

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: JUNE 16 – JULY 16, 2007

Aristide supporters march in Haiti

AP, USA Today

July 15, 2007

Port-au-Prince, Haiti (AP) — Supporters of exiled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide marched through Haiti's capital on Sunday, demanding the ousted leader's return and accusing President Rene Preval of turning his back on his one-time ally.

Chants of "Preval is a traitor!" and "Bring Aristide home!" rose up as more than 1,000 protesters marched from the Port-au-Prince slum of Bel-Air to the heavily guarded National Palace, Preval's official residence.

"We helped Preval get in power and now he has turned his back on us. We still love Aristide and we want him home," Erick LeBon said during the march, which was called to mark Aristide's 54th birthday.

UNREST: Haitian government, U.N. seek to disarm gangs

A former slum priest-turned-president, Aristide was toppled during a 2004 rebel uprising. He was flown out of the country aboard a U.S.-supplied jet and later accused the United States of kidnapping him in a coup — a charge Washington denies.

Currently exiled in South Africa, Aristide has said he wants to return to Haiti but that the timing depends on Preval, his former prime minister and political protege.

Preval, a champion of the poor overwhelmingly elected last year with help from Aristide supporters, has said Haiti's constitution allows Aristide to return but has not taken steps to bring him back. The two men are no longer close and reportedly have not spoken in years.

No disturbances were reported during Sunday's protest, monitored by blue-helmeted U.N. peacekeepers and Haitian police.

Aristide supporters periodically hold street marches calling for his return, but the events attract far fewer people since the departure last year of an unpopular U.S.-backed interim government appointed to replace Aristide.

PM arrives in Colombia
ALAN FREEMAN
The Globe and Mail
July 15, 2007

BOGOTA — Prime Minister Stephen Harper arrived in Colombia Sunday evening on the first leg of a four-nation visit to Latin America designed to underscore his government's new Americas strategy on trade and foreign policy.

Mr. Harper was greeted after his six-hour flight from Ottawa aboard a Canadian Forces Airbus by a host of Colombian officials led by Foreign Affairs Minister Fernando Araujo.

Human rights, free trade and Colombia's efforts to end years of civil strife are expected to on the agenda during talks Monday between Mr. Harper and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe.

Mr. Harper travels from Colombia later Monday for Chile followed by Barbados and Haiti later in the week.

300 peacekeeping troops fly to Haiti, Liberia
July 16th, 2007
The Asian Journal.com, CA

MANILA, Philippines -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines has sent over 300 troops on a peacekeeping mission to Haiti and Liberia as part of its commitment to the United Nations. At least 165 soldiers and 155 others left for Haiti and Liberia Monday following ceremonies at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

The troops will be replacing existing deployments of the same number, whose six-year tours of duty are about to end, said Lieutenant General Antonio Romero, the Armed Forces Vice Chief of Staff.

The deployments will be the 8th for Liberia, and the 6th for Haiti, Romero told reporters.

"This [sending peacekeepers] will continue. This is our commitment to the United Nations," Romero told reporters.

In a speech, Romero told the peacekeepers: "Wear your flag-bearing uniforms with pride."

Canada, Brazil Discuss Biofuel in Haiti

The Associated Press

The Houston Chronicle

July 11, 2007

BRASILIA, Brazil — Canada and Brazil are talking about helping third-world countries such as Haiti to produce biofuels, a top adviser to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said Wednesday.

Canada's Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who was born in Haiti, took up the subject with Silva during a visit to the Brazilian capital, international affairs adviser Marco Aurelio Garcia told reporters.

Jean and Silva also discussed ways to strengthen already existing assistance programs for Haiti in health and reforestation, Garcia said.

Jean reiterated Canada's desire to double trade with Brazil by 2012. Trade between the two nations hit \$3.5 billion last year. Brazil is Canada's third largest export market in the Americas.

Haiti: An Unbroken Agony

HIP - Flashpoints/KPFA on the Pacifica radio network, will devote most of its program on Monday, July 16 at 5 PM PDT, to Haiti.

Host Dennis Bernstein and filmmaker and journalist Kevin Pina, will interview former civil rights activist and founder of TransAfrica Forum, Randall Robinson from his home in St. Kitts in the Caribbean. Robinson has released a new book entitled "An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President. "

The book is the first detailed account of how the democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was forced to leave the country. Robinson details how the twice-elected President was kidnapped along with his Haitian-American wife by American soldiers and flown, against his will, to the isolated Central African Republic.

Robinson majestically chronicles the convulsive saga of Haiti-from Columbus's arrival to the fearlessness of the slave revolutionaries who defeated the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1804, wresting from France the most valuable colony of any European power anywhere in the world; from the ideals of the young republic, to the foreign backed dictators who corrupted those ideals, culminating in the American-led operation removing from power Haiti's first democratically-elected president and his entire government in 2004.

Also, joining Bernstein and Pina live from Haiti will be Canadian journalist Jean St. Vil reporting on recent demonstrations demanding Jean-Bertrand Aristide's return from exile. Catholic priest Father Gerard Jean-Juste will join the discussion live from Miami where similar actions are planned for this weekend.

Haiti, Dominican leaders vow to bolster relations
The Dominican Today
July 13, 2007

SANTO DOMINGO.- Haiti president René Préval said yesterday relations between Republic Dominican and Haiti must be handled with a positive sense, while his colleague Leonel Fernandez made it clear that both nations "are destined to being brothers, in spite of past differences."

Préval said that together with Fernandez he's forced to guarantee lasting and fruitful relations between both countries because destiny wanted them to meet in a first mandate and afterwards return to work once again together as leaders.

After lunching with Haiti's chief executive in the National Palace, Fernandez called "the encounter with Préval "exceptional" and said it's the start of great initiatives that will bring Dominican Republic and Haiti closer together.

He said the commemoration of the centennial of the birth of the intellectual Jacques Romain, of Haitian origin, is an opportunity to strengthen the bonds that should exist between both countries.

Fernandez defined the Haitian poet and essayist Romain as the "Juan Bosch of Haiti" for his privileged works on the topic of rural people and the blackness as an essential part of the Haitian identity.

Préval received military honors upon his arrival in the National Palace at 12: 37 p.m. accompanied by Haitian and Dominican diplomats, other authorities. Fernandez received him with a warm "bonjour" before hosting the luncheon

In the evening the two leaders attended a round table to mark the birth of Roumain, held in the Santo Domingo State University (UASD) and visited the foundation Funglode.

Officers Graduate From Special Training Exercise
By Macushla N. Pinder
The Bahama Journal
July 16, 2007

For weeks, 12 police officers, among them one female and two members of the Haitian National Police (HNP), endured rigorous and demanding training in anti-kidnapping, special high-risk escorts, anti-ambush, hostage and terrorist situations.

On Friday, the classroom teaching and exercises officially ended. It is now time to apply the knowledge gained and the lessons learnt in practical terms and real time.

That was the charge Minister of National Security and Immigration Tommy Turnquest gave graduates of the first Protective Security and Anti-Kidnapping Course.

"Our grave concern about terrorism, crime and criminality, particularly violent crime in our 21st century world tells us that in respect of maintaining law and order, peace and security, we cannot and must not proceed with business as usual," Minister Turnquest said at the closing ceremony, which also marked the end of a 12-week Community Policing Exchange Programme.

Two senior Haitian police officials participated in the course.

"We must adjust to the new realities," he said. "We must adopt realistic and workable strategies and policies to combat this phenomenon. Importantly, it tells us that effective policing is critical."

Officers who participated in the Protective Security course were enlisted for critical policing initiatives like protecting and securing dignitaries.

"You were especially selected and now much is expected of you... The training you have received gives an indication of some of the measures The Bahamas had to take to provide greater security for Bahamians and our visitors," Minister Turnquest said.

"It also shows that as a nation, we are committed to protective security and to building partnerships with other countries for this purpose, partnerships that are extended to the giving and receiving of training opportunities. It also shows that as a nation, we have endeavored to meet the increased expenditure of national security in a 21st Century world."

The law enforcement exchange programme was set up after former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security Cynthia Pratt and Commissioner of Police Paul Farquharson visited Haiti in November 2006 and observed its young police force.

Haiti's police force is only seven years old, according to Bahamas Ambassador to Haiti Dr. Eugene Newry.

Training began for four officers earlier this year. Since then, training has been completed in public order and drug investigation.

"We do hope that our visiting Haitian officers share their experience and knowledge with their colleagues in Haiti," the minister said.

"We will continue our efforts to build cooperative relationships with the Haitian Police Force, which I believe is in the interest of both of our countries...I trust that for all officers completing their course of training that you are now ready and anxious to take up new responsibilities...We will depend on you to use foresight and not hindsight. We will depend on you to prevent crime and crises...We will depend on you to take our communities from powerless on their own to powerful in partnership with the police."

He said "above all, we will depend on you to keep our country and communities safe."

Delivering remarks on behalf of the graduates, Corporal 2460 Williams admitted that the past few weeks have been demanding.

"This course has been challenging for all of us, especially at 5am for exercise or at 2am during our defensive tactic training," he said.

"...I challenge graduates not to view this or other courses as an opportunity to obtain a certificate for the wall or to display during promotion interviews, but to apply its relevance during normal work duties. I also challenge you to sustain your integrity. When you have lost it, only you would know."

Haitian Ambassador to The Bahamas Louis Harold Joseph said he is confident all of the officers will apply what they have learnt.

"The training programme is a good experience. It reinforces the relationship between our two countries and promotes better understanding and friendship," he said.

The Haitian officers were scheduled to return home on the weekend.

Haiti: The Unexploited Market

By Tameka Lundy

The Bahama Journal

July 13, 2007

In an era where Haiti is starved for investments and The Bahamas has the capacity to fill the void, the private sector's move to fuse trade links between the two is viewed as a natural fit.

Both countries already have a history; many of the migrants here are predominantly from Haiti and there are so many telephone calls between the two CARICOM countries that a special undersea cable being laid is expected to improve the telecommunications service.

But the investment and business potential in Haiti, a country of 8.3 million people many of whom are mired in poverty, is largely untapped, officials have acknowledged. It is something that the Haitian government and its allies are trying to change.

The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce is planning a trade mission to Haiti and the Dominican Republic as a means of exploring and exploiting the potential that exists and opening the avenues for shipping links, business ties and investments. The work of the chamber's globalization and foreign relations committee has been central in that effort.

"Most of what we are buying come from the US and a significant portion of that comes from Haiti," said Winston Rolle, a member of the chamber as he sought to put things into perspective.

Mr. Rolle - a past president of the chamber – and his colleagues have been pursuing leads on such a mission for quite some time and have even had discussions with the Haitian American Chamber of Commerce.

Executive Director of the chamber Philip Simon said chamber officials have also had discussions with Bahamas Ambassador to Haiti Dr. Eugene Newry and Haitian Ambassador to The Bahamas Louis Harold Joseph.

"We have many successful businesspersons doing business in Haiti and it just seems to be a natural link and also to be able to take advantage of many economies that might exist...in Haiti and the Dominican Republic jointly," said Mr. Simon.

Both men and Ambassador Newry were guests on the JCN television show Contact with host Mike Smith.

A longtime advocate of exploiting the investment potential in Haiti, Dr. Newry says simply The Bahamas and Haiti are members of CARICOM so anything this country can do to help its neighbour helps itself.

He advanced the rationale that importing goods from Haiti, for instance, can help to ultimately drive down high product costs in The Bahamas, a number of commercial ships already sail past The Bahamas en route to Haiti and there is money to be made.

He pointed to the area of low cost housing, the export market and biofuels as ideal investments, not to mention tourism.

"The type of tourists who go to Dominican Republic do not come [to The Bahamas] and the ones who will be going to Haiti do not come [to The Bahamas] so the key is for The Bahamas to piggyback off of that," said the ambassador. "That is very important."

He also pointed to the untapped potential in infrastructure like road building.

"I spoke with President Preval and he reminded me again of Haiti's desire to have road builders go to Haiti," Dr. Newry said, "[Bahamians] need to be in there bidding like the rest of the people."

Just recently the Canadian International Development Agency pledged to contribute US\$16.5 million to a programme financed by the Inter American Development Bank to improve basic infrastructure in Haiti. The IDB is carrying out basic work in Haiti like road and transportation rehabilitation and maintenance programmes.

In 2005 the IDB sponsored programme received a US \$7 million contribution from the OPEC Fund for International Development. Spain has also expressed interest in providing co-financing to the facility.

Haitian Ambassador to The Bahamas Louis Harold Joseph told the Bahama Journal recently that Haiti has made good progress since its president Rene Preval was re-elected. Mr. Joseph said the government has stabilized the Haitian currency and is also putting systems in place in an effort to attract international investors.

"There is a slight increase in the rate of growth in Haiti this year," the ambassador said. "During the last 20 years, the rate of growth was negative, but this year it's positive."

Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic ratify Biological Corridor
The Dominican Today
July 13, 2007

SANTO DOMINGO. - Presidents Leonel Fernandez and Haiti's René Preval, and a representative of Cuba's Government ratified the creation by those nations of the "Biological Corridor of the Caribbean," in a National Palace ceremony yesterday.

The Corridor seeks to preserve the environment and natural resources, and reduce the loss of the Caribbean and American subtropical regions' biological diversity.

The official document, in which the 3 Caribbean countries assume the commitment, was made public prior to the luncheon hosted by Fernandez for his Haitian colleague, in the presence of senior officials and special guests of their governments.

The Environment and Natural Resources ministers from the 3 nations had previously signed the agreement.

US Suspends Mango Shipments From Haiti
AP, The Houston Chronicle
July 9, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The discovery of fruit fly larvae in mangos from Haiti has prompted the United States to temporarily block shipments of one of the impoverished Caribbean nation's few exports.

Inspectors found the live larvae in a mango shipment that reached the Port of Everglades in Florida on June 25, and in two others that had not yet left Haiti on July 2, U.S. Animal Plant Health Inspection Service spokeswoman Melissa O'Dell said Monday.

All three had passed through Haitian treatment facilities designed to kill pests, she added.

O'Dell said the U.S., which is Haiti's largest trade partner, will send inspectors to the island this week to help improve pest control. It was not known when shipments would be allowed to resume.

Haiti to crack down on counterfeit medicines

The Associated Press

July 9, 2007

International Herald Tribune

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: Health officials announced a crackdown on the counterfeit medicine trade in the capital, where street vendors by the hundreds sell unmarked antibiotics and cold medications out of buckets and plastic bags.

Officials will seize any contraband medicines and also shut down unlicensed pharmacies selling drugs that have not undergone safety testing, Health Director Gabriel Thimothe said Monday.

No penalties were announced for people caught selling the medications.

Counterfeit pharmaceuticals are rampant in underdeveloped countries, according to the World Health Organization. In 1995, nearly 90 children died in Haiti after they ingested a cheap cough syrup laced with a chemical used in antifreeze.

HAITI-DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A Fragile Coexistence

By Elizabeth Eames Roebling

IPS

July 12, 2007

PEDERNALES, Dominican Republic - The border between Anse a Pitres in Haiti and Pedernales in the Dominican Republic, both seven hours from their respective capitals, is barred only by a chain that pedestrians can easily cross.

Unlike some other crossings that are tightly controlled, Haitians pass freely back and forth during the week. No immigration checks occur until buses are stopped at the fort leaving the town.

Still, relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic are so delicate that the theft of a motorbike, which precipitated a melee along the Pedernales River last week, drew the intervention of the head of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti and representatives of both the national governments.

The governors of Pedernales and the Departement du Sud Est from Port au Prince met last week on the southern border to publicly demonstrate that there was no conflict between the two nations.

In the Jul. 4 incident, a Haitian was accused of stealing a motorbike from the Dominican side. A number of Dominicans crossed into Anse a Pitres and started to beat him up. A lot more Haitians arrived to aid the accused. In the end, there were as many as 200 people gathered on the banks of the river fighting with rocks and machetes.

Local residents, including Ramon Mateus, director of Plan International, and Frederico Oscaldo, the Haitian consul in Pedernales, insist that the altercation, in which eight people were wounded, was merely infighting among gang members.

"It is an organised gang of delinquents who regularly steal motorbikes from the Dominican side and sell them on the Haitian side. This is an ongoing problem," Oscaldo said.

Mateus, whose office works to promote friendship between the residents and dispel any ideas of "anti-Haitianismo", added that, "The people in Anse a Pitres are country people, not sophisticated. They could not be regularly stealing motorbikes without the cooperation of people on the Dominican side."

This belief was shared by Marino José, owner of the Hotel Dona Chava, a lifelong resident of Pedernales who himself has never crossed over the border into Haiti.

"Certainly it is a gang of delinquents," he said. "The Haitians could not be doing it alone. They could not be wandering about stealing without someone catching them."

José said that young Dominicans have crossed over into Haiti to get their bikes back. But if the bikes have been seized by the Haitian authorities, which often happens if they discover that a Haitian has a bike with Dominican identification plates, they require them to pay a "recovery fee" that is sometimes more than the bike is worth.

There is also a large population of Colombian nationals living in Pedernales who own several apartment buildings, and a concrete company, along with a dock with a ship on the deep water port of Cabo Rojo. The company has not been producing concrete for the last year.

The 20,000 residents of Anse-A-Pitres, which has no electricity, live primarily through fishing, although few of their boats have motors so that they do not catch as much as the motorboats which leave from the Dominican side and can go further out.

Many of the women go into Pedernales during the day to perform domestic labour in Dominican homes. A wage of 50 dollars a month is typical, and there are many more people looking for work than there are jobs available. One Haitian woman working at a local hotel is paid 65 dollars a month for seven days a week, 12 hours a day.

Mateus challenges the local custom of keeping young Haitian girls to do housework in Dominican homes for room and board only, with no salary.

"I have been at meetings with Dominican women, high-level women, who have these girls of 13 years old at their homes. They do not pay them. They do not send them to school. I say to them that this is a form of slavery. They say that it is not, that they are giving them a place to live and food. But if you are not sending them to school and not paying them, what do you call it?" he said.

On market days in Pedernales, Mondays and Fridays, the consul on the Haitian side and his assistant and two customs officials on the Dominican side eye the goods coming out of the market and determine the duty on the spot. There are no set customs duties posted. Neither official could give an estimate of how much money changed hands during the two market days every week.

Marino José says that the director of customs is building a new house. "The front door alone costs 50,000 pesos. His salary is only 15,000. How is this possible? I have watched them collect the customs. There is no paperwork, no records."

Recently there has been a tightening of controls on Haitians arriving without proper passports and visas. Three hours before the local bus from Santo Domingo arrived in Pedernales, the bus driver received a phone call.

"Two or three, you say?" he commented.

At the next military checkpoint, he turned to the fare collector and pointed out one of the guards, saying: "Go talk to that one." When the fare collector got back on the bus, he told the driver: "He says we can only bring in two and he wants 300 pesos each." The driver said: "That means that we will charge them 1,200 pesos" -- about 36 dollars.

Jose says that the military men at the border checkpoints are paid the minimum wage, about 120-150 dollars a month. If a bus stops and is not carrying any undocumented Haitians, the officer will say to the driver: "You are not bringing anything. You are not bringing a livelihood."

Hellish conditions prevail in Haiti jails

Thursday, July 12, 2007

By Clarens Renois

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): A surge of violent crime has crammed Haitian jails far beyond capacity, in "inhuman conditions" where inmates often lack water, medical care or enough room to sleep lying down.

Since 2003, Haiti's prison population doubled, from 3,500 to 7,000, officials said.

An Inter American Commission on Human Rights reported on prisons last month: "Overpopulation creates inhuman conditions that result in a serious risk to the security and physical integrity of persons deprived of liberty and poses a further risk to the situation of insecurity of the (Haitian) population in general."

The commission noted deteriorated prisons without adequate shelter, water and medical attention.

"In the Delmas police station ... women, men and children shared a common cell, without water, food or any other basic service," the commission said.

The police station cells were meant to hold persons no longer than 48 hours, but several persons had been held for weeks -- without being charged or seeing a judge.

The UN stabilization soldiers in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has often blamed a dysfunctional justice system in part for overcrowding and hellish conditions in prisons.

The commission found that in June, 84 percent of all inmates had not been judged or charged: 98 percent of boys in the Prison for Minors in Delmas; 95 percent of women at Petion-ville; and 96 percent of inmates at the National Penitentiary.

That penitentiary, with half of Haiti's inmates, was built under US occupation 1915-1934, and nearly 3,000 inmates are stuffed by the hundreds in small cells.

"Some prisoners sleep standing up -- others in a sitting position or take turns lying down -- some in the morning, others at night," said a prison guard.

Celestin said there were .65 inmates per square meter (11 square feet) of prison space, when the international standard calls for one prisoner per four square meters of space.

"We're aware of the situation and we're trying to make improvements with what little means the country has," he added.

Things recently deteriorated further, amid increasing arrests of drug traffickers, kidnappers and the arrival of numerous Haitian criminals extradited from Canada and the United States.

"The prisoner profile has changed, but the conditions are still the same," said Celestin, who also regretted the shortage of prison guards, saying there were only 321 in all Haiti's prisons: a guard-to-prisoner ratio of 1-12.

He said the government plans to recruit 400 security officers, build new penitentiaries and refurbish old ones.

"We're still a long way from meeting international standards," he admitted.

