefers to call "demonstrations," and the extreme poverty, he sees a country whose people have hope.

"Every day is like their voting day," he said. "I don't know if the typical American would have that positive outlook they're somehow maintaining."

He said that because of years of deforestation (trees are cut down and used for cooking fuel), the country often has to recover from mudslides after heavy rains. And because there's no infrastructure, Haitians are also forced to look to sewers and ditches for basic needs like water.

The solar ovens the group was distributing can be used to boil the water before use. The ovens also are used as an alternative to cutting down trees for fuel, said Niedert.

He said that the people the group met all took the workshops about the solar ovens seriously.

"It's an event to have people show up in your community to do something like this," said Niedert, adding that Haitians would put on their "Sunday best" for the three-day seminars they held. "It's sort of humbling."

He said that when he was preparing to travel to Haiti, he left behind t-shirts and caps with logos of American companies or the U.S. flag. He found he didn't need to do that.

"Although they may agree or disagree with whatever (U.S.) administration is coming or going, they certainly recognize the symbolism and the meaning of freedom and to have rights and to have the opportunities to succeed," said Niedert, who said vehicles are often adorned with American symbols right alongside Christian symbols. "This isn't a place to haul a Bible down;

their spiritual needs are covered. It's their physical needs, that's where the need is for these people."

Niedert said that he hopes Preval, although not the U.S. government's first choice for Haiti's president, can generate enough international interest in Haiti to help rebuild the country.

Preval, a former protege of Aristide who has widespread support among Haiti's poor, distanced himself from the ousted leader during the election.

"If he can help rebuild the infrastructure, I think that would be wonderful for the country," said Niedert.

He said that individually, the best things Americans can do is to pick a community or cause in Haiti and help that.

"The scale of poverty is too overwhelming to be able to help more than one spot," he said.

But Niedert, like many Haitians, holds out hope.

"It's certainly not hopeless. I know that," he said

Haiti Democracy Project Objects to Abuse of a Human-Rights Forum
James R. Morrell
March 1, 2006
Haiti Democracy Project web page

The Haiti Democracy Project strongly objects to a flagrantly one-sided hearing planned by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on March 3, 2006. The commission will hear three partisan groups allege gross human-rights violations by the U.N. mission in Haiti when there is no factual basis whatever for the accusation.

This is a shocking breach of professional standards and grossly abuses an important hemispheric forum for the victims of genuine violations, making this forum a tool of a political faction.

The procedure for hearing petitions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights makes clear that there are important professional fact-checking stages before the acceptance of petitioners at a hearing. The professional standards of fact-checking were not adhered to.

While the Haiti Democracy Project welcomes a variety of opinions being voiced publicly on the Haiti issue, we deplore an official veneer of approval being granted to flagrantly one-sided, counterfactual presentations such as those to be presented on March 3.

The Haiti Democracy Project strongly encourages member nations to appear at the March 3 hearing to challenge both the petitioners and the decision of the commission to receive them.

(Note: In the original version of this communication, the Haiti Democracy Project suggested that reputable human-rights-monitoring organizations, such as the Haitian Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), be invited to add balance. In fact, the commission will hear from RNDDH at a separate hearing earlier in the day.)

Sticking With Haiti
By Sarah McGregor
Embassy, Canada's foreign policy news weekly
March 1st, 2006

Canada's support for Haiti runs out this summer. Everyone who cares about the struggling democracy is looking for the cue that the Harper government will, as it promises, stick with the hemisphere's poorest country "for the long run."

The test of Canada's devotion to the long-suffering population of Haiti -- a focal point of its current foreign policy -- begins this year as the international community reappraises the level of foreign aid needed to restore the fragile democracy.

Canada is Haiti's third-most generous foreign donor, but its financial commitment of \$180 million over two years -- of which \$143 million has been dispersed -- runs out this summer.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has signaled he will follow the lead of his predecessor Paul Martin and stay on as one of Haiti's major patrons following last month's chaotic vote tabulation in the Caribbean nation. Amid allegations of fraud and disorganized ballot counts, a political compromise was reached last month to declare René Prével as president-elect. A second run-off vote for members of Parliament is expected this month, and the inauguration of Parliament is slated for March 29.

On Feb. 17, Mr. Harper called Mr. Prével to offer best wishes and to promise Canadian support over the "long run," according to a government press release. Only in the coming months will the Conservatives make tough decisions on what portion of Canada's relatively modest, and widely dispersed, aid budget to extend to the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

In the meantime, the Canadian government is looking forward to a "firm commitment to reform and political dialogue" with the new Haitian government, says a government official, in a technical briefing.

The assistance package will also be influenced by priorities identified by Haiti's elected officials, as well as by the country's ability to absorb a surge of aid dollars. Mr. Prével has asked the international community not to abandon his country in its bid to bolster social and economic foundations, as donors including Canada did a decade ago after democratic elections. Many feel conditions in Haiti have worsened in recent years, with the annual income hovering around \$400 and the average life expectancy at 53 years. Experts suggest that Haiti could require billions of dollars over the next 10 years to curb violence and bring a measure of prosperity to the region.

International donors are expected to meet by July to discuss a future round of aid funding. The Interim Cooperation Framework, established in 2004 to guide the Haitian government's reconstruction agenda, has been extended until the end of 2007.

"We haven't yet decided how much money... [but we] expect the minimum [period to extend Canada's financial commitment at the conference] to be for one year," says Yves Petillon, Director of the Canadian International Development Agency's Americas Branch. Mr. Petillon says the likely scenario is for Canada to continue channeling aid through multilateral agencies and NGOs, and not in the form of direct budgetary support to the Haitian government. "We support something very clearly," he says, pointing to the \$19 million Canada directly paid on behalf of Haiti to the Caribbean Development Bank for membership dues, and to the World Bank to erase outstanding debts.

Canada has demonstrated a positive role in justice reform, including the training of the Haitian police force, observes Mark Schneider, senior vice-president of the Washington office of The International Crisis Group, a nonpartisan organization. "Canada has a strong sense of the rule of law," he says. "[Canada is] experienced in police training and in international peacekeeping around the world."

The breakdown of Canada's commitment to Haiti included about \$38 million for democracy building and support of the electoral process. More than 106 election observers and 25 Canadian police officers were deployed to the region for the Feb. 7 vote. Canada trained about half of the 3,500 electoral guards manning polling stations, and also spent \$26 million to send about 100 police officers to help the UN force, MINUSTAH, stabilize the country. As well, it promoted economic growth with \$29 million in projects, including a partnership with a public electricity utility in Jacmel, a town of 40,000 people on the southern coast. It's now one of the few places in the country where affordable power flows 24 hours a day, says Mr. Petillon. Canada earmarked more than \$68 million for health care and education provision, including the training of teachers and health care professionals and the construction of a hospital.

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'Haiti Is Back in Business'

* Haiti's ambassador to Ottawa says Aristide will have to judge for himself whether his return to the country would be good or bad for Haiti.

Robert Tippenhauer, Haiti's Ambassador to Canada appointed by the interim government, says it was a positive move by the Organization of American States and the United Nations to help broker a deal to declare René Préval the presidential winner.

"It was done to avoid a serious situation that would have destroyed efforts of the past 20 years, let alone [the past] two years with the help of the international community," he says, in an interview. The former businessman says his return to the private sector could be imminent as the new Haitian government appoints its own team of foreign envoys. But Mr. Tippenhauer says he'd also be happy to stay in Ottawa and serve the new government, if he's asked. "I am always ready to serve my country," he says.

He emphasizes a crucial step to attracting foreign investment -- which leads to job creation -- is an improved security situation in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and across the country. Mr.

Tippenhauer says Mr. Préval is committed to moving forward on economic reforms in order to gain the confidence of domestic and international investors. "Haiti is back in business," says Mr. Tippenhauer.

Mr. Préval served as prime minister under then-president Jean-Bernard Aristide for a brief stint in 1991. Mr. Préval replaced Mr. Aristide as president between 1996 and 2001.

Mr. Aristide was eventually re-elected, but once again forced into exile in 2004. Last month, from South Africa, Mr. Aristide told reporters he plans to return to Haiti.

Mr. Tippenhauer says that as head of state several years ago, Mr. Préval was "handicapped by past president Aristide." But the diplomat believes it will be different this time around. "Aristide was the man who pulled all the strings and [Préval] was his protégé. The mere presence of Aristide blocked him from being himself. I think now he has the opportunity to show the real Préval," says Mr. Tippenhauer. "He has the experience of leading the country already. I think he will create the ambiance to give confidence for the private sector. I don't see why he would want to be Haiti's president if he isn't interested in improving the standard of living for Haitians." As for a possible return of Mr. Aristide, "he will have to judge for himself whether coming back is good or not for Haiti," says Mr. Tippenhauer.

S. McGregor

Haiti Democracy Project Said Backed By Big Business, CIA

Originally: The case for Aristide

By Marc Mohan

The Oregonian

February 13, 2006

Haiti Democracy Project

March 1, 2006

On Feb. 29, 2004, Jean-Bertrand Aristide for the second time became the exiled president of Haiti. The question that lies at the heart of the documentary "Aristide and the Endless Revolution" is whether his exile was his own idea or whether he was pressured, even kidnapped, by the United States.

Director Nicolas Rossier wears his pro-Aristide stance openly, detailing the clergyman's rise to prominence as a champion of Haiti's oppressed poor, the majority of the populace. In 1990 the fiery, sometimes blunt orator became the first democratically elected leader of the nation. His exhortations against Haiti's wealthy elite led to a coup the following year, during the presidency of George H.W. Bush. Aristide was restored to power by the Clinton administration and handed over power to an elected successor (also a first in Haitian history) in 1994.

Re-elected in 2000, Aristide ran afoul of such groups as the Haiti Democracy Project, backed by American business interests, and, allegedly, the CIA. Deprived of international aid, the country descended again into lawlessness and misery, culminating in a runway showdown, where, Aristide says, he was given the choice between boarding an American aircraft or being abandoned, defenseless, on the tarmac.

Despite his clear sympathies, Rossier makes some effort to address allegations by his opponents of corruption and even political murder by Aristide's forces. The director includes anti-Aristide voices such as former Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega and former ambassador to Haiti Timothy Carney (both during the George W. Bush administration).

Haiti Democracy Project Corrects Oregonian
James R. Morrell
Haiti Democracy Project
March 1, 2006

To the editor of the Oregonian:

On February 13, Marc Mohan in an article entitled "The Case for Aristide" wrote in your newspaper that our organization, a small Washington thinktank named the Haiti Democracy Project, was "backed by American business interests, and, allegedly, the CIA."

The Haiti Democracy Project is backed by neither.

Sincerely,

James R. Morrell
Executive director
Haiti Democracy Project

Argentina Leads UN Sec Council
Prensa Latina
March 1, 2006

United Nations, Argentina assumes the presidency of the UN Security Council on Wednesday with an agenda that gives priority to follow up elections in Haiti, according to diplomatic sources in Buenos Aires.

Argentine Foreign Affairs officials at the UN said the Security Council would convene an open session on the need to foster Haitian economic and institutional growth.

They said the number of sessions to ensure the participation of states interested in discussing the Security Council agenda will be increased during the Argentine UN presidency, which will extend all over March.

Reports on conflicts in Somalia, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan, Middle East, Congo and Ivory Coast, among others, will be reviewed.

This is the second time Argentina assumes the UN Security Council since its entry as non-permanent member in January 2005.

Haiti struggles through a messy election aftermath 'Legislative run-off scheduled for March 19 will likely be postponed'

AP

Jamaica Observer

Wednesday, March 01, 2006

A presidential vote count is disputed by the winner's two main rivals. Now, a legislative run-off needed to form a new government could be postponed for weeks because of yet more delays.

PREVAL... his two closest opponents trailed far behind

The aftermath of the Haitian elections that returned former President Rene Preval to office has been as chaotic and messy as the country itself. Still, Haitian officials and international observers are reasonably upbeat. After all, Haiti has only had four elections in its bloody, 200-year history.

"I don't think it's as bad as it sounds," said David Wimhurst, a spokesman for the UN. "The election of Mr Preval has been universally welcomed except for one or two quarters. It's a result that has generally been accepted by the entire international community."

Haiti's February 7 election began with a late, chaotic start when some polling stations did not open on schedule. There were long lines and a few scuffles. That was followed by an agonisingly slow vote count and allegations of voter fraud.

After a week had passed without a declared winner, angry supporters of Preval poured into the streets of the capital, clamouring for their candidate to be named the victor and accusing election officials of trying to steal the vote.

Fearing an explosion of violence, diplomats pressured Haitian electoral officials to find a compromise. The problem? With 90 per cent of the votes counted, Preval had 48.76 per cent - just shy of the 50 per cent plus one vote he needed to win outright and avoid a run-off.

When Preval's two closest rivals refused to concede, election officials met throughout the night until they agreed to divide the unusually large number of blank ballots among the 33 candidates according to the percentage of votes they received.

That gave Preval 44,478 of 91,219 blank ballots, said Gerard Le Chevallier, the UN elections chief in Haiti. Preval gained 58,346 more votes after another 5 per cent of the valid votes were tallied, giving him 51.21 per cent of the vote with 95.78 per cent counted.

The remaining results were either lost, stolen or destroyed before they could be processed, Le Chevallier said.

Preval's two closest opponents trailed far behind. Former President Leslie Manigat had 12 per cent and Charles Henri Baker, a wealthy businessman, had 8 per cent.

Still, both candidates accused officials of bowing to pressure and undermining the electoral process, with Baker saying the decision "presaged a dark period for Haiti's future".

Robert Maguire, a Haiti expert and professor at Trinity College in Washington, said officials worked within Haiti's "ambiguous electoral laws" to correct what appeared to be a glaring irregularity with the blank ballots.

"Nobody is going to walk four to six hours to vote just to put a blank ballot inside the box," Maguire said.

Though the solution diffused the anger among Preval supporters, tension mounted within the divided nine-member electoral council, which was charged with organising the first election since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a violent rebellion two years ago.

Two council members denounced the body's director-general, Jacques Bernard, accusing him of "megalomania" and of excluding them from important decisions. Preval supporters accused him of trying to manipulate the vote count to deny Preval a first-round victory - a charge Bernard denies.

Bernard finally fled the country on February 19 after opponents ransacked his farm and diplomats warned that gang members planned to ambush his car as he left the vote tabulation centre.

"That's when I decided it was time to leave," Bernard said in a phone interview from Washington. "I'm not used to bodyguards and armoured cars, I can't live with it. My life had become in danger."

Bernard and other election officials said the street protests prevented poll workers from finishing their duties, meaning a legislative run-off scheduled for March 19 will likely be postponed.

"I haven't quit, but I need time to decide whether I want to go back, if I'm ready to take all these personal risks for the elections," he said.

Election officials still in Haiti won't say when the run-off might be held.

"The pressure of the street made us lose one week of work and put us behind in our plans to hold the run-off on March 19," council secretary general Rosemond Pradel told local Radio Metropole.

The delay could force the postponement of Preval's March 29 inauguration, since technically he can't take power without a sitting parliament.

During a visit to Haiti this week, Thomas Shannon, assistant US secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, urged all sides to work together to finish what's been started.

"What's important is that this electoral process keep moving forward. The Haitian people have waited too long already, and it's our hope that this process will meet its timetable and that a new government will be inaugurated soon," Shannon said.

Airport officers smuggled cocaine

BY JAY WEAVER

jweaver@MiamiHerald.com

Miami Herald

March 1, 2006

American Airlines' former director of security at Haiti's main airport pleaded guilty on Tuesday to smuggling millions of dollars' worth of cocaine to the United States aboard the airline's planes.

Stephanie Ambroise, who once worked at Port-au-Prince airport, was arrested in fall 2004 by Drug Enforcement Administration agents at Miami International Airport.

She later was indicted along with her husband on charges of conspiring to smuggle more than five kilos of cocaine into the United States from 1999 to 2004.

Ambroise, who pleaded guilty on the eve of trial, faces up to five years in prison. Her husband, Yonel Joassaint, also pleaded guilty Tuesday before U.S. District Judge Paul Huck.

Joassaint, a former security employee for American Airlines at Port-au-Prince airport, faces up to 12 years in prison.

Both defendants, prosecuted by assistant U.S. attorneys Matthew Axelrod and Michael Davis, are scheduled for sentencing on May 11.

CHARGED IN MIAMI

The couple was charged in a federal investigation into a narcotics-trafficking conspiracy allegedly linked to some former officials in the government of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. So far, more than 20 defendants have been convicted in Miami federal court.

According to court records, Ambroise would "coordinate and receive suitcases and other merchandise containing cocaine to pass through airport security." In return, she first received \$1,000 per kilogram and eventually raised her price to \$2,000 per kilogram, records show.

MONTHLY SHIPMENTS

Confidential sources told investigators that Ambroise worked with a Haitian drug trafficker named Serge Edouard, who was convicted at trial last year. They made two to three shipments monthly to Miami and New York, according to court records.

The suitcases and other containers would be taken to Ambroise's husband the night before the shipment and she would put numbered shipping tags on them, records show. She would

then call an airport worker, give him the tag numbers and he would put the bags onboard U.S.-bound flights.

American Airlines flies from Haiti to Miami, New York and Boston.

Analysis: Aristide's return
By Jason Motlagh
UPI Correspondent
World Peace Herald
Published March 1, 2006

WASHINGTON -- Haiti's beloved and detested former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide intends to return home, a prospect U.S. officials and analysts say could subvert efforts to hoist the western hemisphere's poorest country from the brink of total breakdown.

President-elect Rene Preval, a former Aristide protégé set to be sworn in March 29, has said the Haitian Constitution does not require citizens to have a visa to enter or leave the country. "The response (to letting Aristide return) isn't with me," he recently told reporters, "it's with the constitution."

Aristide, presently exiled in South Africa, said he was preparing to go back to Haiti "as soon as possible" and was working out the details of his homecoming with Preval and the United Nations, which has a 9,500-man peacekeeping mission that earlier this month oversaw the first democratic elections in Haiti since the February 2004 ousting of Aristide in an armed revolt.

"For the past two years, the Haitian people fought peacefully through demonstrations calling for my return... When they went to vote, they voted for my return and said it very clearly," Aristide said last week, according to the BBC. He held that he would recognize Preval's authority and work behind-the-scenes as a teacher -- claims that have aroused groans in Washington.

State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli said in a Feb. 22 news briefing that Aristide's return could only inflame simmering class hostilities and destabilize Haiti. "Aristide is from the past," he said. "We're looking to the future."

U.S. fears of Aristide as a ghost of Haiti's past haunting an uncertain future are rooted in recent experience. After becoming its first elected president in 1990, the ex-slum priest was deposed by a military coup a year later, only to be forcibly restored in 1994 by U.S. troops under the Clinton administration.

He was then elected to a second term in 2001, but widespread allegations of corruption and stirring street violence sparked a rebellion that engulfed the country until the United States whisked him away and installed an interim government. Aristide still insists he was "kidnapped," charging that U.S. foreign policy during his reign sought to undercut his authority.

This claim was boosted last month by a New York Times story that revealed how representatives of a federally-funded agency carried out activities that, according to the U.S.

ambassador at the time, systematically damaged his attempts to foster cooperation between Aristide and his domestic opposition.

Although Preval once served as Aristide's prime minister and is the heir to the impoverished masses that swept Aristide to power, analysts say Preval is his own man who has done much to distance himself; this includes breaking away from Aristide's Lavalas party to form his own, Lespwa.

During his first term as president from 1996-2001, U.S. officials are said to have held Preval in high regard for his personal integrity and accessibility. He was also stubborn when it came to implementing reforms -- resistance that has been attributed to pressure from Aristide.

It remains to be seen whether Preval can escape the shadow of his doppelganger.

"Preval is between a rock and a hard place... He seeks to establish himself as an autonomous political actor in Haitian politics, though his (Feb. 7) election victory was in part based on his links with Aristide," said Dan Erikson, director of Caribbean programs at the Inter-American Dialogue.

Erikson brushed aside suggestions that Aristide could be subject to Haiti's toothless justice system, as Preval has implied, noting that figures such as Guy Philippe, the man who led the 2004 rebel uprising against Aristide and has been accused by U.S. authorities of drug trafficking, was one of the 32 candidates in the latest election.

"(Haiti) is a place where we've seen that every prosecution is a selective prosecution," he said.

Analysts say Preval's biggest test if Aristide returns -- aside from keeping order -- will be rekindling strong ties with the United States.

