

Haiti News Roundup: November 24 – December 5, 2005

Elections in Haiti - What about Democracy?

by Paddy Rua - WSM

Anarkismo.net

Monday, Dec 5 2005

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The 30th of September marked a new anniversary of the first coup against Aristide in Haiti. That day, activists in 47 cities around the world, held an international day of solidarity with Haitian people who, once again, are suffering from the effects of a coup and a bloody occupation under the command of the UN.

In Dublin, we were visited by a Haitian activist, Obed Alexis, who gave a conference and we participated in the picket organised by the Latin American Solidarity Centre, joining this international protest. We showed Haitian people that they are not on their own and that there are plenty of hands ready to help them in their struggle against the occupation and Latortue's dictatorship.

The demands behind the protest were simple: respect for Haitian people's sovereignty, release of all political prisoners and the immediate retirement of UN troops from Haiti, which have backed the elite and have worsened repression. It's worth mentioning that most of the armies involved in this UN mission, like the Nepalese, Pakistani, Peruvian, Chilean, Moroccan, etc. have serious records of Human Rights violations and still, are supposed to be guardians of democratic values in Haiti.

Now, with the date of the Haitian presidential elections approaching (mid December), we're told this is a concrete way for Haitian people to exercise their right to sovereignty and to express their will. Without getting into the argument of the banality of "democratic" elections, we can wonder how this will can be expressed as Haitian society is crushed under the weight of rampant violence promoted by the death squad of the ruling classes, by the brutality of its police and the occupational forces, and when prominent militants of the most popular political party –Fanmi Lavalas- are imprisoned, dead or exiled. These are the reasons why popular organisations have called to a boycott of the elections and why the people are reluctant to believe that any democratic progress could be achieved with them. That was reflected in the low turnout to inscriptions in the first months of the process; this trend only changed when, in order to force people to participate in a blatantly irregular process, the de facto government introduced a new ID card that will be given only to voters. After the elections, this will be a compulsory document for Haitian citizens.

This elections will be a milestone in the occupation; it's the necessary illusion of democracy in a world dominated by multinationals in a deeply undemocratic way. It's the way the ruling class have to

sanctify the coup and its violent aftermath. It's the way they have to show the world that Haiti is back to normal ‐with 10,000 citizens less. It's the way the elites validate themselves in power as a result of popular will, instead of a bloody coup. The US and France, with its firm grip in the region are quite interested in this process running smoothly: The elections will cost U\$60 million, 90% coming from the EU and the US. After all it's good investment; the sweat shops will keep going on at low cost, the markets will keep wide-open, there'll be more control of the flow of cocaine and immigrants into the US, and the prospect of a reliable ally in the region is always welcome.

The candidates are a motley bunch of 34 businessmen and thugs, quite representative of the worse of Haitian history of oppression. And Aristide's party is torn between those who call for active resistance and boycott, and the bourgeois sectors that are trying to accommodate to the new situation and presented their own candidates: ex-president Preval and Bazin, former prime minister of the dictator Cedras!.

The elections can't be expected to solve Haiti's deep problems, but have highlighted a number of issues for the international movement: the inconsistency of a strategy that brings together in equality of terms the popular and bourgeois sectors of society and the new "democratic" face of imperialism, that globally is imposing its will through elections, showing the true face of capitalist democracy. Not much is left for Haitian people, but the need to go back to its popular roots, to its tradition of "popular democracy" from below and to draw from there an anti-capitalist program to overcome the source of Haiti's problems: the sharp class division between the rich and the dispossessed. Without addressing that issue, the danger of new coups will prevail, and any democratic dream will only remain as an illusion.

Paddy Rua

Ransom demanded for shot, kidnapped missionary

By Roel Farcia

Morris News Service

Shawnee News Star, Shawnee, OK

Dec. 3, 2005

ZEELAND, Mich. -- An American missionary is being held captive in Haiti for \$300,000 ransom. Phillip Snyder, 48, left Zeeland, Mich., Tuesday night and arrived in Haiti Wednesday in what was going to be a short trip in an effort to bring back a Haitian child to the United States for eye surgery. The child also was kidnapped.