Canada recently contributed two million dollars for the improvement of Haiti's prison system, on top of 10 million dollars it already pledged in February to help reform the national police and curb violence in the country.

Working closely with Haitian officials in the improvement effort are foreign experts sent especially by the United Nations.

Haiti president begins whirlwind visit to Dominican capital
The Dominican Today
July 12, 2007

SANTO DOMINGO.- Haiti president René Préval arrived in Dominican Republic at mid-morning Thursday for a 9 hour visit that includes a meeting with his colleague Leonel Fernandez, the Santo Domingo State University (UASD), and to the Global Foundation, Democracy and Development.

Preval arrived at 10:20 a.m. at Las Americas Airport, where officials of the Foreign Relations Ministry and Haiti's embassy in the country received him.

The Haitian leader boarded a Dominican Air Force helicopter which flew to the National Palace, to meet with Fernandez. The two heads of State will participate in the ceremonies to mark the 100th anniversary of Haitian intellectual Jacques Roumain's birth.

At 4 p.m. Préval will also visit the UASD campus, and from there the Global Foundation, Democracy and Development (Funglode). His return to Port au Prince is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Haiti and Dominican Republic are major drug traffickers
Wednesday, 11 July 2007
Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation, Barbados

An influential Washington-based think-tank has identified Haiti and the Dominican Republic as the "Caribbean's Big Leaguers" in drug trafficking.

In a report issued here Tuesday, the Council on Hemispheric Affairs said both countries, comprising the island of Hispaniola, have become "major routing points and trafficking destinations for drugs moving from South America on their way to the US and Europe".

The report said drug trafficking involving the islands has reached "alarming levels," prompting the governments in Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince to call for more US aid.

"Washington emphasises its support for Haiti and the Dominican Republic, with SOUTHCOM (US Southern Command) sponsoring new programmes," the report said.

"But will these initiatives be enough to stem the flow? Will the UN Mission in Haiti mutate into an effective counter-drug trafficking instrument?" it asked rhetorically.

"Much rhetoric continues to emerge from Brussels. However, the EU (European Union) has yet to show its ability to create a viable and predictable policy to aid the Caribbean region in the fight against drug trafficking, much of which can be expected to flow to Europe."

The report said the entire Caribbean region has become the "latest conduit" through which illegal drugs coming from South America, primarily Colombia, are trafficked by Colombian and Mexican drug cartels and their local affiliates to their final destinations.

"These latest developments have prompted numerous crackdowns on drug traffickers operating on Hispaniola by local forces.

"However, there persists the issue of a lack of funds, personnel, training, and a master strategy, not to mention ongoing corruption in the two countries, which certainly have hobbled efforts at stifling the anti-drug strategy," it added.

The Council said Washington has donated limited amounts of economic aid to Haiti, and SOUTHCOM forces have continued its exercises with Caribbean defence forces, donating equipment to help nations like the Dominican Republic, to crack down on drug smugglers.

But it said such actions appear not to be sufficient "to curb an increasing amount of illegal narcotics coming from the region".

The report said recent developments, like declarations, which are intended to transform the UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) into an anti-drug force, may be a signal that the international community is getting serious about the ongoing problems of drug trafficking in Haiti.

"Nevertheless, it is yet to be seen what powerful entities like the European Union, a growing destination point for South American and Caribbean basin drugs, will do about this critical issue," it said, pointing out that there is a "growing necessity for a decisive inter-continental policy" of dealing with drug trafficking.

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs urged Washington and Brussels to collaborate in drawing up a "major strategy to stop Mexican and Colombian drug traffickers from carrying out their dirty businesses unchallenged".

It said Haiti is one of the most "convenient launching points" for cocaine being spirited out of Colombia en route to Florida and added that traffickers were attracted by Haiti's weak legal system, "easily-bribed" police and 1,500-kilometre (900-mile) coastline "that is all but unprotected".

The Council said since 1997, Haitian authorities have permitted US Coast Guard patrols into its waters and US planes into its airspace in hot pursuit of suspected felons in order to track down smugglers, "with mixed results".

It warned that the high volume of drug trafficking may inflate the historical tensions between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

"With weak security services particularly in Haiti, and tainted judicial systems, in addition to a loosely guarded border, it may be only a matter of time before the governments and the people of each nation replace cooperation with mutual recriminations for propagating the drug trade," the report said.

Haiti studies creation of security force to replace UN

**By Stevenson Jacobs
Associated Press Writer**

Jul 11, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Haiti is considering the creation of a security force to one day replace UN peacekeepers sent three years ago to stabilize the troubled country.

A special commission named by President Rene Preval will decide whether such a force should take the form of a reconstituted military or act as a supporting unit of Haiti's outgunned police, said Sen. Yuri Latortue, president of the Senate commission on justice and security, on June 21.

Pres. Preval was expected to appoint the commission soon, and the commission's report would be due eight months later, Sen. Latortue said.

An 8,800-member UN force provides the only real security in the impoverished Caribbean nation, which is still recovering from a violent uprising that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Sen. Latortue, the nephew and former security chief of ex-interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, said his Senate colleagues support creating a new military force.

"We can't provide our own security yet. But once the UN soldiers leave, the country will need a military force to keep the peace and protect our borders," Sen. Latortue, a former officer in the Haitian armed forces, told The Associated Press in an interview.

Pres. Preval has said he prefers creating a police force similar to that of France's national police over reinstating the military, which orchestrated several coups throughout Haiti's history.

Mr. Aristide dismantled the military in 1995, after a U.S. military intervention restored him to power following the 1991 coup that first ousted him.

Subpar rice included in aid to Haiti

By Angelica Oung

Taipei Times

Thursday, Jul 05, 2007

'UNFIT FOR ANIMALS': Haitian officials complained to the foreign ministry about the shipment and a Yunlin County rice processing plant is under investigation

"The rice the factory attempted to pass off as acceptable quality was so poor that it was immediately obvious upon visual inspection -- the rice had turned yellow and black."

Tsao Shao-hwei, Agricultural and Food Agency official

Part of a food aid shipment to Haiti in February contained rice "unfit even for animal consumption," a Council of Agriculture official said yesterday.

The problem came to light when Haitian officials complained about the subpar rice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in turn informed the council on May 24, said Tsao Shao-hwei (曹紹徽), an Agricultural and Food Agency (AFA) official.

Tsao said the case has been turned over to the police, who suspect malfeasance on the part of factory owners.

Council officials said the poor rice had been traced to a processing plant in Yunlin County.

The ten 50kg bags that were found to contain poor-quality rice in the 420-tonne shipment were from the Chun-ku Rice Processing Plant.

The plant said that substandard rice had been mixed with good rice by mistake because its foreign laborers had misunderstood instructions that were not given in their mother tongue.

Tsao voiced skepticism at that explanation.

"The rice the factory attempted to pass off as acceptable quality is so poor that it was immediately obvious upon visual inspection -- the rice had turned yellow and black," Tsao told reporters yesterday. "It would be hard for the factory to pass this off as a mistake."

High-quality unprocessed rice was delivered by the AFA to the plant to process before being shipped to Haiti.

"We strongly suspect they sold some of the good rice, substituted poor-quality rice for part of the shipment and pocketed the profit," Tsao said.

"Our contract with the plant ended on June 5. The results of the police investigation will decide whether plant officials will be found criminally culpable," he said.

Tsao said that Taiwan first started providing rice as foreign aid in 2002. The amount of rice donated varies from year to year depending on the level of demand from famine-stricken countries and has ranged from 20,000 tonnes to more than 60,000 tonnes per year.

Ministry spokeswoman Phoebe Yeh (葉非比) said yesterday that the aid program for Haiti began in February and would run until next January.

"We believe that this is an isolated case ... but we will pay attention to prevent it from happening again," she said.

Additional reporting by Jewel Huang
This story has been viewed 992 times.

Gangs stalling Haiti's reconstruction: MacKay

July 1, 2007

Canadian Press

CTV.ca

TORONTO -- Haiti remains a "volatile" nation plagued by gangs and drug trafficking more than three years after an uprising ousted former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, despite Canada's half-billion dollar pledge to help stabilize the troubled country, says a newly released document.

A briefing prepared in January for Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, obtained by The Canadian Press through an access to information request, paints a grim picture of Haiti as a nation where "chronically high" crime has kept United Nations forces from "advancing as was hoped" following last year's election of current Haitian president Rene Preval.

"Haiti's security situation remains volatile," the briefing paper says. "Temporary improvements, followed by peaks in criminal activity demonstrate that security and stability has not been achieved."

Andre Lemay, MacKay's press secretary, said the foreign affairs minister was travelling through Atlantic Canada over the long weekend and was unavailable for comment.

Dan Dugas, MacKay's communications director, said in an e-mail that authorities have made "significant progress" clamping down on Haitian gangs. Still, he acknowledged Haiti's security situation remains "fragile."

"Important challenges remain in dismantling criminal gangs throughout the country, strengthening Haitian law enforcement capacity and modernizing the penal and justice systems," Dugas wrote.

University of Florida anthropologist Gerald Murray, who estimates he has been to Haiti to do fieldwork nearly 100 times since 1974, including two stays of a year or more, said the country has become "more chaotic" since Aristide was ousted. Murray, who last visited Haiti in January, attributes the heightened violence to Haiti's "deteriorating" economy and a police force he calls ineffective.

"The country has fallen to pieces," Murray said.

An 8,800-member UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by its French acronym MINUSTAH, provides the only real protection in the impoverished Caribbean nation. The briefing called the UN security force "irreplaceable as the only institution that can provide stability and security in Haiti."

While the briefing says there has been tangible progress reforming the Haitian National Police, it also says the force needs another 14,000 officers by 2011 "to be fully capable of handling all Haitian police requirements." To reach that target - which would bring force strength to 20,000 police officers and administration - the briefing says the national police must recruit 1,500 people a year for the next four years.

Murray said it's unlikely more police officers alone will curb violence in Haiti. The country lacks the necessary checks and balances on its police and public officials to weed out possible corruption, he said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper is expected to travel to Haiti in mid-July as part of a larger tour of the region as he tries to bolster Canada's profile in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Haiti is second only to Afghanistan on the list of Canada's long-term development commitments. Canada pledged \$520 million last year, spread over a five-year period ending September 2011, to help Haiti's reconstruction and development.

The Canadian International Development Agency allocated \$485 million for reconstruction projects. Foreign Affairs contributed \$15 million to support security and justice, while \$20 million is funding up to 100 Canadian police officers as part of the UN security force.

But some critics say there are no safeguards to ensure the Haitian government properly allocates foreign aid. Murray suggested non-governmental organizations could, at least temporarily, oversee Haitian government aid money spending.

Development money should be allocated for short-term aid projects instead of trying to "change the character of the Haitian state," he said.

"If the Canadian government just gives the money to the Haitian government, kiss it goodbye," Murray said.

A CIDA spokesman wouldn't say how the development agency ensures Canada's aid money is properly spent by the Haitian government.

One of the most daunting threats facing authorities is drug trafficking. The briefing says Haiti has become a "major transit hub" for drugs, with traffickers taking advantage of the country's security situation to smuggle drugs from South American through Haiti to North America and Europe.

Robert Maguire of Washington, D.C.-based Trinity University, who has visited Haiti at least 100 times in the last three decades, and since 1990 has served as chair of Haiti Advanced Area Studies at the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service Institute, called the Caribbean nation's drug trafficking problem "enormously bad."

"Haiti is caught by virtue of its geography in this kind of trafficking network where cocaine flows into it and flows out of it," he said.

"It fuels the gangs, it fuels corruption, it undermines trying to build institutions based upon rule of law. Haiti will remain vulnerable as long as it has the poverty and corruption and lack of institutional capacity to clamp down on the drug trafficking."

However, Maguire said, following two years in which Haiti's situation worsened, the country's lot has improved somewhat in the last six months after the Preval government arrested gang leaders with a "minimum of collateral damage" to Haitians.

Foreign aid money and Preval's efforts to work with different political and economic factions have also helped Haiti's progress, he said.

Plea for Haiti
The Nation Newspaper, Barbados
July 7, 2007

Private sector agencies and the wider CARICOM region have been urged to assist violence-torn Haiti in rebuilding.

Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, speaking during a Press conference ahead of the 28th CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting at Hilton Barbados yesterday, pledged that the social, economic and political issues that affected the poverty stricken Caribbean nation would be placed on the front burner.

He said despite millions of dollars being pumped into Haiti's parliamentary structure, the judiciary and police force were not functioning effectively and needed technical expertise to guide them.

Insulza thanked CARICOM nations for assistance rendered so far but said much more needed to be done.

Deputy Secretary-General of the OAS, Albert Ramdin, agreed with Insulza and stressed that Haiti did not have enough qualified people to operate the various branches of government and spoke of the importance of regional co-operation, especially in the area of education.

"CARICOM could assist Haiti at both the political and technical level. For instance, there is a new parliament in Haiti and it needs to function effectively and there is no reason why nationals from CARICOM cannot go in and help them set it up.

"Capacity building is key to the future success of Haiti and I do not see why the University of the West Indies cannot set up a campus in Port-au-Prince for students who can afford to pay for tertiary education. What is needed in Haiti is creative out-of-the-box ideas to assist Haiti in its development."

Regarding the role of the private sector, Ramdin said housing, creating employment opportunities and generating income opportunities were critical areas in which they could assist the government.

He also said a major trade show would be held in Haiti on October 22 and 23 in an attempt to showcase what the nation had to offer.

juliewilson@nationnews.com

Haiti's movie industry grows

By Stevenson Jacobs

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Washington Times

July 11, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

Even in hard times, Haitians go to the movies. Now they're also making them in record numbers — about 10 feature films a year — rivaling Cuba as the Caribbean's biggest movie producer and often outselling better-financed imports.

The ultimate dream? To transform the impoverished, politically volatile country of 8 million into a cinema powerhouse — Haitiwood — following the lead of India and Nigeria.

While most Haitian industries are stagnant, show business is booming, driven by plunging production costs and an appetite among Haitians at home and abroad for movies shot in their native Haitian Creole.

"Movies are becoming Haiti's most popular art form after music," says Arnold Antonin, a director and president of the Haitian Filmmakers Association.

He estimates Haitian film production has risen 300 percent in the last five years, including an explosion in straight-to-DVD releases shot in Haitian immigrant communities in the U.S.

The country's first Creole-language film was released in 1980 — Rassoul Labuchin's "Anita," the story of a peasant girl who becomes a servant for a wealthy family.

Today, Haiti still doesn't have a national film commission to finance local production. But cameras have continued to roll, even after a bloody 2004 revolt that toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and plunged the country into tumult.

**Delegation Returns From Haiti 'Hopeful'
Goodwill Mission Considered Success
WPLG, Miami
Local10.com, Florida
July 10, 2007**

MIAMI -- A delegation made up of 17 South Florida politicians and support staff has returned to Miami after spending three days in Haiti.

The delegation, organized by City of North Miami Councilman Jacques Despinosse, went to Haiti on a goodwill mission and returned with ideas on how to help Haitians.

"Right now everything is calm. That's what you hear from the government, the chamber of commerce and even from the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti," said Despinosse, at Miami International Airport Sunday night.

"So now they're focusing on education, education, education. That's why we're launching a campaign locally to get school supplies to bring back ourselves to the children of Haiti in September," said Despinosse.

During the weekend trip to what is considered the poorest country in the western hemisphere, the delegation met with President Rene Preval and the country's Parliament.

The delegation also toured schools, hospitals, prisons and several cities and towns, which the delegates said gave them ideas on how to help.

"Some major problems they have like local infrastructure and education, we can't help them with that, the federal government can. But we can help with things like adopting a neighborhood school, sending them good police cars -- things that we can do at the local level," said North Miami Mayor Kevin Burns.

Burns said he plans to talk to the City of North Miami police department to see if some of the officers would be willing to go to Haiti to help train their police force.

According to U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson, the U.S. federal government is responsible for 60 percent of Haiti's international aid.

The delegation hopes to increase the aid to Haiti with help and contributions from South Florida residents.

"I am making a plea to all the constituents of South Florida -- to donate a back pack, school supplies, whatever, and we personally will make sure it gets to the hands of the needy in Haiti," said Despinosse.

How To Donate To Haiti

If you would like to donate school supplies to the children of Haiti, you can drop them off or mail them to:

Councilman Jacques Despinosse
9999 NE 2nd Ave., Room 303
North Miami, FL

Commentary: The Greater Caribbean This Week: Peace with poverty is not peace
Saturday, July 14, 2007
By Rubén Silié
Caribbean Net News

The inspiration for this article came to me from a news report by the AFP entitled "Peace returns to Cite Soleil, but poverty persists". The report gives an account of the fight against the armed gangs that held that poverty stricken area in Port au Prince, Haiti, hostage to violence.

Dr Rubén Silié Valdez is the Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States. Feedback can be sent to: mail@acs-aec.org

We have to first of all ask ourselves how those groups with such meagre resources were able to acquire weapons, to the extent that they managed to seize physical control of that area, preventing the National Police from gaining entry for a long time and keeping the blue helmets of the UN Mission (MINUSTAH) in check. It is a well known fact that the process of arming those groups is an age old practice encouraged by groups that hold power, who at some point in time understand that unscrupulous people can be used to create an atmosphere of general terror, or they can be used as a shock troop to intimidate political adversaries, or simply to carry out criminal activities.

Such a practice has not been exclusive either to this era or to Haiti; it is rather an historic resource used by powerful players to gain control of new spaces. For example, during the 19th century, the expansion of military leaders in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic was driven by the large companies that wanted to acquire production zones or which sought to persuade governments so that they could receive tax exemptions. The procedure involved offering weapons to a gang that would support them and confront those who opposed them. Thus, more and more weapons fell into the hands of individuals or groups who would not have been able to gain access to such arsenals on their own strength. A similar situation has occurred with the conflicts in Afghanistan, or the case of the former associates of Bin Laden. In both cases there was a change in allies and those who helped to arm them regretted doing so.

However, the serious and delicate aspect of the current situation in Haiti is that since the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship (1986), the practice of arming gangs has been recurring in Haiti, and we know that once there is a shift from a chaotic environment to true institutional normalcy, a plan is announced to disarm the civil population.

Nevertheless, such plans have emerged on several occasions and with varying results in each case. We are also certain that weapons are never removed entirely from the possession of those groups, with some always being left in the hands of those directly involved, thus leading to an increase in the number of weapons in civilian hands. Many of these individuals usually change their allegiance from one gang leader to another, while others take their own initiative and create new small groups that end up acting of their own accord.

What is striking about this entire situation is that the vast majority of the bullies who join gangs come from the most socially excluded areas, where poverty serves as fodder for such negative behaviour. Usually, it involves young people who are frustrated over the impossibility of finding decent ways in

which to insert themselves into a society that ends up excluding them. Therefore, reading the news report that peace has returned to Cité Soleil, yet poverty persists, we wonder how lasting this return to peace will be.

In Haiti, there is a need to continue working toward so-called “positive peace”, which according to the formula of the Philosopher Spinoza, “is borne out of the strength of the soul, of harmony and justice”[1]. Without a doubt, the situation of non-violence is imperative in order to commence community development efforts, but it does not mean that the confrontations have ceased, since the contradictions and conflicts that stem from poverty, such as exclusion and inequality, continue to await a response. In that sense, the peace that exists in Cité Soleil is a peace that is still limited.

The political success enjoyed by the Haitian Government with support from the MINUSTAH, requires a boost from the international community. It is an excellent opportunity to bring to fruition the assistance offered, since there is no doubt that the young people, from whom weapons have been seized or who have simply relinquished them, would be potential candidates to take them up again, if new levels of social insertion are not achieved in a timely fashion.

Dr Rubén Silié Valdez is the Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States. The views expressed are not necessarily the official views of the ACS. Feedback can be sent to: mail@acs-aec.org

The Business of Haiti: The Fine Line Between Chavez and Washington
by Richard Morse
Huffington Post.com,
July 9, 2007

The last crack down on the gangs of former President Aristide happened on December 23, 2006. Since then Haiti has been working its way back towards becoming a functioning country. People are going out at night without hearing gunshots. Kidnappings and murders are no longer part of everyday conversations. The parts of town we used to enjoy, until they were taken over by the gangs, are beginning to show signs of life. Delegations from the US, among other countries, have shown great optimism during recent visits to Haiti. It hasn't been easy. The multinational effort has been led by the Brazilians, but Chile, Argentina, the US, France and Canada have all strongly participated as the United Nations.

What's next you may ask?

JOBS.

If Haiti doesn't begin to attract investors soon, it's all going to be for naught. Haitians need jobs and if necessary they'll take boats and enter the United States or Caribbean job market. That's not necessary however. Haitians would rather stay home.

HOPE, a textile job bill recently passed in the US Congress, is projected to create at least ten thousand jobs in Haiti but it's not enough. Not only do we need jobs in Haiti but we also need job training. Technical programs should be incorporated in High Schools and Colleges to prepare future workers. Haitians are good people and Haiti is right off the coast of Florida so it's convenient. Let's create stability here in our own neighborhood. In the long run it will be to everyone's advantage.

There is another option. Ignore Haiti and let Chavez handle things. He already sells gas to Haiti at 50% off, with the balance as a twenty-five year low interest loan. He also wants to build a refinery here. My question is, does Chavez want to help Haitians or is he trying to create an anti-American political block in the hemisphere?