"When push comes to shove, the U.S. is the bull in Haiti's china closet. Preval would have to have a working relationship with the U.S. administration," said Robert McGuire, a Haiti expert at Trinity College in Washington, D.C. "If this administration would reach out and engage respectfully there could be a nice détente in U.S.-Haiti relations... there are potential favorable indicators for that."

Upon hearing election results, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said: "We're going to work with the Preval government. We want this government to succeed," adding that the administration will look for additional ways to aid Haiti's recovery.

President Bush called Preval last Thursday to congratulate him on his victory and encourage him to build an inclusive government. The pair reportedly discussed bi-lateral cooperation to boost economic development in Haiti, where one percent of the population controls more than 50 percent of the wealth and 80 percent of the population is unemployed.

The leaders also talked about ways to crack down on the trans-American drug trade that has made Haiti a major trafficking entrepot, to the tune of 14 percent of U.S.-bound cocaine.

The U.S. has provided hundred of millions of dollars in aid to Haiti over the years but has drawn criticism since Aristide's departure for taking a less direct role in its neighbor's affairs.

For its part, the U.S. has paid for the lion's share of the \$584 million U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti. And last week the Security Council voted to extend the U.N. mandate until August, a move that has new meaning now that Haiti's most polarizing figure has announced his upcoming travel plans.

"Aristide's return would really put a till on relations between the U.S. and the new Haitian government," said Erikson. "It would be a litmus test for Preval's overall intentions."

**Venezuela Wants to Help
Strategy Page
March 1, 2006**

The violence has slowed, but not stopped, since the February 7 elections. The followers of president-elect Preval expect to get jobs and other goodies after Preval takes office on March 27th. The UN may be prevailed on to stay for another few years, but unless a new government can reverse two centuries of corrupt government, Haiti will return to its normal status: corrupt dictatorship.

February 27, 2006: Apprised of the fact that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez would like to visit Haiti in mid-March, President-Elect Rene Preval (who is to be inaugurated at the end of March), has responded with a not-so-subtle suggestion that his schedule is too full for him to find room to properly welcome the prospective visitor.

February 23, 2006: President-Elect Rene Preval said that former president Aristide could return from exile. Preval was a follower of Aristide, but was not tainted by the corruption that drove Aristide out of office. The U.S. opposes letting Aristide return, believing that Aristide would make an attempt to return to power, and resume his corrupt ways to pay for it. Preval believes he can handle Aristide, and use him to control the violent Aristide followers.

Build strong electoral framework

Opinion Editorial

Miami Herald

BY KATHIE KLARREICH

kklarreich@aol.com

March 1, 2006

The lasting image I have of Election Day in Haiti last month was just after sundown. I was standing outside the hollow shell of a building where 43 tables, or polling stations, were located. Poll workers who had been on site for more than 14 hours were huddled around a single candle per table, the only light available for the polling booth president to read the ballot, pass it around to political party observers for confirmation and then have the secretary record the vote on a master tally sheet. I left before the last vote was counted, bleary-eyed and discouraged that after so many years, so many elections, so many battles to get to this celebratory day of democracy, this was the best that Haitians were going to get.

Election a disgrace

While I admit that it's hard to build an electoral framework without an infrastructure, this was the fourth presidential election I've witnessed in the last 18 years, and I know I am not setting the bar too high by saying that it was a disgrace.

The entire procedure, from the ill-conceived voting booths to the dismal tabulation process was an insult to the Haitian people. It's hard to understand how, with a \$75 million budget covered by the international community, a bloated electoral calendar that included four postponements over three months and well-paid -- if not over-paid -- international experts from the United Nations and the Organization of American States, there could have been so much mayhem and magouy -- a catchall Creole word that means corruption, deceit and swindling.

Which begs the questions: Why? And then what, if anything, can be done to rectify the problem for the 129 parliamentary seats and numerous local spots yet to be determined? Although the runoffs were originally set for March 19, they have already been postponed. Unfortunately, the delay appears to be related to technical tally difficulties and the flight of the Provisional Electoral Council president rather than an aptly concentrated effort to identify and correct the massive fraud that took place in the first round.

What went wrong?

If I were a conspiracy theorist, I would say that this is part of a master plan by the international community to undermine President-elect René Préval, who can't govern until he has a prime minister, chosen in conjunction with the parliament. Préval's previous record as president has the international community concerned that he will either realign himself with ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, or govern as an independent, truly democratic leader with an unprecedented popular mandate.

With no investigation into all that went wrong with the first round of voting, and because there will be far less attention paid to these upcoming elections now that the presidency has been decided, there will be an even greater chance for irregularity. Voters will trek long distances, confront incomplete registration lists and then cast their vote without knowing if it will be counted because poll workers with political agendas know precisely how much they were able to get away with already. Tinkering with tally sheets, allowing voters to cast multiple ballots and stuffing the ballot box will, in some places -- particularly those in the hard to reach areas in the countryside -- be the norm, rather than the exception.

Expose the problems

There were more than a thousand national observers and three international observation teams for Haiti's first round. These groups have been shamefully silent. Sending internal memos and holding backroom discussions on electoral discrepancies with foreign diplomats and Haitian officials without demanding changes or exposing the problems and their sources to the press serves only to massage their egos and pad their pockets. It does nothing to advance the democratic process in Haiti. If this is the best that they can do, they should stay home.

It doesn't have to be this way. We have to demand that our dollars are put to better use, propping up Haitian institutions that will hold the Haitian state accountable. We need to be selective but generous in supporting specific grass-roots groups, some of which trained local observers who did their best to try to ensure fraud-free elections. The vast majority of the 37,000 poll workers and nearly 2.1 million who voted want, and deserve, at least that much. Kathie Klarreich is a freelance journalist and author of *Madame Dread: A Tale of Love, Vodou and Civil Strife in Haiti*.

Father Gaston visits from Haiti

**By Erica Dimka
Wisconsin Dells
March 2, 2006**

Wisconsin Dells - St. Cecilia Catholic Church members know their collections and other efforts to help the Sacred Heart Parish in Thiotte, Haiti, have been appreciated, but recently they've heard first-hand of the improvements made - and about what is still needed.

The Sacred Heart Parish priest, Father Gaston Pierre, arrived in Wisconsin Jan. 25, and spent the first two weeks in Baraboo with Father Larry Bakke at St. Joseph Parish, which is also a sister parish with Thiotte. While there, he met with members of the Haiti Medical Mission Group.

Recently, he's been con-celebrating mass with Monsignor Felix Oehrlein of St. Cecilia Church.

Pierre said he is "enjoying (his) visit" and that everyone has been welcoming and taking good care of him.

"All the people in Wisconsin Dells received me with joy," he said, calling them "good people."

While he has been to Florida and Manhattan before, Pierre is experiencing his first trip to Wisconsin. He said the area has "many beautiful" things, including the river, nice houses and big buildings.

He explained that the two areas are different in many ways - especially the climate.

"Haiti is always green, always hot," he said. "Here, it is very cold."

He said some people in Haiti have nice houses too, and that they have many rivers and beautiful things. But, he said, the government doesn't take care of it like in the United States does.

"My country is a nice country too. If (we) had the possibility to take care of it, it would be very, very beautiful," he said. "Here is better, 1,000 times better"

About the parish

Sacred Heart is a very large and fairly young parish. About 25,000 people live in it, some Protestant and some Catholic. It used to be a chapel in another parish but broke off in 1992. Pierre is the third person to serve as priest of the parish.

"I love Thiotte because it's my area (near where I grew up)," he said. "I would like to do my best to help the community develop, but the way is not easy."

According to information said by Pierre and prepared by Jan Kaiser - who with her husband Bruce has hosted the priest - the parish has become larger. He even has a new priest to assist him. Pierre said the growth is not because of an increase in population in the parish, but because of an increase in practicing Catholics.

St. Cecilia twinned with Thiotte in 1993 and St. Joseph joined in 1997. Pierre said that despite the differences between the areas, the churches' practices are the same.

"A mass is a mass," he said. "We do the same thing as they do here."

The parishioners celebrate mass for about an hour and half on Sundays, with a shorter mass during the week. Pierre said the church buildings, however, are more basic in Thiotte, and that they don't have the resources to maintain them as nicely.

The parish's needs

The parish includes 13 chapels, eight schools, a radio station and a private clinic. Five of the chapels are newly founded and do not yet have a building.

In addition, they need to build several more schools, as well as rebuild a school in the center of the parish that served as a primary and high school, as it was "devastated" by floods in 2004. The ground washed away, making it impossible for the children to get there, and the country's Ministry of Culture called it a high risk area.

Pierre said the parish has a plan for the school building, but it needs to raise money for it. Manos Unidas, an organization in Spain, will pay for half of the \$200,000 cost if the parish can find the other half first.

Pierre and Jan Kaiser, who helped translate some of the priest's statements, explained that people in Haiti have more confidence in church schools than national ones. Because of this, Pierre said, "we would like to rebuild it" so children can learn and prepare for life.

It's also important for the school to have a strong trade component. According to the information prepared by Kaiser, children are "lethargic" about education because it will not ensure a job without a trade. Right now, the closest trade school is five hours away by car, in Port-au-Prince.

The parish also needs one more water cistern. Members of St. Cecilia provided cisterns for the townspeople outside of Thiotte, but Pierre said the people would like an 8,000 gallon cistern in town so people don't have to carry water to the clinic. Ideally, it would be put in between the rectory and clinic, so gravity could feed water to the clinic, rectory and radio station.

St. Cecilia parishioners and others from Baraboo, Sauk City and Madison have aided Thiotte in other ways, providing health care, construction and teaching missions. One project right now is to raise money for reforestation of the area. Some of the trees will be planted by Thiotte students, Pierre said, to help teach them about forestry.

Other organizations and people are also aiding the area. However, some, like Catholic Relief Services and Caritas, have had to scale back their services to focus on other areas of Haiti.

The German organization Adveniat, whose mission it is to provide parish priests with vehicles at reduced prices, will help Pierre with one of his biggest needs. Pierre borrows a car from his bishop, but it keeps breaking down. He needs a "solid" car, he said, in case of emergencies and to get to different areas of the parish on "very bad roads."

Kaiser added that residents don't have vehicles, so the priest will give rides when necessary. He is like a bus, taxi and ambulance driver in one, she said.

Adveniat will provide a 10-seat, four-wheel drive vehicle for \$12,000, so Pierre is also trying to raise money for that.

The future

Pierre said the people of Haiti are very divided, and many agree that the recently elected president, Rene Preval, has his work cut out for him. However, his election may mean changes, Pierre said.

"...We have hope. We hope one day Haiti will be better," Pierre said, adding that that could be accomplished with the help of God and the new president.

**URGENT MEDIA ADVISORY on HAITI: March 3, Washington
February 28, 2006
MaximNews**

Hearings: Investigating Human Rights Abuses in Haiti and Role of UN Mission and Member States

Who: Ms. Loune Viaud, 2002 RFK Memorial Human Rights Award Laureate and Director of Strategic Planning and Operations at Haitian medical complex, Zanmi Lasante; Todd Howland, Director, RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights; Bernadin Gracia Tiofa, Peer Community Health Educator with Zanmi Lasante; Dr. Paul Farmer, Founding Director, Partners in Health and Presley Professor of Medical Anthropology, Harvard Medical School; Professor Margaret Satterthwaite, Assistant Professor of Clinical Law, New York University School of Law

What: Inter-American Commission for Human Rights will hold a general interest hearing about the economic and social rights situation in Haiti (focusing on the rights to health, water and food) as well as highlighting the international human rights obligations of Organization of American States Member States. The hearing is open to the public.

When/Where: March 3, 2006 at 3:00pm Padilha Vidal Room B, GSB Building of the Organization of American States in Washington, DC, 1889 F. St, NW, Washington, DC 20006; Contact: Jeffrey Buchanan, 202-463-7575 ext 241

Todd Howland Available for Media Interviews: ToddHowland@MaximsNews.com
MaximsNews Columnist
Todd Howland

Selective Memory at the United Nations:

Human Rights in Haiti

Todd Howland is the Director of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights. The Center supports the human rights work of 34 RFK Human Rights Award Laureates and Social Justice Fellows working in 20 countries.

Howland has also worked on numerous human rights missions with the United Nations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commission of the European Communities, the Carter Center Human Rights Program and many other programs. Please see his full bio.

UNITED NATIONS - 1 March 2006 / www.MaximsNews.com/ Bodies at the United Nations set the world's standards for human rights law, but the UN still chooses to ignore these laws in many of its own activities in places like Haiti.

It pontificates about how sustainable peace can only be achieved through the respect of all human rights or through human security, but it ignores these ideas when structuring its own field operations.

The international community functions under an outdated notion of who is bound by human rights law.

Human rights and humanitarian law are debated intensely at the UN before determining whether it must intervene in a crisis, but once the UN – acting on behalf of its Member States – actually decides to intervene, the relevance of human rights law is quickly forgotten.

When it comes time to actually incorporate its own insights and empirical data about achieving sustainable peace, best practices are set aside in favor of bureaucratic turf and the self interests of individual Member States.

The United Nations seems to be suffering from a case of selective memory. Political and bureaucratic concerns trump human rights obligations in the organization and operation of international interventions because Member States and UN bureaucrats don't think they are bound by human rights law in these situations.

When it comes time to spend money and assign experts to these missions, human rights priorities are often put on the backburner.

For the sake of the mission's bottom line, the human rights situation on the ground is not as important for Member states writing the checks as is the desire to keep missions from becoming too broad.

Donors only want to pay for the blue helmets and the administrative infrastructure to support them. Typically less than 1% of the peacekeeping budget goes toward any project other than sustaining the peacekeeping operation.

The argument goes that any non-peacekeeping spending should be done through voluntary contributions by Member States.

These contributions come from bilateral or multilaterals who will work with government for on average two years to develop a very, very large project so that money can be released and the project implemented.

The problem with this method is that normally the host government which has received peace mission is weak and/or dysfunctional.

These two methods are maintained, while the human rights situation on the ground continues to deteriorate.

Haiti is probably one of the best examples of how adherence to these methods, for bureaucratic and political reasons, has in fact negated the UN's ability to measurably improve Haitians' human rights, regardless of millions of dollars being spent supposedly to benefit them.

The UN Peacekeeping mission to Haiti's annual budget averaged over twice the budget of the government of the Republic of Haiti.

This is not even considering the budgets of other international organizations in Haiti such as the Organization of American States mission, the International Development Bank, World Bank and all the Member States with missions and projects in Haiti or NGOs and corporations.

Together the international community in Haiti is exponentially better resourced than the government. Why should the Republic of Haiti be the only actor held accountable for improving the rights of the Haitian people? Why should Member States and their agents enjoy the moral high ground but no accountability?

There is something wrong with this picture where Member States can pat themselves on the back and say they are going to help poor Haiti and the poor Haitians.

While they may or may not have had a human rights obligation to intervene, the reality is that once they intervene and begin to make promises and spend money, there is no accountability. Good intentions or PR is not enough.

Just as in general principles of law, the Good Samaritan has no obligation to intervene, but if he or she does, the intervener is held to have legal obligations.

Also in general principles of law, we find joint enterprises and joint enterprise liability. The international community is part of the joint enterprise of bringing sustainable peace and the respect of the full spectrum of human rights to Haiti.

There should be shared responsibility and accountability. There is a need to clarify that Member States don't leave their human rights obligations at home and don't eliminate them by acting through sub-contractors like the Organization of American States or the UN.

US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton has a point; the UN needs to be held accountable, but so do its Member States.

It is overdue for Member States to take their human rights obligations seriously and recognize that human rights law provides a framework for government action both inside and outside their own countries.

There is a great need to clarify what human rights obligations exist and how states should be held accountable in an intervention by the international community.

For that reason our organization, with other human rights groups, has brought an action to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights that will be heard this week.

Our position is that each Member State has legal obligations which require them to measurably improve the human rights situation in the countries where they commit resources.

As someone who has worked inside UN efforts to bring peace and improve the human rights situation, having it known and understood that human rights law provides a framework and benchmark for success, would have helped to restructure to maximize our contribution to improving the human rights situation.

This is true for Haiti.

In Haiti there was no hot war. But every day in Haiti people die from preventable disease and from lack of drinkable water and access to even rudimentary health care. Each Member State intervening in Haiti has an obligation to improve that reality.

So much could have been accomplished in the last couple years with modest resources, even less than what was spent; if the international interventions were structured in a way to measurably improve the human rights situation.

While not every project would be a guaranteed success, certainly many projects would have helped to transform lives and give the Haitian people some control and influence over the resources being spent in their name.

This experience in and of itself is mandated by human rights law.

Political participation in the decisions affecting them is a fundamental to human rights law.

Why it can be ignored at a time of crisis is far from legally sound, especially when it is the people's participation and empowerment that can help to build the basis for a sustainable peace through laying the foundation for good governance.

In the end UN's Mission should be about helping the people UN rhetoric claims these interventions are about.

If this is ever going to change, UN Member States can not forget their human rights obligations at the time when the dispossessed of the world are depending on them to remember.

ToddHowland@MaximsNews.com

Threatened CEP Administrator Jacques Bernard Addresses Haiti Democracy Project Seminar
Feb. 28, 2006
Haiti Democracy Project

Date: Monday, February 27, 2006
Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, the Shotwell Room

At this event, Jacques Bernard, administrator of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, gave a low-key, nonconfrontational account of the recent Haitian vote and the security problems which he encountered, necessitating his trip to the United States.

He recalled that when he came aboard the Provisional Electoral Council as its administrator, it had been in existence for eighteen months without having achieved effective administration, and without being able to move forward with electoral preparations. This was in part because the nine members of the commission had split up the work into separate bailiwicks, with no one knowing what the other was doing.

The result was disjointed management, with most people not knowing what was going on.

He recalled that on coming aboard, he brought everyone together. Everything had to be done under one board and with him as director-general. Some have said that he, Bernard, was the candidate of the executive branch imposed on the CEP. This was not true. He was a candidate for the position before the CEP and it was the CEP who elected him to the position. He had the support of the majority of the commission, except for two or three members.

Overall, the successful outcome of the February 7, 2006 election showed that with good management, one could achieve a great deal in Haiti. With three and a half months of preparation, Haiti was able to have decent elections. There were some weak points in the vote. Subsequently, there was, after the turmoil in Port-au-Prince, workers at the tabulation center being intimidated by the crowds, and the chief of security was threatened. Nevertheless, most things went right. The OAS did a good job of voter-registration. When he joined the CEP, the OAS was still registering voters. The CEP was still attempting to qualify candidates.

Mr. Bernard turned to the parliamentary elections, which, according to announcements, would be delayed. He believed that the second round should be easier than the first because the machinery was in place. The late start that was so evident in the first round could be corrected. Also, the problems with the electoral list and photos could be addressed. A third issue also for resolution was that some of the voting centers were simply too big, the density of people crowding in them too great.

He noted that in his absence the electoral commission named a three-person committee to continue his work.

He had decided that under the circumstances, he needed to take a leave of absence as the pressures against him had been undeserved. He had been serving without pay, for the good of the country.

He noted that Haiti had a president-elect and now must have a parliament.

He concluded by noting that Haitians had a predilection to fight among themselves unnecessarily.

Ambassador Raymond Joseph said that he would speak for the Haitian government under instructions from the prime minister. The Haitian government supported Mr. Bernard and was taking the necessary means to thwart those who were disparaging him and to invite him back to resume his work. He hoped that Mr. Bernard could return as soon as Wednesday, March 1.

He appealed to Mr. Bernard not to let his detractors stop him. He recalled the departure of election commissioner Leon Manus in 2000 and said that Haiti could not afford to have another electoral director be forced to leave by mob violence.

John Merrill, chief of Latin American programs in the office of the Secretary of Defense, recalled that he had recently participated in the Haiti Democracy Project's electoral-observation mission in Port-au-Prince as one of several government personnel seconded to election missions. The Department of Defense itself took no position on elections, but he understood that the U.S. government's position on Mr. Bernard's work was exactly the same as had been enunciated by Ambassador Joseph, namely that it wished Mr. Bernard would return as soon as possible as it was essential to hold the second round with minimal delay. He asked Mr. Bernard to specify what he needed in order to return.