Currently the FBI and Snyder's oldest son, Chad Snyder, who lives in Haiti, are working to have them released.

His wife Amber is at home waiting for further news. She received a call from her husband about 1 p.m. Thursday. She didn't know about his situation at the time.

Amber Snyder said her husband sounded distracted, and she realized something was wrong.

Phillip Snyder assumed Chad had contacted his wife to tell him about the kidnapping.

"When he (Phillip) called, he sounded funny," said Amber Snyder, 38. "He said, 'I just want to let you know that I'm OK and that I love you.' And then he said, 'They got me this morning.'"

Amber Snyder then asked her husband if he'd been kidnapped, and he said yes. He'd also said he was shot in one arm.

Amber Snyder said the Red Cross was able to examine her husband.

Phillip Snyder lived in Haiti from 1979 to 1991 and left only when he and his family were threatened. They moved to Zeeland in 1991.

In 1998, Phillip Snyder co-founded the non-profit organization GLOW Ministries International with his mother, Bettie. GLOW is an acronym for God's Love for Orphans and Widows. The Snyders have been helping Haitians for about 35 years.

Amber Snyder said GLOW helps Haitians by providing help with food, education and shelter.

Phillip Snyder told The Holland Sentinel for an October 2004 story about GLOW, "Our primary focus is not to bring a North American influence into Haiti. We want to work with Haitian pastors to enable them to help fulfill their vision."

U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland, contacted Amber Snyder when he learned about the kidnapping to give his support.

"We'll be calling the U.S. Embassy in Haiti," Hoekstra said. "We hope to get this resolved quickly."

Hoekstra said information he received said Phillip Snyder was kidnapped on the way to the embassy. He said that 28 Americans have been kidnapped in Haiti since April.

Haitian Police Commissioner Francois Henry Doussous told The Associated Press that he spoke on the phone with both Snyder and his kidnappers.

Doussous said police believe the kidnappers brought Phillip Snyder to the Port-au-Prince slum of Cite Soleil, a base for armed gangs blamed for much of the recent violence in the capital.

Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation, has a long history of instability.

"We do not consider these kidnaps to be politically motivated," said Doussous. "This is purely criminal activity, the gangs need money."

Haitian Creole permeates Spring Valley life
By SUZAN CLARKE
THE JOURNAL NEWS, Rockland, NY
December 4, 2005

Quick Creole

Here are some commonly used Haitian Creole words and phrases

- Bonjou: Good day.
- Kouman ou ye?: How are you?
- Sak pase: What's up?
- N'ap boule: Good! (traditional response to 'Sak pase?')
- Wi: Yes.
- Non: No.
- Mesi: Thanks.
- Merite: You're welcome.
- Silvouple (or Souple): Please.
- Mwen grangou: I'm hungry.
- Mwen swaf anpil: I'm very thirsty.
- Kouman ou rele?: What is your name?
- M rele ...: My name is
- Poukisa?: Why?

SPRING VALLEY

Revitalization could bring major changes to the village, but one constant will be the sound of Creole in the shops, streets and neighborhoods.

The complex and musical language permeates virtually every aspect of village life. The language abounds on local-access cable programming. It is spoken in social settings, in businesses and schools, inside Village Hall and at the Village Court, in the Police Department and at numerous churches in the ethnically diverse community.

Creole is one of the characteristics of the village — where an estimated 37 languages are spoken — that distinguish it from its counterparts in the county.

The 2000 U.S. census found 11,000 Haitians in Rockland, but community activists place the actual number at a minimum of 30,000. Spring Valley has the largest concentration of Haitian residents in Rockland.

The growth in the Haitian community has highlighted a language that has been maligned and misunderstood, but that is beloved for its beauty and poetry and its integral role in peoples' struggle for self-actualization.

"Creole is very musical, as musical as Spanish," said Denizé Lauture, a professor of Spanish and French at St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill.

After the arrival of the Spaniards in 1492, the language that was spoken became a synthesis of Spanish and the languages of the Taino, or indigenous Indians, and those of African slaves, he said.