Bastille Day and Carib freedom

Thursday | July 12, 2007

Martin Henry

The Jamaica Gleaner News

On July 14, 1789, the commoners of Paris, rebelling against the oppression of royal power, stormed the Bastille, launching the French Revolution. This Saturday marks the 218th anniversary.

Shortly after the storming of the Bastille, feudalism was abolished on August 4, and on August 26, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was proclaimed.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, some 500,000 humans languished in slavery in the French colony of Saint-Domingue.

The French Revolution helped to inspire the Haitian which started only three years later in 1791. After 13 years of complicated fighting, a black and free Haitian Republic was established on January 1, 1804.

The Haitian Revolution had tremendous impact on the quest for freedom in the Caribbean and across the Americas. White slaveholding power everywhere feared it; black slaves were inspired by it. In the United States, Thomas Jefferson the principal architect of the Declaration of Independence, which had helped to inspire the French Revolution, refused to support the Haitian Revolution.

Timothy Pickering, who served in the Cabinets of both George Washington and John Adams, wrote to Jefferson enquiring how could he praise the French Revolution and refuse support for the rebels on Saint-Domingue because they were 'guilty' of having a "skin not coloured like our own"?

In a letter to James Monroe, Jefferson speculated in trepidation that the insurrectionary violence on Saint-Domingue probably forecast the future in the United States. Too much contact, he feared, might advance that day.

Fight to restore slavery

The British, too, feared the impact of the Haitian Revolution particularly on their neighbouring colony of Jamaica and, in fact, joined in the fight to destroy the Haitian Revolution and to restore slavery there.

Independent Haiti provided a safe haven for slaves escaping within its borders. Under the Haitian Constitution, Article 44, all people who were black that step foot onto Haitian soil were considered Haitian and therefore protected by the constitution.

One famous case involving Jamaican slaves occurred in 1817. In January 1817 James M'Kewan took a group of his slaves on an expedition to the east end of the island where they would supply other vessels with goods.

The black crew was separated from the owner during the task and when the owner signalled to three of the slaves to fetch a boat so that he could get on board, they ignored his signal and sailed to Haiti leaving the owner stranded.

Request rebuffed

M'Kewan went to Haiti in search of his slaves, and when he could not find the slaves, he went to President Petion to personally demand the restitution of his property. Petion rebuffed the request pointing out, that under Haitian law, the slaves were no longer slaves but were citizens of Haiti.

English law, in fact, had an article quite similar to article 44 in the Haitian Constitution. On April 10, 1817, a note was written to the admiralty in Jamaica stating that "the laws of Hayti [sic] much resemble those of Great-Britain, so far as not to permit persons, who have once landed in that island, to be considered or treated as slaves". The arrival of the Haitian boat people here takes on such poignant significance in light of this bit of history.

The success of Haitian blacks played a significant part in the movement for independence in the Spanish colonies of South America. The successful Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela had Haitian support. Not only were the Venezuela revolutionaries inspired by the Haitian Revolution, but Haiti supplied troops and financial support despite its own economic distresses from the Revolution, much as Cuba would do in the anti-colonial struggles in Africa a century and a half later. Bolivar found sanctuary in Haiti [as he did in Jamaica].

Martin Henry is a communication consultant.

Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo Visits Haiti **Periodico 26, Cuba**

HAVANA.— Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo visited Haiti over the weekend to review Cuban collaboration with the sister nation, Cuban TV reported on Sunday.

Lazo met with Haitian President Rene Preval and attended the opening of one of two ophthalmologic centers donated and staffed by Cuba to serve the population free of charge.

The Cuban vice president reaffirmed that Cuban assistance to Haiti will continue, not only in the field of public health but also in other areas of the economy and social programs.

Lazo, accompanied by President Preval, met with mayors and local Haitian officials. The two leaders also met with a delegation from Venezuela led by the South American nation's deputy foreign minister, Rodolfo Sanz, to analyze joint cooperation plans with Haiti, noted the Cuban TV report. (PL)

Janitors strike forces Haiti's biggest hospital to turn away patients

The Associated Press

IHT

June 28, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A two-week strike by janitors and support staff has forced Haiti's largest hospital to turn away patients, officials said Thursday.

Doctors and nurses are not taking part in the protest but say garbage piling up inside Port-au-Prince's General Hospital has made it impossible to practice medicine.

"We can't even use the operating room due to the garbage and unhealthy conditions," said one doctor, Dezard Ulick.

Only homeless patients with nowhere else to go are staying at the hospital.

The striking employees are demanding four weeks' worth of unpaid wages, ambulances and the rehiring of colleagues who recently lost their jobs. They say hospital and government officials have not met with them about their concerns.

Workers held a similar protest last year, at one point removing the corpses of 11 infants from the morgue and laying them out in a courtyard to pressure the government for back wages.

Haiti's cash-strapped government, still reeling from a 2004 rebellion that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has struggled to pay thousands of public employees, many of whom have gone months without a salary.

Smugglers, poverty fuel Haiti exodus

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

July 8, 2007

CAP-HAITIEN -- For decades, Haitians have boarded rickety boats and fled the country -- some coming ashore in South Florida -- to escape political turmoil.

After a lull following the election last year of President René Préval, Haitians have resumed risking their lives at sea -- but this time, politicians and others say, the country's moribund economy and more-aggressive smugglers are behind the surge.

In recent months, after scores of migrants drowned near the Turks and Caicos Islands, Haitian officials have scrambled to curtail the flight. Police have become more vigilant in patrolling the coast and cracking down on smugglers. And some lawmakers have held town hall meetings and produced radio ads in the north, from where most boats leave, in the hope of deterring others by describing the dangers of the voyage.

Marc Antoine François, a member of parliament from Ile de la Tortue, who is behind the campaign, acknowledged in a recent interview that he faces a daunting task in a country where few people have jobs.

"When you have a problem, you have to attack it at its root," says François, who last month launched his anti-migration campaign on Ile de la Tortue, an island off Haiti's northwest coast known as a boat-building hub.

Préval, in turn, doesn't deny that work needs to be done. But he added on Friday: "When they say things are not good, they don't have a frame of reference because they did not live the past when things were really bad," referring to the period after the 1957 seizure of power by François "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

During the next four months, there are plans to run radio ads in certain communities urging people not to board the boats and to report clandestine voyages to authorities. Also planned is travel to South Florida to urge Haitians abroad to stop financing the trips on behalf of family members -- but instead to invest in the country to create jobs.

While Préval's government receives high marks from the international community for creating political stability, improving security and reducing inflation, a complicated portrait of misery is emerging, and it is fueling the migration surge.

'ONE AVENUE'

"The majority of the young are of the age where they should be in school, but they cannot go to school," François says of life throughout this impoverished nation of eight million people. "They

have no means of getting an education or learning a trade. They only see one avenue: Take a boat and go to Nassau or the United States. We have to change that."

So far this year, U.S. Coast Guard cutters have intercepted 1,221 Haitian migrants, more than the 1,198 for all of last year. And that worries some international and Haitian officials, who fear that the desperate voyages could easily cause political unrest.

"There is something that is happening that we don't quite understand," says Maureen Achieng, chief of mission in Port-au-Prince for the International Organization for Migration, which has teamed up with Francois and other lawmakers to tackle the problem. "We don't know what's really pushing things in the last couple of months because the situation isn't any worse necessarily."

Achieng and others say they know that poverty and misery are major reasons that people attempt to leave. But what they want to know is if something else is at play. They hope that a comprehensive study of the factors compelling people to leave will provide answers. They then hope to create programs to address the issue.

HUMAN SMUGGLING

Meanwhile, Haitians told The Miami Herald that smugglers are increasingly profiting from their misery. As Préval increases the pressure on drug traffickers, unscrupulous boat owners turn to human smuggling.

Aggressive smugglers capitalize on desperation and recruit passengers on the false belief that if they are caught at sea, they would be sent to Australia, rather than returned to Haiti, according to residents and lawmakers.

"They are exploiting the masses," says Georgemain Prophète, a local official.

Their message is reinforced by return visits from emigrants who look better fed and better dressed.

Prophète and others say the Haitian coast guard has stepped up efforts to arrest smugglers, but it's hard to shut down a business where there is a waiting list. It's also a business with no set fees: Some people barter food in payment for their voyage. Others say they pay hundreds of dollars; a Miami Herald reporter was told that in at least one instance, \$5,000 was paid.

"People want to change their situation, and they are not concerned if they don't have legal papers," Prophète says. "We talk about hope in [Cap-Haitien], but we haven't seen any benefits yet."

U.S. Coast Guard officials say that while the numbers of individuals leaving Haiti by boat are up, there is no indication that the final goal is South Florida. Many migrant-crammed vessels leaving Haiti are island-hopping with an eye toward the financially stable Turks and Caicos, a British dependent chain 150 miles north of Haiti.

"It has been an increasing problem for us," Jean Harrod, a spokeswoman for the governor's office in Turks and Caicos, says, noting that last year they repatriated almost 3,000 Haitians back to Haiti. "We

don't have a big population. We estimate we have 33,000 people. That would represent nearly 10 percent of our population."

Despite the Haitian government's success at controlling inflation -- it's down from 40 percent in 2003 to 8 percent today -- and keeping the local currency stable, the economic outlook remains grim.

The government needs to create jobs, entrepreneurs and regional economic development, says Haitian economist Kesner Pharel. "That is the main challenge of the government," he says.

Life has not become more expensive, Pharel says -- it just feels that way.

"Because I am not working, I don't have any money and I am saying my condition isn't any better," he says. "This time last year, inflation was more than 10 percent, and now it's less."

Economists also cite another factor for the pinch many feel: Nearly three million people receive remittances totaling \$1.6 billion annually, most from the United States. The increasing strength of the Haitian currency has resulted in a loss of purchasing power, and local market prices have risen.

Michel St. Croix, the mayor of Cap-Haitien, says that less than 10 percent of the city's 800,000 residents have jobs. The city is Haiti's second-largest and, like others, has lost countless jobs in the wake of political turmoil.

When he entered office a few months ago, St. Croix says, there was only \$81,081 in the city's coffers. He was able to collect \$135,135 more through taxes, but it's still not enough to satisfy the city's myriad needs, he says.

Recently, his office launched a street-cleaning program, one of several small projects it hopes to introduce with international community help. So far, about 400 Haitians have been put to work cleaning the streets, earning a little less than \$3 a day. That's almost \$1 more than the pay for most Haitians, 76 percent of whom live on less than \$2 a day.

St. Croix is demanding more money from Port-au-Prince -- and more attention.

"I am mounting pressure on the government to give the people a way to make a living," he says.

After a boat washed ashore in Hallandale Beach earlier this year, Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis told The Miami Herald that stimulating Haiti's economy was one of his biggest challenges.

He had hoped that international donors would fund a project aimed at creating jobs in several cities.

When donors declined, the government decided to fund the projects itself. But the jobs, like the foreign investments, have been slow in coming.

Residents may not be willing to wait much longer.

"If this government was an illegal one, the country would have been in flames already," says Fritzner Vital, an unemployed construction worker, after another unsuccessful day of looking for work. "There would have been protests because things are that bad. If things don't change, the same people who supported Préval will be left with no other choice but to take to the streets."

Haiti Studies Creation of Security Force
By STEVENSON JACOBS
AP, Los Angeles Times
June 21, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Haiti is considering the creation of a security force to one day replace U.N. peacekeepers sent three years ago to stabilize the troubled country.

A special commission named by President Rene Preval will decide whether such a force should take the form of a reconstituted military or act as a supporting unit of Haiti's outgunned police, said Sen. Yuri Latortue, president of the Senate commission on justice and security, on Thursday.

Preval is expected to appoint the commission next week and the commission's report would be due eight months later, Latortue said.

An 8,800-member U.N. force provides the only real security in the impoverished Caribbean nation, which is still recovering from a violent uprising that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Latortue, the nephew and former security chief of ex-interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, said his Senate colleagues support creating a new military force.

"We can't provide our own security yet. But once the U.N. soldiers leave, the country will need a military force to keep the peace and protect our borders," Latortue, a former officer in the Haitian armed forces, told The Associated Press in an interview.

Preval has said he prefers creating a police force similar to that of France's national police over reinstating the military, which orchestrated several coups throughout Haiti's history.

Aristide dismantled the military in 1995, after a U.S. military intervention restored him to power following the 1991 coup that first ousted him.

Haiti trip gives altered image

Officials from Miami-Dade County visited Haiti on a goodwill mission, finding both progress and challenges.

By JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

July 7, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE -- Miami City Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones still remembers the cautions she received when she told relatives and friends that she was headed to Haiti. Don't go, they said. The place is steeped in problems.

But after two days here, Spence-Jones and 12 other elected officials representing the Florida Legislature, Miami-Dade County and five of its municipalities -- Miami, North Miami, North Miami Beach, Miami Gardens and El Portal -- are finding something far different.

"It's nothing like what people say it is," Spence-Jones said, between meetings with Haitian President René Préval and U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson. "I am glad I came. I can see for myself. We have to begin to change the image."

After months of facing violence from armed gangs and an unprecedented spree of for-ransom kidnappings, Haitian government officials have returned a measure of security to the capital. But much remains to be done.

"We cannot accomplish everything at the same time," Préval said. "Today, I am happy to hear people are discussing other problems besides crime and kidnapping. They are discussing the problem of the [exchange rate]. They are discussing privatization. They are discussing energy."

OTHER PROBLEMS

"They are discussing all of the problems that truly remain as problems. But it is a good sign they can discuss all of the matters besides kidnapping and insecurity."

Indeed, as the South Florida delegation traveled through the jammed streets here, its members saw for themselves the progress -- and the work that remains.

"We want to show the people not only in Miami but in the United States that what they think about Haiti, what they read in the paper, what they see on the TV is not the truth," said Philippe Derosé, one of four North Miami Beach council members, three of whom are Haitian American, on the four-day fact-finding trip.

As local government officials who represent communities with large Haitian populations, Derosé and North Miami Councilman Jacques Despinosse, who organized the visit, said they want to build a bridge between Haiti and their cities.

Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis welcomed the gesture but also offered one cautionary note: What Haiti really needs, he said, is investment and technical assistance.

NO JUNK

Don't send us junk, he said referring to used cars and other equipment that cities often send here but that often don't work.

"It's better you send less but send equipment that is new," Alexis said.

"Haiti is a country with a lot of opportunities. The question before us now is investments, and how do we attract investments?"

Also in the South Florida delegation were North Miami Mayor Kevin Burns, Miami-Dade Commissioner Audrey Edmonson and state Rep. Ronald Brise, D-North Miami.

Rampant gangs and drugs stalling Haiti's reconstruction, MacKay warned
By STEVE RENNIE
The Chronicle Journal, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
Sunday, July 1, 2007

TORONTO (CP) - Haiti remains a "volatile" nation plagued by gangs and drug trafficking more than three years after an uprising ousted former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, despite Canada's half-billion dollar pledge to help stabilize the troubled country, says a newly released document.

A briefing prepared in January for Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, obtained by The Canadian Press through an access to information request, paints a grim picture of Haiti as a nation where "chronically high" crime has kept United Nations forces from "advancing as was hoped" following last year's election of current Haitian president Rene Preval.

"Haiti's security situation remains volatile," the briefing paper says. "Temporary improvements, followed by peaks in criminal activity demonstrate that security and stability has not been achieved."

Andre Lemay, MacKay's press secretary, said the foreign affairs minister was travelling through Atlantic Canada over the long weekend and was unavailable for comment.

Dan Dugas, MacKay's communications director, said in an e-mail that authorities have made "significant progress" clamping down on Haitian gangs. Still, he acknowledged Haiti's security situation remains "fragile."

"Important challenges remain in dismantling criminal gangs throughout the country, strengthening Haitian law enforcement capacity and modernizing the penal and justice systems," Dugas wrote.

University of Florida anthropologist Gerald Murray, who estimates he has been to Haiti to do fieldwork nearly 100 times since 1974, including two stays of a year or more, said the country has become "more chaotic" since Aristide was ousted. Murray, who last visited Haiti in January, attributes the heightened violence to Haiti's "deteriorating" economy and a police force he calls ineffective.

"The country has fallen to pieces," Murray said.

An 8,800-member UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by its French acronym MINUSTAH, provides the only real protection in the impoverished Caribbean nation. The briefing called the UN security force "irreplaceable as the only institution that can provide stability and security in Haiti."

While the briefing says there has been tangible progress reforming the Haitian National Police, it also says the force needs another 14,000 officers by 2011 "to be fully capable of handling all Haitian police requirements." To reach that target - which would bring force strength to 20,000 police officers and administration - the briefing says the national police must recruit 1,500 people a year for the next four years.

Murray said it's unlikely more police officers alone will curb violence in Haiti. The country lacks the necessary checks and balances on its police and public officials to weed out possible corruption, he said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper is expected to travel to Haiti in mid-July as part of a larger tour of the region as he tries to bolster Canada's profile in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Haiti is second only to Afghanistan on the list of Canada's long-term development commitments. Canada pledged \$520 million last year, spread over a five-year period ending September 2011, to help Haiti's reconstruction and development.

The Canadian International Development Agency allocated \$485 million for reconstruction projects. Foreign Affairs contributed \$15 million to support security and justice, while \$20 million is funding up to 100 Canadian police officers as part of the UN security force.

But some critics say there are no safeguards to ensure the Haitian government properly allocates foreign aid. Murray suggested non-governmental organizations could, at least temporarily, oversee Haitian government aid money spending.

Development money should be allocated for short-term aid projects instead of trying to "change the character of the Haitian state," he said.

"If the Canadian government just gives the money to the Haitian government, kiss it goodbye," Murray said.

A CIDA spokesman wouldn't say how the development agency ensures Canada's aid money is properly spent by the Haitian government.

One of the most daunting threats facing authorities is drug trafficking. The briefing says Haiti has become a "major transit hub" for drugs, with traffickers taking advantage of the country's security situation to smuggle drugs from South American through Haiti to North America and Europe.

Robert Maguire of Washington, D.C.-based Trinity University, who has visited Haiti at least 100 times in the last three decades, and since 1990 has served as chair of Haiti Advanced Area Studies at the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service Institute, called the Caribbean nation's drug trafficking problem "enormously bad."

"Haiti is caught by virtue of its geography in this kind of trafficking network where cocaine flows into it and flows out of it," he said.

"It fuels the gangs, it fuels corruption, it undermines trying to build institutions based upon rule of law. Haiti will remain vulnerable as long as it has the poverty and corruption and lack of institutional capacity to clamp down on the drug trafficking."

However, Maguire said, following two years in which Haiti's situation worsened, the country's lot has improved somewhat in the last six months after the Preval government arrested gang leaders with a "minimum of collateral damage" to Haitians.

Foreign aid money and Preval's efforts to work with different political and economic factions have also helped Haiti's progress, he said.

Dominican Republic and Haitian presidents meet
Saturday, July 14, 2007
By Beata Lockwood
Caribbean Net News

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic: President Leonel Fernandez met with Haitian President Rene Preval at the National Palace in Santo Domingo on Thursday. The luncheon meeting left both with very positive feelings that it was an opportunity to strengthen the bonds between the two countries.

The Dominican Republic and Haiti, who share the same island of Hispaniola, have had many differences in the past and continue to have differences to this day, in particular due to the uncontrolled migration of Haitians to the Dominican Republic in recent years.

President Preval first received military honours at the Palace before the luncheon meeting with Dominican Republic and Haitian diplomats, who also reported that the meeting was very positive in many areas.

The two presidents attended a round table meeting in the evening, held at the recently newly renovated Santo Domingo State University, to honour the centennial birthday of Jacques Roumain, the renowned Haitian poet and intellectual whose work had a profound influence in Haiti, especially involving the poor rural people.

The presidential meetings ended with the two heads of state again expressing their willingness to work more closely in the future to improve the currently strained relationships between the two countries.

Ambassador Says Economic Ties The Answer To Migration Problems

By Quincy Parker

The Bahama Journal,

July 11, 2007

Bahamas Ambassador to Haiti Dr. Eugene Newry continues to push for Bahamians to realize the economic potential of The Bahamas' relationship with Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

In fact, he said the best thing that can happen for The Bahamas in regards to the problem of Haitian economic migrants is for The Bahamas to participate in the burgeoning economic life of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Dr. Newry insisted that 'this is not a pro-Haiti or a pro-Dominican approach; this is a pro-Bahamian approach'; it's a case where Bahamians must turn their economic thinking around, and understand that The Bahamas' future is tied inextricably to the Caribbean.

He said The Bahamas can "grab a hold of a big chunk of the wealth building from the Caribbean by helping [Haiti and the Dominican Republic] get themselves sorted out."

"From the Bahamian interest point of view, the most productive areas of the Caribbean for The Bahamas for years to come are Haiti and the Dominican Republic," Dr. Newry said.

"They've got enormous potentials for investors from The Bahamas for relatively small amounts of money to go in and make huge amounts of monies for The Bahamas from those two countries, and at the same time help those two countries to get on their feet."

Dr. Newry advocated a continuation and an escalation of The Bahamas' neighbourly approach to Haiti as a mechanism for effectively addressing the vexing problem of illegal Haitian migration.