Mr. Bernard replied that he could not work with two certain individuals on the commission, who were blocking the commission's work from the inside. One represented a small political party that had received less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the vote; this person didn't want a second election and was using delaying tactics. The other person was expressing pure personal ambition to be the president or controller of the CEP. Mr. Bernard recalled that he had taken away such control because as administrator he needed to run the operational structure. This person was on the commission as a representative of the Catholic Church.

His conditions, therefore, were that the two gentlemen be removed. In their position, they were destroying the process and had put his life in extreme danger. The mob which had invaded the Hotel Montana had portrayed him as a cheater.

He recalled that the count over which he was presiding had found that Preval was receiving 48.9 percent of the vote, as against 11.8 percent for the next contender. He recalled that the commission had invited Preval to monitor the count. The commission had the most modern

means in place against fraud that had ever been used in Haiti. These means included the identity card and fingerprints; as well, the central tabulation center to which the ballots were brought, while still respecting the law requiring the posting of results at the departmental electoral bureaus (BEDs) and communal electoral bureaus (BECs).

Returning to ways to resume the process, Mr. Bernard noted three issues: 1. A delay of parliamentary elections; 2. Disposition of the two gentlemen; and (3) the challenge initiated by Leslie Manigat. In that regard, he noted that the government had recently removed recourse to the supreme court, and so the challenge could only be heard by the institution that had taken the adverse action itself, namely the electoral commission.

In response to a question from a Voice of America reporter, Mr. Bernard stated that civic education was the weakest part of vote preparation. He cited the weakness of training of the poll workers. For example, there was no need for them to sign all the ballots before opening, during which huge lines formed. They only needed to sign a few dozen and could continue to sign them during the day to stay ahead of the voters.

For the voting centers, they had created fifty annexes, and split five of them into two centers. It made ninety-eight changes in all. More changes were needed in the voting centers because the density of the people in them was a problem. The commission had visited 764 of 804 voting centers before the vote.

Asked his opinion of the method of counting of the blank ballots, he noted that there were some people who considered that a violation of the electoral decree. Since he was not a member of the electoral commission, he had not been among those who had made that decision. Since he still was an administrator of the commission, he could not comment on that decision of the commission.

He concluded by noting that Haiti had a new reality. It had a new president-elect, would have a new parliament. With good management, Haiti could achieve a great deal of progress.

The Haiti Democracy Project seminar on February 27, 2006 was chaired by Amb. Ernest H. Preeg, chairman of the project's board of directors and former U.S. ambassador to Haiti.

Attending the seminar were:

Ambassador of Haiti to the United States Raymond Joseph

Ambassador of Haiti to the Organization of American States Duly Brutus

Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to the Organization of American States Roberto Alvarez

Latin America program director of the Office of the Secretary of Defense John Merrill, and member of Haiti Democracy Project's electoral-observation mission (Port-au-Prince)

Belinda Bernard, U.S. Agency for International Development (in personal capacity)

James Morrell, director of the Haiti Democracy Project and member of its recent electoral observation mission (Nord-Est)

Gerald Gourdain of Beltsville, Md., Haiti Democracy Project and member of its electoral-observation mission (Nord-Est)

Elmide Meleance of Hyattsville, Md., Haiti Democracy Project and member of its electoral-observation mission (Port-au-Prince)

Paul Pumphrey, Brothers and Sisters International and member of the Haiti Democracy Project's electoral observation mission (Nord)

The meeting was also attended by representatives of:

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

National Democratic Institute

Partners for Peace

Inter-American Dialogue

United Nations Foundation

Haiti Oye

International Republican Institute

Voice of America

Evangelism Spreads Throughout Haitian Communities

New America Media, News Feature,

Alicia Ng

Feb 28, 2006

BROOKLYN, NY.--Days after Rene Perval was declared the president of Haiti , parishioners of the French Baptist Speaking Church, Église Baptiste d'Expression Française, gathered to attend services in New York. They arrived from all over the region: within Brooklyn and the boroughs, from New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. With a congregation of nearly 4,000, the church, one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in New York City, attracts a diverse and increasingly mobile Haitian population.

On a Saturday morning, men and women dressed in their best church clothes flock to services offered in Creole, French, and English. The popular French service is held in the church's majestic main room and attracts an older crowd, while a group of younger Haitians attend a simultaneous English service in the back room. After service, various ministries, among them a group of doctors and another of teachers, chat up both old and new generations of immigrants. Congregants catch up on the week and savor Creole dishes.

"The gospel is making its way into the Haitian community," says Pastor Jean-Baptiste Thomas, "There are more Protestant churches than Catholic churches serving the Haitian community in New York City."

More than one-hundred Haitian Protestant churches dot the city's landscape, reflecting the growing evangelical movement among Haitians in the United States. New York, followed by Florida, Boston, and Chicago, is still home to the largest Haitian community in the world. But as the cost of living rises in the New York state, Haitians are looking for greener pastures elsewhere-and Protestant evangelicism is moving along with them. Pastor Jean-Baptiste Thomas, a church planter, will travel to Florida and Georgia in the next months to open new churches.

Since the ousting of "Papa Doc," Jean-Claude Duvalier, the Haitian constitution has allowed for religious freedom. Although there is no official, state-sanctioned religion, the country retains its 1860 Concordat with the Catholic Church. According to the U.S. Department of State, the overwhelming number of Haitians are Roman Catholic. Baptists form the largest among the Protestant denominations. Voodoo, decreed a religion in 2003, is also practiced alongside Christianity. But Protestant church leaders say official numbers are misleading--there are no available statistics for Protestant congregations. Instead, the proliferation of new churches and the roster of new faces attest to the spiritual and communal support Haitians of all classes are seeking from evangelical churches.

"I am American and I love New York, but sometimes, I feel by myself. And when I finally meet another Haitian, I feel more comfortable than when I meet a Chinese for example. And the same goes for the Chinese," says a churchgoer.

A radio program and ministry in Haiti help immigrants seek out the church upon arrival on U.S. soil. "They know us in Haiti already because of the work we do," Pastor Thomas says. Although the number of parishioners at his church is decreasing, Thomas says he'd rather see Haitians stay in Haiti.

Haiti struggles through election aftermath

By STEVENSON JACOBS

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Seattle Post Intelligencer

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- The top electoral official flees the country in fear. A presidential vote count is disputed by the winner's two main rivals. Now, a legislative runoff needed to form a new government could be postponed for weeks.

The aftermath of Haiti's elections, which returned former President Rene Preval to office, has been chaotic. But Haitian officials and international observers are reasonably upbeat. After all, Haiti has only had four elections in its bloody, 200-year history.

"I don't think it's as bad as it sounds," said U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst. "The election of Mr. Preval has been universally welcomed except for one or two quarters. It's a result that has generally been accepted by the entire international community."

The Feb. 7 election got off a few hours late - some polling stations did not open on schedule. There were long lines and a few scuffles. That was followed by an agonizingly slow vote count and allegations of voter fraud.

After a week had passed without a declared winner, angry supporters of Preval poured into the streets of the capital, clamoring for their candidate to be named the victor and accusing election officials of trying to steal the vote.

Fearing violence, diplomats pressured election officials to find a compromise. The problem? With 90 percent of the votes counted, Preval had 48.76 percent - just shy of the 50 percent plus one vote he needed to avoid a runoff.

When his two closest rivals refused to concede, election officials met throughout the night until they agreed to divide the unusually large number of blank ballots among the 33 candidates according to the percentage of votes they received.

That gave Preval 44,478 of 91,219 blank ballots, said Gerard Le Chevallier, the U.N. elections chief in Haiti. Preval gained 58,346 more votes after an additional 5 percent of the valid ballots were tallied, giving him 51.21 percent of the vote with 95.78 percent counted.

The remaining results were either lost, stolen or destroyed before they could be processed, Le Chevallier said.

Preval's two closest opponents trailed far behind. Former President Leslie Manigat had 12 percent and Charles Henri Baker, a wealthy businessman, had 8 percent.

Still, both men accused officials of bowing to pressure and undermining the electoral process, with Baker saying the decision "presaged a dark period for Haiti's future."

Robert Maguire, a Haiti expert and professor at Trinity College in Washington, said officials worked within the country's "ambiguous electoral laws" to correct what appeared to be a glaring irregularity with the blank ballots.

"Nobody is going to walk four to six hours to vote just to put a blank ballot inside the box," he said.

Though the solution appeased Preval supporters, tension mounted within the divided nine-member electoral council, which was charged with organizing the first election since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a violent rebellion two years ago.

Two council members denounced the body's director-general, Jacques Bernard, accusing him of "megalomania" and of excluding them from important decisions. Preval supporters accused Bernard of trying to manipulate the vote count to deny Preval a first-round victory - a charge Bernard denied.

Bernard fled the country Feb. 19 after opponents ransacked his farm and diplomats warned him that gang members planned to ambush his car.

"That's when I decided it was time to leave," Bernard said in a telephone interview from Washington. "I'm not used to bodyguards and armored cars, I can't live with it. My life had become in danger."

Bernard and other election officials said the street protests prevented poll workers from finishing their duties, meaning a legislative runoff scheduled for March 19 will likely be postponed.

"The pressure of the street made us lose one week of work and put us behind in our plans to hold the runoff on March 19," electoral council secretary general Rosemond Pradel told local Radio Metropole, declining to say when the runoff might be held.

The delay could force postponement of Preval's March 29 inauguration, since technically he can't take power without a sitting parliament.

During a visit to Haiti this week, Thomas Shannon, assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, urged all sides to work together.

"What's important is that this electoral process keep moving forward. The Haitian people have waited too long already, and it's our hope that this process will meet its timetable and that a new government will be inaugurated soon," he said.

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

U.S. downplays Aristide's possible return

**By STEVENSON JACOBS
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER
Seattle Post Intelligencer
Monday, February 27, 2006**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Haiti's success depends on whether its people can unite behind a new government, a top U.S. diplomat said Monday, calling ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's possible return "one of the least important questions" facing the country.

Thomas Shannon, assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, urged Haitians to support president-elect Rene Preval's government and to help the impoverished nation "meet the tremendous development challenges that it faces."

"The success or failure of Haiti will depend on whether or not the Haitian government and the Haitian people work together," Shannon told reporters during a one-day visit to meet with Preval and Haitian officials.

Shannon's visit came more than a week after Preval was declared the winner of Feb. 7 elections, the first since a revolt two years ago toppled Aristide, a former ally of Preval who still enjoys wide support among Haiti's poor.

Aristide has been living in exile in South Africa, and Preval has said Aristide's return is permitted under the constitution.

But Shannon downplayed that possibility when asked how the United States would react.

"From our point of view, it's one of the least important questions that Haiti faces at this time," Shannon said. "We are focused on Haiti's future, not on its past, and we believe the Haitian people are also."

Shannon said he didn't believe Haitians would take to the streets calling for Aristide's return. "Mr. Aristide has been gone for over two years, and those protests haven't appeared," he said.

Associated Press Writer Jonathan M. Katz contributed to this report from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

How Rene Preval won Haiti's presidential elections

Pravda, Russia

02/28/2006

A week after Haiti's Feb. 7 presidential elections, former president Rene Preval led with 48.76 percent of the vote just shy of the 50 percent plus one vote needed to avoid a runoff. Here's how the runoff was avoided, according to Gerard Le Chevallier, the U.N. elections chief in Haiti:

Preval's supporter poured into the streets alleging fraud, prompting Haitian electoral officials to begin negotiating a compromise at the urging of diplomats.

Electoral officials met into the early hours of Feb. 16 before deciding to divide thousands of ballots left blank for unknown reasons among the 33 candidates according to the percentage of votes they had received. Under the agreement, Preval received 44,478 of 91,219 blank ballots, thus giving him the majority he needed.

Preval gained 58,346 more votes after another 5 percent of the valid votes were tallied, giving him 51.21 percent of the vote with 95.78 percent counted.

The remaining results were either lost, stolen or destroyed before they could be processed, reports AP

Anti-Haitian Bias Rooted in Dominican History

Jeffrey Zahka

World Press Review

February 28, 2006

Haitians are repatriated in a military truck after the Dominican border was closed due to violent demonstrations. (Photo: Ricardo Rojas / AFP-Getty Images)

"Dominicans define themselves in terms of who they are not," said Tamar Thompson, project coordinator of the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Rights. "Globally speaking, there is no place where you score points for being darker."

Thompson's words are reflected in the way citizens of the Dominican Republic describe their racial identities: "oscuro" for the darkest skinned, "canela" for those of medium hue, and "claro" for those with the lightest complexions. All are referred to as "Indians." None are referred to as "black." That word is only used to describe persons from the nation occupying the western one-third of Hispaniola, their shared Caribbean island.

Much of Dominican self-identity is rooted in the Republic's long-standing rivalry with neighboring Haiti. Although Dominicans most closely identify with their former Spanish colonizers, their Independence Day, Feb. 27, celebrates the country's victory over Haiti in 1844. Antecedently, Haiti had ruled the Dominican Republic for 22 years. Although the two countries have not fought any wars since then, this period of subjugation has remained in Dominicans' collective consciousnesses.

Historical Prejudice Against Haitians

"There is a historical anti-Haitian feeling [among Dominicans]. They see Haitians as the enemy; as the people who can eventually take the whole island," says Dr. Miguel Anibal Perdomo, professor of Dominican Identity and Literature at Hunter College in New York City. Added to this collective bias is the view among many Dominicans that Haitians are culturally, economically, and socially inferior. Such stereotyping is characterized by the general disdain for Haitian religious and cultural practices - referred to as "voodoo" - and for the recent election-related violence, joining the international perception of Haiti as a nation spinning out of control.

Part of this anti-Haitian sentiment may lie in the way Dominicans view themselves. As in many Caribbean societies, skin color is often correlated with social and economic mobility. A booming industry has developed around the practice of straightening the otherwise naturally frizzy hair of many Dominican women. According to Cristina Jackson, 34, who moved to New York from the Dominican Republic ten years ago, skin color is a sign of social status: "Marrying a white man or a white woman is often viewed as strategic so as to 'improve the race,'" she said. Indeed, during the regime of Dominican General Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961), immigration from Europe and the United States was openly encouraged as a means of further whitening the population — a melting pot of Spanish, African, and Taino Indian. The upper classes tended to be of European stock.

Deportation Policy Bias

Anti-Haitian bias is most noticeable in the Dominican Republic's deportation policies, aimed not only at both legal and illegal Haitian workers, but also at Dominicans of Haitian descent and children born to Haitian parents. According to Thompson, over 15,000 Haitians have been deported from the Dominican Republic since May 2005. Many were simply seized, then dropped off at the Haitian border; a country which the deportees had likely never visited before. In addition, Haitian mothers are often denied birth certificates for newborn children delivered in Dominican hospitals, further complicating later proofs of Dominican citizenship. According to Thompson, "the Dominican Republic's response to Haitian births is 'we don't grant birth certificates because Haitians are in transit.'" While the Dominican constitution guarantees citizenship to all persons born within the country's borders, the law excludes those who are only briefly passing through on their way to some other destination. In a May 2002 report, Human Rights Watch called upon the Dominican government to establish a standard of due process in expelling illegal Haitian immigrants, while guaranteeing the rights of those granted citizenship due to their birth within the country as set out in their constitution.

Officially, the Dominican government has publicly condemned the systematic abuse of Haitians. Yet such condemnations have done little to allay Haitian anger towards the Dominican government and its president, Leonel Fernandez, whom many blame for the prevailing anti-Haitian sentiment. During his most recent visit to Haiti in Dec. 2005, riots outside the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince forced Fernandez to cut short his visit with interim President Boniface Alexandre.

According to the Christian Science Monitor, between 700,000 and one million Haitians are living illegally in the Dominican Republic. Despite the Republic's 17 percent unemployment rate, most come looking for low-paid, unskilled labor work, mainly in the sugar plantations which line the Haitian-Dominican border. Not unlike the United States, the Dominican Republic is dependent on the availability of cheap labor to meet the demands of a growing economy. However, with the current political turmoil in Haiti, the influx of refugees has swelled in recent months. According to a Feb. 7 report by the Miami Herald, mob violence and random acts of violence against Haitians has been on the rise, due both to competition for jobs and racial discrimination.

Denial of African Roots

Much of this weighs heavily on the minds of transplanted Dominicans in places like New York. "For me, this is very embarrassing," said Perdomo, a medium-complexioned Dominican who arrived in the United States 15 years ago. He believes that the decision to shift away from embracing an African heritage began centuries ago: "There was a sense of 'deculturación' among the African slaves of Hispaniola. [There was] an attempt to erase any vestiges of African culture from the Dominican Republic. We were, in some way, brainwashed and we've become westernized."

Yet, upon arriving in New York, many Dominicans find that they face prejudices similar to those reserved for only the darkest among them in their home country. "Dominicans only discover the truth about not being white when they arrive in New York City," said Perdomo.

Betsy Uribe, 33, who emigrated from the Dominican Republic in Oct. 2004, concurred: "I'm not saying we don't have racial problems; the rich will never allow a black to become president. People in the DR will say 'we don't discriminate,' but then they'll make excuses why they don't want them."

Haiti election woes may delay legislative runoff
Tuesday, February 28, 2006
CNN.com

Haitian President-elect Rene Preval's inauguration could be postponed by a delay in the country's legislative runoff.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- The top electoral official flees the country in fear. A presidential vote count is disputed by the winner's two main rivals. Now, a legislative runoff needed to form a new government could be postponed for weeks.

The aftermath of Haiti's elections, which returned former President Rene Preval to office, has been chaotic. But Haitian officials and international observers are reasonably upbeat. After all, Haiti has only had four elections in its bloody, 200-year history.

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Fearing violence, diplomats pressured election officials to find a compromise. The problem? With 90 percent of the votes counted, Preval had 48.76 percent -- just shy of the 50 percent plus one vote he needed to avoid a runoff.

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"What's important is that this electoral process keep moving forward. The Haitian people have waited too long already, and it's our hope that this process will meet its timetable and that a new government will be inaugurated soon," he said.

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Plan for visit from Haiti's Rene Preval on Thursday
The Dominican Today
February 28, 2006

SANTO DOMINGO. – Haiti's president elect René Preval will come to the country next Thursday and will meet with president Leonel Fernandez to address the course of both governments' relations, within the framework of the former taking office.

Foreign Relations minister Carlos Morales Troncoso made the announcement yesterday on Preval's arrival to the country, who said that it will be today at 5:00 PM when the details of the 36 hour visit are provided.

Regarding the topics of discussions between Fernandez and Preval, Morales affirmed that he expects the leaders to address, in the first place, reactivating the bilateral agenda through the Binational Mixed Commission.

He said that the Dominican Government has been in a dialog with the Haitian provisional authorities, but that now, with Preval taking office, in depth discussion will be possible with the new Haitian leader in the issues of immigration, trade and the environment.

It will be Preval's first visit abroad since being proclaimed Haiti president elect.

Morale spoke briefly with reporters shortly before entering the National Congress, where Fernandez delivered the State of the Nation message for 2005, a traditional review of the Government's accomplishments that year.

3 killed, dozens injured in Haiti carnival

Tue Feb 28, 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - At least three people died and more than 50 have been injured during carnival festivities in Haiti, which has been plagued by political and gang violence, doctors and witnesses said on Tuesday.

Doctors at the general hospital in the capital said a man and two women died on Monday along the parade route in Port-au-Prince.

A 19-year-old man was killed when a float carrying a musical group ran him over. A woman died when she fell from a float and was crushed, and another woman died after being hit with a piece of a broken bottle, according to witnesses.

At least 50 people have been injured since the annual festival began on Sunday.

Hundreds of people have died in political and gang violence in Haiti in the last two years.

In the months leading up to the February 7 election, gunfire in the slums and kidnappings for ransom were a daily occurrence in the capital. But the country avoided a feared explosion of violence in connection with the vote, its first since former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed by an armed revolt in February 2004.

Haiti's interim government disbursed nearly \$2 million to finance the popular annual pre-Lenten carnival.

Haiti: no easy answers

Caribbean nation has a president, but the country remains in shambles

Newsday

Feb. 27, 2006

In a chaotic and flawed election that resulted in a brokered deal, Haiti now has a president. René Préval is a populist whose appeal and support among Haitians was beyond dispute. But what is in serious doubt is whether Préval has a viable country to govern, let alone even the skeletal outlines of a democracy.

An election does not make a democracy, as has become obvious in the Middle East. Without a functional civil society, the institutions necessary to make it work and an economy robust enough to support it, a democracy has no future.