"So then you did not have people speaking three different languages, you have people speaking many different languages," Lauture said. "They have to find a way to communicate, because, remember, the slaves who arrived from Africa, they were from many different regions. They spoke many different languages."

The French influence came much later, he said, in the 1600s.

Ignorance and misinformation often led to a belief that Haitian Creole is a broken or corrupted version of French. It is a language, with literature and structure, that serves the needs of Haitians at home and abroad, Lauture said.

Although French is one of the official languages of Haiti, most Haitians do not speak it fluently. They speak Haitian Creole, the other official language of the country's estimated 8 million people.

Lauture, a Haitian native who now lives in the Bronx, has taught Haitian Creole language and literature at the college and other institutions in Rockland County.

Historically in Haiti, French was spoken by the privileged elite and the ruling class and was considered a lingering symbol of colonialism.

Creole was spoken by everyone, especially by the nation's majority of impoverished, disadvantaged residents, and was stigmatized as being inferior.

That controversial social and cultural rift affects Haiti's society even today, Lauture said.

"I think Haitians should have more pride speaking Creole," he said. "There is no greater accomplishment for a people or a nation than to create a language."

Max Laguerre revels in that accomplishment. The Port-au-Prince native who now lives in Orangeburg chatted in Creole with friends at Spring Valley's Restaurant Tropical on East Church Street. He said he and other friends have had fun with the language.

"Haitians speak it because that's the way they want to communicate. ... They do it because sometimes they don't want other people to know what they're talking about," he said, smiling.

Harold Simpson, proprietor of 79 1/2 Luncheonette in Spring Valley, said Creole, French, English and Spanish have flowed freely in his restaurant.

Simpson, whose restaurant recently closed for good because of an urban renewal project to revitalize downtown, said young Haitian-Americans seemed to want to learn more about the language.

"A lot of the times they come, they approach me in Creole. I guess they would like to see me speak Creole," he said.

The average New Yorker knows enough Spanish to effect the most basic communication, but, despite the seeming omnipresence of Haitian Creole in the village, not many non-Haitian villagers are able to speak it.

Steven White, a lifelong Spring Valley resident, has many Haitian friends. His desire to learn their language led him to take a course at Rockland Community College for two months in 1984.

White, who played drums with the local band La Troupe Makandal, got a chance to travel to Haiti.

"I went to play a few shows, and when the shows were over, I just stayed until my money was gone," White said. He was there for two months.

"By the time I came back, I was speaking Creole fairly well."

He knew Creole when he met the woman he would marry.

"She was one of the few Haitians who was not impressed," he said, laughing, as he talked of his wife Emilia's reaction to his mastery of Creole.

Most Haitians he encounters don't expect to hear him speak Creole with such fluency, so much so that, "if the person does not see my face, they wouldn't know I'm not Haitian."

"I've surprised people," he said.

White takes that as a compliment and says his knowledge of the language is equally gratifying to Haitians.

"Haitians feel that it is such a great compliment to them that somebody took the time to learn their language, because it's not like Spanish or French or German, it's not a world language. They seem to really enjoy that and take it as a compliment to their culture," White said.

For Murielle Hyacinthe, owner of Murielle's Beauty Salon on Main Street, the sounds of Creole evoke her native land.

Although Hyacinthe speaks English and French fluently and has a knowledge of Spanish, it is Creole that is close to her heart.

"I was living in Chicago before. It was different. I felt a little bit isolated. But now being here, I feel like home."

Lature hopes that pride in Haitian Creole will prevail over the economic, political and perception problems that Haitians face.

"Creole is a very beautiful language," he said. "To hear poetry in Creole is one of the most beautiful things you can hear."

Mix of cultures starting over in new land thrives in working-class enclave

By Bill Douthat

Palm Beach Post

Monday, December 05, 2005

GREENACRES — Big oak trees casting a canopy over the streets of Villa del Trio give the working-class enclave a look of Old America. But its homes are largely occupied by immigrants who are just putting down roots in America.

On one porch, a young Honduran in the county barely a year, reads an English-Spanish dictionary in hopes of improving his chances of finding a better job.