"If you help the other fellow fix his situation, then your problem with that fellow disappears," he said.

"If we help the Haitians to fix their situation, they will stay at home. There is no Haitian who is in The Bahamas for love of The Bahamas. They are here for economic advancement."

The ambassador pointed out that while many Bahamians may feel The Bahamas has been 'generous' to Haiti, the Haitians who are here have been producing something in The Bahamas.

"You have to look at this thing objectively. Yes, perhaps the most generous country on earth towards Haiti has been The Bahamas, but at the same time don't let's bend over backwards the other way now and pretend that this has been some charitable act," he said. "No way."

"The Bahamas has benefited from Haitian labour in The Bahamas, and in the new generation of Bahamians, we now have lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc. (of Haitian descent) – We're benefiting at another level now. So this is a mutual exchange society, as it should be."

Dr. Newry also disclosed that the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce is going to Haiti shortly.

"The Haitians will bend over backwards – I assure you – to welcome them and show them the economic advantages of trading with Haiti," he said.

The ambassador also weighed in on the issue of the 'shanty towns' that have popped up in some areas, which he conceded are both illegal and environmentally unfriendly. He argued that there should be a way – in a humane, charitable way – to take down those places and send those people who are illegally here back home.

Dr. Newry questioned the political willpower of all past governments.

"How is it that no matter what government it has been in the past, they've always been somewhat hesitant about doing that? Occasionally, there's a little raid and you send a few people back, but the [shanty towns] are [soon] back," he said.

"I'm sure that the police and the government and everybody knows that those places are there, so the question really is how is it that they're still there? For example, there are many Bahamians who go ahead and rent places to these people and make money from them, because we are Bahamians, we're just human beings like everybody else trying to make a buck – sometimes legally, sometimes illegally."

As an example of the positive reengineering of the Haitian economy, Dr. Newry – who was appointed by former Prime Minister Perry Christie – pointed out that the Haitian 'gourde' (national currency) has exhibited strong growth over the last three years. In 2004, 50 gourdes equaled one US dollar – in 2007, 35 gourdes equaled a dollar.

"That's a significant improvement in the value of the Haitian money," Dr. Newry said.

In 2006, Haitians living in the United States sent \$1.2 billion home – an amount which, in addition to the \$27 million from The Bahamas and extra remittances from elsewhere in the world, made up 40 percent of Haiti's annual budget.

Dr. Newry also noted that there has been a distinct influence on the Haitian police through that force's interaction with Bahamian police, particularly through community policing initiatives.

"I've seen police officers for the first time in my life, as regards Haiti, leading little old women across the street," he said. "I'd never seen that before.

"In other words the image is, and President [Rene] Preval has said this, Commissioner Mario Andresol – who's the Chief of Police down there in Haiti – has said that this is part of their 'Bahamianization,' if you wish, of their philosophy."

According to Dr. Newry, at least seven percent of all Bahamians – somewhere in the vicinity of 20,000 or so – are of Haitian origin. Beginning with Haiti's independence in 1804, Haitians have made their way to The Bahamas and intermingled with Bahamians.

"We have lawyers, we have accountants, we have [Olympic] athletes [all of Haitian descent], and it's because of The Bahamas' generosity," he said.

"From that point on, you started having certain categories of Haitians who came to The Bahamas. These were all the mulattoes, the light-skinned people. Some went to Louisiana, some went to France, some went to Jamaica, but some came here."

Dr. Newry added, "The families like the Dilleys, the Godets, the Benjamins, the Pauls, the Goodmans – although Goodman doesn't sound very Haitian, Goodman's Bay is a Haitian name – Perpall Tract; all those are wealthy Haitians that came to The Bahamas in 1804. Now you tell one of those people they are not Bahamians, that they are trying to overrun the country. You see how foolish that is?"

Dr. Newry said the situation played the same in reverse, with a number of prominent 'Bahamian' names in Haitian telephone books – like Rolle, Moss, Collie, etc.

"We are basically one people in the Caribbean, and don't fool yourself on that," he said.

Keep troops in Haiti
Caribbean Broadcasting Corp, Barbados
Friday, 29 June 2007

The head of the United Nations' mission to Haiti, Edmond Mulet, says the UN's peacekeeping force should remain in the country for at least four years.

Mr Mulet said that although there was now a legitimate government in Haiti, the situation in the country was still very fragile.

"We would have to remain there at least until the next general elections, that are within four years, and also to accompany this transitional process ...," he said.

"The international community has had to take part in Haiti more than 8 times in the last 20 years ... we wanted this to be the last time in which an intervention is forced."

Mr Mulet was speaking in Argentina, the latest leg of a tour of Latin American countries which have contributed to the UN mission. He has also been to Chile and Uruguay.

The UN's peace-keeping mission was deployed to Haiti following the overthrow of President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

In February, the UN Security Council extended the peacekeeping mandate until the 15 October.

Corporation as Savior
Richard Morse
Huffington Post Blog
July 9, 2007

Digicel came to Haiti and now everyone and anyone can have a phone. Democracy in communication; the world has truly changed. Whether you're popping into the country for a few days or whether you're a sugarcane cutter in the provinces, you can have your own phone. Just a few years ago you had to have serious connections in the government or you had to be part of the social elite to have a phone (land line). Now, anyone can have a phone. The cheaper phones are between \$15 and \$20.

At first, the cell phone service provided by the local companies was completely over priced. People bought phones (\$700) and then couldn't afford to use them. You were overcharged for outgoing calls and also charged for incoming calls. Then, out of Ireland, comes Digicel to the rescue. No contracts, just buy phone cards. With Digicel you can receive calls even if you have no credit on your phone and you can also send a "call me" text message at no cost. Actually the two most difficult things may be 1) charging your phone when you have no electricity (this is a fairly common problem here, but there are entrepreneurs that will charge your phone on a car battery for 50 cents) and 2) getting a call through during peak hours.

It's hard to think of a corporation as "savior" but Digicel has even spent over a million dollars on the Haitian National soccer team. What could be better: democracy, phones (send money!!) and soccer. I don't know if these phones work when you're in a boat on your way to Florida or the Bahamas (text: send help we're sinking!!) but soon...

Venezuela Endorses Accords with Bolivia and Haiti
Prensa Latina
June 28, 2007

Caracas, Venezuelan National Assembly endorsed two Acts of energy accords with Bolivia and Haiti Thursday, within the bounds of the agreements of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas ALBA.

The agreements establish the delivery of 250,000 barrels a month of oil, refined products and liquefied gas or its energy equivalents to Bolivia and 14,000 barrels a day to Haiti.

The treaties are of exclusive implementation for public bodies backed up by the signatories with supplies subjected to evaluation and adjustment, in accordance with the energy products demand of both countries and Venezuelan availabilities.

ALBA constitutes an integrationist agreement, based upon cooperation with a high social content, signed among Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

In case of Haiti, the energy agreement is held in the open character of ALBA, making possible the signing of agreements of this kind with other countries that aren't members.

Commentary: Hispaniola: The Caribbean's new big leaguers in the drug trafficking trade

Wednesday, July 11, 2007

By Alex Sánchez, COHA Research Fellow

Caribbean Net News

The two nations that occupy the island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic (DR) and Haiti, have experienced an alarming surge in drug trafficking traversing their borders en route to North American and European markets. The entire Caribbean region has become the latest conduit through which illegal drugs coming from South America (principally Colombia) are trafficked by Colombian and Mexican drug cartels and their local affiliates to their final destinations. These latest developments have prompted numerous crackdowns on drug traffickers operating on Hispaniola by local forces; however, there persists the issue of a lack of funds, personnel, training, and a master strategy, not to mention ongoing corruption in the two countries, which certainly have hobbled efforts at stifling the anti-drug strategy.

During last March's Santo Domingo Summit on Drugs, Security and Cooperation, DR's president, Leonel Fernandez, declared that the U.S. has not done enough to aid Caribbean nations in tackling drug trafficking. Washington has donated limited amounts of economic aid to Haiti, and the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) forces have continued its exercises with Caribbean defense forces, donating equipment to help nations like the DR to crack down on drug smugglers. However, such actions appear to not be sufficient to curb an increasing amount of illegal narcotics coming from the region. Recent developments, like declarations, whose purpose is to transform the UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) into an anti-drug force, may be a signal that the international community is getting serious about the ongoing problems of drug trafficking in Haiti. Nevertheless, it is yet to be seen what powerful entities like the European Union (a growing destination point for South American and Caribbean basin drugs) will do about this critical issue. There is a growing necessity for a decisive inter-continental policy of dealing with drug trafficking, and Hispaniola should certainly be the location where Washington and Brussels should come together to draw up a major strategy to stop Mexican and Colombian drug traffickers from carrying out their dirty businesses unchallenged.

Drug Trade via the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is a prime transshipment country. For its part, Santo Domingo claims that it is not receiving as much aid from Washington as it requires. For example, President Fernandez has accused Washington of reducing its surveillance of the Caribbean by more than 60 percent, with fewer ships and planes dedicated to the pursuit of traffickers. In an effort to expand its vigilance against drug trafficking, Fernandez has pledged that his country will buy eight Brazilian "Super Tucano" fighter jets at a total cost of \$92 million.

In the past year, numerous incidents have demonstrated that the DR is a major venue for the drug trade. As part of a nationwide campaign that ran from August 16 to October 12, 2006, almost 1,500 locations selling illegal drugs were ordered to be shut by the government. The National Drug Control Directorate (DNCD) announced that of these, 296 were in Santo Domingo, 237 in the surrounding Santo Domingo Province, and 222 in Santiago, the country's second largest city. The police also seized 109 kilograms of cocaine in October 2006 and arrested four suspects in the administrative region around the

Dominican capital of Santo Domingo. Those detained by the DNCD included one Chilean and three Dominican nationals.

Even Dominican police officers are not immune from involvement in illicit drug use. In August 2006, the country's national police directorate fired 61 officers for testing positive after a random drug sampling was administered. Dominican government officials said that 16 of the 61 sacked officers had tested positive for cocaine.

Due to its location, the Dominican Republic has become a favored route for transporting drug shipments to Europe. In one such scenario, according to Spanish national RNE Radio 1, members of the Civil Guard's judicial police arrested a woman of Dominican citizenship in La Coruña (northwest Spain). She was suspected of receiving packages sent by air from the Caribbean island to her home in La Coruña. The shipment in question consisted of three bags with 84 shoes, containing over 21.5 kilos of cocaine in their hollowed heels.

Drug Trade Through Haiti

Haiti is one of the most convenient launching points for cocaine being spirited out of Colombia en route to Florida. As reported by Isabelle Ligner of the Agence France Presse, traffickers are attracted by Haiti's weak legal system, easily bribed police and 1,500-kilometer (900-mile) coastline that is all but unprotected. Haitian authorities have permitted U.S. Coast Guard patrols into its waters and U.S. planes into its airspace in hot pursuit of suspected felons since 1997, in order to track down smugglers, with mixed results.

Ligner notes that Haiti neither processes nor consumes cocaine. However a Haitian government official has been quoted as saying that "growth of drug trafficking in Haiti is one of the main reasons [why] the national police, just a decade old, was so quickly corrupted." Such declarations, in addition to those made by Haiti's President Preval, illustrate that while Haiti is not a cocaine producer, it is certainly a transit route for the product, with a local population supplying at least some consumers as well. It is unrealistic to believe with any conviction that the population of a country that is heavily used for drug trafficking does not also generate some drug-consumers as well.

There are numerous pieces of evidence that demonstrate the current high volume of drugs going through Haiti. For example, in June 2005, Haiti's former national police commander, Rudy Therassan (2001-2003), pleaded guilty to offering to protect Colombian cocaine shipments transiting through the country. He was sentenced to almost 15 years in prison. In early May 2007, the police in Port-de-Paix, Department of the Northwest, arrested nine individuals suspected of involvement in illicit drug trafficking. During the bust, police seized more than 200 kilograms of cocaine in three bags. Then, in early June, The Haitian National Police (PNH) and the international police force serving under the flag of the United Nations (UNPOL) seized 420 kilograms of cocaine and arrested 10 individuals, including four Haitian policemen. The drugs, divided into four well-sealed packs and traveling from Cotes-de-Fer (Southeast), were intercepted in the Leogane area (35 kilometers south of Port-au-Prince) during a routine traffic stop on National Road 2, according to the Haitian media.

Island Initiatives

Last April, the Dominican armed forces conducted a five-day military exercise on the border with Haiti. The land, air and naval operations were carried out to prevent the trafficking of drugs, guns and contraband. The operations were followed by exercises designed by SOUTHCOM, which claims that the 400-km-long Dominican-Haitian border is a major staging area for illegal drugs arriving to the U.S.

In a report carried by Haitian Radio Galaxie on March 9, PNH Director Mario Andresol hailed the current cooperation between the Haitian and Dominican police. Andresol highlighted the exchange of information between the two nations' police forces operating on the island in order to thwart the actions of traffickers.

The high volume of drug trafficking may inflate the historical tensions between the DR and Haiti. The two Hispaniola neighbors have had numerous low points in their relations, the primary example being the 1937 murder of around 20,000 Haitian refugees and sugar workers, who were living in the DR during the dictatorship of President Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961). Today, around one million Haitians are thought to illegally reside in the Dominican Republic. Tensions have risen sharply in the past few months, with Haitians vigorously protesting a variety of racist manifestations by Dominican authorities against Haitian refugees residing in the DR. According to the EFE news wire, a group of 50 Haitians burned Dominican flags after having "wiped their backsides" with them, which caused outrage among Dominicans in the northern province of Valverde. The protestors had to be hastily escorted out of the immediate area by the police after lynching threats were made. Ten Haitians were later arrested on charges of desecrating Dominican national symbols.

With weak security services (particularly in Haiti) and tainted judicial systems, in addition to a loosely guarded border, it may be only a matter of time before the governments and the people of each nation replace cooperation with mutual recriminations for propagating the drug trade.

Declarations and Protests

In early March, during the regional summit on drugs and security in Santo Domingo, attended by the Haitian President Préval, DR President Fernández complained that the U.S.'s "lack of interest since [the terrorist attacks of] September 11" has led to an increase in drug trafficking in the Caribbean. Later, on March 29, 2007, Fernández received Admiral James Stravidis, the chief commanding officer of SOUTHCOM. The meeting came about in order to maintain Washington-Santo Domingo relations after Fernández' complaints over Washington's waxing indifference to the Caribbean's drug plight. According to Latin News, after the meeting with Fernández, Stravidis remarked that "the fight against drugs and terrorism goes hand-in-hand" due to its nature as a "global war." In addition, Stravidis indicated that the U.S. is willing to continue its aid to Dominican authorities with equipment and training. A most energetic promoter of improved cooperation with the Hispaniola governments is Florida Senator Bill Nelson, who sits on the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee and whose state is the port of entry for much of the narcotics flowing through the Caribbean regime. In early January of this year, Nelson visited Haiti, declaring that a 1998 agreement allowing U.S. drug agents to patrol Haitian waters for drug traffickers, has "been successful and the amount of drugs coming in by sea has been reduced ... but the amount of drugs coming in by airplane has considerably increased."

In any case, it was ironic to hear Fernandez' forceful declaration at the drug summit, after he and President Bush met in Washington in late October of 2006. In a joint press conference following that

meeting, Fernandez praised DR-U.S. relations, saying that he and Bush “have touched on a number of issues such as ... drug trafficking [and] ... crime.”

On the other hand, President Preval, before attending the March drug summit in the DR, more graphically found that: “no matter where the drugs come from, they go to the United States. So, my problem is the demand in the United States and Europe. The place where drugs are made is not the most important thing. What is important is that, as long as the demand is present, there will be production somewhere. So, fighting drugs in the United States, fighting drugs in Europe [to prevent] demand is the most important thing.” This was somewhat removed from the more muffled statements he made on the subject on other occasions.

President Preval traveled to Washington on May 5. The Haitian head of state was accompanied by the presidents of Haiti’s two parliamentary chambers, two representatives of the business sector and two trade union leaders. Haitian Radio Galaxie reported that Preval declared before his trip to Washington that “as far as I am concerned, I will insist on the drug issue, because I want to address the drug issue not only by segment, but also in its entirety. In my opinion, the important issue is drug consumption, particularly in the United States and Europe. We do not have enough means to fight drug trafficking, which is, in my opinion, an important element of the instability in Haiti.”

Declarations made by leaders like Fernandez and Preval, who openly claim that they are not receiving enough aid to tackle what is essentially someone else’s problem (since Hispaniola is only a stopover for South American drugs en route to the U.S. and Europe, not their final destination), should be regarded as eye-opening remarks. It appears that drug trafficking in the Caribbean, and especially through Hispaniola, has reached the level where diplomatic statements by government officials are no longer sufficient to obviate an increasingly dramatic situation. To make matters worse, a recent Government Accountability Office study warned that U.S. planes and ships cannot sustain the current level of patrol of the Caribbean for much longer without major overhauls and a replacement of equipment.

Foreign Assistance: The US

There are conflicting reports on what percentage of South American narcotics travel through the Caribbean en route to the U.S. According to the United Nations’ 2007 World Drug Report, in recent years, 30-50 percent of the cocaine in the US entered via the Caribbean. However, in 2005 the United States Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement had concluded that the proportion was only around 10 percent. The main smuggling vectors through the Caribbean in 2005 were Haiti and the Dominican Republic (4 percent), Jamaica (2 percent) and Puerto Rico (1 percent).

Due to the upsurge in the drug trade from Hispaniola to the U.S., due to an infamously renowned and corrupt legal and police presence in Haiti, Washington essentially has taken on the role of de-facto policeman of Haiti’s waters and airspace to combat the drug cartels. In recent years, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the U.S. Coast Guard have played the virtual role of Haiti’s protector, yet President Preval’s declarations suggest that this is not enough.

US security agencies have created a network of operational and intelligence groups in order to combat drug trafficking throughout the Caribbean. The pattern for drugs coming from South America through

the region is fairly clear by now: speedboats (among other vessels) carry Colombian cocaine to Puerto Rico and Florida by way of islands such as St. Maarten and the U.S. Virgin Islands (eastern Caribbean), as well as and from Hispaniola. The most frequent modus operandi is taking advantage of big ships such as cruise liners which are “fed” illegal drug shipments, often at sea, by speed boats made of materials that are undetectable by radar. The ships are often equipped with cranes, which are used to transfer the drugs while both vessels are in motion. Planes carrying the contraband are becoming more common as well, flying to illegal makeshift landing strips in Haiti to drop off their cargo.

The DEA is increasingly resorting to stepped-up joint training operations with the Dominican Republic’s and Haiti’s anti-drug personnel. Recently, American, Dominican and Haitian forces launched “Operation Rum Punch,” to counter the flow of narcotics going through the island. As part of Rum Punch, DEA helicopters flew over the Hispaniolan countryside, searching for drug runners on horseback or motorcycles.

In addition, SOUTHCOM sponsors training exercises known as TRADEWINDS, in which security forces from Caribbean nations gather annually to improve their ability to manage a wide range of security concerns and scenarios, including responding to drug trafficking. A spin-off of TRADEWINDS is a program called “Enduring Friendship,” which, according to SOUTHCOM’s website, is a “multi-year U.S. initiative to help partner nations in the Caribbean bolster their capabilities to anticipate and respond to threats and emergencies in their territorial waters.” In addition, the program provides Caribbean nations improved communications systems and high-speed interceptor boats that far outperform anything that the traffickers currently have in their arsenals. The course takes place in Fort Myers, Florida, and has an estimated overall cost of \$75 million, most of which comes from the Department of the Defense, with a portion from the State Department.

Finally, the 2007 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, released by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, mentions the fact that Washington is contributing three corrections experts to form the nucleus of a sixteen-member UN team that will work on improving the infrastructure and management of Haiti’s prison system. In addition, the U.S. has provided an adviser to help the HNP Director General implement anti-corruption measures.

More Money, Same Problems

Assistance to Haiti has also come in the form of financial assistance, albeit at inadequate levels. A 2002 thesis by Lieutenant DeEtta Lachelle Gray Barnes at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, describes the not so encouraging picture of the war against drug trafficking in Haiti, highlighting that the U.S. has provided inadequate aid to the country. Since 1994, through UN and U.S. assistance, approximately 6,000 members of the Police Nationale d’Haiti (PNH) have been retrained and supplied. By 2002, the total amount of aid received had reached \$50 million. Yet, the police still have not earned the confidence of prominent politicians or Haitian society in general. In early January 2007, Shaila B. Manyam, spokeswoman of the U.S. embassy in Port-Au-Prince, said that Washington has contributed more than \$40 million to Haiti’s national police since 2004. She went on to declare that “the United States shares Haiti’s concern about drug trafficking [...] our two countries have a long history of cooperation on combating this scourge and that cooperation will continue.”

The National Drug Control Strategy's FY 2008 Budget Summary (published in February 2007) mentions that for 2008, there has been a request by the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) of \$2 million. This includes a request for additional millions of dollars. According to the report, the INCLE plans to use these funds for: "training and equipping the Haitian Coast Guard for maritime interdiction operations, improving the operational capacity of the Haiti Counter-Narcotics Trafficking Office in cooperation with DEA, and assisting the Haitian government's Financial Investigative Unit with money laundering investigations." The request for additional funds will permit the establishment of a Counter-Narcotics Trafficking Office presence outside of Port au Prince – especially in the Northern plateau area where drug-trafficking is endemic. There is no mention of the Dominican Republic in the Strategy's summary.