It would take a massive and well-coordinated international effort to return Haiti to a minimal level of functionality - a process that could take years. But the hopes for such an effort coming soon are chimerical. Haiti has no natural resources, no strategic significance and poses no real threat.

It's simple to articulate what Haiti needs: security and order, foreign investment, massive aid, and a ruling class willing to make political compromises with its opposition. But achieving those aims is far from simple, or certain.

Haiti is a failed state, the poorest nation in the hemisphere. Its economy is virtually dead, save for the illegal transshipments of narcotics, which account for 14 percent of all U.S.-bound cocaine. Despite the presence of 7,200 United Nations peacekeepers, gangs of armed thugs make the streets of its capital, Port-au-Prince, almost as dangerous as those of Baghdad. It's the scene of a dozen kidnappings a day. AIDS has ravaged its population. Deforestation, unchecked pollution and lethal mudslides have devastated its environment.

There is a natural and human desire to help Haiti out of its miserable predicament. But there also needs to be a realistic assessment of what it will take to make a difference. That might well include, for instance, a U.S.-led invasion and long occupation. Clearly, there's no stomach for that now. Some problems don't have clear solutions.hN

Canada, Haiti and the struggle for justice: An interview with Patrick Elie
by Derrick O'Keefe
Bay Area IndyMedia
Monday, Feb. 27, 2006

Patrick Elie is a former cabinet minister in the government of Haiti, a leading social justice activist in that country and a fierce opponent of the 2004 coup d'état against the democratically-elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a regime change which was supported by the United States, France, and Canada. Elie is currently on a five-week speaking tour across Canada, visiting over twenty towns and cities. Derrick O'Keefe, co-editor of Seven Oaks, recently interviewed Elie by telephone.

Derrick O'Keefe: Patrick, your visit to Canada was delayed as a result of events in Haiti. And then when you did arrive here you were subjected to rough treatment. Could you explain what happened?

Patrick Elie: I was scheduled to come to Canada on February 14. But, what happened was, with the election and the attempted fraud that followed, the people of Haiti took to the streets and voted with their feet after having voted with their ballots. And, as a consequence, Air Canada cancelled its weekly flight to Port-au-Prince. So I had to start the tour one week late.

I left on February 21 and arrived in Montreal in time for an event at Concordia University. But when I got to Customs I was detained and searched. All my papers were examined – I'm talking about personal papers, and notes, agenda and everything. These were even taken away from me. I insisted on being present when they were going to examine these papers, but they refused. I had a TV camera and they insisted on viewing the film that was in it. They took my laptop. All kinds of stupidity. And of course they couldn't have anything against me, so then the supervisor of Customs came and told me I was cleared but now CSIS wanted to talk to me.

O'Keefe: How long did CSIS take with you and what was their attitude towards you?

Elie: It was an attitude that was not aggressive, I would say. But they wanted to know a bunch of things that were none of their business. They wanted to know who invited me, who my contacts were in Montreal, etc. They also wanted to know where I was staying in Montreal and what was my phone number. I said it's none of your business. They also, and this is even more interesting, asked me about the content of my private conversations with President Aristide since his exile. So after about a half an hour I told them, 'I'm tired of this, I'm already late. So unless you're going to arrest me I'm going.' So I just picked up my luggage and I left.

But because of this I missed my event at Concordia, because I was only able to clear the airport at 10p.m. Fortunately, the next morning we had a press conference in Montreal that was quite well covered.

O'Keefe: The election of René Prével strikes me as yet another amazing victory by the Haitian people. Do you think that the United States, France and Canada, who helped

engineer the regime change in the first place, could have foreseen this outcome? And how will these countries now try to maintain their control over Haiti?

Elie: I think they started to get a bit edgy, first when people started registering [for the election] in higher than predicted numbers, and then when that registration process accelerated after Préval had declared rather late in the process. I believe that, had he declared as early as the other candidates, they would have devised some kind of plan to actually deal with his candidacy.

And when you can't derail or sabotage an election upstream, then what you do is go downstream. After Aristide was first elected in 1990, they went downstream and did the coup. I supposed a coup was not yet in the plans this time, so they went downstream and started tweaking the results. For me, there were two victories by the Haitian people. The first was that swift maneuver around the trap that was this election by coming out in droves to vote on February 7. But even more significant, and more beautiful in my view, was the coming out on February 13 to really state their decision that their vote was not going to be stolen. I think this was even a greater proof of the determination and political savvy of the Haitian people.

O'Keefe: What do you foresee in terms of the results of the National Assembly elections?

Elie: From the partial results of the first round, it looks like the party of Préval was leading everywhere they had presented candidates, and leading by a sizable margin. If the second round is not rigged, and if Préval is able to find some allies, he will have a majority parliamentary block. And that will mean that he will be able to find a Prime Minister who will be cooperative rather than adversarial. But of course this is if there is no further 'hanky panky' with the results.

The Haitian people traditionally give more importance to the presidential election, and tend to slack off when it's time for the parliamentary election. So I hope that Préval's party will really mobilize strongly so that the vote comes out for that second round, and ensure that all the candidates of the platform are in fact elected.

O'Keefe: You mentioned the issue of a new Prime Minister. What happens now to the Lavalas political prisoners, including Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. Is there any chance that he will be released in the near future given the election results?

Elie: I think that President-elect Préval said that this was among the priorities, and that this was an easy enough issue to resolve. I understand that Prime Minister Neptune, I haven't read the letter myself, wrote to Préval saying that the release should happen before the president is inaugurated lest it be construed as a political decision of favoritism rather than a decision based on justice. So I think we should keep on pushing for the de facto regime, which actually jailed these political prisoners, to release them, rather than waiting for President Préval's inauguration.

O'Keefe: Two of the questions on people's minds now with respect to Haiti are: when or will the UN troops leave and when or will Aristide return to Haiti?

Elie: Both questions are to be answered by the elected officials of Haiti. When you are in charge of a country, when you are the President, and the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice of the entire country, you have to weigh whatever action you are going to take. You set the right course, but the rhythm of what you do has to be realistic. So, for example, when you take the UN, their presence has been so massive that to require them to leave in a swift fashion might introduce an element of destabilization. So, I think President Préval has indicated that the mission should change, and I suppose also that a timetable should be established for its fading out. My opinion is that one of the first things that should be done is to get rid of that Jordanian battalion which has been a plague really.

O'Keefe: You are doing an extensive tour of Canada. What is your main message to the people here, and do you see any opening for a real change in Canadian policy towards Haiti?

Elie: There is always a possibility when you have a change in government, but that will only remain a potential for change if the Canadian people don't step in and say 'we don't want our tax money to be used against another people'. And for that to happen, Canadians have to be informed about the real situation, about the real Haiti and the real Haitian people, who have been so misrepresented by the mainstream press and also by the so-called experts on Haiti, who have been proven wrong over and over again by the Haitian people. Reality flies in their face, and yet on CBC and Radio Canada, they are always the ones being given the microphone, when they are completely incompetent and have been proven so by the last election. So, as they are the ones presenting Haiti to Canadians, it's no wonder that either Canadians are indifferent to Haiti or even hostile to the Haitian people. And that allows for the kind of misguided policy that Canada has applied in Haiti over the past five years.

O'Keefe: As minister in Haiti democratic government in the 1990s, you played a historic role in dismantling the notoriously repressive Haitian army that was associated so many dictatorships.

Elie: It's something I did out of necessity. I am a chemist by trade, I have a PhD in organic chemistry. But my country needed me. It needed me in the most difficult jobs, which were the fight against drug trafficking, and then after that in trying to dismantle the state security apparatus, the army, and set up a new police. It had to be done. I had no formal training, but that's the way it is. When you have to learn on the job you learn on the job, and you do the best that you can, and that's what I did.

O'Keefe: I don't know what your relationship is with the president-elect, but do you see yourself ever again taking on government-level responsibilities in Haiti?

Elie: First of all, about my relationship with Mr. Préval, we have known each other for thirty years now, and we have been comrades in the political struggle. There's no problem there. However, I think I'm more useful on the outside pushing in. Because if everybody gets into government, then who is out there to keep watch? I would, however, consider only one position, which is that of Ombudsman. Haiti's judicial system is in such a shambles that I

think I could be helpful while it is being redressed. Meanwhile, a lot of people, especially poor people, are being victimized by this system. And I think the Ombudsman's role can be part of alleviating these problems.

For more information on Patrick Elie's cross-Canada tour, see

<http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca>.

www.sevenoaksmag.com/features/99_feat2.html

Generator sent to Haiti to finish ex-Mountie's mission
Mon, 27 Feb 2006
CBC News

Relatives and friends of a former RCMP officer slain in Haiti late last year have helped complete his final mission by shipping a much-needed generator to an orphanage in the country.

Mark Bourque, 57, was gunned down in an ambush on Dec. 20, 2005. The retired RCMP officer was working with a UN team helping to prepare for the country's elections in January.

FROM DEC. 20, 2005: Canadian peacekeeper shot by Haitian gunmen

Bourque was from Quebec but had several family members in Saskatchewan.

Now his cousin, Doug LaBrash of Saskatoon, has helped complete Bourque's quest to hook up electricity at a Haitian orphanage for girls.

LaBrash told CBC that a friend of Bourque, Raymond Kyling, contacted a generator wholesaler and arranged to have the machinery shipped to Haiti through the office of Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean, who immigrated to Canada from that country when she was a girl.

LaBrash said he still can't make any sense out of his cousin's death.

"It's kind of tragic, that after 34 years with the RCMP ... he wasn't even on a mission that guns should have been involved in," he said.

He called the incident that killed Bourque "just a weird ambush on one of the roads in the morning."

Doctor faced tough decisions in Haiti
By Brock Spencer
Heart of Illinois, WHOI ABC news
Monday, February 27, 2006

Twenty volunteers from the heart of Illinois are back on American soil, after a medical mission to Haiti almost turned ugly

The Friends of the Children of Haiti group was stuck in the Caribbean nation against their will for an extra week, during a period of political unrest.

But, a local doctor said helping patients outweighed all of his fears.

Pictures taken by the group bring back memories of all the lives Dr. Jeremy Ufert and his group touched while in Haiti.

It also reinforces a need to do more.

Ufert, who is currently a doctor at Methodist Medical Group in Pekin, said, "I guess how lucky I am to be alive. Born in this country (United States) and take my experience and basically give it to someone else."

The group's mission was to work at a medical clinic on the south coast of Haiti, inside the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

"You see a lot of scabies and skin infections. You see a lot of basically intestinal worms and things like that in the children and malnutrition," Ufert said.

In a two week period, the Friends of the Children of Haiti group treated more than 2,500 patients.

But, one in-particular is ingrained in Ufert's memory.

"It ended-up that this child basically had liver failure and would be dieing within the next few weeks to months."

The only thing the doctor could do was to temporarily ease the pain of the 7-year-old boy.

Ufert said, "Even though it's a horrible situation, it's one that helps me go back each time. Because I know if I wasn't there, they might not have had anyone."

Thoughts that made it easier to deal with an uprising going-on at the same time.

"Basically, there was a lot of civil unrest and it almost went into a revolution, " Ufert said.

But the group stuck together, in hopes of making a difference in a nation far from home.

Bringing care from Horsham to Haiti

By Lous Sessinger

Phillyburbs.com

The Intelligencer

Feb. 26, 2016

Dr. David R. McPhillips of Horsham was part of a medical aid mission to Haiti when he was a student in 1968. In January he returned to again help the people of the impoverished Caribbean nation.

“In 1968 things were bad,” he said. “Now it's 10 times worse. They even admit they're not a third-world country; they're a fourth-world country.”

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Life expectancy is just 50 years, the literacy rate is only 50 percent and four out of five adults live on less than \$2 a day. It has a long history of government instability. Civil unrest and violence are rampant in some parts of the country. There are few roads and little health care.

McPhillips is an optometrist at Primary Eye Care Associates in Horsham. For many years he has donated his services as a member of Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity of Pennsylvania.

He and volunteer Chris Wurst of Warminster, owner of Tru Brew Coffee Services in Hatboro, have been on approximately 50 VOSH missions between them. The missions have been to places such as Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

Wurst later this week will be returning as a volunteer at VOSH's clinic in the remote rainforests of Guatemala.

And he was part of McPhillips' five-member mission to Haiti last month.

Working in conjunction with Christian missionaries, the team spent three days providing free eye care near the city of Cap Haitien. They saw approximately 1,000 men, women and children during their short stay.

It was kind of an exploratory mission, McPhillips explained. Typically a VOSH mission involves about 15 volunteers who stay for about a week.

In Haiti the team conducted routine vision exams, provided eyeglasses to those who needed them and screened patients for glaucoma and cataracts. McPhillips plans to return to Cap Haitien with a larger mission, including ophthalmologists who can perform cataract surgery, later in the year.

In the long run, he hopes VOSH will be able to establish a permanent clinic there similar to the one it has in Guatemala.

VOSH/PA is an all-volunteer organization. Its mission is to improve the vision care of needy populations in developing countries by providing primary eye care and by partnering with local eye care specialists and like organizations.

The group has served more than 90,000 patients in eight developing countries. It has performed more than 4,000 sight-restoring surgeries and dispensed more than 80,000 pairs of glasses.

VOSH welcomes volunteers for its missions. One doesn't have to be a health care professional to volunteer. It also accepts donations of eyeglasses and tax-deductible cash contributions to help support its work.

For more information about assisting VOSH/PA, call McPhillips at (215) 675-2404 or visit the group's Web site, www.voshpa.org.

*Lou Sessinger is a columnist with The Intelligencer. He can be contacted at (215) 957-8172 or lsessinger@phillyBurbs.com.

Give Haiti united message from D.C.

BY JAMES DOBBINS

Opinion Editorial

Miami Herald

james_dobbins@rand.org

February 26, 2006

For more than a decade, Washington has been bitterly divided on policy toward Haiti. In 1994 the Clinton administration, over virulent Republican opposition, sent U.S. troops into Haiti to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. In 2004, in a move condemned by Democrats, the Bush administration spirited Aristide out of Haiti and sent U.S. troops back into that country in support of the regime that had overthrown him.

During the intervening 10 years, mixed signals from Washington consistently exacerbated Haiti's endemic political divisions. The New York Times recently revealed one such episode, in which representatives of the federally funded International Republican Institute conducted activities in Haiti that, in the view of the U.S. ambassador at the time, undercut his efforts to promote reconciliation between Aristide and his domestic critics. Whatever the truth, the widespread impression was created in Port-au-Prince that influential voices in Washington opposed reconciliation and wished to see a premature end to the Aristide presidency. This month's election in Haiti may finally have broken this pattern. René Prével, who served as Aristide's first prime minister in 1991 and who is still known in Haiti as Aristide's "twin," was declared the winner on Feb. 16 after a retabulation of the vote.

The Bush administration, which would almost certainly have preferred a different outcome, nevertheless persevered in seeking to keep the electoral process on track to deal responsibly with the many charges of massive fraud and to promote an outcome that recognizes the clear choice of the Haitian people. Assuming that Prével ultimately gets the clear backing of a conservative Republican administration in Washington, the divisive and debilitating American debate on policy toward Haiti might finally be brought to a close.

U.S. should take the lead

It is easy enough to see the basis for a bipartisan accord on Haiti. Aristide is gone, and should stay that way. Representing the same constituency of impoverished, uneducated, desperate Haitians, Prével has emerged and won a clear political mandate. U.N. peacekeepers will need to remain for years to come as Haiti builds new institutions for public security and the rule of law.

The United States, as Haiti's near neighbor, should take the lead in helping to build those institutions and in alleviating the poverty of its long-suffering population.

Prével should be encouraged to be inclusive in his choice of cabinet and advisors. Opposition leaders should be encouraged to recognize and accept the election outcome and to work with the new government. No one in Washington should back dissident elements in Haiti that seek

to challenge the results. No federally funded voices in Port-au-Prince should undercut policies being advanced by the American ambassador.

The durability of any such American accord will, of course, depend heavily on how Préval handles his new responsibilities. During his last term of office from 1996 to 2001, American officials found Préval to be personally honest, accessible and willing to act against abuses in his own regime, but rather undynamic and unwilling to press forward with necessary economic reforms. Without Aristide at his elbow, Préval may prove more decisive this time around.

Much responsibility for the lost opportunities of that earlier period also rests with the opposition parties that then controlled the Haitian Parliament and which were unwilling to pass the measures need to qualify for billions of dollars in international assistance. The Haitian Parliament that emerges from this most recent election may well be dominated by those same opposition figures.

Only a united message from both sides of the aisle in Washington has any hope of getting the various Haitian factions to work together for the good of that country. The early call made by President Bush to Préval, congratulating him on his victory and urging him to build an inclusive government, could signal a new era in U.S. Haitian relations.

James Dobbins was the Clinton administration's special envoy for Haiti from 1994 to 1996. He heads the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation.

**Preval Was Not Agent But Observer of Ruin of Democracy
Haiti Democracy Project, on National Public Radio
Friday, February 24, 2006**

HEADLINE: Speculation Builds on how Haiti's Preval Will Rule

ANCHORS: STEVE INSKEEP

REPORTERS: AMELIA SHAW

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

This is MORNING EDITION from NPR News. I'm Steve Inskeep. After demonstrations and allegations of massive fraud, the Haitian government, last week, named Rene Preval as the new President. He's often described as close to Haiti's former President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, but if Aristide returns from exile, it is not clear that President-Elect Preval will roll out the red carpet. Amelia Shaw reports from Port Au Prince.

AMELIA SHAW reporting:

Michele D. Pierre-Louis knew Rene Preval long before he entered politics. Today, Pierre-Louis, the Executive Director of the Open Society Institute in Haiti. Back in the 1980s, she and Preval were bread-makers in a large bakery in downtown Port Au Prince. She says this is where they first met Aristide.

Ms. MICHELE D. PIERRE-LOUIS (Executive Director, Open Society Institute in Haiti): Besides selling bread in the bakery, we used to give to practically all the hospitals, the hotels, the markets and also the priest where I still was because they used to give food to about 20,000 to 25,000 kids a day, and they often used to offer bread to the kids.

SHAW: Pierre-Louis says the bakery was where Preval began his involvement in politics. It was also where he got his first lesson in management.

Ms. PIERRE-LOUIS: He learned a lot of things. He learned to plan because when you were an enterprise with such a fragile item as bread, you have to plan. If you over-produce, you lose. If you under-produce, you lose.

SHAW: When the first coup d'etat occurred in 1991, then President Aristide and Preval, who was Prime Minister at the time, both went into exile. Aristide was reinstated as President in 1994. When Aristide stepped down, Preval took over as President and later made way for Aristide to return to the presidency in 2001. Aristide left Haiti after a violent uprising in 2004. Historian, George Michelle, says that many Haitians remember Preval's years in the palace as a sweet time.

In contrast, to numerous coup d'etat, an aid embargo, and the last two years of instability under the interim government, Preval's political campaign called Hope in Creole, inspired many poor Haitians, who want a future of change, but Michele says Preval also inspired the wealthy, who want a future of investments.

Mr. GEORGE MICHELLE (Political historian): The very wealthy gave him money for his campaign because the very wealthy like security, and they have seen Preval, at times, not to be bad one. So, they are ready to give Preval a second (Unintelligible).

SHAW: Preval's future; however, may be overshadowed by his past alliance with the exiled President, Aristide. Many of Preval's voters are among the urban poor, who say they want Aristide to return. On the other hand, analysts say that Aristide's return could cause instability. The United States has called Aristide a thing of the past, and George Michelle says that Preval may have personal reasons for keeping Aristide out.

Preval's sister was shot while he was president.

Mr. MICHELLE: She was shot. She was shot by Aristide's henchmen. The driver was killed, and she was badly wounded, but she survived, fortunately--and Mr. Preval did not appreciate that.

SHAW: Michelle says a number of mysterious murders occurred to people close to Preval during his presidency, and he was never able to investigate. Among those killed was Preval's close friend and radio journalist, Jon Dominique. But James Morrell, Director of the Washington-based think tank Haiti Democracy Project, faults Preval for being too passive.

Mr. JAMES MORRELL (Director of Haiti Democracy Project): He presided over the destruction of Haiti's democracy. He was not the agent of it, he was just a passive observer of it.

SHAW: Morrell says Preval's only positive achievement was that he served out his term without being overthrown or exiled. But, he says Preval has well-respected advisers and has made overtures to business leaders and opposition parties. Michele Pierre-Louis says if Preval is still the same bread-maker he was as a young man, Haiti might have a chance.