Next door, an older woman who would give her name only as Rosa says in Spanish that she came from Honduras four years ago with her two sons to escape poverty and despair. They were encouraged to come by a third son, who lives across the street. He came 10 years ago and was the first in the family to settle in Villa del Trio.

The small neighborhood reflects what immigration scholars call re-familization, the reassembly of the family after the first immigrant settles in the United States.

Villa del Trio, so named because most of its homes are triplexes, has families from all over Latin America. Residents said the neighborhood of 252 homes on three streets is 60 percent to 80 percent Hispanic, although in the mix are American-born whites and African-Americans and at least one Hindu family.

The U.S. Census says from 1,300 to 1,500 Hispanics live in Villa del Trio and surrounding neighborhoods.

"You can tell there is a lot of Latin influence in this neighborhood," said Steven Restrepo, 18, who moved here from Colombia when he was 6. He steps to the sidewalk to make his point.

"There's a Mexican family across the street; those on the other side are Puerto Rican; a Guatemalan lives over there; they are from Haiti; and those down there are from El Salvador," Restrepo says, pointing around the block.

"We got the League of Nations here," said Maria, a resident for 31 years. "But it's one big happy family, and we're going to keep it that way."

At Greenacres Elementary School, less than a mile away, Principal Diane Conley says about 65 percent of her 560 students are Hispanic. When she came 10 years ago, many of her Hispanic students came from cities along the coast and already knew some English; now more and more are coming with limited English proficiency.

Conley said she's also noticed that family members of settled immigrants are moving into the surrounding neighborhoods.

"A good share are now immigrants, and the family members are not English-speaking," said Conley, whose school has two Spanish-speaking translators and one Haitian Creole translator to assist parents.

Greenacres City Councilman Richard Radcliffe said the family reunifications are reminiscent of those of earlier immigrants to this country.

"It's kind of the Old America when the parents came over, then the grandparents and eventually everybody came over and assimilated," said Radcliffe, whose district includes Villa del Trio. He said the neighborhood is popular with immigrants because it's one of the last areas in the county with relatively cheap housing.

"This is the place where people have always been able to get a start," Radcliffe said.

Villa del Trio was started 31 years ago by condo-builder K. Hovnanian Cos., which sold the triplexes starting at \$19,000 for the small center unit and \$29,000 for the larger units on the ends. A design quirk left the occupant of the center unit with no way to get a lawnmower to the back yard except through the front door.

When it began, all the homes were painted the same light-green color, but that didn't last.

It began as a homeowner community, but now most of the units are rented, said Bob Locke, who bought a unit in 1974 as a temporary place to live while he worked on a three-year construction job. Locke stayed until he retired and has no plans to leave the neighborhood.

Down the block, Jose Luis Rodriguez said he is enjoying sharing his street with Hondurans, Mexicans and Guatemalans and the Puerto Rican guy who calls Rodriguez "Cuba" because that's where he's from. Rodriguez moved here a little more than year ago with his wife, Grenys, after living in Miami, which had too much Latin influence, and Bradenton near Tampa, which had too little. The West Palm Beach area has the right mix, he said.

"Here we don't interact very much with the neighbors, but when we do, they are friendly," said Rodriguez, who left Cuba in 2000 after working as an independent journalist in Havana. He said he studied photojournalism in Cuba but was rejected for employment with state-run publications because he was not considered a loyal communist. So, risking jail, he started reporting as a freelancer and eventually was granted a visa to come to the United States.

"Here I can sense the freedom," said Rodriguez, who lives with his wife and three children in a two-bedroom apartment. He has dreams of opening his own photo studio and now takes photos of weddings and family events. But he also works as a cross-country truck driver to earn money for his dream and to buy a home for the family.

The Hispanic newcomers are drawn by housing prices, not cultural convenience. There are no bodegas — Latin grocery stores — and the ice cream truck that trolls the neighborhood sells ice cream, not helados. As if transformed by the lack of cultural identity, backyard fiestas are muted affairs, except for Mexican ranchera music that occasionally spills over the fences from the next street, Restrepo said.