Nevertheless, in spite of continuous aid and numerous initiatives, flawed law enforcement in combating drug trafficking continues to be a major problem, particularly for Haiti. For example, the 2007 INCSR mentioned how the HNP Director General dismissed 500 officers during 2006 for misconduct. Cases like this are probably the reason why financial aid to Port-au-Prince is quite limited, as Washington policymakers believe that it will just be stolen by some corrupt Haitian official instead of put to good use. Washington seems to be focusing on trying to improve Haitian legal and law enforcement agencies to make them into an effective drug-combating force and then determining if they should provide more aid. Regarding the DR, focus appears to also be in training and providing new equipment.

Foreign Assistance: The European Union

The Rio Group-European Union (EU) meeting took place on April 17, 2007 in Santo Domingo. In attendance were 50 foreign ministers and nearly 2,000 delegates. Key topics included energy, aid for Haiti, the strengthening of multilateral relations, citizens' security, the environment, fighting poverty and combating drug trafficking. The Dominican Republic is the current holder of the rotating chair of the Rio Group, while Germany holds the EU's revolving presidency.

It remains to be seen what other steps will be taken by the EU to aid the Hispaniola governments to curb the drug trade, such as dispatching financial aid or sending EUROPOL units to the island. Individual governments like the Netherlands have taken significant steps in recent years to control illegal narcotics coming from the Caribbean through its own borders. The aforementioned United Nations Drug Report explains how "cocaine enters the Netherlands from the Caribbean either by sea, typically via Rotterdam, or by air, mainly via Schiphol airport in Amsterdam. However, the importance of Amsterdam has declined drastically in recent years, following the introduction of strict controls (100 percent checks on direct flights from the Netherlands Antilles to Amsterdam) and greater cooperation with the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname. As a consequence, drug couriers choose other Caribbean countries [as launching pads], such as the Dominican Republic, to avoid detection, and are more reluctant to fly directly to Amsterdam." In addition, the report mentions that in 2005, fully 25 percent of the foreigners arrested in Spain in connection with cocaine trade were of Colombian nationality, with citizens of the Dominican Republic accounting for 6 percent.

So far, it appears that there is no overarching and coherent strategy for EU aid towards the Caribbean in controlling the flow of narcotics. Rather, individual governments are taking steps to prevent drugs from entering their borders. Belgian and British vessels crossing the Caribbean, also, on occasion, have

cooperated with the U.S. Coast Guard. The issue is that, like the Netherlands, Europe is not so much helping fight drug cartels in Haiti or the DR, but rather is focusing on preventing the drugs from flowing into their countries in the first place by resorting to stricter controls at airports, seaports and land crossings.

MINUSTAH As An Anti-Drug weapon?

Haiti remains a paradise for drug runners despite the presence of 9,200 UN troops, deployed after president Jean Bertrand Aristide went into an induced exile in 2004 as the country slipped into renewed violence. The new Brazilian Commander for the UN military force in Haiti (MINUSTAH), General Carlos Alberto Dos Santos Cruz, said his troops would confront the drug problem, without clearly acknowledging whether it was a main cause for the violence now engulfing the country. "I cannot say whether drugs are the main problem here, but we are going to face it," said Gen. Santos Cruz, "We are going to face it under the law and using the means we have." Since December 2006, MINUSTAH has undertaken a series of military operations aimed at dislodging the country's gangs from areas which they now control. In February 2007, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of MINUSTAH for an additional eight months. It will now expire on October 15.

Turning MINUSTAH into a major counter-drug trafficking force may be only a matter of time. Recently, the UN envoy to Haiti, Edmond Mulet, declared that "there are people involved in corruption, drug trafficking and goods smuggling who are trying to destabilize the government." In addition, Haiti's police force repeatedly has often been acknowledged as one of the most corrupt in the entire hemisphere. A February 2006 article in The Toronto Star by the highly regarded Reed Lindsay explains that "Haitian police have failed to stop a wave of violence, just as they have been implicated in numerous high-profile crimes. And in some poor areas, residents are as afraid of the police as they are of criminal gangs." Such a dramatic scenario means that unless some external unit (i.e. from the U.S., UN or some CARICOM operation) pledges increased aid to the island, drug trafficking will continue indefinitely. Lindsay reports that, according to Haitian police chief Mario Andresol, one in five Haitian police is corrupt, and most of the armed gangs count on at least one local police officer as a member.

It is unclear how much help MINUSTAH can muster in order to curb drug trafficking in Haiti. They have a force of less than 10,000 troops, most of whom are distrusted by the general population. With little aid from a very corrupt judiciary and police force, it would be naive to believe that MINUSTAH alone can be of much help in controlling the illegal flow of narcotics, in addition to the other security problems with which the force is burdened. Recently, David Wimhurst, a spokesperson for the UN Mission, declared that "peacekeeping in Haiti is a Band-aid. The cure to what ails Haiti is development."

The Drug Iceberg

Corruption and weak legal systems, in addition to hundreds of miles of open borders and coastline, have converted the island of Hispaniola into a drug trafficking paradise. While there is a growing amount of drug-consumption on the island, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are mostly regarded as stopovers for drugs en route to North America and Europe. The occasional drug bust may be good for

governmental publicity and self-esteem, as well as for promoting good ties with Washington, but most likely these “feel good” operations just get at just the tip of the drug iceberg.

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs, founded in 1975, is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, tax-exempt research and information organization. It has been described on the Senate floor as being “one of the nation’s most respected bodies of scholars and policy makers.” For more information, visit www.coha.org or email coha@coha.org.

Pain at the pump spurs strike action in Haiti

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

By Jeb Sprague and Wadner Pierre

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A two-day transport strike last week gripped Haiti's major cities and underscored a mounting crisis over fuel prices, which rose nearly 20 percent in just two weeks.

A normally bustling street in Port-au-Prince on June 13, 2007 during the two-day transport strike. On June 12 and 13, transport workers shut off their engines, leaving residents of Port-au-Prince and other urban centres largely without the services of taxis or the colourful buses and pick-up trucks known as tap-taps.

A spokesperson for the Initiative de Secteur de Transport, an ad hoc strike committee representing 18 transport unions, Benissoit Duclos, said the action was driven by three pressing issues.

First, the government "has increased traffic fines so that what was a 50-gourde fine is now 1,000 gourdes and what was a 500 gourde fine is now 10,000 gourdes," he said.

"Second, over the last three to four years, the government has not charged for nor distributed registration stickers for vehicles. They are now distributing these but ordering a lump sum payment of 4,000 gourdes for all the years that these were not distributed," Duclos told IPS.

Lastly, the price of gasoline has become unaffordable for most drivers, rising by 34 gourdes to 207 gourdes per gallon this month. Many workers, with a salary that hovers around 70 gourdes a day, must spend 20 to 40 gourdes on transportation (35.4 gourdes equal one U.S. dollar).

The striking workers drive cars and buses, which the working poor depend on for transportation. While some drivers use company cars, many cars are independently owned.

"Poor people, the majority working in the informal economy or assembly industry, cannot afford the higher costs of transportation that these measures would force upon us," said Changeux Méhu, president of ATCH, a union of bus drivers.

"The people don't feel they have a say in government policy," he told IPS.

The strikers appear to enjoy broad national support with a coalition including the Fédération des Transporteurs du Nord, the Fédération des Transporteurs de l'Artibonite and the south based Association des Propriétaires de Conducteurs du Haïti.

On the first day of the strike, Rétes Réjouis, a coordinator of the Fédération des Transporteurs Publics Haïtiens, a well organised transport co-op, declared support for the strike.

"It is a nationwide strike from the grassroots," one transport worker told IPS. A roster of the unions does not include the numerous small but heavily foreign donor-backed labour groups often held up in the international media as "independent".

Haiti's Minister for Social Affairs and Work, Gerald German, voiced surprise that the workers would launch a strike. But Duclos argues that the Rene Preval government has become too close with big business and "the people that supported the de facto government and 2004 coup" -- referring to the overthrow of the elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide government and the creation of an interim government.

Interim appointees backed by the United States, including President Boniface Alexander and Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, discharged Haiti's large businesses from paying many of their taxes. Trade unionists interviewed noted with irony that poor vehicle owners are now being forced to pay back registration fees.

Interim authorities also launched the Cadre de Coopération Intérimaire (CCI), a macro-economic adjustment programme largely formulated by international donor institutions and the local groups they back.

Thousands of public sector workers were laid off and government ministries were placed under foreign financial supervision. Mark Schueller at the University of California, Santa Barbara who has studied the CCI, says that it also "promoted high-value crops for exports, benefiting few Haitian farmers" while strengthening the "importation of subsidised or monetised rice, draining Haitian peasants' productive capacity to feed Haiti."

In 2006, after a heated election, René Garcia Préval won the presidency with wide popular support. More than a year later, appointees from the interim government remain in numerous high-level posts and a large U.N. force is deployed in the country.

With the fanfare surrounding Preval's inauguration and good relations with Venezuela, many believed that Haiti's entry into PetroCaribe, a Venezuelan-backed programme offering oil at preferential rates to Caribbean countries, would alleviate high gasoline costs.

Rather than selling oil directly to the companies active in Haiti, such as Esso/Exxon Mobil, Chevron-Texaco, Total and Dynasa, Venezuela's state oil corporation, PdVSA, will sell it to the Preval government, which will in turn sell to the companies at the same price.

The government profits by purchasing a large part on credit with low interest rates and a long grace period. Preval has indicated that the government will then bank the money, gathering interest.

This is especially helpful as Haiti's government has long been susceptible to foreign pressure through its financial dependency on donors. Haiti's meagre tax revenues have left it unable to fund its own national investment budget.

A symbolic shipment of oil from Venezuela arrived on Preval's inauguration in May 2006, but in recent months, PetroCaribe has stalled. Terms were signed on Mar. 12, 2007 during Venezuelan

President Hugo Chavez's visit to Haiti, and shipments were supposed to begin in July. But the two large U.S. oil companies that export to Haiti are said to have stonewalled negotiations.

Leaders of the transport unions told IPS that they hoped PetroCaribe would directly benefit the poor, lowering prices at the pump. But under the Preval government's plan, this will not happen. PetroCaribe has nothing to do with the cost of fuel, Preval says, insisting he will not subsidise the cost of fuel, which is determined by market prices.

Hyppolite Pierre, a Haitian author and a professor at the Community College of Baltimore County in Maryland, observes that "international lenders such as the IMF, the World Bank and the IDB [Inter-American Development Bank] consider such subsidies as a waste and therefore strongly discourage those practices."

The influential US embassy in Port-au-Prince has long pushed for a non-subsidised floating fuel price.

In 2002, a document purported to have originated from the U.S. government or international financial institutions threatened that major petroleum companies would cut off their exports to Haiti if the government did not end its subsidisation of oil. Haiti, with no alternative source of petroleum, was pressured to comply.

But Haiti's Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis insists that even with PetroCaribe in place, "The government cannot subsidise the price of oil, because Haiti does not produce oil."

Transport workers, now in talks with the government, say it is essential the government subsidise fuel or they will simply be unable to operate. For many workers in the informal economy and garment sector, half their wages are spent on transportation.

Dozens of community schools and a slew of literacy centres, once subsidised by the Aristide government, are now cut off from government funds and suffering from rising fuel prices, since they often rely on generators for electricity.

In the Petion-ville district of Port-au-Prince, one community school, SOPUDEP, has come under pressure. The mayor of Petion-ville has attempted to get the school closed down, say school employees.

Rea Dol, head of SOPUDEP, said, "The situation requires prompt intervention by the state. After all people went through to vote for President Preval, he must respond to the population."

Because of this, "we support the strike," she said, "so that it puts pressure on the government to see that people are suffering."

Bahamas accord with Haiti under review

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

Caribbean Net News

NASSAU, Bahamas (BIS): The 1995 accord between the governments of The Bahamas and Haiti is currently under review, the Senate was told.

Senator Elma Campbell, Minister of State for Immigration, said the Bahamas government is reviewing the accord “as we look at establishing a policy which will permit Haitian nationals to qualify for legal permanent status in our country.”

Campbell was speaking during debate in the Senate on the government's \$1.5 billion budget for fiscal year 2007-'08.

Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham and Haitian President Rene Preval met recently in Washington, D.C., when a number of issues were discussed.

The Senator also announced that the government is to introduce by the end of 2007, a new form of coded work permit.

It is expected this “will reduce” any suggestion that they are being duplicated illegally, she said.

Campbell said the Department of Immigration receives, on a weekly basis, an average of 500 applications for work permits, residency and citizenship.

“There is an unbelievable backlog of pending applications,” she stated. “As at May 14th this year, there remained outstanding some 3,500 applications for work permits, some 1,200 for citizenship and some 1,500 for residency.

“In keeping with the government’s commitment to process all applications for citizenship, naturalization, permanent residency and other categories of residency in a timely, transparent and expeditious manner, my department has commenced the compilation and review of all outstanding applications, in an effort to expedite these applications, where possible, in the shortest period of time.

“When this is completed, we will be better able to advise the public on reasonable, realistic time frames in which one might expect not only these outstanding applications to be processed, but also of a realistic turn-around time for new applications,” she said.

Campbell also pointed out some of the initiatives the Department of Immigration is considering in an effort to expedite the processing of applications for citizenship, naturalization, permanent residency and other categories of residency.

They include the following:

Providing regular training for all officers involved in the application process in an effort to ensure that they are familiar with current government laws, policies and procedures;

Continuing to provide training and assistance to Family Island administrators and foreign service officers in order to equip them to ably assist the department in fulfilling its mandate, locally and internationally;

Collaborating with relevant government stakeholders to ensure that persons entitled to permanent Bahamian status are not denied their right, while at the same time ensuring that those so entitled do not benefit, by any means;

Educating the public as to the policies and processes involved in all of the application process;
Designing a programme to be offered locally to all persons applying for Bahamian citizenship so as to acquaint them with the history, geography, and civics of The Bahamas.

Campbell emphasized that the new administration has undertaken:

To as a matter of priority, deal with the registration as of citizens' minor children, of children born abroad to married Bahamian women and of spouses of Bahamians;

To review, and amend as appropriate, the fees applicable to work permits and certificates, as the government gives strong consideration to eliminating the existing processing fee of \$25, which fee, in no way covers the processing costs;

The department is also re-evaluating the requirements for those seeking to qualify for permanent residence. These are referred to as "economic" applicants;

The department is also looking at amending the fees in respect of spouses, minor children and children born in The Bahamas to non-Bahamian parents.

Campbell said that in its efforts to develop an effective immigration strategy, the Department of Immigration has been allocated \$18,392,389 in the 2007- 2008 Budget. This represents an increase of \$2,091,091 over last year's budget.

Additionally, \$8.82 million of the allocated amount will go toward paying salaries, an increase of a little over half a million dollars.

The present staff complement of the Immigration Department is 199 officers and 113 clerical and administrative officers.

In an effort to increase the administrative efficiency of the Department, 50 new immigration officers will be trained and executive, administrative and clerical staff will be enhanced

False HOPE for Haiti
by Tom Ricker
June 19, 2007
ZNet Magazine, MA

Earlier this month President Bush certified that Haiti was “prepared” to take advantage of trade preferences extended under the HOPE Act – also known as the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act. It has been argued that HOPE will bring desperately needed apparel jobs to Haiti. For example, the free-trade-cheerleading Washington Post editorialized on Monday, November 27, 2006: “After 15 years of political turmoil, violent unrest and economic mismanagement, this looks like a rare opportunity to consolidate tentative progress in Haiti. Congress shouldn't miss it.”

Congress passed the HOPE Act shortly after midnight on the last day of the “lame duck” session in December 2006. It was attached to a much larger tax bill by the Republican leadership in order to make it harder for textile state Republicans to vote against it. But what did Congress actually pass? It is hard to say they captured an opportunity to consolidate any progress other than further enriching Haiti's sweatshop overlords, and professional putchists, e.g. Andy Apaid.

HOPE Background

The HOPE act would provide tariff free access to the United States market for apparel made in Haiti. This is not a completely new program. For years Haiti has been part of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and under these rules has had tariff-free access to the U.S. market for apparel. The caveat is that the fabric had to be made in the United States. Prior to CBI expansion, the U.S. government provided tariff reductions for apparel made with U.S. fabrics under special provisions of customs code. These rules facilitated the expansion of apparel assembly in Haiti, a sector that reach employment levels over 100,000 by the mid-1980s.

The new part of HOPE is the extension of tariff free access to apparel made in Haiti, even if the fabric is not from the United States. There are limits - preferences are primarily extended to fabric from countries that have free trade agreements with the United States. Manufacturers in Haiti would be allowed to use fabric from other sources as well, but there are caps on the volume of this fabric, and the way the bill is written, these caps are reduced over the five year life span of the bill.

Apparel is an important export sector for Haiti, and over the recent past Haiti has become even more dependent on it. Since 1990 the share of Haiti's exports to the United States represented by apparel has increased from 45% to 90%. In value terms, apparel exports have nearly double since 2001. However, employment has lagged in this sector as companies have shifted production contracts elsewhere and political conflict has scared some investors off. A recent increase in apparel exports has been driven by producers from the Dominican Republic. Companies like Grupo M shift production to Haiti to take advantage of the proximity of lower wages, and weaker unions. Yet, despite these recent trends employment in this sector is still below 20,000 today.

False HOPE

As currently constructed the HOPE Act would have a marginal impact on employment in Haiti, and what “success” it would have is ultimately based on more effectively exploiting Haiti’s poverty. The apparel industry is in a global transformation amidst changes in international quota systems, and the explosion of assembly manufacturing in Asia. Keeping Haiti competitive in this environment means keeping wages low and workers un-organized, and even then there are no guarantees. A temporary expansion of tariff-free access for third country fabric does not solve the underlying problem. Indeed, by placing so much emphasis on apparel HOPE deepens economic insecurity in Haiti, it does not alleviate it.

A real HOPE bill would help create jobs beyond Haiti’s sweatshops, especially in the agricultural sector, and would strengthen the Haitian government’s ability to develop the economy and provide basic government services to its citizens.

A Better HOPE

The single greatest generator of unemployment in Haiti over the past twenty years has been the destruction of the rural economy. The loss of economic opportunity in the countryside has translated into a wholly unsustainable urban migration. Urban communities in Port-au-Prince, Gonaives, Port de Paix and elsewhere are straining unsuccessfully to absorb dislocated peasants and their families.

The current HOPE Act does not impact this tragic cycle in any meaningful way. But Congress can take steps that would help. A real HOPE Act would provide Haiti’s government the space to adjust tariff levels to protect its agricultural producers. It is unlikely that the destruction already wrought by years of extremely low tariffs (lowest in the Caribbean) can be reversed. But giving families still trying to scrape out a living in the rural economy a fighting chance would help stabilize employment far more than creating sweatshops.

Another approach a new HOPE could take would be to shift funds for development away from project based grants and loans, delivered primarily through the non-governmental sector, to direct support for government ministries in Haiti.

Haiti has the lowest public sector employment in the region, less than 0.7 percent. Public education programs and government provision of health services suffer as a result. Most education and health care is currently provided by non-governmental organizations, including networks of church based programs. These programs often fill in important gaps, but over time ultimately further undermine the public sector’s capacity. In the long run, rebuilding the existing public infrastructure in health and education has to happen if Haiti has any chance to break the cycle of underdevelopment it is currently trapped in.

Encouraging private sector employment through tariff preferences, as in the current HOPE Act could also be pursued, but not in a vacuum. Worker rights need to be protected, and not with boilerplate labor clauses that go un-enforced. This should not take place through unilateral mandates issued by the U.S. Congress, essentially blackmailing the government to comply or lose benefits. Enforcement should evolve through dialogue, and direct support for the ministries that would be responsible. Further there must be an absolute insistence on protecting workers rights to organize and collectively bargain. The best guarantor of worker rights is an organized work force.

Finally, an alternative HOPE could flourish if Congress will take what steps it can to insist that Haiti's debts be cancelled immediately and unconditionally. The Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank have already agreed to cancel a large portion of Haiti's debt. But the current program requires that Haiti wait at least two years (more likely three) meet a host of invasive policy conditions, and then face continued indebtedness anyway because the debt "relief" targets will still leave Haiti with a debt burden. Canceling Haiti's debt outright today would free up \$50-70 million a year, and provide the government many opportunities to engage in the public investment mentioned above.

Haiti's Preval says PetroCaribe has nothing to do with the cost of fuel...

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Bylined to: Jeb Sprague/Wadner Pierre

VHeadline.com, Venezuela

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Haiti discusses advances on trade

AP

Cay Compass News, Cayman Islands

Sunday 24th June, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) – President Rene Preval said U.S. and Caribbean officials discussed trade and fighting drug trafficking at a conference in Washington during which the Haitian leader met with U.S. President George W. Bush.

Preval returned to Haiti on Saturday following the Caribbean Community conference, which ran from June 19–21. He told reporters the sessions produced agreements on trade, security, health and other key issues.

He also said U.S. and Caricom officials brainstormed efforts to fight drug trafficking in the region. "With this dialogue we have initiated, there is a greater understanding of these problems and the way in which we must face them," Preval said, without providing more details of the sessions.