Ms. PIERRE-LOUIS: He really would like to do something for the country. He really would like to prove himself on his own.

SHAW: She says Preval wants to be judged by his actions and look into the future, but to do so, he is going to have to reckon with his past.

For NPR News, I'm Amelia Shaw in Port Au Prince.

What are the challenges that Préval must face?

By Gotson Pierre

February 23, 2006

AlterPresse

A week after the proclamation of his victory in the 7 February elections, René Préval is taking stock of the expectations awaiting him in the context of a current situation marked by a problematic political transition and recurring social and economic problems.

At his first press conference on 22 February, the new head of state admitted, "I am frightened to see the passions aroused by the presidential campaign, the election of a president, and the hopes that the population have in this president."

Préval is trying to break with the tradition of an Executive making fabulous promises, knowing without doubt that he will be judged on his results in a context that bares no comparison with his first stint as President between 1996 and 2001.

"The only promise that I have made to the people is that I will work with all my strength for the good of the country and will make sure that there is no corruption in the public administration or the State."

The president-elect proposed two essential missions for himself: the establishment of the institutions provided for in the Constitution to create stability in the country, and the creation of the conditions necessary for private investment in order to create jobs. "I believe there is a general consensus around these objectives," he said.

However it is certain that popular expectations go a lot further than the objectives announced by Préval. A number of organisations from the popular sector have already made it clear they want to go beyond a simple respect for the popular will as reflected in the elections.

Taking encouragement from the mobilisation that followed the 7 February elections, the Mouvement Démocratique Populaire (MODEP), the Tèt Kole peasant organisation, and the youth group Solidarite Ant Jèn (SAJ), suggest that the "popular masses are searching for a real alternative."

"Let's not forget our demands," state these organisations, insisting that "the same errors committed in 1990 cannot be repeated" (a reference to former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's popular mandate.)

The demands put by MODEP, Tèt Kole and SAJ include opposition to the "foreign occupation", which holds the country under the yoke of the great powers.

By "foreign occupation", these organisations mean the presence of the UN mission (Minustah) composed of more than 8,000 troops and police from 40 countries.

The popular sector also intends to put pressure on the new administration to detach itself from the Interim Cooperation Framework (Cadre de Coopération Intérimaire, CCI), which the interim government agreed with funders in 2004.

The organisations from the popular sector are still critical of the fact that the people's aspirations were not taken into account by this agreement, which applies until December 2006 and which is based on neo-liberal objectives.

For example, these organisations want the government to act directly to lower the prices of essential commodities. They also want a "genuine agrarian reform" in which the land is controlled by "those who work it."

The agrarian reform carried out by Préval during his first presidency is often described as a "parody of an agrarian reform". Land was given over to peasants in the Artibonite, who called in vain for a proper structure to the process.

Major reforms of the health service and of the police and judiciary are expected. "All these questions must be addressed by the government acting in an autonomous manner", suggest MODEP, Tèt Kole and SAJ.

But based on the experience of his first presidency, Préval wants to convey the message that being President doesn't mean he can open all the doors, and that actions to be undertaken must be realistic.

The President has "limited power" and his room for manoeuvre is "reduced" without collaboration with a strong Parliament, stated Préval.

"If there is not a strong Parliament where cohesion reigns, the President cannot respond to the passions and the hopes that the people have in him", predicted Préval.

Will the new head of state be able to decide on the minimum objectives in agreement with the Haitian nation, including the popular movement, and taking into account the desires of the majority population?

(Translated from French by Charles Arthur)

www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org

'Haiti voted for my return'
Jean Jacques Cornish
Mail & Guardian, South Africa
24 February 2006

Two years after being spirited out of his troubled Caribbean home, Jean-Bertrand Aristide maintains that his love affair with the Haitian people is as hot as ever.

The former priest, who has been sheltering in South Africa since May 2004, announced this week that he's going home. He cannot say exactly when. That is being negotiated with his political protégé Rene Garcia Preval, who won the February 2 presidential poll.

Even though Aristide said he wanted nothing to do with that election, he now maintains the vote was for his return.

"There is a love story here," Aristide said in an interview with the Mail & Guardian this week.

"When we look at the people of Haiti, it's clear there is a love story. If they love me and express that love for the past 10 years, the way they are dying for me to be back, it's because there is truth. The love story is linked to truth. The people are not dumb. If you are lying they will smell it. If you are telling the truth they will die for you."

Aristide's Lavalas party spurned the elections because its leadership was either jailed, in hiding or in exile. Now, he accepts the outcome of the poll.

"I congratulate the people of Haiti and president-elect Preval because what happened on February 2 was very clear: the people went to vote because they wanted to organise a referendum against my kidnapping in 2004. They said no to the coup, no to the kidnapping. They voted for my return by voting for Preval.

"It was said by the people voting, and it was very clear, they said no to the coup and yes to democracy."

Was he pleasantly surprised with the outcome?

"The Haitian people are bright. Seventy per cent are illiterate, but they are not dumb. They know what to do. You're talking about a people who always fought for their dignity.

"Voting for them is a matter of dignity. They don't accept people through a coup d'état; destroy their votes, because it means destroying their dignity. So fighting democratically for their dignity, they went to vote. That is why they voted for my return.

"So my return is not a matter of one single person. It transcends one single person. It's a matter of the people whose rights have been so often violated through coups d'état -- 35

coups in 200 years of independence, it's too much. The people of Haiti said we want to move from democratic elections to democratic elections and not from coup to coup."

Aristide is being consulted on the date and terms of his return. But the matter is really in the hands of Preval and the United Nations, charged with peacekeeping on the island.

France and the United States are also involved. They have misgivings about his return, despite his assertion that he wants to be a teacher rather than a politician.

Aristide retorts: "I think because they know what democracy means and they talk so often and so much about freedom and democracy they will respect the rights of my country.

"The people in 1990 voted for me as their president. A coup happened in 1991. The same people voted for me in 2000. Another coup happened in February 29 2004. The people again in February 2006 voted for my return. They know about their rights and they expect others to respect those rights."

His undertaking to stay out of politics and become a teacher is less than rock solid. "I enjoy teaching. Before being elected twice I was teaching. Now I am at the University of South Africa. Back home I will be investing in education. When I was elected we had 34 public secondary schools in my country. Now we have 138. Which means investing in education was part of my dreams.

"In my country, where we only have 1,5 doctors for every 11 000 people, we founded a university and we had 247 medical students, who were unfortunately chased away from the university when the coup happened.

"So investing in education is one of the best ways to promote human growth. Without human growth you will not have a balanced world. Economic growth is necessary. Human growth is also necessary. Education is part of that.

"Just look at Nelson Mandela. He spent 27 years in jail. When he came out, that was wonderful for him to help his country to move in 1994 from apartheid to democracy. Being a former president he continues to serve his people without being a president. I will continue to serve my people through education.

"In Haiti earlier this month Bishop Desmond Tutu said it reminded him of the old days of apartheid.

"I agree with him because although Haiti was the first black independent country in the world since 1804, today we still have walls of apartheid in Haiti dividing the 1% of the population controlling 51% of the wealth, while the huge majority are living with less than \$1 a day.

"So South Africa is an inspiration for many countries, including Haiti, where we can have rich and poor, government and civil society, joining hands in the spirit of Ubuntu and dialogue and

justice and building not walls of apartheid anymore but bridges of solidarity. So I am more than happy to keep investing in education.

“If politics has to do with serving the people, you can be elected president and you serve your people. I did that. As you can be a normal citizen and you keep serving your people and I will do that.”

Preval's mission

Almost a week after he was declared president, Rene Garcia Preval broke his silence on Wednesday, telling the press about his presidential mission, writes Amy Bracken.

In his first speech as president-elect, Preval did not bask in his glory. On the contrary, he emphasised that he could not hold up Haiti by himself. He would need a complete government, and more.

“I want to remind the Haitian people of the limited power of the president ... If Parliament is not strong and cohesive, the president can't respond to all the problems, to all the hopes we see the people expressing,” he said. “It's the two chambers that ratify the prime minister, and it's the prime minister who chooses all the civil servants.”

Preval said he noticed a lack of enthusiasm for the legislative elections. “I'll repeat,” he said. “Go and vote for your legislators.”

Haitians voted for members of Parliament the same day they voted for president, February 7, but a second, run-off round will likely be necessary for every post next month, according to election officials.

Preval said Haiti's future presidency will have two fundamental missions: first, to build institutions that are provided by the Constitution, such as municipal and national assemblies, which appoint judges. “The second mission is to create the conditions for private investment to create jobs,” he said. -- IPS

**UN force should stay in Haiti for 2 or 3 more years: UN
China View
February 25, 2006**

SANTIAGO, Feb. 24 (Xinhuanet) -- Juan Gabriel Valdes, head of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti said on Friday that UN police force should remain in the Caribbean country for another two or three years.

"The fundamental aim of the UN in Haiti is to consolidate the development and professionalization of an autonomous police force, which will allow the country to have its own state security forces, and no longer need outside help," Valdes told La Segunda newspaper.

Valdes, a former Chilean Foreign Minister, met with Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and the current Foreign Minister Ignacio Walker on Thursday to discuss how Chile can contribute to Haiti's future.

Chile's contingent is authorized to stay until July 30, and so president-elect Michelle Bachelet and the next session of legislators, who take office on March 11, will have to decide whether the Chileans will stay any further.

"The fundamental thing is to maintain international support, which will need troops at first," said Valdes. "Later technical and financial support will be needed for around 20 years," he added.

Haiti's president-elect, Rene Preval, will also have to give his permission for the UN forces to stay, once he is in power, Valdes said. Enditem

Tourists flock at Haiti's most colourful carnival
Zee News, India
February 25, 2006

Jacmel, Feb 24: Haiti's most traditional and colourful Carnival celebration kicked off over the weekend with thousands pouring into the streets to celebrate.

The city of Jacmel (located some 300 kilometres south of Port-au-Prince) hosts the yearly event, which draws visitors from all over Haiti and the world.

The festivities were slightly delayed this year due to the recent controversy over the presidential election, but the city was bustling with activity on Saturday (February 18) as workers raced to finish.

One of the highlights of Jacmel's celebration are the elaborate masks that dancers wear as they parade down the streets and artists were still working on them late Saturday afternoon.

Bazelais Omel has been making Carnival masks for 25 years in Jacmel. This year he had a wide array, some reflecting themes of the ongoing violence in Haiti and others reflecting different religious aspects and politics.

But whatever the subject of his masks, Omel said he takes great care to make sure they're environmentally-friendly.

"We used the cement bags that people throw on the streets to make masks. And boxes we use to make masks. We collect the plastic boxes that are in the street to make the masks. All of this is to decrease the amount of garbage. Because garbage is not good for us, it causes health problems so we are always looking for ways to decrease the amount of garbage," he explained.

The festivities began on Saturday afternoon with a short Carnival parade of children, and then culminated on Sunday with the main parade.

Floats, dancers and music filled the streets in the boisterous celebration while spectators watched from stands above.

Jacmel is a city in southern Haiti with a population of some 26,000. Founded in 1698, it is the capital of the department of the Southeast.

Bureau Report

Caricom could soon readmit Haiti, says Franklyn
Jamaica Observer
Observer Reporter
Friday, February 24, 2006

Franklyn... says stability will soon return to Haiti
Mandeville, Manchester - Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Delano Franklyn has expressed strong optimism that following recent elections, Haiti will soon be re-admitted to the Council of the Caribbean Community (Caricom).

"Even though there are challenges, from all indications it would appear that Haiti, based on the outcome of (the) election, will once again settle down to some form of democratic stability," Franklyn told the Rotary Club of Mandeville during a luncheon meeting at the Golf View Hotel on Tuesday.

"That being so, I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that Caricom Heads will at some point in time, quite soon, be re-inviting Haiti to once again take their seat in the council of the Caribbean Community," he added.

Haiti, admitted to Caricom in July 2002, was suspended from the Council in 2004 following the collapse of the elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The latter left Haiti in controversial circumstances, and after spending several months in Jamaica, went into exile in South Africa where he still lives.

Another former president, Rene Preval, has been declared winner of the recent Haitian elections. News reports suggest that Preval is contemplating allowing Aristide's return to Haiti.

On Tuesday, Franklyn said he was "looking forward to the day when, having accepted the invitation to again become part of the Caricom Community, Haiti through it's president, will also add it's signature to the Caricom Single Market and Economy."

On February 1, Jamaica, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago signed the declaration of entry to the Single Market aspect of the CSME, a seamless trading bloc that will allow the free movement of labour, services, skills and goods across the Caribbean.

Haiti: living on the edge
Mariano Aguirre
24 - 2 - 2006
Open Democracy UK

Haiti's peaceful election has left unresolved the question of whether United Nations involvement in the country has been success or failure. Mariano Aguirre assesses the record and looks ahead.

Haiti's legislative and presidential elections on 7 February 2006 were held in a climate of tension, even though there were few major irregularities and less violence than seen in Haiti over the last two years. The supporters of René Prével, the ex-president who nearly won an absolute majority, organised demonstrations to demand that their leader be declared the winner with 48.7% of the votes, thus ensuring that a second round of voting would not be held. The electoral committee and the Brazilian government (which leads the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, [Minustah] decided to be flexible in their interpretation of the electoral laws and awarded victory to Prével to avoid more serious incidents).

At the same time, the Spanish defence minister José Bono – giving only forty-five days' notice – announced on 10 February that he is ordering the return to Spain of 200 Spanish troops who form a component of Minustah. The withdrawal of the Spanish forces will pose a problem for the UN, as it will weaken a very complex and controversial mission and leave Haiti more insecure.

The state's many crises

Haiti is the poorest state in Latin America. It has 8.5 million inhabitants, four out of ten of whom are under fourteen years old. Economic growth has been negative for the last twenty-five years and Haiti ranks 157th out of 177 countries on the UN development index. Most of the population lives on less than one dollar a day, and thousands of citizens try to emigrate, especially to the United States and Canada.

Haiti's colonial legacy is to blame for much of its structural instability: slavery, a corrupt and repressive mulatto elite (5.4% of the population) that ruled over the black population (94.2%) from independence in 1804 until the US occupation (1915-34). When instability made foreign companies lose interest in Haiti's cheap labour it suffered economic bankruptcy. Its agricultural sector was displaced by competitors and prices either fell (coffee and sugar) or hit the northern countries' tariff barriers. Moreover, tourism was hit by the rise of HIV/Aids and the unstable political climate.

Rural poverty, environmental destruction, mass emigration and internal migration towards teeming cities are all part of life in Haiti. In post-colonial times, Haiti was run by an alliance between the army and the business elite. Now the capacity of the state to provide services and guarantee rights and employment has collapsed. Land is neither productive nor competitive, the elite is fragmented (and part of it has fled the country) and the Lavalas movement, led by former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, brought the lower middle classes

into the circles of power. As in some African states, the impact of integration in the global liberal market, corruption and internal institutional fragility has broken down post-colonial alliances, and violence has become a means of fighting for ever-scarcer resources.

France, the ex-colonial power, has lost interest in Haiti. For the US, Haiti matters because of the Haitian balseros (rafters) who arrive in Florida and compete for resources with the Cuban community. Black members of the United States congress also lobby on behalf of the mainly black population in Haiti, factors that led to the US intervention in 1994.

Haitian migrants send back an estimated \$1 billion dollars in remittances every year. In 2000, the US froze economic aid, intensifying the country's crisis. The economist Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University (then too an advisor of Kofi Annan) accused Washington of fomenting the Haitian crisis by backing a criminal opposition against the president-elect, Aristide.

Aristide gained strong popular support during his years fighting against "Baby Doc" Duvalier's dictatorship. He was elected president and took office in February 1991, but was ousted seven months later. The US invasion put him back in power in 1994 but his popularity waned. His government (in which René Préval served as prime minister) was plagued by corruption, internal power struggles and repression. To make matters worse, Colombian narco-traffickers began to use Haiti as a transit route to the US. The police forces became deeply corrupt.

Since Aristide – for some an anti-imperialist leader, for others a dictator – was forced to step down by the US and France in February 2004, the country has been governed by an interim government. At the same time, the UN Security Council sent Minustah; the stabilising mission has succeeded in organising the elections but has not been able to stop the increase in internal instability, violence, the growth of armed groups or the economic crisis.

The mission and "diffuse" conflict

Minustah's force is 9,000-strong: 7,265 soldiers under Brazilian command and a 1,741 strong police force led by Canada. It is the first time that a Latin American country (Brazil) has led a peacekeeping operation on the continent and, moreover, one in which, other countries of the region are participating (including Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Ecuador) alongside Nato members. It is also the first time that Spanish and Moroccan forces have collaborated in a mission. The Chilean lawyer Juan Gabriel Valdés has political charge and the UN Security Council extended the mandate by six months on 14 February 2006.

In some Latin American circles, the UN mission is considered a hasty undertaking designed to satisfy US needs and give an opportunity for Brazil, Argentina and Chile to compensate for their governments' rejection of Washington's position on Iraq. It is also argued that its presence has exacerbated Haiti's problems. On top of that, Aristide's opaque departure seemed to some to resemble a coup.

But for several Latin American governments, the operation has proved to be a way of managing a crisis on the continent, especially in a country where the US has traditionally intervened. At the same time, the intervention has opened the debate on interventionism in

Latin America: this is good news for some and bad for others who fear that the classification of some states as "failed" or "fragile" leaves the door open to interventionism and that this is a dangerous step for Latin American sovereignty.

Another frequent criticism is that the UN multinational force has taken sides with the group opposed to Aristide, by fighting against the latter's followers and it has not done anything to disarm the militias formed out of the dissolution of Haiti's armed forces.

In contrast to what has happened in other UN operations over the last fifteen years, Minustah's mandate has been more widely interpreted, and this has entailed the use of force on occasions. In some UN circles it is considered to be an "explorative" mission, combining peacekeeping negotiated between armed actors with the imposition of peace – in other words, using force without the consent of those actors. The UN in New York speaks of a "diffuse conflict, which is not a case of separating two groups but rather of multiple actors who establish mobile and changing alliances."

However, other UN circles consider that the mission was improvised, and that instead of a peacekeeping operation, an international police deployment would have been necessary in 2004, as well as significant investment in development resources for immediate needs. This should have been combined with an effort in promoting reconciliation between the groups in conflict, paying special attention to deactivating the political view of "winners take all" that is so dominant in Haiti.

This critical view considers that the UN mission should have centred its attention on rebuilding the police force, so as to break the self-fulfilled prophecy that the international forces cannot leave because there is no local security. A source who prefers not to be identified said: "We have a Kosovo-style mission with civilian officials, but we do not run the towns and we do not have experts in dialogue and reconciliation."

A shortage of appropriate equipment and funds compounds this difficult mandate. As a result Minustah is being criticised for not disarming Haitian society: it is estimated that around 390,000 short weapons are in the hands of citizens and *chimères* (violent bands) who carry out an average of ten kidnappings a day. Amnesty International has indicated that the UN should improve the protection of its citizens, carry out disarmament and prevent impunity by taking to court those responsible for human-rights violations.

The problem is that weapons are a means of protection for the rich and of earning a living for the poor. And this means that disarmament must be accompanied by options and incentives to encourage people to disarm. On the other hand, the state system is on the verge of collapse and there is no provision for services or the rule of law. The UN under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, considers that the forces should move from a peacekeeping mission to a peacebuilding mission, beginning with areas such as the legal system.

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan's idea is that there should be long-term engagement in the country for at least a decade. Haiti could also be one of the cases where the Peacebuilding

Commission, which was created by the United Nations in September 2005, could begin to function. However, in general, the trend regarding interventions in fragile states over the last decade and a half has been to go in with a fast exit strategy; this approach is apparently cheaper and less risky but not necessarily more efficient.

The politics of aid

In July 2004 the international donor conference promised \$1.25 billion to Haiti. Around 50% of this has been made effective, though Oxfam criticised the fact that \$422 million were in the form of loans and that this would increase Haiti's external debt. José Bono complained about international tardiness in channelling the aid and said that if the trend continued he would indeed withdraw Spanish troops.

In UN circles, however, they remember that big projects need time. Damián Onses Cardona, Minustah spokesperson, explained in a telephone call that Haiti is receiving aid from important projects but that it needs "other mechanisms for more immediate projects" that would satisfy people's urgent needs and create trust.