Another neighbor says most family events are celebrated at nearby parks, because a large crowd with a barbecue grill big enough to roast a pig won't fit in most back yards. And where would guests park? Villa del Trio is blessed with its oak trees, sidewalks and underground electrical wires, but cursed by few parking spaces for so many residents. Driveways dominate the lawn in front of the triplexes, leaving little room for grass.

Villa del Trio homeowner Victor Osorio says his street has no Latin ambience because people are too tired after a long day's work to do much socializing with their neighbors.

"It's not like a Latin neighborhood where people get together all the time," said Osorio, who was born in Chile but has lived in this country for 21 years. "This is a working-class neighborhood."

Another of Villa del Trio's longtime residents, who gave his name as Bob, said the old-timers are feeling the change.

"The language," Bob said. "You can't understand what they are saying."

But one of Bob's Latin neighbors said the neighbors get along without a common language. When Hurricane Wilma knocked out power on the street for several days, some of the English-speaking residents brought water and ice to their non-English-speaking neighbors, she said.

"Son bien (they are very) nice," said the Latin woman, speaking the new language of the neighborhood.

Observer wrong on Canada's role in Haiti
Letters
Jamaica Observer
Sunday, December 04, 2005

Dear Editor:

I was very saddened, once again, on reading your editorial (Daily Observer, December 1) commenting on the Canadian federal elections. The Observer continues to persist with the line that Canada somehow conspired with the US and France, the 'troika' you refer to in your editorial, in removing President Aristide from office in Haiti.

As I have pointed out to the Observer previously, such a statement is very far from the truth. Canada has never been in the business of deposing duly-elected representatives, not in Haiti, or anywhere else. We have too much respect for the democratic process than to even consider, or lend support to, such initiatives.

On the contrary, our position always has favoured working with Haitians and the international community to promote the well-being of all segments of Haitian society. Quite frankly, the Haitian saga over the last 50 years has provided its share of setbacks and disappointments, but this has never lessened our strong resolve to help the Haitian people.

Canadian objectives, both prior and since the departure of Aristide, have been to promote national reconciliation within the framework that respects the rule of law, democracy, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. All of this recognising and respecting Haitian sovereignty.

Canada has taken the lead internationally in efforts to re-establish security and stability in Haiti. Our efforts have been successful in helping Haiti raise US\$1.085 billion from the international community over the next two years. Canada's own contribution of CDN\$180 million over two years is the third largest after the EU and the US.

Elections Canada is playing a leadership role in the electoral support and observation. Earlier this year, Elections Canada established the International Mission for Monitoring Haitian Elections (IMMHE), along with the independent electoral commissions of Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama and the United States.

Danville Walker, Jamaica's Chief Electoral Officer, is very involved in this process, supporting the Elections Canada team, and will lead the team during the first round of elections while Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, is working on the Canadian federal election.

In addition to this close cooperation between Caricom and Canada in support of the Haitian elections, we worked in common cause to secure a Special Statement on Haiti at the recent Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

Indeed, it was as a result of Canada's engagement with the Caricom and Haitian delegations that led to finalising and securing this statement by a consensus of the 34 countries of the hemisphere participating at the summit. We are committed to a bright future for the Haitian people.

We look forward to Caricom's normalisation of relations with Haiti once the electoral process leads to the establishment of a government that has the confidence of Haitians and the international community. This is in all of our interest, particularly in the Western Hemisphere.

Lastly, your editorial recommends the strengthened engagement of the Caribbean Diaspora in Canada's electoral matters. This is an area where my mission and Delano Franklin, the Jamaican minister responsible for the Diaspora, have cooperated closely over the last two years.

We both agree that the Caribbean Diaspora needs to make greater efforts to engage with all levels of government in Canada to deliver their concerns and promote issues that are important to them, such as security, education, trade and development assistance. A more politically engaged Diaspora cannot but strengthen bilateral relations and keep to the fore the interests of Jamaica and the Caribbean in the eyes of the Canadian political establishment, and serve the interests of this Diaspora in Canada as well.