Preval's trip also included a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

A joint statement by Bush and Caricom issued at the conference said impoverished Haiti will continue to require "substantial regional and international support" toward rebuilding its social, political and economic institutions.

Haiti : Negotiations between the Government and the Public Transport Trade Unions
AlterPresse
Tuesday 19 June 2007

P-au-P., --- Negotiations are proceeding between the Executive and the spokesmen of the syndicates in control of the strike, that has paralyzed public transport on the 12th and 13th of June, according to information received by AlterPresse.

It is the minister of social affairs who has been commissioned to pursue these talks.

At the time of the preceding discussions between the head of state and the public transport syndicates, held the day after the strike, René Préval has made some promises with the latter about two of their claims concerning in particular the tariffs of fines and of number plates.

On the other hand the question of fuel prices, which the syndicates want to see reduced, is left to the coming negotiations with the minister of social affairs.

From its side, the “Committee Initiative National Strike of transport”, who has taken the initiative for the recent strike, was give, on 18th of June, 48 hours to announce its decision. [gp me apr 19/6/2007 12:40]

Fire Destroys Port-Au-Prince Marketplace
Associated Press
Forbes NY
July 2, 2007

A fire ravaged a marketplace in Haiti's capital, prompting a protest march Monday by hundreds of street vendors who accused the city government of setting the blaze to remove them from the area.

The fire began Sunday night near Port-Au-Prince's cathedral, destroying merchandise including fruit, radios and televisions.

"We knew the mayor wanted to clean up this area and move the marketplace, but they never told us what day we should move," vendor Julio Alexis said.

City officials did not immediately return calls for comment or make a public statement. Haitian police firing shots in the air broke up the demonstration.

Some vendors said their sales at the market were their only source of income. "Nothing remains," said TV repairman Philippe Audosit.

People scrounged through the market's ruins Monday for aluminum and zinc roofs, under the watch of police and U.N. soldiers.

More than 80 percent of the 8.7 million residents live in poverty in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

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Canada's CIDA contributes CAD\$19.5 million to IDB-financed infrastructure program in Haiti
Caribbean Press Releases, Barbados
07/6/2007

Washington -- July 6, 2007 -- The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will contribute a CAD\$19.5 million (about US\$16.5 million) grant to a program financed by the Inter-American Development Bank to improve basic infrastructure in Haiti, the IDB announced today.

The IDB's Board of Executive Directors approved modifications to the original US\$70 million program to increase its resources with the Canadian cofinancing, which will place emphasis on the rehabilitation of roads and encourage greater participation of Haitian women in projects supported by the program.

Haiti is the leading recipient of Canadian aid in the Western Hemisphere. Besides its contribution to the IDB-financed program, CIDA has distinguished itself for its work to improve conditions in sectors as diverse as electricity, agriculture, microfinance and security in Haiti.

CIDA's resources will expand a transparent and flexible facility that helps Haitian ministries and decentralized government agencies undertake medium-size infrastructure projects (ranging from US\$200,000 to US\$3 million) in areas they can have a high economic impact and raise the quality of life of the local population.

The program, which has already disbursed almost US\$12 million and has committed around US\$30 million more to specific projects, can finance works on a broad range of infrastructure, including roads, bridges, ports, airports, cargo terminals, irrigation ditches, potable water and sanitation systems, public marketplaces and abattoirs.

The facility also finances activities to ensure the technical quality of project planning and implementation, including environmental and social impact studies and mitigation measures, as well as the transparent and sound management of program resources.

In 2005 the program received a US\$7 million contribution from the OPEC Fund for International Development. Spain has also expressed interest in providing cofinancing to the facility.

The IDB is carrying out two other basic infrastructure-related initiatives in Haiti, the US\$50 million road rehabilitation and maintenance program and the US\$78 million transportation infrastructure rehabilitation program. By request of the Haitian government, these programs are financing investments in sections of two of the principal highways, RN1 and RN2.

Haitian radio hopes to sooth crime-torn slum

Monday, July 9, 2007

By Clarens Renois

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): From the heart of Haiti's crime-torn slum of Cite Soleil, Radio Boukman broadcasts a message of peace as it seeks to show that the neighborhood has more to offer than gun-toting criminals.

With Port-au-Prince's airwaves counting 55 radio stations, 95.9 FM seeks to stand out as "the radio of change," giving the Haitian capital's 300,000 slum dwellers a voice to discuss their plight.

Instead of news, Radio Boukman broadcasts creole rap and talk shows with young hosts discussing the community's woes.

"We believe that it is through music, dialogue and communication that real peace and change will emerge in Cite Soleil," said programming director Tanis Jean-Louis.

No one knows Radio Boukman's audience rating, but station managers believe it has become the "point of reference" for Cite Soleil residents since coming on the air a year ago.

"We broadcast all kinds of music, although we favor creole rap and local production," said station general director Nelson Jean Lifethe.

Radio Boukman, named after a former slave who led the first major slave rebellion in the former French colony in the 18th century, also wants to show a different face of Cite Soleil to shed its violent image.

"Some believe Cite Soleil is another country, an unproductive area classified as lawless by the authorities," programming adviser Hilaire Nesly said.

Each morning, 21-year-old Fabienne wakes up the population of Cite Soleil, which means Sun Town, by playing songs and reading horoscopes on her show "Morning Sun."

"Our program reveals the many talents hidden in this grimy, miserable slum," Lifethe said.

The mission of the station, which has 30 workers including some 20 volunteers, is to "create an environment of peace and teach people to live together," he said.

UN peacekeepers, who were deployed to Haiti after president Jean Bertrand Aristide fled an uprising in February 2004, launched a series of raids in Cite Soleil in December to crack down on armed gangs.

Joel Joachim, the station's administrative director, said young people need jobs to keep them away from a life of crime.

The Haitian government recently announced the creation of thousands of jobs for impoverished neighborhoods such as Cite Soleil, but radio managers say officials need to commit to improving the slum's plight.

Radio Boukman gives the slum's population a chance to express their needs and vent their complaints about everyday problems including lack of water, power outages, unsanitary conditions, disease and poverty.

"Our work will be in vain if the authorities do not show support," said Joachim, whose station is helped by donations from international aid groups.

"The children need good schools to change their lives and young people need work to keep them away from violence," he said.

One of the station's technicians was part of a Cite Soleil gang. Today he makes between 40 and 75 dollars per month.

"It takes effort to discourage young people from violence, but it is just a drop in the ocean because there is a lot of misery here," Lifethe said.

On the Caribbean, 20/20 Blindness

By Johanna Mendelson Forman

The Washington Post

Friday, June 22, 2007

This week leaders of 14 Caribbean countries will meet in Washington, D.C. to discuss the future of the region and its relationship with the United States. For U.S. leaders, the Caribbean 20/20 Vision conference is a low priority on the foreign policy agenda.

The media silence on this event underscores the lack of understanding that exists about the region. Although the Caribbean states vary in size, (most are small), wealth and population, we underestimate the region's geopolitical potential. These states represent votes at the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS), and make it possible for the U.S. to advance its agenda in multilateral organizations. And the Diaspora population that resides in the U.S. provides sizeable portions of national GDPs in the form of remittances.

About Think Tank Town

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Since 2001, when the United States and our Western Hemisphere neighbors declared the Caribbean our "third border," U.S. policy toward the region has been limited to fighting drug traffickers and preventing terrorists from advancing to U.S. shores. (Note the capture of would-be bombers of New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, who hailed from Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, happened because there was excellent cooperation with Caribbean law enforcement officials.) Yet the U.S. does little to recognize the importance of countries at our third border as both a potential for energy independence as well as a geopolitical area that brings with it a large voting block in multilateral organizations like the UN and OAS.

The last seven years have failed to generate a coherent policy to manage our relationships with the Caribbean, having handed the Haiti mess off to the UN and Brazil. Only in March, 2007 did President

George W. Bush pay some attention to Latin America on a whistle-stop tour that yielded a memorandum of understanding on biofuels with Brazil, but little hard cash to help give the leaders of the region a reason to change their minds about the loss of an ally and friend.

The Caribbean is a region where broad policy issues on energy security, climate change and international trade and development converge. The small island states could help reduce U.S. dependency on foreign oil through the development of biofuels for export and their own use. The transformation of the Caribbean to an energy powerhouse could also create new jobs, reduce the exodus of poor islanders to the U.S., and generate a whole new group of trading partners who would seek these energy crops for their own needs.

But our third border also carries great risks. In addition to the narco-trafficking and other illicit trade that pours through the region, the Caribbean sits in the path of most Atlantic hurricanes. And if climate change predictions are accurate, the 60 percent of the Caribbean population who live on the coast will be at even greater risk to the growing severity of weather patterns. The resulting humanitarian crisis that could be generated from environmental refugees is coming, and no one in our emergency planning sector, save U.S. Southern Command, is really prepared to deal with this matter. The state of Florida, the southern most tip of the continental U.S, is also at risk as the closest safe haven for people of the Caribbean fleeing environmental devastation.

U.S. effectiveness as a good neighbor in the Caribbean could help erase the sense of betrayal that many of the Caribbean states felt after the U.S. intervened in Haiti for a second time in 2004. Our actions not only created ill will among Caribbean Community states, but it also reduced our effectiveness in the corridors of multilateral institutions like the OAS and the UN, where the U.S. had counted on the Caribbean to help support U.S. interests through their votes.

If the United States is to once again rely on the support of these small island states, it will have to demonstrate that it takes its commitment to the third border seriously by crafting a policy that addresses regional concerns: stimulating trade and development, reducing poverty, stabilizing Haiti and mitigating climate change through expanding renewable energy resources. Only by putting greater emphasis on a collaborative approach to the complex policy issues of security and development in the Caribbean will the U.S. once again be able to regain its legitimacy as a trusted actor and ally.

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INTERVIEW-Haitian leader says priorities drugs, corruption

21 Jun 2007

Reuters

By Joseph Guylor Delva

WASHINGTON, - Haiti's president said on Thursday that fighting drug trafficking and corruption in his impoverished Caribbean country was now the priority of his government.

Rene Preval said in an interview in Washington, D.C., that sustainable social and economic development was not possible unless both plagues were fought.

"Police officers, judges, customs and government officials are bought off by drug dealers and there will be no stability if traffickers are not defeated," Preval told Reuters during a meeting of Caribbean leaders in the U.S. capital.

"They will do anything to destabilize the government."

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has suffered frequent waves of violent instability as it tried to build a democracy after decades of dictatorship.

Its first democratically elected leader, former Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted early in his first term in a military coup and then again during a later term through an armed rebellion in February 2004.

Preval's election last year revived hopes for peace and a U.N. peacekeeping force has in recent months had some success in tackling the street gangs that had taken control of the sprawling slums of the capital Port-au-Prince.

But Haiti remains a significant transshipment route for South American cocaine and its police and courts are notoriously corrupt, presenting challenges to efforts to build democratic institutions and economic conditions that would ease grinding poverty.

Preval and 14 other Caribbean leaders met with U.S. President George W. Bush on Wednesday to discuss trade, economic development and regional security.

Preval said when it was his turn to speak he addressed only the problem of drug trafficking.

"Because if this problem is not solved, there is no point in talking about a strong state, about investments, progress and stability," said Preval.

Preval, who recently submitted to parliament a bill that would force government officials and their close dependents to declare their assets every year, said corruption was a major threat to development.

"...If we allow smugglers and other corrupt officials to go unpunished, honest investors won't come to do business in our country," he said.

LIFE IN HAITI

Haitians risk death `in search of a life'

As survivors and the family members of victims of the recent Haitian boat tragedy in the waters of the Turks and Caicos Islands await answers, life in Haiti hasn't improved, they say.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Mami Herald

July 8, 2007

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti -- Gina Sévère and her five children's dreams of a better life are now in the hands of her younger brother, two months after her husband drowned off the Turks and Caicos Islands on a risky voyage from Haiti.

Sévère fully expects her brother to attempt to leave, too.

"The country doesn't offer you anything," says Sévère, tears trickling down her face. ``Things are not getting better."

Sévère's view is shared by many here, fueling an increase in the number of Haitians who have boarded dangerously flawed and overcrowded boats for the perilous journey out of the country.

In one such journey nine weeks ago, Sévère's husband, Anold Jacques-Magloire, was among 61 Haitians whose bodies were recovered in the shark-infested sea near Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos.

"People have problems, they have difficulty," says Sévère's brother, Jocenel St. Ange, 25, who is unemployed. ``That is why they are taking boats -- to find a better life."

Although the tragedy provoked an outpouring of grief among Haitians, and for a few weeks halted the deadly clandestine voyages, they later resumed. Turks and Caicos officials say that three weeks later, they repatriated 37 Haitian migrants after a boat attempted to land on May 28 in the British dependent territory, 150 miles from Haiti's northern coast.

The U.S. Coast Guard also intercepted and returned 50 Haitians in June. So far this year, the U.S. Coast Guard has intercepted 1,221 Haitian migrants, more than the 1,198 for all of last year.

A WOMAN'S SECRET

Florence Joachin, 25, didn't tell her mother that she was heading to Providenciales when she asked to borrow \$285. Clairecida Osias recalls her daughter saying only that she was ``leaving in search of a life."

"I thought she was headed to Port-au-Prince," says Osias, who borrowed the money. ``What was I to do? When you have a child who is trying to help you even though she has her own two children to take care of, and she says she wants to go in search of a life, you are resigned to help her."

Osias learned the truth when someone brought Joachin's crumpled passport to the house and asked if the photo was of her daughter.

As she recalled the moment, she stares at the mass grave, her eyes surveying the tiny white wooden crosses standing atop the white slab. Osias' days are now consumed with grief and worry over food and money.

"There is no money, no work," Osias says. "Things are worse now."

An expectant father, Antoine JeanBaptiste, and his two best friends were among the 78 survivors who managed to stay alive by stripping naked to prevent others from pulling them under.

The three, like other survivors, accuse the Turks and Caicos police patrol of ramming the wooden boat at least twice before towing it from shallow water and into the deep just as they were preparing to disembark.

The British government has launched an investigation into the allegations and the accident, and is expected to issue a report next month.

POOR CONDITIONS

"Just look at the miserable conditions in which people here are living," Jean-Baptiste says, walking through a neighborhood of rundown and unfinished houses with overgrown weeds and debris on the outskirts of Cap-Haitien.

It was the second time that Jean-Baptiste had tried to make it into Turks and Caicos, where he hoped to find work as a plumber. He doesn't rule out trying again.

"The way it works here, you cannot work for a certain rate," he says. "If you find something but don't do it, someone else will jump at the chance. That is why the minute you find something, you have to jump at the chance."

Some, however, don't get that luxury. They go months and even years without work despite their skills, says Vilsaint Dorvilien, 31, noting that many of the men aboard the boat were laborers seeking jobs in Turks and Caicos' building boom.

Dorvilien, who can barely afford the one-room shack he shares with five others, including his wife and two children, says he sold two goats and borrowed the rest of the money he needed from his father and brother to make the ill-fated trip. He says he paid \$333.

"You wake up each day looking at the telephone, hoping someone will call, or you go from job to job hoping to find something," Dorvilien says, describing his daily routine. "I'm sitting here now, not doing anything. I want to work."

Concern Over Criminal Deportees
By Tameka Lundy
Bahama Journal
July 2, 2007

Often overlooked by the wider society, though never fully discounted by the police, criminal deportees to The Bahamas are said to be committing a small fraction of crimes.

However, the crimes that they are committing are the most serious infractions of the law, according to a senior police official.

"From what I have seen there is a low percentage [of criminal deportees here committing crimes] but they are involved in very serious types of crimes," said Chief Superintendent of Police Glen Miller, head of the Central Detective Unit.

"They have been involved in major drug trafficking, firearms trafficking and homicides and in some instances serious armed robberies, but that's been at a very low percentage."

Chief Supt. Miller could not give specific figures.

The grave worry for The Bahamas and countries in this region is as these countries continue to accept more and more people who are expelled from countries like the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, there is little effort made to provide for their proper reintegration into the society that is forced to accept them.

"It's something the government could consider," Chief Supt. Miller said.

"We have experienced cases where someone has been in the US for 20 years, served five or 10 years in prison and was deported... That persons in essentially homeless... The fellow doesn't know anybody and he has to live so it is definitely something worth considering."

The matter was grave enough for CARICOM leaders to raise with US President George W. Bush when they were in Washington, DC for the Conference on the Caribbean in late June and politically expedient enough for the president to make it quite clear that his country will continue to expel criminal deportees.

Both President Bush and his counterpart leaders in the Caribbean have acknowledged the need to work more closely on immigration security issues in a manner that is respectful of national laws and government services capacity and sensitive to the effects of human displacement.

In a joint statement that was issued at the conclusion of multilateral discussions in the US capital, both sides also vowed to work toward the expansion of the pilot reintegration programme for deportees in Haiti to include other CARICOM member states.

Guyana's President Bharrat Jagdeo reported following the meeting with President Bush and US congressmen that the issue is a political one and they would find it very difficult to reverse the policy on criminal deportees.

"I think in the region we have been realistic enough to realize that will not happen because it is not politically feasible for them to do it," he said.

"So we have almost uniformly moved away from early calls years ago that this should not happen to now some support in rehabilitation and resettlement and there was a commitment that that will be examined, but no commitment that we will receive support just that it will be one of the issues that [the US] will follow up on."

The issue of criminal deportees had been a source of tension between the US and Guyana years ago. Guyana's refusal to accept criminal deportees led the United States to ban the issuance of visas to Guyanese government officials and their families in late 2001. That ban was lifted once Guyana agreed to accept 100 deportees.

REPORT TACKLES DILEMMA

A report on crime and violence in the Caribbean region that was compiled through the efforts of the World Bank found that although the average Caribbean deportee is not involved in criminal activity, a minority may be causing serious problems, both by direct involvement in crime and by providing a perverse role model for youth.

The report, which was released recently, recommended that more services be offered to reintegrate deportees, with departing countries contributing to the cost of these programmes.

The point was made that in general, there is an over-reliance on the criminal justice system to reduce crime in the region. At the same time, analysts pointed out that some types of crime such as organized crime, drug and firearms trafficking are generally impervious to prevention initiatives and their control requires an efficient criminal justice system.

"Assisting in the reintegration efforts for deported offenders could be a cost cutting effective way for deportee-sending countries to promote development and weaken international crime networks," the report said.

For a while the US Government bluntly made the point that its Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has no mandate or funds to resettle criminal deportees in the Caribbean or anywhere elsewhere. The matter was raised again at a meeting of Caribbean foreign ministers in New Providence several years ago when Jamaica on behalf of CARICOM made the suggestion to then US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

In response to the proposal seeking financial help to resettle immigrants the Bush Administration made it clear that it could not use seized assets in the way that CARICOM had suggested.

HAITI AS A PILOT

Each year the US, UK and Canada deport thousands of people convicted of various crimes to their countries of citizenship in the Caribbean. Between 1998 and 2004, the US alone deported 31,000 convicted criminals to the Caribbean.

Since the early 1980s, the US was deporting non-citizens to their home countries if a judge ordered deportation based on the severity of one's conviction. This happened in the most serious of cases.

Haiti received its repatriated citizens and processed them quickly through their police and immigration offices letting them free within a day or so.

For a time, those repatriated to Haiti were held in police station holding cells throughout the country for an indefinite period of time. The country later set up a Commission, based in the Ministry of Interior, to oversee who would be released and when.

However, years later there was a new procedure to direct all newly arriving criminal deportees to be held for an indefinite period of time at Haiti's National Penitentiary and the Commission continued to be in force.

The Bush administration provides \$1 million for a programme in Haiti that helps Caribbean criminal deportees from the US readjust to life in their native land. The programme emphasizes that those deported to Haiti are not security risks. Tom Shannon, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, said he hopes the programme can be expanded to Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and other Caribbean countries.

THE WAY FORWARD

The prime minister of St. Kitts and Nevis Denzil Douglas called the matter of criminal deportees to the Caribbean a "hot issue."

"This is posing a very big problem for the Caribbean," he said recently, "and the need to collaborate on the deportees issue on a programme to support the reintegration of deportees is a very necessary step for the immediate future."

The CARICOM Regional Task Force on Crime and Security recommended in 2002 that member countries establish offices for the resettlement of deportee modeled after a programme in St. Kitts and Nevis where the Returning Nationals Secretariat is charged with facilitating reintegration of deportees. The Secretariat provides counseling and offers assistance in finding jobs, locating housing and using social services.

In Jamaica, a church-based group called the Land of My Birth Association recently started to offer similar services to some deportees.

Chief Supt. Miller, the head of the Central Detective Unit in the Royal Bahamas Police Force, told the Bahama Journal that once the force is notified of an incoming deportee, that individual is met at the

airport and an investigation is conducted to determine whether that person is wanted by local authorities before they are released into the public.

"Persons who spend most of their lives abroad and are being deported, we have seen several of those cases in Nassau and in Grand Bahama and we have seen persons turn to crime for survival..." he said.

"In some instances that is all he knows and I think we can put together some kind of programme to sensitize the public to these individuals as to what they are faced with."

A hearing is to be held in the US in the next week on the matter of criminal deportees.

For asylum seekers, a fickle system

Amid the national debate over immigration reform, asylum has been largely overlooked.