Until 2006, Haiti received \$165 million annually in aid, but this was frozen because of accusations of corruption. In 2004, Spain placed Haiti on its list of priority countries and committed itself to donating €4.1 million of development assistance over the next two years; the areas given priority were governance, water supply, food security and education.

The UN considers that Spain and Morocco are fulfilling an important role. At the same time, it is very unusual for a state to give such short notice before withdrawing its troops; usually between nine months and a year's notice is given so as to avoid logistical problems. The reasons that led Bono to evacuate the troops are not officially known. The possibilities are numerous: a perception that the mission has failed, that the Spanish army prefers to take part in Nato rather than UN missions, or a fear of casualties that could be exploited by domestic political opponents of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government.

Despite the six-month extension of Minustah's mandate by the UN Security Council on 14 February, the judgment must be that – as with other post-cold-war UN missions – Minustah has not achieved its goals. This failure could now have serious consequences. The total withdrawal of troops could give rise to chaos or perhaps a temporary return of US troops and the resistance of armed groups. This in turn could lead to a new cycle of foreign forces leaving, internal insecurity and collapse, leading to further intervention. The scenario would be a Somalia or Afghanistan in the Caribbean.

René Préval's government may succeed in stabilising the situation, perhaps with the presence of UN troops under a different mandate more sensitive to some of the criticisms, and with the support of foreign donors. If it does not, Haiti will fall into another wave of violence. This will reopen the debate as to whether fragile countries such as this one should be placed within a protectorate system established by the international community, either formally or informally, for a defined period. This scenario, however, is rejected in Latin

America, and it does not arouse much enthusiasm in the international community. For the foreseeable future, Haiti seems destined to continue living on the edge.

Haiti political prisoners relieved at new president

24 Feb 2006

Source: Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Several jailed allies of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide hope the victory of his one-time supporter, Rene Preval, in the presidential election will mean freedom for them.

Former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert and a pro-Aristide political activist and singer, Annette Auguste, are considered by some human rights groups to be political prisoners.

Speaking or writing from jail, they said they expected the interim authorities, which have ruled Haiti since Aristide fled an armed revolt in 2004, to release them before the new government takes office at the end of March in the troubled Caribbean country.

"We hope that the interim government, which has put us in jail for political reasons, will have the decency to release us before the inauguration of President Preval," Privert told Reuters on Friday.

"If not, we will address the same demand to the new administration of President Preval because as political prisoners, it is the government which has to free us," said Privert, wearing a white T-shirt and blue shorts as he sat at a small prison table with a laptop by his side.

Preval was named president a week after the Feb. 7 election when thousands of angry supporters began to protest against suspected fraud that seemed aimed at denying him a first-round election victory.

Fearing a blood bath and urged on by diplomats, election authorities changed the way they counted blank ballots to give Preval a first-round victory. He was opposed by the same rich elite who helped oust Aristide and supported by the poor masses who provided the backbone of Aristide's political power.

Privert and Neptune have been jailed for nearly two years after being accused of being involved in a massacre of around 50 people in Feb. 11, 2004, near the northern town of St-Marc. Few bodies were ever found, however, and both men have denied the accusations.

The judge who investigated the allegations indicted Privert because he failed to condemn the massacre. That was sufficient evidence, the judge said, that Privert supported the killings.

Neptune, who served as prime minister under Aristide, has long said his arrest was politically motivated, a charge the interim government denies.

"It's not the justice system that has thrown Annette Auguste, all the other political prisoners and myself in jail," Neptune wrote in a Feb. 21 letter to President-elect Preval.

"It's the machinery of injustice, set up by the government resulting from the coup, which has committed this criminal act. They should be released way before the government, elected by the majority of the people, takes office," Neptune said.

Neptune, and Father Gerard Jean-Juste, another leading figure in Aristide's Lavalas Family Party, were both considered likely favorites to win the presidency if they had not been jailed. Preval entered the race at the last minute.

Preval this week said the constitution allowed the president to pardon people prosecuted for political reasons.

But Auguste, known as So Ann and jailed since May 2004 on vague charges of involvement in a fracas at a university in the capital, said that was not what she wanted.

"Someone who is pardoned is someone who has committed a crime or other wrongdoing," she told Reuters from the women's prison in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Petionville, wearing a green dress and sitting on a small chair outside her cell.

"I am a political prisoner. I did not do anything wrong."

Dominican-Haiti Border Troops Stay
Prensa Latina
February 24, 2006

Santo Domingo, The Dominican Republic intends to keep the military build up along the border with Haiti, said Armed Forces Chief, Maj. Gen. Ricardo Estrella.

Estrella said the goal of "Operation Vaquero" is to deter transborder arms, drugs, people trafficking and cattle and car theft, adding that the positive results have encouraged his decision.

The General said he intends to make the operation permanent along the near 243 km common border as long as he remains head of the Armed Forces.

mh/emw/prl/mf

Who Benefits from Aristide's Return to Haiti?

Friday 24 February 2006

By Daniel Simidor

Submitted to AlterPresse on February 23, 2006

Aristide's decision to return to play the Nelson Mandela of Haitian politics, even before Preval's inauguration, is very destabilizing. Even in a country with such strong and stable institutions, Mr. Mandela's status as paramount chief of South African politics places him above Mbeki - sort of the relationship between the CEO (Mbeki) and the Chairman of the Board (Mandela) in many corporations. Fortunately for South Africa, the real Mandela has retired for good and gone back to private life.

Aristide on the other hand is actively undermining Preval's authority, trying to usurp his popular mandate even while claiming to respect him as president. "The Haitian people saw the vote as a non-violent way to have me back," Aristide proclaims from his exile in South Africa. "It was a vote for me, of course. The people said it clearly, people voted the way they did because they want me back."

Let's face it, Aristide means trouble. If his sole intention were "to continue to invest in education," he would have waited at the very least after the investiture of the new government to make his announcement. With this move, Aristide clearly intends to back Preval into a power-sharing situation where he will keep the upper hand. The agenda is no longer what Preval could or couldn't do for Haiti, but how much power Aristide and his followers will be able to wrestle for themselves.

Sadly, with the new elections and with Preval as the new president, Haiti finally had a chance to begin addressing the pressing issues of social justice and social peace at the heart of the current crisis. Different social strata were beginning to move, however grudgingly, toward political consensus, or at least toward some truce. A new spring would soon blossom for the "first Black Republic...the poorest country in the Americas," as the French *Le Monde* puts it.

But Aristide had no intention of Haiti going anywhere without him. And yet the man who threatened in his New Year message not to allow "them" to replace his "guts" with their "straw," is little more than a puppet in this macabre game where no one in Haiti, not even Aristide himself, is likely to be a winner.

The big question then is who is pulling the strings? Those who don't want Preval's victory to go to his head? Those who don't want him to feel too independent, to show too much initiative? In other words, those who would allow Preval to be Haiti's new president only if he can be made to toe the line, if his government is divided and weak, dependent on the so-called international community for its survival?

The best way to keep those crazy dreams of sovereignty and human development from messing with the program for Haiti, as outlined in the Interim Cooperation Framework (CCI) and other important documents and UN resolutions, is to keep Haitians at each other's throats. Aristide's return at this juncture accomplishes just that.

Daniel Simidor
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Bush congratulates Préval, stresses support for Haiti

President Bush called Haitian President-elect René Préval to congratulate him and talk about aid and drug trafficking.

BY PABLO BACHELET

pbachelet@miamiherald.com

Miami Herald

February 24, 2006

WASHINGTON - President Bush phoned Haitian President-elect René Préval Thursday to congratulate him and discuss economic aid and drug trafficking issues, the White House said Thursday.

White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said Bush told Préval the United States had a ``a continuing interest in the democratic and economic success of Haiti."

"The two also briefly discussed cooperating in Haiti's economic development and the fight against the illegal drug trade," Perino added. Haiti is one of the major transit points for Colombian drugs heading to U.S. streets.

The call was a show of support for Préval, who was once close to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide has accused the administration of forcing him out of office during a 2004 armed revolt -- a charge Washington denies.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a House panel last week that the Feb. 7 election was a ``chance for a country that has had too few chances, and I think you will see that we will be looking at what resource needs we have for Haiti, as this new government gets up and running."

The United States is Haiti's top foreign donor, having allotted nearly \$400 million since Aristide was overthrown.

Bush's 2007 budget request contains mixed news for Haiti.

It proposes a 22 percent cut in two U.S. Agency for International Development programs, to \$39 million, leading some members of Congress to urge that aid be reinstated. The administration also wants to trim anti-drug trafficking aid from \$15 million to \$10 million. But it also proposes a 34 percent increase in assistance for HIV/AIDS initiatives, to \$63 million. The administration has also declined to support congressional initiatives to provide special concessions to Haiti's textile industry.

Latortue appeals for attention to Haiti's plight
Radio Jamaica
February 23, 2006

Haiti's interim Prime Minister has asked the international community not to neglect the country's economic and social needs just because elections have been held. Gerard Latortue made the plea during a speech to the United Nation's Security Council.

Meanwhile, Haiti's former leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide says the results of this month's presidential election show that the voters love him and will welcome his return from exile in South Africa.

Area Residents Make Medical Mission To Haiti

by Jerry Keuhn

Platte County Citizen

Trenton Republican Times, Missouri

February 23, 2006

Editor's Note: The following article was written by former Trenton resident Jerry Keuhn, accompanied his father, Dr. J.A. Keuhn of Trenton, on a medical mission to Haiti. The article was first published in the Platte County Citizen on Feb 8.

Look a child in the eyes and it doesn't matter where in the world you are or where the child is from – the eyes really are the windows to the soul, as the old saying goes.

And the eyes of children will dance with enchantment, laugh with humor, yearn with earnestness and cry with bewilderment regardless of race, gender, financial status or environment. After all, kids are kids are kids – no matter where you go – and that point was never so evident to me as it was during a recent trip I took to Haiti. This was true even as these children are living and growing up in some of the worst conditions known to the human race.

First, a little background: Haiti, a Caribbean island country located less than a 100 miles from both Cuba and Jamaica, is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and was the third poorest in the entire world just a few years ago. It is the oldest republic in the Western Hemisphere other than the United States and as a former slave state, has an almost entirely African-American population.

Haiti used to be a popular tourist destination, but political unrest during the past couple of decades has had crippling consequences – most notably trade embargos from the United States that shut down most industry and tourism, and former President Aristide's removal from the government within the past couple of years. While most were not sad to see Aristide ran off, since then the political turmoil has gotten even worse, with a presidential election postponed four times before finally being held last week.

Rene Preval was finally named the new president Feb. 16 after it took over a week to count the votes, with angry protests, fiery roadblocks and a handful of deaths marking an election that is bound to impact the future of Haiti for years to come. Also, a spate of recent kidnappings has scared off many people who would otherwise be in the country providing support. And since no one's struck oil in Haiti, change may be a long time coming.

All of the political upheaval and damaging hurricanes has left the vast majority of Haitians living in extreme poverty and squalor. Most Haitians live in simple huts with dirt floors; the fortunate ones touched by the work of missionaries and other humanitarians might have cement walls, but they still have no more living room than many Americans have in their bathrooms and closets. There is very little running water, electricity, healthy food or

sanitation; trash is strewn everywhere, AIDS and other disease is a constant problem, there are no jobs and education is practically non-existent. Also, anyone who thinks the roads are bad in Missouri should go to Haiti for awhile; even one of the best highways in Haiti – the one that runs between Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, and the northern opposite end of the island – has potholes that can swallow a large car and is barely drivable in the best weather conditions.

The living conditions are in complete contrast with the natural beauty of the landscape (some of the most beautiful in the Caribbean) and the tourism industry that bolsters so much of the rest of the Caribbean has all but disappeared in Haiti. On our last day in Haiti, a group of us went snorkeling amongst beautiful coral reefs – we were swimming through sea life with fish never seen in the United States outside of an aquarium. The sunsets, the mountains, the ocean are as beautiful as the most desired tropical paradise, yet the only cruise ships that visit stay far away to the north part of the island and tourists are usually not even told they are actually in Haiti.

So what led this former Trenton resident (I now live in Platte City) to leave his comfortable home and head to Haiti? After all, while the climate in Haiti is usually much preferable to the grimness of a Missouri January, Haiti is no longer known as a vacation destination.

I went to Haiti on the invitation of my father, Dr. J.A. Keuhn, D.O., a family physician who has practiced medicine in Trenton for three decades. After many years of being a family doctor in a rural community, my dad was looking for a way to do volunteer medical work outside of the United States as a way to help others who were not so fortunate. After a visit approximately eight years ago, my dad bought an oceanfront home of a missionary who had been in Haiti for almost 40 years and then began to make periodic trips to Haiti 3-4 times per year. My dad's home and base for the humanitarian work is in Mont-rois, a village of about 10,000 located about an hour away from Port-au-Prince.

Since setting up shop in Haiti, my dad and other volunteers, mostly from the Trenton area, have ran free medical clinics, traveled up into the mountains to help and minister the mountain villagers, and helped start a school and church, amongst other things. While the work often seems futile and frustrating, progress has been made. Almost 500 children attend the group's school and more than 200 Haitians have sponsors in the United States who help provide the basic necessities to those willing to work to improve their own quality of life.

Many others from the Trenton area have made the journey to Haiti over the years, making a unique connection between rural north central Missouri and a third world country. Along with my dad and his wife, Chris, others who went on the January trip included my uncle, Steve Keuhn, who owns and operates Steve's Cars; Brad Ewing, an EMT at Wright Memorial Hospital; Lu Littleton, a nurse at the hospital; Adrian Cox, a farmer and truck driver who lives near Hickory; and Greg Lamp, who works for a software company from his home and is the youth minister of the Grace Fellowship Church.

I was unable to make the trip to Haiti until this year, but it was worth the wait - it ultimately proved to be a great experience and helped me realize just how fortunate I am. My wife, Ladena, and I traveled to the Ukraine last year to adopt our son, Blaine, (we just had our one-year anniversary of his leaving the orphanage Jan. 29!) and while I thought living conditions were poor in the Ukraine, conditions in Haiti were even worse.

So while in Haiti I did what I could. I helped wipe blood from wounds during surgeries (some nasty growths that get much bigger in Haiti and would be removed while tiny in the United States), I counted pills, I painted a chalkboard, and I pitched in wherever else I could. But the duty I took upon myself and that I enjoyed the most was this: I passed out candy to children.

Unless you want to get hounded unrelentlessly by begging children, you wait until just before leaving a place before giving anything to anyone in Haiti. So I waited, with pockets full of M&Ms and Sweet Tarts and whatever other sweets we might have had. Then I would pick a child that I had been communicating with (as much as possible) and put a piece of candy in his or her hand. Within seconds, I would be surrounded by many other outstretched hands. I gave until I did not have anymore to give – a piece or two at a time.

What struck me most was the way these children would take the meager two peanut M&Ms I gave and suck on them, savoring the chocolate, taking their time before swallowing the nut inside. I knew it was not much, but that little bit of sweetness was more than most of these children had ever known. These same children were the same ones who were delighted to get a piece of clothing different from the same outfit they had worn for the previous week(s), thrilled to sit in a classroom and take lessons, ecstatic to have just one nice piece of clothing to wear to a church service on Sunday. They appreciated everything they had, without a doubt and with sincere thanks.

Everyone who went on this trip to Haiti pitched in as needed to do a variety of tasks: two days of surgeries, another day for a medical clinic in the mountains, replacement of a stolen water pump at the school - ministering to the needs of the Haitians however we could. Greg, Adrian and Brad went beyond their call of duty to purchase food, bedding and more for Haitian families they had grown fond of, while I looked for someone I could help myself.

During my last day in Haiti, I decided to sponsor a young boy who is the son of one of the teachers at the school I previously mentioned. Jo-Vince Joseph is a young five-year-old boy who lives with his father, mother and sister in an area about eight-foot long and six-foot wide. Another brother lives somewhere else with an aunt because the Josephs do not have enough money to support another hungry mouth. The family cooks over a charcoal fire outdoors, washes their bodies and clothes in a nearby stream and has no electricity or other items that we consider necessities. The \$20 a month I am going to send Jo-Vince will provide him with two school uniforms, pay his tuition, guarantee him one square meal a day and help provide him and his family with clothing and other necessities. It's not much, but hopefully it can help him survive and maybe even a bit more (anyone interested in sponsoring a Haitian child can contact me at Keuhn@aol.com or another member of the group who went to Haiti).

The rest of the world is finally beginning to realize the crisis that is occurring in Haiti – including Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, who were in the Port-au-Prince airport the same day we were leaving the country for our return to the United States. While our group did not see or meet the famous American actors, it was good to know that the plight of the Haitians is not going unnoticed.

One night during our stay in Haiti our group sat around the dock and watched the sun set and discussed this: what is it the Haitians really need to see a turnaround from poverty to prosperity?

At first we talked about the obvious and concrete – Haiti needs a stable government, an end to the kidnappings and other political upheaval, food, sanitation, better homes, jobs and industry, education and Christianity (as opposed to voodoo – which many of the country's citizens had practiced for generations).

Then we talked about hope. Should we show Haitians the possibilities that abound in the rest of the world? Should we show them worlds with homes of running water, buffet restaurants, shopping malls and voting booths? Do we tell them they can do anything they desire, as we tell our own children and students? Do we promise that with hard work and good study habits they can be happy and successful? And if we give them hope, where do we draw the line – where do we stop so we are not just teasing them with an oasis of false dreams, like dangling a lottery ticket in front of a homeless man?

The opinions varied that night and throughout the trip depending on the current moods of optimism and pessimism – whether the glass was half full or half empty could be determined by something as simple and complex as the low and high tides. I asked myself these questions after I returned to my hundreds of square feet home in Platte City with hot showers, three bedrooms with comfortable mattresses, refrigerator, two-car garage with SUV and pickup truck, climate control and clothes washer – just the basics in America.

And you know what? The jury is still out – I still don't know. I just hope we did some good and that Haiti and a few of its citizens benefited from our visit. Because, God knows, Haiti could use the help.

Haiti's Preval wants to strengthen bonds with DR
The Dominican Today
February 23, 2006

SANTO DOMINGO.- Haiti's president elect René Preval yesterday stated his intention to bolster ties with Dominican Republic during his mandate, through a "brotherly" and total relation of understanding.

In an exclusive interview for the local network CDN, the Haitian chief executive said that his interest is to seek a brotherly relation "between our peoples" in the same manner in which the bilateral relations were conducted during Dominican president Leonel Fernandez's first term.

Preval said that he chose to visit Dominican Republic precisely to deepen the bonds with his neighboring country and the Dominican chief executive. "I want to reaffirm this friendship," Preval said.

Donors Group Welcomes Election of Préval as President of Haiti
United States, global community commit to working with Haiti's new leaders
By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer
US State Dept.
February 23, 2006

Washington -- The United States and other members of an international donors group for Haiti have welcomed the election of René Préval as Haiti's president and offered their commitment to work with the Caribbean nation's new leaders.

In a February 21 statement, the group of donors, which met in Washington that day under the chairmanship of the World Bank, discussed the status of the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF), in operation since July 2004 to support the Haitian people. Some \$780 million of donor support pledged in the context of the ICF has been disbursed to Haiti as of the end of 2005. The United States has disbursed \$277 million of that total amount, a U.S. State Department official confirmed February 23.

In addition, more money from the international community is in the "pipeline" to be disbursed to Haiti, the official said.

The ICF outlines Haiti's many needs, from restoring electricity services to feeding disadvantaged children and getting them to enroll in school. The ICF has involved more than 200 national and international experts from 26 bilateral and multilateral donors, including the U.S. Agency for International Development. In July 2004, the United States and other donors pledged more than \$1 billion to support the ICF. (See related article.)

Préval, who won the February 7 presidential election, is scheduled to take office as Haitian president on March 29. Municipal and parliamentary elections in Haiti also were held February 7. The United Nations says a second round of parliamentary elections will be needed as many leading candidates will not have the requisite majority required in the first round of voting. (See related article.)

Heading the U.S. delegation at the World Bank meeting for Haiti were Patrick Duddy, the State Department's deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs; and Larry Greenwood, the State Department's deputy assistant secretary for international finance and development in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

Other country delegations at the meeting were from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Besides the World Bank, other international groups at the meeting were the Caribbean Community Secretariat, the Caribbean Development Bank, the European Commission, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Organization of the Francophone, the Organization of American States, the Pan American

Health Organization, the U.N. Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH), and the United Nations Development Program.