Claudio Valle
Canadian High Commissioner

Haitian culture group to perform at Gusman Center

A Haitian cultural society celebrates its 40th anniversary, and its mission to celebrate Creole culture, arts and literacy in South Florida.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

Sun, Dec. 04, 2005

The funeral is far from somber. Dancers, moving like spiders, guard the entrance to the cemetery where Baron Samedi, the Vodou guardian of the dead, awaits to claim the soul. As the pallbearers approach, so does Samedi, letting out a wicked laugh. The drums beat faster, the dancers' movements, more frantic.

Though mourners chant the name of the deceased, Jozafa, and declare him dead, they believe his death is the beginning, not the end. In the tradition of their enslaved ancestors, they believe the dead Haitian peasant will now return to his ancestral home, Africa.

This Haitian-Creole tragicomedy is more than a play. It is a celebration of Haiti's culture and the Creole language that only 40 years ago started to gain respect through the efforts of Haitian folk culture groups like Sosyete Koukouy, which revolutionized the way Haitians now think about themselves and their culture.

Today, the Sosyete Koukouy, one of Haiti's most prominent cultural troupes whose players now live mostly in the U.S., will celebrate 40 years of preserving the Haitian culture and keeping the Haitian language alive by showcasing Lanmo Jozafa or The Death of Jozafa.

The troupe's name means Society of Fireflies, and was founded Dec. 18, 1965, in Haiti as part of an unprecedented movement dedicated to championing the Creole language, arts and culture.

"When we formed the group, Creole was patois; you couldn't speak it in school establishments and it was very segregated," said Jean-Marie Denis, better known as Jan Mapou, one of the group's founders and owner of Libreri Mapou bookstore at 5919 NE Second Ave. in Little Haiti.

"After our cultural revolution in 1965, Creole went into schools, books were being published and everybody started talking Creole openly everywhere."

Still, there were those who insisted on speaking French, long the official language of Haiti and associated with those who were educated. Creole finally became Haiti's second official language in 1987 within the newly rewritten Haitian Constitution.

Former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a linguist who championed the plight of Haiti's poor, made the teaching of Creole the basis of a literacy campaign promoting the teaching and writing of Creole to adults and children.

PAN-CREOLE CULTURE

Today, the French Creole language and culture is not just celebrated by Haitians, but by others who share the language and culture as part of International Creole Day on Oct. 28.

In South Florida, home to 245,747 Haitians, one of the fastest growing Haitian communities in the United States, according to the latest census data, Creole is recognized in other ways.

Former Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas made it among the official languages used at Miami International Airport, and Miami-Dade College recently announced that due to unprecedented demand, it was creating a new Associate in Science Degree program in Translation/Interpretation Studies for Haitian-Creole speakers beginning Jan. 4 at the InterAmerican Campus, 627 SW 27th Avenue.

But for Sosyete Koukouy performers, the mission goes beyond just promoting use of the language. It's also about helping Haitians and non-Haitians better understand the culture by putting on performances about life's challenges, such as Jozafa's wake, funeral and burial in a rural Haitian town.

ORAL HISTORY

Through the play, audience members learn how the celebrations in rural Haiti take on a much more flavorful atmosphere, with mourners playing cards and domino games, singing, dancing and making jokes while reflecting on the life of the deceased.

"It's the best way to know and understand the Haitian heritage," said Mapou, who wrote the play more than two decades ago.

Mapou founded the Miami branch 28 years ago. There are other branches in Homestead, Canada, Tampa Bay, New York, Connecticut and Haiti.

About 35 of the Miami actors, dancers and singers will participate today, and English translations, via headsets, will be done by Gepsie Metellus, a Haitian community activist.

Ernst Julmeus, 57 and a Miami resident, said of the group's contributions: "Most of our traditions have been transmitted orally. If you don't keep them, they will die," he said.

Nancy St. Leger, 47, a teacher at Coconut Grove Elementary, said the group also instills Haitian pride.

"In May we go from school to school and do shows. The kids love it so much; they love seeing the costumes and an authentic Haitian performance," said St. Leger, one of the dancers in today's play, and the group's dance director. "I love doing it, it's teaching children to be proud of their culture."