By Bill Frogameni

The Christian Science Monitor

July 3, 2007 Edition

Fort Lauderdale, Fla. - Three grueling weeks after they cast off from Haiti – subsisting on toothpaste and saltwater, they said, once the food ran out – just over 100 men, women, and children ran their rickety boat aground off Hallandale Beach, Fla., just north of Miami.

As the weakened Haitians waded or tried to swim toward land – one man died just yards from shore – they were helped by local firemen and others then taken to a county detention facility.

That was March 28. Three months later, they're still in detention, seeking asylum in the United States, prompting community demonstrations, the involvement of a local US congressman, and even a hunger strike.

Amid the contentious national debate over immigration reform, asylum has been largely overlooked. But like the immigration system overall, critics say, the asylum process is difficult, broken, and unfair.

"The Haitian community is very frustrated and angry," says Marleine Bastien of the Miami-based Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition. "There's such discrepancy.... People feel even if they make a good-faith effort, their chances are minimal in getting asylum."

The statistics explain some of the frustration.

Unlike refugee status, a designation generally pursued by people who want to come to the United States, asylum is for individuals without authorization already in the US or at a port of entry. And their numbers are dropping – despite the recent surge in immigrants.

Since 2001, the annual number of asylum applicants has dropped by a third to a half, depending on the category. The number of people granted asylum has also fallen by a third: from a record 38,641 in 2001 to 25,257 in 2005, the last year for which complete data are available.

The drop may be due to immigrants' perceptions that the system has become more adversarial since 9/11, says Ms. Bastien, whose coalition represents some of the Hallandale Beach detainees: "People feel the burden placed on them is very heavy, very high."

To begin with, different nationalities receive different treatment. Toward the top of the pyramid are Cubans. If they set foot on US soil, they circumvent the asylum process altogether, thanks to the Cuban Adjustment Act first passed in 1966. Instead, Cubans are automatically designated refugees and, thus, are eligible to apply for legal permanent resident – or "green card" – status. By contrast, most others already in the US without authorization or at a port of entry must go the asylum route.

For those who do, it helps to be Russian. Russians won asylum 64 percent of the time, according to a recent study of high-volume immigration courts between 2000 and 2004. At the other end of the scale were Colombians (36 percent), Venezuelans (26 percent), and Haitians, the lowest of all, at 16 percent.

Nor are courts consistent from city to city. Haitians got asylum 27 percent of the time from a federal immigration court in New York, whereas a court in Miami granted Haitians asylum only 15 percent of the time, according to the study. Albanians got asylum 65 percent of the time in San Francisco; in Detroit, only 17 percent. The study also found that female judges granted asylum at a higher rate than did male judges.

"There's a great deal of randomness and disparity in the system that seems at odds with the rule of law," says Philip Schrag, of the Center for Applied Legal Studies at Georgetown University Law Center and an author of the study.

Asylum seekers who present themselves voluntarily to immigration officials usually fare better than those who, like the Haitians apprehended on Hallandale Beach, get caught. Voluntary seekers make their case to US Citizenship and Immigration Services, part of the Department of Homeland Security. If they're denied there, they can go through the immigration courts. In 2005, Haitian applicants made up 17 percent of all voluntary seekers granted asylum, more than any other ethnic group.

Those who get caught – and thus go directly to immigration court – don't win asylum so easily. The US typically grants asylum to those who fear persecution because of their politics, race, nationality, or religion. But certain observers caution that some applicants, especially from impoverished nations like Haiti, are fleeing economic problems, not political ones.

Asylum "can be pretty valuable," says James Carafano, who studies homeland security at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington. "Getting into the US ... is an incredibly marketable commodity."

Unlike Cubans, who are well-organized politically, Haitians have little clout in the US, which compounds their immigration problems, says Cheryl Little, executive director of the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center in Miami. She says US officials have determined that most of the Haitian detainees in Pompano Beach have a credible fear of persecution if they're returned to Haiti – an early step in the approval process. But immigration officials won't confirm this, saying they can't discuss specific cases.

US Rep. Kendrick Meek, a Democrat whose district includes part of Hallandale Beach, has asked US immigration officials to release those who have demonstrated "credible fear" so they can better prepare for trial. But detention is usually mandatory in such cases, says a spokesperson for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Movie Review: 'Ghost of Cité Soleil'

A revealing documentary connects politics to gang violence in Haiti

By Colin Fredericson

Epoch Times, Ireland

New York Staff

Jun 30, 2007

Poverty, hunger, government instability, politically backed street gangs, love, and a little bit of voodoo comprises the independent documentary, Ghosts of Cité Soleil.

The shocking realism of everyday life in Haiti through the eyes of its most feared inhabitants provides an apocalyptic look at a city with ample weaponry, and little else by way of subsistence. Danish independent filmmakers take us to a city the United Nations terms one of the most dangerous places on Earth.

We first join gang boss 2pac and his soldiers, known as "ghosts" in Cité Soleil, outside of the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, in 2004, a few months before then President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted. These street gangs command national fear, financially backed by corrupt presidential power as they rule the slums, and dish out bullets and beatings to Aristide's opponents.

The gangs roam the streets of Haiti to violently silence Aristide's opposition. But as no second of stability is to be found in the metamorphic political mess, the opposition militia gains more and more momentum, eventually ousting Aristide. The gang members find themselves with no escape from an oncoming backlash of revenge as politics and power change hands and international security forces arrive, albeit ineffective in calming the violence.

We even witness a phone call to New York where Haitian music artist Wycleff Jean resides and speaks with the Haitian 2pac, hoping to inspire a bit of hope as they share about music and life. 2pac sees music as his escape, enthusiastically sharing raps he's written with Wycleff. And later Wycleff is seen running jubilantly through the streets of Cité Soleil.

A powerhouse documentary full of bouncy hand-held camera work and a music video styled cinematography, emphasizing the rugged images of lost hope. This is a real-life gangsta rap reality, where young men carry the big guns, and yet feed themselves and their community on humanitarian aid and bloody money handed out by politicians who use them.

Through the everyday life and endless strife of a country worn down by instability and vengeance, Ghosts of Cité Soleil gives you the closest look you're likely to get at the complex reality of the current ongoing crisis in Haiti.

US, Caribbean nations agree on more cooperation in security and trade

The Associated Press

The International Herald Tribune

June 20, 2007

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/06/20/america/NA-GEN-US-Caribbean-Conference.php>

WASHINGTON: U.S. President George W. Bush and leaders of 14 Caribbean countries issued a joint statement Wednesday agreeing on more cooperation in trade and security.

One item in the Caribbean Community agreement, produced during this week's Conference on the Caribbean, encouraged emphasis on the "international financial services sector" to help the island states diversify their economies. It also cautioned they must remain "committed to the maintenance of appropriate regulatory and supervisory practices, consistent with the highest international standards."

U.S. authorities consider some parts of the Caribbean hotbeds of large money laundering operations.

On security, the agreement spoke of "the multidimensional nature of the security threats and challenges faced by our countries" and promised to "work together in the fight against terrorism, trafficking in persons, drugs and small arms and transnational crime."

One nation, Haiti, came in for special consideration.

"We are heartened by the substantial progress in Haiti made by the government of President (Rene) Preval, with the support of international partners," the statement said.

"We recognize that Haiti will continue to require substantial regional and international support" toward rebuilding its social, political and economic institutions after decades of conflict, it added.

Caribbean countries at the conference are Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago,

Impounded Fathers
By EDWIDGE DANTICAT
New York Times
Op-Ed
June 17, 2007

MY father died in May 2005, after an agonizing battle with lung disease. This is the third Father's Day that I will spend without him since we started celebrating together in 1981. That was when I moved to the United States from Haiti, after his own migration here had kept us apart for eight long years.

My father's absence, then and now, makes all the more poignant for me the predicament of the following fathers who also deserve to be remembered today.

There is the father from Honduras who was imprisoned, then deported, after a routine traffic stop in Miami. He was forced to leave behind his wife, who was also detained by immigration officials, and his 5- and 7-year-old sons, who were placed in foster care. Not understanding what had happened, the boys, when they were taken to visit their mother in jail, asked why their father had abandoned them. Realizing that the only way to reunite his family was to allow his children to be expatriated to Honduras, the father resigned himself to this, only to get caught up in a custody fight with American immigration officials who have threatened to keep the boys permanently in foster care on the premise that their parents abandoned them.

There is also the father from Panama, a cleaning contractor in his 50s, who had lived and worked in the United States for more than 19 years. One morning, he woke to the sound of loud banging on his door. He went to answer it and was greeted by armed immigration agents. His 10-year asylum case had been denied without notice. He was handcuffed and brought to jail.

There is the father from Argentina who moves his wife and children from house to house hoping to remain one step ahead of the immigration raids. And the Guatemalan, Mexican and Chinese fathers who have quietly sought sanctuary from deportation at churches across the United States.

There's the Haitian father who left for work one morning, was picked up outside his apartment and was deported before he got a chance to say goodbye to his infant daughter and his wife. There's the other Haitian father, a naturalized American citizen, whose wife was deported three weeks before her residency hearing, forcing him to place his 4-year-old son in the care of neighbors while he works every waking hour to support two households.

These families are all casualties of a Department of Homeland Security immigration crackdown cheekily titled Operation Return to Sender. The goals of the operation, begun last spring, were to increase the enforcement of immigration laws in the workplace and to catch and deport criminals. Many women and men who have no criminal records have found themselves in its cross hairs. More than 18,000 people have been deported since the operation began last year.

So while politicians debate the finer points of immigration reform, the Department of Homeland Security is already carrying out its own. Unfortunately, these actions can not only plunge families into

financial decline, but sever them forever. One such case involves a father who was killed soon after he was deported to El Salvador last year.

"Something else could be done," his 13-year-old son Junior pleaded to the New York-based advocacy group Families for Freedom, "because kids need their fathers."

Right now the physical, emotional, financial and legal status of American-born minors like Junior can neither delay nor prevent their parents' detention or deportation. Last year, Representative José E. Serrano, a Democrat from New York, introduced a bill that would allow immigration judges to take into consideration the fates of American-born children while reviewing their parents' cases. The bill has gone nowhere, while more and more American-citizen children continue to either lose their parents or their country.

Where are our much-touted family values when it comes to these children? Today, as on any other day, they deserve to feel that they have not been abandoned -- by either their parents or their country.

Edwidge Danticat is the author of the forthcoming "Brother, I'm Dying," a memoir.

The Pope praises Dominican bishops for aiding Haitians
The Dominican Today
July 6, 2007

VATICAN CITY.- Dominican Republic's bishops were praised by Pope Benedict XVI, for their programs to help emigrating Dominicans and to assist the thousands of Haitian refugees who have sought a better life in their neighboring Caribbean nation.

Dominican Episcopal Conference president Ramon de la Rosa told the pope the bishops of his country and of Haiti meet frequently to assist one another and to benefit the migrants.

De la Rosa also said bishops from throughout the Caribbean are meeting more frequently to deal with common concerns, such as "the growing migration between the islands, tourism" and the plans of various governments to promote greater economic integration in the region.

Benedict told the bishops that while the Dominicans still have a "deeply Christian soul" there are "symptoms of a process of secularization" that must be combated with strong education in the faith and the commitment of all church members.

"At the same time, church communities in cooperation with public institutions must act to safeguard the stability of the family and promote its spiritual and material progress," the pope said.

The church cannot "ignore the difficulties the family institution is encountering in your nation, especially with the drama of divorce and pressures to legalize abortion," and to extend legal recognition to "unions not in accordance with the design of the Creator for matrimony," he said.

Benedict also encouraged the bishops to spend more time with their priests and seminarians.

"If young men see that the priests live a true spirituality of communion around their bishop, giving witness to unity and charity among them, to evangelical generosity and missionary openness, they will feel a greater attraction to the priestly vocation," the pope said.

Haitian leader says priorities drugs, corruption

Friday, June 22, 2007

By Joseph Guylor Delva

Reuters

WASHINGTON, USA (Reuters): Haiti's president said on Thursday that fighting drug trafficking and corruption in his impoverished Caribbean country was now the priority of his government.

Rene Preval said in an interview in Washington, DC, that sustainable social and economic development was not possible unless both plagues were fought.

"Police officers, judges, customs and government officials are bought off by drug dealers and there will be no stability if traffickers are not defeated," Preval told Reuters during a meeting of Caribbean leaders in the US capital.

"They will do anything to destabilize the government."

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has suffered frequent waves of violent instability as it tried to build a democracy after decades of dictatorship.

Its first democratically elected leader, former Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted early in his first term in a military coup and then again during a later term through an armed rebellion in February 2004.

Preval's election last year revived hopes for peace and a UN peacekeeping force has in recent months had some success in tackling the street gangs that had taken control of the sprawling slums of the capital Port-au-Prince.

But Haiti remains a significant transshipment route for South American cocaine and its police and courts are notoriously corrupt, presenting challenges to efforts to build democratic institutions and economic conditions that would ease grinding poverty.

Preval and 14 other Caribbean leaders met with US President George W. Bush on Wednesday to discuss trade, economic development and regional security.

Preval said when it was his turn to speak he addressed only the problem of drug trafficking.

"Because if this problem is not solved, there is no point in talking about a strong state, about investments, progress and stability," said Preval.

Preval, who recently submitted to parliament a bill that would force government officials and their close dependents to declare their assets every year, said corruption was a major threat to development.

"...If we allow smugglers and other corrupt officials to go unpunished, honest investors won't come to do business in our country," he said.

Haitian Senate Backs President on Army
Prensa Latina
June 18, 2007

Port-au-Prince, The Haitian Senate supported President Rene Preval's plan on Monday, to set up a "gendarme" unit instead of restoring the armed forces.

Jean Rudolf Joaisil, member of the congressional Justice and Security Committee and former military officer, assured that the Senate has no interest in reinstating the army dissolved in 1995.

This unit will guard the national territory from foreign threats, patrol the border and support the police, and it is of no importance what it is called, he pointed out.

He said that the situation of public security is now tolerable and called on authorities to continue being tough on crime.

Haiti's Armed Forces were dismissed as part of the arrangements to reinstate former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, ousted by a military coup.

They were replaced in 1995 by a civilian force backed by the UN Mission for Haiti (MINUHA), considering that the Army had hindered democratic processes, supported coups and perpetuated dictatorship.

A legacy of heroism -- and too often failure

Thorough account of the CIA questions the agency's ability to succeed at its central mission.

BY TIM RUTTEN

LEGACY OF ASHES: The History of the CIA. Tim Weiner. Doubleday. 720 pages. \$27.95.

Miami Herald

July 15, 2007

Legacy of Ashes is a magisterial account of the agency's 60 years, a timely and vital contribution to one of the most fraught debates roiling our divided capital: the correct role of the intelligence agencies and their proper relationship not only to the executive and legislative branches but also to the rule of law itself.

Weiner, a superb New York Times reporter who covered the CIA during the 1990s, has been working on this book for at least 20 years. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 at the Philadelphia Inquirer for stories he did on the Pentagon's secret budget and turned that material into his first book, which was followed by the definitive book on Soviet mole Aldrich H. Ames' devastating betrayal of the CIA.

The most remarkable thing about Legacy of Ashes is that it is based entirely on primary sources and on-the-record interviews. Nothing goes unattributed, and when the author does draw conclusions -- which he does frequently and with refreshing clarity -- they have that muscular authority that only facts can create.

Those facts are drawn from multiple sources, including the author's exclusive access to the CIA's numerous secret histories of its operations, from more than 50,000 documents in the archives of the agency, White House and U.S. State Department, from on-the-record interviews with 10 directors of central intelligence and from more than 300 interviews with current and former CIA agents and officials.

In Weiner's view, the story that emerges is "how the most powerful country in the history of Western civilization has failed to create a first-rate spy service. That failure constitutes a danger to the national security of the United States. . . . The annals of the Central Intelligence Agency are filled with folly and misfortune, along with acts of bravery and cunning. They are replete with fleeting successes and long-lasting failures abroad. . . . The one crime of lasting consequence has been the CIA's inability to carry out its central mission: informing the president of what is happening in the world." The war in Iraq is but the most immediate consequence of that failure.

Even its storied "successes" in Iran, Guatemala, Chile and Afghanistan -- all of which are examined in fresh new light in this book -- turned out to be long-term failures. Despite the incalculable cost of its technical and analytic component, the agency has failed to give warning of every significant international event from the onset of the Korean War to Sept. 11. It gave U.S. and military officials faulty information on the Balkans and Somalia. When it came to understanding and grappling directly with the Soviet Union and its effective intelligence operations, the CIA failed miserably and repeatedly.

Weiner is particularly good on Bill Clinton's cluelessly dysfunctional relationship with the CIA and on its consequences. It was a devastating period for the agency, which had enjoyed a particularly favored position when one of its former directors, George H.W. Bush, occupied the White House.

Clinton also refused to accept one of the agency's rare, real-time warnings concerning the genocide in Rwanda. When he chose to intervene in Haiti to support Jean-Bertrand Aristide, he discovered that the president's major antagonists were drug-dealing Haitian intelligence officials, trained and financed by the CIA. As a consequence, he -- like other chief executives before him, notably Richard Nixon -- came to believe the agency was riddled with opponents of his policies.

Weiner gives a far more coherent and convincing account of the agency's failures in the run-up to the Iraq war than George Tenet did in his own recent memoir. He believes in the indispensability of an intelligence agency, but he's too good a reporter and too realistic an analyst not to weigh the possibility that, as the world's most open society, we might lack the genius for constructing a necessarily secret institution.

Tim Rutten reviewed this book for The Los Angeles Times.

Fred Thompson defends his lobbying past
AP
26 June, 2007

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Fred Thompson, a likely Republican presidential candidate, on Tuesday defended his work as a Washington lobbyist, telling The Associated Press that lobbying is an important part of life because "government's got their hands in everything."

Thompson, who likes to cast himself as a political outsider, earned more than \$1 million lobbying the federal government for more than 20 years. He lobbied for a savings-and-loan deregulation bill that helped hasten the industry's collapse and a failed nuclear energy project that cost taxpayers more than a billion dollars.

In September 1991, Aristide said: "The burning tire, what a beautiful tool! ... It smells good. And wherever you go, you want to smell it."

Aristide won Haiti's first democratic elections in 1989 and was overthrown in February 2004, fleeing amid an armed rebellion and protests against corruption and other problems.

"They'll talk about it — probably with the same results," he said.

Thompson was scheduled to attend a fundraiser in Nashville later in the day.

"I have a general time in mind," he said. "You're either running or not running. I think the steps we're taking are pretty obvious."

Metal Thieves Hurt LatAm Economies

By JONATHAN M. KATZ

The Associated Press

Washington Post

Saturday, July 7, 2007

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic -- Copper exports have surged in this Caribbean nation with no active copper mines _ thanks to thieves who plunder power and telephone lines.

Scrap metal thieves also thrive in Brazil, where vandals sawed off the arms of a bronze statue of soccer legend Pele last month. In Jamaica, bandits ripped up tracks and cables from an old Kingston railway station.

Even the U.S. has not escaped. In Fort Wayne, Ind., thousands of dollars worth of copper gutters were stripped from a church in the middle of the night last month.

Theft of scrap metal has increased sharply in recent years as prices have risen. Copper is the most tempting target because it brings the most cash per pound. The vandalism can spell disaster for countries with struggling economies, especially when it damages already shaky electrical sectors.

In the Dominican Republic, thievery has accounted for much of the 288 tons of copper exported this year. Much of that scrap copper makes its way to China, which imported 460,000 tons in the first two months of 2007 alone to feed its booming economy.

"Globalization has created a climate in which these types of activities are going to flourish," said Cuauhtemoc Calderon Villareal, an economist with the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Mexico.

World copper prices reached a record \$4.16 a pound in May 2005 and have mostly stayed above \$3. That has meant a bonanza for owners of copper mines in Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Mexico. It has also driven copper exploration in areas such as the central mountains of the Dominican Republic.

But the side-effect of thievery has devastated the island's already crippled electrical sector. Hospitals depend on shaky generators and schools refuse donated computers because there is often not enough electricity to run them. The country already loses about half the power it generates to infrastructure damage and customers who do not pay.

When thieves in Santo Domingo cut 1,000 feet of copper wire in May, it knocked out power to a huge swath of the capital for two hours _ including a hospital, naval base and downtown hotel.

"The wire thieves are increasing the number of blackouts," said Pedro Pena Rubio, commercial director of the Dominican state-run electric company. "They need to abandon this practice immediately."

Governments have tried to respond.

Haiti, the hemisphere's poorest country, runs television ads imploring people to "stop cutting down wires." In May, the South American nation of Guyana banned exports of scrap metal altogether to close the market for thieves who have taken the wiring out of traffic lights in the capital and towns along the Atlantic coast.

The Dominican Republic has set up an investigative task force and is requiring exporters to prove they obtained their copper scrap legally. Copper exports have fallen by almost 20 percent since that requirement took effect in April, customs officials say.

But a probe of the 11 companies that have exported more than \$1.8 million worth of copper scrap from the country since January 2006 has yet to produce any indictments.

People in Santo Domingo describe seeing neighbors walking down the street with reams of stolen copper wire wrapped around their shoulders. Some barter the scavenged wires for food or drugs, while others sell them to scrap companies.