Participants at the meeting expressed support for Haiti's second round of parliamentary and local and municipal elections, scheduled for March 19. Those elections should "proceed smoothly and in a timely fashion," said the donors. According to the donor group statement, the scheduled second round of elections demonstrate the newly elected Haitian authorities' commitment to consolidating democracy, good governance, political dialogue and national reconciliation.

The donors agreed to meet with the new Haitian authorities in Port-au-Prince within the next several weeks to discuss extending the ICF through 2007, as was agreed to by Haitian authorities and donors who met in Brussels, Belgium, in October 2005. The ICF currently is scheduled to expire in September 2006.

In addition, a donors' "pledging" conference will take place later in 2006, possibly in either July or September. The conference is designed to generate more resources for Haiti and to ensure extension of the ICF.

The State Department official said among the issues for the donor community regarding Haiti include identifying priority areas for assistance; how to improve coordination among donors, and between donors and the Haitian government; making improvements to the existing ICF; and better communicating "donor results."

Juan Gabriel Valdés, the U.N. special envoy to Haiti, told reporters February 22 that the World Bank meeting proved "very positive."

"What donor countries expressed towards staying in Haiti was extremely important. I am hopeful that this time the international community will not repeat the mistakes of the past" in not following through on its commitments to Haiti, he said.

Haitian interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue told the U.N. Security Council, also on February 22, that the international community must not abandon his country. He called the February 7 elections "only the first step of the long path that leads us to stability and democracy and economic and social development."

For additional information on U.S. policy, see Haiti.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

Aristide can return, Haiti's president-elect says

Thu Feb 23, 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haitian president-elect Rene Preval said on Wednesday that exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, his former mentor, was entitled under Haiti's constitution to return to the Caribbean country.

But Preval, who has been told directly by Washington that it opposes the deposed president's return, said the decision should be made by Aristide himself.

The future of Aristide, a hero to the poor ousted by an armed revolt two years ago who now says he wants to go home as soon as he can, is a critical issue for Preval as he attempts to stabilize his violent nation.

Washington, which backed the departure of the firebrand former Roman Catholic priest from Haiti in February 2004, repeated its opposition to his return on Wednesday.

State Department spokesman Adam Ereli told reporters in Washington: "It is probably not a good idea, it does not serve a useful purpose."

Aristide, who won two presidential elections only to be driven from power both times, was accused of despotism and corruption in his second term.

Six days after being declared the winner of the February 7 presidential election, Preval spoke cautiously about Aristide when he held his first news conference on Wednesday, insisted that Aristide himself would decide whether to return.

"The constitution says no Haitian needs a visa to leave the country or come back to the country," Preval told reporters in the yard of his sister's home in upscale Peguy-Ville, near the capital. "A president has an obligation to respect the constitution."

In South Africa, Aristide said on Tuesday he expected to return to Haiti "as soon as possible" and in a meeting with reporters on Wednesday said he planned to help shape the future of his country as a private citizen with a focus on education.

"I am confident that I can serve my country without being involved as the president of the country now," Aristide said. He declined to rule out a return to politics, however.

Preval, who won the support of Aristide's legions of supporters in the slums, served as president from 1996 to 2001, between Aristide's two terms. He did not say whether he had talked to Aristide since the election.

An unassuming 63-year-old agronomist, Preval said he planned to improve security in Haiti to create better conditions for investors. An estimated two-thirds of Haitians are unemployed and annual income is about \$390 per person.

The poorest country in the Americas has been plagued by political and gang violence. Nearly 2,000 people have been kidnapped for ransom in the last year.

"If all we have in this country is kidnapping and criminality, investors won't come," Preval said.

"The government is going to create conditions to encourage private investment. The government is going to work at creating those conditions but it won't have the capability to provide many jobs for Haitians."

He urged Haitians to vote "massively" in runoff elections for legislative posts on March 19. Elections officials said about 63 percent of Haiti's 3.5 million eligible voters turned out for the first round on February 7.

Preval Seems to Discourage Aristide's Return to Haiti

The president-elect says the exiled leader should note that charges have been filed against him.

By Carol J. Williams and Chantal Regnault,

Special to The Times

Los Angeles Times

February 23, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Ousted President JeanBertrand Aristide has the constitutional right to return to Haiti whenever he chooses but may want to keep in mind that charges have been filed against him, President-elect Rene Preval said Wednesday.

In his first major public statement since being declared the winner last week of a Feb. 7 election marred by tabulation delays and fraud allegations, Preval was pressed repeatedly by reporters about Aristide's announcement a day earlier that he was ready to come home after two years in African exile.

"Article 41 of the Haitian Constitution says that no Haitian needs a visa to enter or leave the country," Preval told journalists on the lawn of his sister's gated villa. "The response isn't with me. It's with the constitution."

Aristide told international news agencies in Pretoria, South Africa, that he was preparing to return to Haiti "as soon as possible" and that he was working out the details with Preval, United Nations officials, Haiti's Caribbean Community neighbors and his South African hosts, who have said there must be a safe environment for Aristide's return.

Leaders of the armed rebellion that drove out Aristide in February 2004 not only remain at large but have acquired considerable financial and political clout over the last two years. Rebel chief Guy Philippe was one of Preval's 32 challengers in the presidential election.

U.S. and other Western diplomats have cautioned Preval against encouraging or facilitating the return of Aristide, a fiery liberation theologian whose two terms as president — the first truncated by a military coup, the second by the rebellion — deepened racial and class divides and left Haiti in chaos.

Preval is said by confidants to have little interest in having Aristide back in the country, fearing that his presence would set off new unrest in the slums ruled by gangs armed and empowered by Aristide. Riots that ensued after rumors that Preval's vote share was being manipulated were believed to have been instigated by Aristide's network of allies and slum-based gang leaders.

Haiti's U.S.-backed interim government filed charges against Aristide in U.S. District Court in southern Florida in November, alleging that he "abused his power and deceived and betrayed the Haitian people by directing and participating in ongoing and fraudulent schemes" involving drug trafficking and misappropriation of public funds.

In an interview with CNN en Espanol after his news conference, Preval appeared to be alluding to those charges when he observed that Aristide and others who fled two years ago "have to ask themselves if they really want to come back and they have to find out if there is any legal complaint against them."

As a former prime minister under Aristide and loyal substitute in the National Palace during the 1996-2001 presidential term for which Aristide was constitutionally ineligible, Preval was seen by many poor Haitians as the best candidate to pick up the deposed president's mantle.

The bond between Preval and Aristide weakened during the latter's second term in office, when Aristide abruptly disposed of agrarian reforms and other projects initiated by Preval and fired his predecessor's advisors. Still, some Haitians who voted for Preval did so with the expectation that his victory would allow the return of Aristide.

*

Times staff writer Williams reported from Miami and special correspondent Regnault from Port-au-Prince.

Haiti's Leader Says Aristide Can End Exile

By GINGER THOMPSON; AMY BRACKEN CONTRIBUTED REPORTING FROM PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI, FOR THIS ARTICLE

February 23, 2006

MEXICO CITY, Feb. 22 - In his first news conference since being declared president of Haiti last week, René Préval kept up the mystery swirling around the possible return from exile of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, saying only that the Constitution permits him to come home if Mr. Aristide so chooses.

Mr. Aristide, a former ally of Mr. Préval's, was forced out of office two years ago by a violent uprising and pressure from the United States. The former president, accused by his opponents of corruption and violent repression, fled Haiti and has since lived in South Africa.

However, he has begun sending messages that he would like to return home. In a televised appearance in South Africa on Wednesday, Mr. Aristide said he looked forward to returning to Haiti "as soon as possible," and said he would consult with Mr. Préval about an appropriate time.

When asked last Thursday how he felt about Mr. Aristide's desire to return home, Mr. Préval said: "My position is simple. Article 41 of the Constitution stipulates that no Haitian needs a visa to leave his country, or to return to it."

Then Mr. Préval seemed to throw the decision back to Mr. Aristide, saying, "Questions about whether he will be involved in politics, you have to ask him, not me."

It is the question that has dominated public attention in Haiti since last week, when Mr. Préval was declared the winner of the Feb. 7 presidential election. Political opponents of Mr. Aristide's, and several foreign diplomats, have made clear to Mr. Préval that they do not want Mr. Aristide to return. And even though Mr. Aristide is still loved by this country's poor, political leaders critical of the way he was removed from power acknowledge that his return could start a new round of unrest in Haiti, the hemisphere's most troubled country.

Mr. Préval, a protégé of Mr. Aristide, who was president from 1996 to 2001, has so far refused to publicly address those concerns. The president-elect has tried, since he began running for a new term in office, to distance himself from Mr. Aristide by forming his own political party and surrounding himself with advisers known as opponents to Mr. Aristide.

Still, Mr. Préval was elected with the overwhelming support of the poor people who had lifted Mr. Aristide to power.

US peace mission to Haiti would cost twice that of UN
MSN Money
February 23, 2006

All Financial Times News

A US peacekeeping operation in Haiti would cost twice as much as the current United Nations mission there, the US's Government Accountability Office has found, in a study that is likely to bolster the UN's case before critical congressional paymasters.

"The UN budgeted \$428m for the first 14 months of this mission. A US operation in Haiti of the same size and duration would cost an estimated \$876m, far exceeding the US contribution for Minustah [the UN mission] of \$116m," the GAO said in a report this week.

Its findings underline the relative cost-effectiveness of multinational peace operations as opposed to unilateral intervention, even at a time when the UN is under fire for alleged fraud and mismanagement in its procurement procedures. The US pays for 27 per cent of UN peacekeeping missions.

On Wednesday John Bolton, US ambassador, convened a Security Council meeting to discuss audit findings of possible wastage in UN peacekeeping procurement, and the organisation faces a mid-year budget freeze if it does not undertake sufficient reforms.

Mark Malloch Brown, UN chief of staff, cited the GAO study, requested by congressmen Dana Rohrabacher and William Delahunt, as part of the UN's defence. While condemning any instances of fraud, he also insisted the potential losses had been exaggerated.

More generally, he said after the meeting that "we do peacekeeping operations on the cheap", although he also suggested that insufficient training and the low take-up for civilian posts in field stations meant that "maybe we've been a little too cut-price".

The UN will present a package of management reforms next week to address shortfalls identified in the wake of the oil-for-food scandal and the debate over procurement. But it also warns that meaningful change will come with a hefty price tag.

The GAO report places those figures in context, although its authors also note several qualitative distinctions between US and UN-led missions.

"While a US peacekeeping operation in Haiti would be more expensive...it would be subject to higher operational standards and supported by an extensive military infrastructure," the report said.

"Strong, well-trained and quickly deployed US forces have proved militarily effective in short-term operations in Haiti in the past."

On the other hand, "the UN's strengths include multinational participation, extensive peacekeeping experience and an existing structure for co-ordinating nation-building activities.

Complex political considerations are likely to influence decisions about the role of the US and the UN in peacekeeping."

UN Haiti mission says security improving, denies deal with gang bosses
China View News
February 24, 2006

HAVANA,-- The United Nations stabilization mission in Haiti said on Thursday that the security situation in the capital Port-Au-Prince had improved due to cooperation with local police.

"It's clear the situation has improved. Things are better thanks to closer cooperation," said Damian Onses Cardona, spokesman for the UN mission in Haiti known as Minustah.

The spokesman also denied the existence of any deal with gang bosses, which it had been suggested, had helped the situation to improve.

"No deal has been done with those no-goods; that is absolutely clear." he said.

Security was improving even before the extra deployment of troops and police around the Feb. 7 general elections, he said.

A French Minustah officer said that 1,000 military police manning mobile checkpoints and patrols were responsible for the sharp drop in crime.

Minustah came to Haiti after the overthrow of former president Jean Bertrand Aristide in February, 2004.

In the same news conference, Minustah also announced the nomination of U.S. diplomat Lawrence Rossin as deputy special UN representative to Haiti. Rossin had held the equivalent post during the UN mission in Kosovo. Enditem

Haiti 'to allow' Aristide return
BBC News
Feb. 23, 2006

Jean-Bertrand Aristide says Haitians want him to return
Haiti's President-elect Rene Preval has said the constitution permits the return of ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, now in exile in South Africa.
He was speaking after Mr Aristide said he intended to return to his country as soon as possible.

The ousted leader said his supporters had voted for his return by electing Mr Preval, his former ally.

But the US state department said Mr Aristide's return would serve no useful purpose and could destabilise Haiti.

"Aristide is from the past. We're looking to the future," State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said.

He was responding to Mr Aristide's first comments about his possible return since Mr Preval won the vote earlier this month.

I have the right to be back

Jean-Bertrand Aristide

"For the past two years, the Haitian people fought peacefully through demonstrations calling for my return," Mr Aristide, who was forced from office in 2004, said on Wednesday.

"When they went to vote, they voted for my return and they said it very clearly."

However, he said the date of his return was not yet clear.

"It will emerge from consultation with those who are concerned.

"If the US really cares about democracy, as they say, about freedom, as they say, everybody would expect them to show respect for human rights. I have the right to be back," Mr Aristide added.

Haiti's president-elect seeks stability to rebuild nation
China View
February 23, 2006

HAVANA, Feb. 22 (Xinhuanet) -- President-elect Rene Preval said on Wednesday that Haiti must maintain stability and enhance security to attract private investments, media reports from the country's capital Port-au-Prince said.

Preval said that after taking power on March 29, he would strive to rebuild the country's corruption-prone civil institutions, and would set fighting corruption and reviving the economy as his government's two priorities.

A planned presidential amnesty would apply only to political prisoners, not to criminals, he said. Haiti has been suffering from gang violence, some of which was politically linked, since the 2004 overthrow of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Preval also said he would not interfere with Aristide's return.

"The Constitution is clear: no Haitian needs a visa to enter or leave the country," Preval said at a press conference. "For the rest, will he do politics, or go into education? You have to ask him, not me."

Aristide told the South African media that he would return to Haiti as soon as possible, but would consult with Preval, the United Nations and others before doing so. Enditem

First Democratic Elections in Haiti
BY NEESHA FAKIR
The Bard Observer, Bard College NY
February 23, 2006

After numerous popular demonstrations in Haiti, it seems very likely that Rene Preval will emerge as Haiti's first democratically elected president, after Former President Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a US/French sponsored coup in February 2004.

Preval was declared president after Haitians voted on February 7, after nearly 85,000 blank ballots were eliminated, giving Preval 51.5% of the vote. Preval's rival and opposition leader Leslie Maniga, who received 12% of the votes, accused election officials of breaking numerous rules and giving Preval a false victory instead of redoing the elections.

Of the estimated 2.2 million ballots that were cast, the blank ballots account for 4% of the total vote. The elimination of the blank ballots saw Preval's win rise up from 49.1% to 51.5%.

There are approximately 7,300 United Nations Troops under Brazilian Command maintaining order and stability in Haiti. The UN Command details that a further 125,000 ballots had to be eliminated as allegations of fraud and irregularities emerged in the election process.

Since 2005, the National Endowment for Democracy has been supporting opposition groups to mobilize against the Aristide Lavalas Party. Since Aristide's overthrow the endowment has injected thousands of dollars into political organizations and parties in order to raise political awareness in Haiti. Significant political organizations like the Fusion of Social Democrats and the Organization of People's Struggle announced that they would unite behind Preval's presidency.

During the election process, Preval asked Haitians to consider his nomination and candidacy in light of his time as Prime Minister from 1996 until 2000. As Prime Minister, Preval increased expenditure on roads, health and public schools.

Preval enjoys much of his support from the rural poor, who comprise nearly 80% of Haiti's population. Though Preval promised to attack national poverty and improve national dialogue and reconciliation, his program of action is still unclear. Preval has also promised to increase the incentive for democratization, to reform political institutions and agriculture, and to quell corruption. However, Preval also acknowledged that the Brazilian-led United Nations Mission for Haiti, whose mission has now been extended to a further six months, would need to stay in the country in order to maintain stability and order.

Meanwhile, exiled President Jean Bertrand Aristide is settling down to a serene and quite life in South Africa. When this reporter spoke to the erudite and amicable 52-year-old President last June, at a public event organized by the University of Johannesburg, he hinted that he was enthusiastic and ready to return to his country, where he claimed that his support bases were still intact. Aristide was exiled to South Africa in May 2004 under the pretense

that he would lobby African Governments to support his rule, claiming that he was removed from power by the governments of France and the United States.

In 1990, Jean Bertrand Aristide rose to power only to be ousted in a coup that same year. The United States supported his return to power in 1994 but suspicions arose amidst voter rigging and Aristide's refusal to undergo World Bank and International Monetary Fund imposed privatization and structural adjustment. In February 2004, Aristide was faced with an armed insurrection and was subsequently overthrown.

The African Union has been constantly meeting to mobilize around the situation in Haiti as they see it as a crucial and significant part of the African diaspora.

New wrinkle in deportation case

U.S. immigration officials claimed in court that a Haitian sex offender facing deportation is not entitled to U.S. citizenship because he is adopted.

BY ALFONSO CHARDY

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Miami Herald

February 23, 2006

Frantzy Odige, the 23-year-old Haitian-born convicted sex offender in deportation proceedings, is not entitled to U.S. citizenship because he may have been adopted, a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement prosecutor told an immigration judge Wednesday.

The claim adds a new complication to Odige's legal struggle to preempt deportation to his native Haiti. Odige argues that his U.S. citizenship automatically derives from his parents, who were naturalized when he was a minor.

André Pierre, Odige's attorney, told The Miami Herald after a 30-minute immigration court hearing that the government's claim does not alter his contention that his client qualifies for citizenship and cannot be expelled.

Immigration Judge Kevin McHugh suggested he may render a decision at the next hearing on March 1.

The adoption claim came from Nancy Waller, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement assistant chief counsel.

Waller and Odige appeared at McHugh's immigration courtroom in Bradenton. Odige has been held in detention in Bradenton since he was taken into custody in January. Pierre participated by phone from his North Miami office.

Immigration officers detained Odige, on probation after pleading guilty to sexual assault on a minor, because under federal law foreign nationals convicted of aggravated felonies must be deported. Odige told the officers he is a U.S. citizen -- but had no way to prove it because he neither had a U.S. passport nor a certificate of citizenship.

Pierre revealed during Wednesday's hearing that his client's family filed an application for a citizenship certificate in 2000, when Odige was 17 -- but never received it. He was awaiting a copy of the application from the family.

Pierre told The Miami Herald after the hearing that neither Odige nor his family had told him that he was adopted. But he said he had questioned Odige's mother closely late Tuesday and concluded his client may be adopted and that the mother did not want her son to know. He said the new information does not alter his opinion that Odige is entitled to automatic derivative citizenship.

"He is clearly a U.S. citizen, your honor," Pierre told McHugh.

Waller argued back that Odige is not a citizen and was required to be present in the United States with a green card at the time his adoptive parents naturalized to claim automatic derivative citizenship.

Pierre countered that Waller was misreading the law. But Waller said she based her conclusion on two other cases.

One of the unpublished opinions cited by Waller involved a Haitian convict who claimed derived citizenship from an adoptive "mother or grandmother." Waller handled the government's side in that case as well.

The immigration judge ruled against Geordany Jean Andre and ordered deportation. The Board of Immigration Appeals affirmed deportation, stating the law requires residence in the United States with a green card at the time of at least one adoptive parent's naturalization.

Miami lawyer Ira Kurzban, a national authority on immigration law, said adoption should not erode Pierre's contention his client is an American -- as long as the adoption occurred before Odige was admitted as a green-card holder in 1999. Pierre said the adoption occurred before Odige's arrival in 1999. The parents naturalized in the late 1980s. Kurzban also said

The Fight for Haiti
Kathie Klarreich
The Nation
February 23, 2006

It seemed almost too good to be true, and it was. And then it wasn't. Haitian politics played out in classic form in February, with all the drama aptly associated with this enigmatic and impoverished nation. Guns had gone underground, kidnappings had stopped and Port-au-Prince streets that had resembled target practice became accessible as an unprecedented number of voters took to the polls to vote in Haiti's presidential and parliamentary elections February 7. The elections were as much a triumph for the Haitian people, whose resolve for change was matched only by the absence of organized violence and intimidation previously associated with Haitian elections, as they were a vote for a new government.

But like so much of what happens in Haiti, the tide of good will quickly dissolved into a sea of protest, confusion and bitter *déjà vu* as days dragged on without electoral resolution. Initial results showed that the most popular candidate, René Garcia Préval, was leading with more than 60 percent; when his numbers began to drop, the Carnavalesque atmosphere in the streets morphed into angry demonstrations that paralyzed the capital, halted traffic, closed schools, shut down businesses and caused flight cancellations. Partisans stormed the mountainside hotel that had become ground zero for election results, with hundreds of clothed protesters taking a dip in the pool to cool off as visiting South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu looked on from his balcony. Six days after the election, with 90 percent of the vote tabulated, Préval's lead had dipped to 48.7 percent, just short of the 50 percent he needed to declare a first-round victory. Stolen again, the people cried, taking to the streets the next day, and the day after, until they finally heard that a technical decision had been reached allowing the Electoral Council to announce that Préval was the winner, reigniting the celebratory pumping and gyrating.

There had been reason for concern. The most polarizing figure in Haiti's recent political arena, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, had twice won the presidency and had twice been forced out, first in a 1991 military coup d'état seven months after taking office and then again in 2004, two years shy of the end of his five-year term. Although the former president currently lives in exile in South Africa with his wife and two daughters, the distance hasn't diminished his influence on the Haitian political scene. He remains wildly popular at the same time that he is feared and despised, a contradiction that accurately reflects Haiti's fractured society and that was played out again in the allegiances of the thirty-three presidential candidates. And therein lies the quandary, the decisive make-or-break challenge for Préval: Can he unite a country that has as many divisions as political parties? Can he negotiate a *détente* with an actively hostile opposition, a wary international community and armed supporters? Finally, can the man who ten years ago stumbled into his first presidential term on the coattails of his predecessor demonstrate that he is no longer Aristide's twin?

In Haiti perception is everything. For Préval partisans, many of whom rose before dawn to form long lines that snaked down country dirt roads or alongside urban piles of garbage and sewage, no amount of explanation was going to justify their candidate having to compete in a second round. That would be like losing Aristide a third time. In contrast, anti-Aristide people viewed the presence of tens of thousands of Préval supporters on the streets as a clear signal that the tactics of the two leaders were the same, to be feared and tempered. They denounced the negotiated solution, questioning the power of mass demonstrations in a country where the rule of law has never been practiced by the book. In this case, the ambiguity of the law served to keep the lid on the powder keg: The electoral law required that blank votes be included in the final tally. An unprecedented number, about one out of twenty-five, had decreased Préval's percentage; but when the blank votes were divided proportionally among the presidential candidates, Préval's total tipped over the 50 percent mark, allowing a first-round victory.

The international community was quick to embrace the solution, in which its members had played a part behind the scenes but which they just as quickly said was a "Haitian solution to a Haitian problem with a president who is a favorite of the majority of the country," according to United Nations spokesman David Wimhurst. This was not necessarily the best solution, admitted one of Préval's closest advisers, because it left unanswered the question of what role fraud had played in the election. "What else can you do?" he asked. "You have a population about to erupt. It may come out later what this was all about, but for the time being, there aren't any other options. Let's look forward now."

How things play out over the next five years depends in large part on Préval's leadership, which doesn't seem to be a trait critics and even some of his friends say is strongly developed, yet was evidenced in his handling of the electoral crisis. While he is credited with building roads, beginning the implementation of a national agrarian reform program and lowering the price of fertilizer during his 1996-2001 term, he was also perceived as a puppet of Tabarre, the area where Aristide settled after his first five-year term ended in 1996. Préval may be most famous for being Haiti's only democratic leader to complete his five-year term, a remarkable feat given that Haiti has had more than forty governments since it declared independence in 1804 and at least twelve just since the 1986 fall of the Duvalier dictatorship. In 2001 Préval retreated from the public eye to his family's home in Marmelade; with an investment from Taiwan he developed coffee, citrus and bamboo plantations. He re-emerged on the political scene and registered as a presidential candidate on the last day possible with a new party, Lespwa--"hope" in Creole--rather than with Aristide's party, Family Lavalas.

Préval, who had voted in Marmelade, wasn't planning to return to the capital until the vote was certified, but recognizing the potential for a social explosion, he boarded a UN helicopter six days after the elections to consult with his core group of advisers as well as key members of the international community. On February 14 he announced that he was going to launch a legal investigation into the vote, charging massive fraud, which was supported by the discovery a day later of thousands of ballots and other electoral material in a dump just

outside the capital. In a calm but passionate appeal, Préval defended his supporters' right to demonstrate but asked them to do so peacefully and with respect. And they did. Préval's statesmanlike call and the response that followed were in marked contrast to a similar situation that had occurred in 1991, in the weeks between Aristide's election and inauguration, when thousands of his supporters took to the streets to prevent a coup, then went on a rampage and destroyed property. Aristide's defense as to why he didn't tell people to go back home was that he was just president-elect.

"Préval took leadership this week," said Robert Maguire, a longtime Haiti observer and professor at Trinity University, shortly after the election. "He spoke clearly and directly to the people and asked them not to back off but to protect their interest, and people listened. It was quite a change of pattern from what we've seen in Haitian leadership previously." Jocelyn McCalla of the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Rights, who has been highly critical of the Aristide government, added, "It demonstrates an understanding that for Haiti to move forward, it is going to need peace, calm and stability and a lot of effort and compromise from people with various backgrounds and ideologies to work together."

But trust is in as short a supply as dollars in this bankrupt country, where only 10 percent of the \$1.2 billion of development aid pledged by the international community in 2004 has been delivered. These elections were Haiti's most expensive--\$75 million--and run by an incompetent Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). The nine-member board was sanctioned by an equally incompetent interim government that had been strong-armed into place by the international community, then left on its own. Many people wonder how, if the CEP can't get the little things right, like the spelling of candidates' names on its website or math calculations that show percentages going down when votes go up, it could possibly have the capacity to oversee any vote at all.

But even those who experienced the chaos of the election firsthand still believe the electoral process can work. César Joynel oversaw the voting at twenty-three stations (which could accommodate 400 voters each); he worked more than forty-two hours straight for a mere \$50 to insure a change in government. Although he lost his voice and went without eating or sleeping, his determination to be part of the electoral process never wavered. "My vote is the only thing I have," the 34-year-old unemployed father said. "Take this away from me, and I've got nothing."

Ironically, it was the intervention of the UN peacekeeping force that saved Joynel from being mobbed by poll workers, who thought he, rather than the electoral council, was responsible for their paychecks when the last of the ballots in his station were counted. Joynel is no fan of the blue helmets--he lives in Cité Soleil, the seaside slum that had become such a hotbed of gang warfare that even the peacekeepers were unable to bring stability. Over the past two years 1,500 have died, and Haitians have been gripped by a kidnapping craze that at its height claimed more than ten victims a day. The UN mandate in Haiti was renewed in mid-February for another six months; Préval has said that the international force should stay as long as it is needed, which, given the wretched state of Haiti's security force and the country's corrupt judicial system, could be years.

The soft-spoken president-elect, who according to friends is better known for his abundance of good will than his long-range planning, is counting on massive international aid to jump-start the country's economy, which has been declining steadily for years. He knows it will take decades to improve conditions in this poorest country in the hemisphere, where 80 percent of the population lives in dire poverty. While Préval may not convince his fiercest rivals, Charles Henri Baker and Leslie Manigat--whose combined votes were less than half of Préval's--to work with him, he has won over some members of the business community, who helped bankroll his campaign. He also has the support of other presidential candidates, who recognize his indisputable popularity. "A more difficult question," asked University of Virginia Professor Robert Fatton, "is what is he going to do with the armed Aristide supporters who want to bring Aristide back?"

Préval has said publicly that as a private citizen, Aristide is welcome to return, but it seems counterintuitive for Préval to encourage the move if he's trying to create a new image as an independent leader. Just one day after the election, acting US chargé d'affaires to Haiti Timothy Carney said, "Aristide is on his way to becoming as irrelevant to Haiti as Jean-Claude [Duvalier], and with no future. Aristide is now demonstrated to be a man of the past." That may be wishful thinking, but it also provides an insight into the direction the United States would like the new government to take.

Préval, who according to James Dobbins, President Clinton's special envoy to Haiti, was not the GOP Administration's first choice in these elections, is aware of the delicate line he's walking with the Americans, whose meddling in Haitian affairs has been heavily criticized as destabilizing the country's democratic process. Despite reinstating Aristide with the support of 20,000 troops in 1994, the United States not only undermined his presidency publicly by imposing an international embargo a few years later but is generally thought to have actively worked behind the scenes to help depose him. Préval recognizes the potential for the international tide to turn against him, and he has to juggle that, just as he has to strike a balance with the armed gangs that support him. How he handles such issues will ultimately define his second term, which is scheduled to begin March 29.

U.N.: 'We will stay in Haiti'

UPI

Feb. 24, 2006

UNITED NATIONS, -- The United Nations is defending its pledge to stay in Haiti and help the impoverished country build a democratic society.

"What Haitians want for the future is peace and reconciliation," said Juan Valdes, chief of the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH, at U.N. world headquarters in New York.

The 15-member U.N. Security Council last week extended MINUSTAH's mandate to August 2006.

Asked whether former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who announced Tuesday he hoped to end his exile in South Africa and return to Haiti, would help or hinder Haiti's development, Valdes simply replied: "It is very important for everyone to look to the future and not to the past."

The U.N. mission to Haiti was established in February 2004 after then-President Aristide fled to South Africa during an uprising of mostly elite Haitians and amid accusations of corruption.

The U.N. peacekeeping mission helped organize the presidential election Feb. 7. After days of delay and allegations of fraud, Rene Preval, former president of Haiti from 1996 to 2001, was declared the winner last week. He will be sworn in March 29.

During his last appearance before the U.N. Security Council Wednesday, Gerard Latortue, interim prime minister of Haiti, thanked the United Nations and the international community for its ongoing aid and urged them to continue to help the island nation. Latortue said the election was the first step to stability in Haiti.

"Democracy is taking its first steps in my country. It needs international help to grow," said Latortue.

The U.N. mission said it will continue to help with the upcoming rounds of congressional elections and on long term projects to restore peace in Haiti.

"It is my hope this time the international community will not repeat the mistakes of the past," said Valdes.

Aristide sees private role on return to Haiti
My Caribbean News
Reuters
Feb. 22, 2006

PRETORIA, South Africa - Former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide said on Wednesday he intended to help shape the future of the Caribbean nation as a private citizen when he returned from exile.

"I am confident that I can serve my country without being involved as the president of the country now," Aristide told reporters in Pretoria, where he has lived since fleeing Haiti in 2004 following a violent revolt against his rule.

Aristide, a populist who won two presidential elections only to be driven from power both times, declined to rule out a return to politics but stressed he would focus on education when he returned to the impoverished nation.

But he said he would do so only after consultations with South African President Thabo Mbeki and Rene Preval, a former ally who was declared the winner of Haiti's presidential election last week.

Preval's victory sparked speculation that Aristide's return would be a speedy and celebratory one. Aristide on Wednesday said the two men had spoken but declined to give details. "It is a private matter," Aristide said.

On Tuesday, he told South Africa's SABC television he believed he would return "as soon as possible."

The former Roman Catholic priest described the election results as a victory for the Haitian people. "I care about him. I care for our president," Aristide said, referring to Preval.

While Preval has distanced himself somewhat from Aristide, he has said there was nothing to stop him from returning from South Africa. Mbeki also has voiced a similar opinion.

It is unclear how the United States, which some have accused of helping oust Aristide two years ago, views the prospect.

Aristide's two interrupted terms in power coincided with unrest that spilled into America's lap.

In the 1990s, the United States was forced to deal with a mass exodus of boat people who fled to US shores to escape a surge in political bloodletting following a military coup that overthrew Aristide.

In 2004, US troops entered Haiti to help restore calm when Aristide was deposed a second time. Washington's overwhelming concern now, it appears, is to maintain stability in Haiti.

But Aristide, who remains popular in much of Haiti and blames the United States for his ousting, might, if he returns, push Preval to challenge US policy in the Caribbean.

Aristide said on Wednesday that relations between Haiti and the United States must revolve around mutual respect and a commitment to democracy, freedom and human rights.

Aristide is not the only one pressing for an end to his exile. One of South Africa's opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA), said on Wednesday it wanted the former Haitian leader to leave as soon as possible.

"The total cost of his stay in South Africa can be reasonably assumed to have run into millions of rands -- an extraordinary waste of precious resources given South Africa's pressing development needs and Mr. Aristide's dubious human rights record," the DA said in a statement.

The system works in Haiti... and the U.S. doesn't like it
Foreign election showcases hypocrisy of the Bush administration
Gary McCabe, Opinion Writer
The East Carolinian, NC
February 23, 2006

In my mind, there are two kinds of countries that make up this world we live in: name brand countries and generic countries. The brand name countries of the world are pretty obvious. Let's just say that if the planet Earth were one giant clothing store, the brand name countries would be in the clothes in the storefront window, showing those who walk past the very best the store has to offer. These countries are rich, powerful and immensely successful.

The Republic of Haiti is clearly the latter kind of country. To put it bluntly, if the United States is the Armani suit of the world, Haiti is little more than a soiled pair of purple sweatpants in a dumpster behind K-Mart.

Destitute and rife with gang warfare, Haiti has been on the verge on anarchy for years. The past two years have been especially difficult following a 2004 political coup d'etat which unseated Haiti's elected leader, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Although the rebellion was a clear attack on democracy, the Bush administration was ambiguous in their response, publicly denouncing the actions of the rebels (the Haitian elite) while somewhat suggesting that Aristide's removal may actually be the first steps toward stability in the nation. It should also be pointed out that the United States had no problem interjecting itself into the rebellion that brought Aristide to power in 1994.

So as you can imagine, it's not often that good news actually comes out of what has become the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere. However, when I opened the paper on Feb. 10, that's exactly what I found.

The good news was this: Haiti had just run presidential elections and early electoral results showed that candidate Rene Preval was poised to win the contest. The significance of Preval's impending win was tied to who he represented, the nation's overwhelming majority of Haiti's 8.5 million people living in extreme poverty.

Preval ran for office on a very ambitious platform, calling for public schools, increased foreign investments, the use of negotiations rather than force to end gang warfare and a complete overhaul of the nation's flawed government. In a magnanimous gesture, Preval even pledged to appoint a prime minister from whichever political party won control of Parliament in this year's elections knowing perfectly well that it would not be his own.

On paper, Preval certainly seems to be the perfect leader for Haiti at this point in time. As President Bush might say, he's a "uniter," not a "divider." He has clear goals for the nation and if successful, Haiti could very well make some positive strides and eventually be in a position to crawl out of that metaphorical dumpster behind K-Mart. So if this is such a positive

event for Haiti, why has the United States done everything in its power to keep Prival from actually taking office?

I won't go so far as to say that the United States was responsible for Aristide's removal in 2004 - enough Haitians have said it that it's almost unnecessary. Besides, that's all in the past. It's quite clear that the traditional Haitian elite who took control in 2004 - later put under the control of a U.S.-installed interim government - attempted to rig this election.

I'm not just speculating either. Patrick Fequiere, a member of Haiti's election council, said it himself. When Preval came up short of the fifty percent vote needed for an instant victory, the council voted him in anyway to avoid the backlash that would surely come from a subsequent run-off, which could very well rob Preval of his victory.

"We had to do something," said Fequiere. "We could have just told Preval 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."

Even after his confirmation, President Bush and his administration are insisting that Preval share power with the traditional elite after begrudgingly accepting him as Haiti's presidential-elect. Share power? If that's the way the world is supposed to handle disputed elections, Al Gore would be co-president right now and we'd probably all be better off.

So to answer my earlier question, the United States government doesn't want Preval in office simply because the United States is better off having Haitians starving to death and killing each other. What does the United States have to gain from a strong, independent Haiti when a country run by like-minded elites is so much easier to manipulate? They don't give a damn about Haiti or any other country for that matter.

Maybe if the Bush administration were up front about that attitude, it would be a bit easier to swallow. Instead, our government runs around the world pretending to be this high-minded nation that wants to "liberate the oppressed" and "spread democracy." Only we've seen too many times what happens to those oppressed peoples when they democratically elect someone that doesn't suit the U.S. government's agenda.

The United States has been telling the Palestinians to conduct democratic elections for years now. Earlier this year, the Palestinians held the elections and voted in candidates representing the terrorist group Hamas.

How do you think President Bush felt the day after those elections? Do you honestly believe he was sitting the Oval Office thinking, "I sure am glad we brought democracy to the Palestinians." Or do you think he's on the phone to Cheney asking, "What the hell are we going to do about this?"

The United States is obviously one brand name country that will not be satisfied until they have a monopoly on the entire world... and seemingly will do anything to reach that end. But is that such a good thing?

We Must Create a Secure Environment to Encourage Private Investment and Create Jobs

President-elect Rene Preval

Caribbean Media Corp

February 22, 2006.

Haiti's president-elect said his one-time mentor, ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, could come back in the country if he wanted, and promised to restore security and order to stimulate private investments in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

Rene Preval said Aristide, who is living in exile in South Africa, could return to his country because the constitution bans exile.

The constitution provides that no Haitian needs a visa to leave the country or to come back to the country, Preval stated.

As to whether President Aristide will be involved in politics or will go to teach, that's a question you should address to him, not to me, Preval told journalists during his first news conference since he was declared the winner almost a week ago. In a statement on Tuesday February 21, Aristide said he would be back to Haiti soon.

Aristide fled the country on February 29, 2004, in the face of a bloody armed revolt and under United States and French pressure to quit.

Preval ensured his administration would create a secure environment to encourage private investments in order to create jobs and opportunities for the Haitian population.

He declined to comment on the formation of the next government, saying he had to wait for the configuration.

According to the constitution, the party that holds the majority in parliament will pick the prime minister and form the government.

A run-off election for the legislative branch is scheduled to take place on 19 March.

Preval encouraged Haitians to turn out massively to elect parliamentarians whose support will be crucial for the implementation of his plans.

It is parliament which will approve the prime minister and it is the prime minister who names all the functionaries in the public administration, explained Preval as to show how determining the legislative election can be.

About the security in the country, particularly in dangerous places such as the slum of Cite Soleil, Preval said military action could not solve the problem.

I'm convinced that the problem cannot be solved militarily because it would have already been solved. We had US troops, we had French and Canadian troops on the territory. The military could not solve it, he said.

You have UN troops with armoured vehicles who are here for a while now. They can't solve it. I think the problem should be addressed in its complexity considering the social and economic aspect, the disarmament and rehabilitation and the criminal aspect, he said.

He promised to discuss with different groups to find a solution through dialogue.

Preval is due to take office on 29 March.

IFES Reacts to Haitian Election Situation
IFES
February 21, 2006

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WASHINGTON, DC – For the past seven months, an IFES team of twelve long-term observers has been monitoring Haiti's electoral process. During that time our team has commented on issues ranging from voter registration, voter education, electoral law, logistics and other topics related to the efficiency and transparency of the presidential and legislative elections. Our findings have always been technical and non-partisan. Our long-term observers were joined in early February by an additional 24 short-term observers who monitored the conduct of the Feb. 7th Presidential and Parliamentary first-round elections. While there were technical and logistical problems, including overcrowded polling stations and inadequately trained electoral staff, IFES' team neither detected fraud nor received allegations of fraud or intimidation.

Civil unrest in the days that followed the elections resulted in a political decision being taken to change the way the blank ballots were counted (contrary to Art. 185 of the electoral decree). The result of that fundamental disregard of electoral law was the declaration of Rene Preval as winner by a narrow margin. IFES cannot now and may never be able to say whether this result reflects the will of the people, but we regret that a proper re-count and/or review were not allowed to proceed. As an institution dedicated to upholding the integrity of the electoral process, we must state that electoral law governing ballot counting was clearly not adhered to.

IFES remains concerned that this deviation from national electoral law may not bode well for Haiti's democratic transition, and may not contribute to an environment conducive to good governance. Whoever occupies Haiti's presidential palace requires both popular support and electoral legitimacy.

IFES urges both Haitian and international authorities to reaffirm their commitment to the promotion of democratic principles and the rule of law.

Finally, we hope that the experiences in Haiti will be studied and documented so that lessons learned, particularly regarding ballot security and early civic and media education related to the counting process, can be documented and applied in future elections in Haiti and elsewhere.

IFES is an international non-profit dedicated to building democratic societies through its work in election administration, civil society strengthening, and the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and good governance. IFES works in more than 25 countries worldwide and in a number of locations in the United States.