"They do it right during the day," said 18-year-old Noemi Ramirez, who works in an ice cream shop that depends on a diesel generator to get through daily blackouts. "They don't care."

Preval Government Responds to Criticism over Privatization Program

HaitiAnalysis.com

Agence Haïtienne de Presse

July 13, 2007

Eddy Labossière, Secretary General of the Association of Haitian Economists (AEH), said Monday that modernization of the National Telephone Company (Téléco) is indispensable to prevent it from disappearing.

Several hundred employees received termination letters last Friday and this Monday as part of the process of privatization of the company announced by the Haitian government.

The situation was tense all day Monday at Téléco, where the atmosphere was far from that of a normal workplace, given that everyone expected that his termination letter might arrive at any moment.

Most company departments have been decapitated. Only three out of twelve still had directors as of this Monday, with the total number of workers destined to be cut from 2,800 to only 800 across the country.

Several employees who were not yet affected by the wave of sackings, or who were to be spared from dismissal, said they were still living from moment to moment because they feared that the new owners will fire them without any compensation after the privatization is complete.

Some did not conceal their intention to leave the company. But, the government pointed out, this is not a case of voluntary departures.

The AEH secretary general explained that the law allows modernization of any public institution that finds itself in financial difficulty, and also allows for the signing of a management contract with experts and allows the government to proceed to grant a concession of capitalize the enterprise in such a way that the State has the possibility of retaining an ownership position greater than 51%.

He said that above all, Téléco must be saved, and he deplored that over the past 30 years, the authorities have taken advantage of this institution by milking it as if it were a cow, thus preventing it from developing itself.

Téléco was valued at close to \$500 million just 10 years ago, said Mr. Labossière, while today it is worth no more than \$100 million.

And one would need to invest about US\$250 million to put it back on track, which is an amount the Haitian State does not have, he asserted.

Mr. Labossière did advocate fair and equitable compensation for the dismissed workers and the possibility that they might have a stake in some way in Téléco after its modernization.

For his part, the secretary general of the New England Human Rights Organization for Haiti, Josué Renaud, deplored the fact that President Préval is charging "headlong into privatization". While he

acknowledged that certain public institutions are in poor financial condition, he asserted that nothing has been done to try to improve them before resorting to privatization.

He emphasized that wherever governments have opted for privatization in Latin America, their efforts resulted in failure, and Haiti continues to import goods that are manufactured by private companies that used to be owned by the State, such as the Haitian Cement Company.

Josué Renaud denounced what he labeled "the arrogance" of President Préval who "seems to think that when he takes such important decisions that have tremendous impact on Haiti's public institutions that he doesn't owe anybody any explanations unless they happen to be prospective buyers of State assets".

Indeed, said the Organization's director, no dialogue has been undertaken with the employees of Téléco. "The word comes down from on high", and the word is "12 months of compensation and that's that", said the human rights organization's director.

Mass Firings at Téléco: The Privatization Plan Begins

Agence Haitienne de Presse

Haiti Analysis.com

July 11, 2007

At least 500 Téléco workers received termination letters Friday as part of the government's announced plan to privatize the company. Another thousand are expected to be fired on Monday. As of last week, there were approximately 2800 workers remaining after the first wave of mass firings, as the government works to reduce the total number of employees to 800, according to several sources. These mass dismissals, which were expected in the wake of numerous statements by President René Preval and Téléco Director General Michel Prémumé, come 10 days after the end of a three week strike organized by the union of telephone workers, initially to demand a dialogue with Mr. Prémumé, and subsequently calling for his departure.

The workers ended their strike after the president of the Communications Commission of the Haitian senate, Mr. Jean Hector Anacacis, asserted that dialogue between the union and the Téléco director general is necessary.

As the first series of letters were sent out on Friday, several police units as well as MINUSTAH officers were called to the perimeter of the Teléco facility to neutralize any possible protesters.

Téléco workers found this decision insulting "after so many years of service to the company". "We have never been against privatization; we are simply asking for what we deserve", said one of the dismissed cadres. He noted that workers who have been terminated, he said, have been invited to go to a teller at the National Credit Bank to receive their legal services and a severance bonus equivalent to 12 months of wages, as the has president said. The workers were demanding compensation equivalent to seven years of wages.

The president of the union of the National Telecommunications Company, Jean Mabou, whose name appears on the list of sacked workers, termed the dismissals made by management illegal and arbitrary.

According to several company cadres, the selection of workers to be dismissed was based on a desire for revenge, and the choice of workers who are being kept in their positions was based on favoritism.

" What is the common sense behind the dismissal of 14 out of the 17 trainers at the training center, while bogus consultants who only go to the office to collect their salaries are kept on because of their friendship with the architects of this privatization", said an indignant cadre who has been sacked.

Silence, We Privatize!

Haiti en Marche Editorial - Translation by HaitiAnalysis.com

July 7, 2007

The privatization of the Préval-Alexis government, it is, take it or Leave it! In fact, the power launches us into a privatization process, that just started up through an abundant firing of the employees of Téléco (the national company of telecommunications), without having said more to the nation than pieces of declarations at forceful press conferences with President René Préval or Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis.

So far, we rather saw the head of State rants against the plethora of employees in the public sector that he seems to consider as the principal handicap to its modernization (short of saying to the development of the country). That a true exposition, a budget ledger, a strict and honest report of performance or nonperformance on public or semi-autonomous enterprises, during the eras of the Duvalier's regime that saw their creation - exactly to protest the monopoly of the international private sector where blackout had become synonymous with Shrewsbury (the American who possessed the sole electric company in Haiti and only followed his own will) - to the interim system instituted after the brutal overthrow of Jean Bertrand Aristide, until at last gas at preferential rate Hugo Chavez's Venezuela came to bring a certain level of hope, not necessarily a solid hope.

As for the Prime Minister, nevertheless a great university personality, he is satisfied in this aspect in conveying the voice of his master, while the ministers of the Economy and Planning, who are supposed to be the orchestrators of such politics, remain silent.. .

Which privatization will eat us up?...

Which privatization is thus the essence? Or rather which privatization will eat us up, because there is privatization and privatization...

Not being any minister, economist, or planning entity, neither any Diafoirus to paraphrase Molière, we can only quote many examples known of all and showing that the term "privatization " covers a much wider, in short infinitely a lot more than what we are inflicted through major blows of always threatening declarations, and more or less interested press articles.

Roughly, there is at least total privatization, semi-privatization and partial privatization.

On this matter, where is the modernization commission of the public sector (but yes, the CMEP) of which it was the function, and that had done so much that it did end up to make us accept that a modernization is not privatization. More precisely, that modernization is a form of privatization without its name.

Except that this bet on modernization, at any rate in our country, was won by foreign firms, that are Haitel, Comcel and Digicel. For the best interest of the clientele, so we notice.

Except also that meanwhile, the Haitian State lost the whole file that had been built so carefully, and so costly, by the CMEP, in some bottom drawer. Today one has chosen a much simpler procedure; it is the take it or leave it! In Creole, "sa k pa kontan anbake".

National Security...

President Préval and those whom it is indeed necessary to call our propagandists of the moment, give for example the cases of the Minoterie and Haiti Ciment, two factories that were created by the Duvalier regime, and that were sold to the private sector under the first presidential mandate of Mr. Préval (1996-2001).

It is a matter of two production businesses of consumers' goods (flour and cement) that can be obtained easily and anywhere. But that we could not in anyway compare with strategic institutions, therefore of national interest and that even turned out - since the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States - a matter of national security, like the main harbor of the capital better known under the name of APN (National Harbor Administration).

There are other harbors in Haiti, public as well as private harbors, but there is only one Port-au-Prince Harbor. Just as the harbor of Santo Domingo only belongs to the Dominican Republic.

Take the cash and get on!...

We are not saying that the APN, or the National Airport Administration, or the Téléco should not be privatized. But following which criteria, which interests - because the public interest, in all those cases should not be neglected and should even win over the criterion of basic profitability, in terms of dividends and dollars. And that it cannot be a simple matter of big bucks. Take the cash and get on!

A good example of semi-privatization is the one of the radio television in France during the Mitterrand regime. The old ORTF had broken down into multiples chains (FR3, TF1, Canal, etc.), profiting as much from private funds as from new technologies, but its culture did not disappear, as in the United States, under the weight of brands of laundry soap and lame videos.

No one ever talked about privatizing the airport of Miami. This airport is a public wealth, duly belonging to the county, in this case Dade County, but it is obvious that the management of the airport is, as long as it can be remembered, given to one or several private firms. Different firms taking care of its different departments (administration, security, janitorial, etc.).

But notice, the contracts of these firms are reconsidered each year, evidently according to their performance but more so according to the necessities of defined moments by virtue of the public interest.

And it is locally elected officials (we insist, local) who proceed to this evaluation (local elected officials that are evaluated by the administrators during regular elections).

Subjected to the sole laws of the market...

We were hit by another example, the one of the water in Bordeaux. Traveling with a Haitian mixed delegation of the public sector - private sector, we visited Bordeaux (France), what we could call a major general water headquarters. Water in the heart of the 21st century. Two principles: 1) water is a resource in the process of disappearance; 2) water is an essential human right. Any man, whatever his wealth, his nationality or his race has right to the quantity of water that is necessary to him.

We cannot therefore leave such a public wealth at the hands of the sole laws of the market.

Nevertheless, the water in Bordeaux (a city that claims to have one of the better waters in the world) is privatized. But in the same way the government Préval of 1996-2001 talked about modernization. Because the Bordeaux Town Council cannot afford the luxury to finance alone all the necessary technological innovations

The found solution is the following: 1) Natural resource is a public wealth. 2) Management is private (administration, research, including all the possible and imaginable means to conserve water). 3) But a mixed commission headed by personalities belonging to the civil corporation sets up the rates.

Return to Shrewsbury?...

There is therefore privatization and privatization. First of all businesses are not the same. Up to the fact that the Ciment and the Haiti Minoterie never should have been to State businesses to begin with. On the other hand it would be too bad that a wild privatization (we insist, wild) of the EDH, the Teleco, up to the APN would make us return to the Shrewsbury's earlier times... It would, then, not be a matter of privatization but of an attempt at liquidation of the national economy.

On the other hand, privatization is not synonymous with the private sector, as we tend to believe, therefore often putting the latter in a bad position despite itself. In any case, the Haitian private sector does not have the means of this massive privatization such as the one announced by the side of power.

Is this therefore a return to Shrewsbury?

Téléco Employees Demand Compensation and Denounce Policy of Sabotage of Public Enterprises

Agence Haïtienne de Presse

July 6, 2007

Workers at the national telephone company Téléco said Monday that they will not accept payment of one year's compensation if they are to be fired from their jobs under the privatization plan announced by President René Préval.

At the public utility's headquarters in Pont Morin, the employees who are united in their views continued their campaign seeking the dismissal of the director general Michel Prémumé, whom they accuse of being opposed to negotiations.

They said they are not opposed to privatization, nor are they able to prevent it. "However it is out of the question that we be sent away empty-handed", they said.

That would be an unjust act by the president, if all employees were to receive an indemnification of no more than one year's work in the event they are dismissed", said some of the workers, recalling that many of them have been working at the company for dozens of years.

Several employees also denounced what they called a policy of sabotage of the public institutions in order to justify their privatization and sale at absurdly low prices.

" We are waiting to see who will take control", they said.

Haiti: Preval to Privatize Téléco, ED'H, and APN
Agence Haitienne de Presse
July 3, 2007

President René Préval announced Saturday that the following public sector enterprises, Téléco, ED'H (Electricity of Haiti), and APN (National Port Authority), will soon be privatized because, he said, the results of these institutions are not at all satisfactory.

According to President Préval, the national telephone company, with its 150,000 land lines, has 3293 employees, which amounts to one employee for every 45 subscribers, compared to cell phone company Haïtel which has 500 employees for 350,000 subscribers, or one employee for every 700 subscribers. Comcel, he said, has 630 employees and 650,000 subscribers, or one employee for every 1,000 subscribers, while Digicel has 700 employees and 1.4 million subscribers, or one employee for every 2,000 subscribers.

"The most important thing for our government is to faithfully accomplish our mission for the welfare of the nation", declared Mr. Préval, reaffirming his determination to correct the situation.

At Téléco, where the union has been calling for the departure of Director General Michel Prémumé for close to three weeks, the president insinuated that the workers who are forced out of their jobs may benefit from one year's compensation, as was the case for employees who were sacked under the Boniface/Latortue government.

The compensation would make it possible for the workers to find other employment, said the president.

With regard to the APN (National Port Authority), the president announced that the ports will be modernized to try to reduce the cost of unloading ships and at the same time prevent boats from taking their business elsewhere.

A commercial vessel currently pays \$35 per ton of merchandise to unload cargo in APN ports, whereas elsewhere the cost is no more than \$17 to \$21.

Mr. Préval also deplored that APN utilizes 85% of its income to pay salaries.

The president also announced the formation of a commission mandated to study the general situation of the ONA (National Office of Old-Age Insurance) as well as all other institutions in the country responsible for social security in Haiti.

"We need a vision for social security", declared Mr. Préval, judging that an in-depth study will be necessary in order to learn whether it will be possible to pay the insured 10 years from now, for example.

The chief of State said he believes that the announced reforms are certain to upset some people, but that he would not be worried about that.

Canada's Aid to Haiti in Context
By: Regan Boychuk - HaitiAnalysis.com
June 29, 2007

A recently released report by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is chock-full of heartening language describing all the good Canadian aid allegedly achieved in Haiti during its holiday from democracy between the 2004 coup and its 2006 elections. One might be tempted to believe Canada is a benign do-gooder when it comes to Haiti. The missing context should dispel any such notions.

CIDA notes that its strategic approach to Haiti “was approved by the Minister in the summer of 2003” and was aimed, in part, to “support the emergence of a social consensus at all levels of society and support agents of change.”[1] CIDA (which had been informed of and agreed with the holding of the 2003 Ottawa Initiative on Haiti[2]) took its cue and labeled the Haitian government as a “difficult partner” in September 2003, suggesting aid should be directed through alternative channels. Internal documents show that CIDA almost exclusively funded organizations ideologically opposed to the overwhelmingly popular government of Jean Bertrand Aristide.[3] In February 2004, the strategy bore fruit when Haiti’s democratically elected government was forced from power and replaced by a regime hand-picked by the United States and headed by a business consultant from Florida.

Since the coup, CIDA states that “Canada’s commitment to the Government of Haiti is in accordance with the priorities of the ICF [International Cooperation Framework], which is currently the main frame of reference”. [4] Since CIDA offers no details about the ICF, I will. The un-elected regime installed in Haiti developed a comprehensive two-year economic and social plan with “about 300 mostly foreign technicians and consultants, some 200 from institutions like the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank”. The plan “calls for more free trade zones, stresses tourism and export agriculture, and hints at the eventual privatization of the countries state enterprises.” And despite the plan’s claim that “The government wishes to undertake a national reconciliation process by involving all components of society”, “Almost no one from the country’s large and experienced national non-government organization (NGO) community, the local and national peasant associations, unions, women’s groups or the hundreds of producers cooperatives or numerous associations was invited to participate” in the preparation of the economic plan. “Even the seven-person Council of Eminent Persons, meant to serve as a kind of counter-balance for Latortue, was not aware of or invited to participate in the process.”[5]

As an unusually frank World Bank report noted: “The transition period and the Transitional Government provide a window of opportunity for implementing economic governance reforms with the involvement of civil society stakeholders that may be hard for a future government to undo.”[6] Canada took full advantage of this “window of opportunity”: Canadian Ambassador Claude Bouche and the US-installed regime presided over the creation of a Haitian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce and, in October 2004, Canada sent its first trade mission since before Aristide’s re-election nearly five years earlier. Demonstrating the Canadian government’s dedication to Haitian well-being, Prime Minister Paul Martin visited Haiti in November 2004—a trip planned in part to recognize the legitimacy of the unconstitutional government, already responsible for wide-ranging repression of Haiti’s pro-democracy movement. “There are no political prisoners in Haiti,” Martin apologetically declared while thousands rotted in prison. “Justice is slow in Haiti.”[7]

On the eve of Prime Minister Martin's trip to lend legitimacy to the coup regime in Haiti, his office published a backgrounder stating that most tariffs and quotas on Haitian exports to Canada had been eliminated on many "textile and apparel goods, an important and promising sector for Canadian investment." Four months earlier, a delegation of the Haiti Accompaniment Project reported:

There has been a crackdown on labor unions and peasant associations. We met with peasant organizers who told us of cooperatives being ransacked, with tools and equipment stolen. One organizer told us of repeated death threats and an assassination plot against him in late May. We met with a labor union organizer who told us of a steadily mounting anti-union campaign directed at the assembly sector. He has received many reports from workers who say that factory owners are not respecting the minimum wage, which was raised last year by the Aristide government. In addition, three hundred workers have been fired from a Grupo M factory in the free trade zone along the Dominican border.

On July 13th, shortly after we left Haiti, the Latortue government announced that it would be offering a tax holiday of up to three years to large businesses who suffered losses between December 2003 and March 2004. No state support was offered to the thousands of poor people who have lost their homes or livelihoods due to the coup d'etat.[8]

So, despite page after page in CIDA's report on Canadian aid to Haiti's post-coup regime detailing water and literacy programs, the overall picture is somewhat different. Canadian aid was used to undermine Haiti's legitimate and popular government and then it was used to prop up the brutal and unpopular regime installed in the absence of Haitian democracy. In a familiar pattern, Canadian aid dried up when foreign investment prospects were not forthcoming but flooded in when the investment climate improved, Haitian human rights be damned.

NOTES

[1] CIDA, "Canada-Haiti cooperation: Interim cooperation framework result summary (April 2004 – March 2006)", Final report, July 2006, pt. 1, "Canada's intervention approach in Haiti".

[2] Foreign Affairs Canada, Caribbean and Central America division, "Secretary of state (Latin America and Africa) (La Francophonie), Mr. Denis Paradis, to host a high level roundtable on Haiti on January 31-February 1, 2003", p. 2 (CIDA informed and agreed). On the Ottawa Initiative, see "Canadian officials initiate planning for military ouster of Aristide", *Haiti Progres*, vol. 20, no. 51 (5 March 2003) and Michel Vastel, "Haïti mise en tutelle par l'ONU?", *L'Actualité*, vol. 28, no. 4 (15 March 2003), pp. 14-15.

[3] CIDA, “Haiti—Strategic approach: Concept paper”, 12 September 2003, pp. 8-9 (‘difficult partner’); Anthony Fenton, “Canada’s growing role in Haitian affairs”, *Haiti Progres*, vol. 23, no. 1 (16 March 2005) (internal CIDA documents).

[4] CIDA, “Canada-Haiti cooperation”, pt. 1.

[5] Jane Regan, “A national plan without the people?”, *Inter Press Service*, 21 July 2004; Republic of Haiti, “Interim cooperation framework 2004-2006”, July 2004, p. 8.

[6] World Bank, “Haiti: Economic governance reform operation project”, 10 December 2004, p. 4.

[7] “Canadian business mission in Haiti”, *Agence France Presse*, 22 October 2004; Brian Laghi, “Internal strife will undermine rebuilding plan, PM tells Haiti”, *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 2004, p. A4; “PM Martin: Canada in Haiti for the long run”, *Agence France Press*, 15 November 2004.

[8] Office of the Prime Minister, “Prime minister to travel to Haiti”, 12 November 2004; Laura Flynn, Robert Roth, and Leslie Fleming, “Report of the Haiti Accompaniment Project”, 29 June–9 July 2004.

Ministry of Planning Discussing Donor Demands and Privatization
Agence Haitienne de Presse
June 22, 2007

A workshop has been held to draft the national strategic document on growth and poverty reduction.

The Ministry for Planning and External Cooperation organized a workshop Wednesday (June 20, 2007) at the Hotel Le Plaza in the capital as part of efforts to draft the national strategic document on growth and poverty reduction in Haiti.

According to workshop leader Michel Delorme, this type of document is one of the demands made by international donors including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for grants of aid to poor and indebted nations.

The workshop, which included local elected officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations, will make it possible to put together a plan that should lead to the drafting of a document to be submitted to Parliament for ratification and to the international donors for approval and financing, said Mr. Delorme.

The various geographic departments of the country have already held a similar workshop to find, together with all sectors of national life, solutions adapted to the needs of each region of the country, he said.

The document that is being drafted will enable the government to determine its priority actions for the various regions of the country in order to reduce poverty and promote economic growth, said the workshop leader.

For his part, the government's delegate in the West Department, Michel Bernadin, said that this initiative will make it possible to move toward better living conditions for the population.

He said he believes in the success of this plan as a means of attaining a genuine increase in the country's wealth.

The IMF and the World Bank have already envisaged, he said, a package of \$860 million for this project and have shown their determination to see all sectors of national life become involved in the drafting of this strategic plan.

For his part, the Deputy from Cabaret, Volciné Pierre Jérôme, who took part in the workshop, said that this strategic national plan for growth and poverty reduction should be taken very seriously because, he said, the the system imposed by the international community can only be beneficial to the Haitian people.

Civil society organizations, he said, rather than the international community, are the ones who really want to eliminate public debt.

The Deputy also denounced a plan to dispossess the Haitian state of its assets through privatization.