Haiti opens branch of consulate in Orlando
ViCtor Manuel Ramos | Sentinel Staff Writer
Orlando Sentinel
December 3, 2005

What: Orlando branch of Miami consulate of the Haitian government

Where: 1616 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando

Contact info: 786-444-2439

Services: Allows Haitians to request passport renewals and other government-issued documents such as birth certificates. Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Haitians in Central Florida: 17,251, the third-largest group of Central Florida residents born outside the mainland after Puerto Ricans and Mexicans.

Jean Robert Belabre thought of the long drive, the hassle of finding a parking spot in Miami's crowded downtown, the lines that turned into a daylong wait at the consular office.

And that was more than enough to make him forgo the whole thing and not plan that family trip to Haiti, where he has not returned since 1995.

Belabre is a U.S. citizen. But others in his household -- like thousands of Haitians living in Central Florida -- often find themselves more than 200 miles from the nearest consular office. It can take more than three hours of driving to get in line for the right stamp on a document.

Starting today, they have a reason to be relieved. They will have the direct link to their country that several community advocates have been seeking as the Haitian government of President Gerard Latortue opens a consular office here.

In creating the Caribbean nation's second Florida outpost, Haiti is recognizing the growth of its emigre community beyond Miami. Haitians have settled in Pine Castle, Pine Hills and other west Orlando neighborhoods for more than a decade. Others have gone to areas farther north around Jacksonville.

"It's definitely a good thing for Central Florida and for the Haitians living here, because it's a connection we didn't have," said Belabre, chairman of the First Haitian Community Center of Central Florida.

The Orlando office will work as a branch of the Miami consulate, with Haitian Vice Consul Laurent Prosper managing it. It will allow Haitians to request passport renewals, powers of attorney and other government-issued documents such as birth certificates, while also representing the interests of Haiti abroad.

"We realized that there is a large community of Haitians in Orlando that needs us here," Prosper said. "We want to be the gateway between Haitians and the rest of the community in Orlando, working with the police, the local government and other institutions."

The Haitian government will have a ribbon-cutting ceremony today at 4 p.m. at the office, 1616 E. Colonial Drive. Community leaders and government officials will take part in a private reception tonight at the Wyndham Orlando Resort.

"Haitian community leaders are rallying around the new consular office because we need the representation," said Nancy Dufresne Charles, who had been advocating for the consular office. "It's a reflection of the growth of our community, which has been invisible for many years."

The 2000 census counted more than 17,000 Haitians in the seven-county area around Orlando, making Haitians the third-largest group of Central Florida residents born outside the mainland. It's also the largest community from the French- and English-speaking Caribbean islands, who have been seeking prominence as a growing minority group in the region.

The Conference of Heads of Caribbean Organizations in Central Florida, a coalition of Caribbean organizations from the island nations, has been working to establish better links between their governments and the immigrants who have settled here, bringing consular officials to town-hall meetings twice this year.

Haiti's move, said Caribbean Bar Association Vice President Wayne Golding Sr., will help strengthen ties with other consular offices and create trade and tourism opportunities.

"It signals to the other consul generals that the need is there to expand beyond their regional approach in Miami," Golding said. "Orlando is its own cultural place now."

Frantz Fanfan, who owns a paralegal and travel business that caters to Haitians in Holden Heights, said he had been trying to persuade the Haitian government to open an office here since the mid-1990s, when he wrote to then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to make the request.

"It should have been done 12 or 15 years ago," Fanfan said, "because that 3 1/2-hour drive is not easy for many people. They had to miss work, they would get traffic tickets and some had accidents on the road. I'm glad that's over."

Haiti: The Long Wait for Democratic Revival
Angus Reid Consultants
December 4, 2005

A great amount of effort is being put into organizing the general elections in Haiti next year. The question is whether the country is ready for them.

(Angus Reid Global Scan) Gabriela Perdomo – The president of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, expressed a "cautious optimism" regarding the upcoming general elections in Haiti. His statement was not surprising. The preparations for the first election to be held after president Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted in 2004 are far from complete.

Last month, the interim government of Haiti—headed by Boniface Alexandre—changed the election date for the third time. The electoral council announced that Haitians will head to the polls on Jan. 8, 2006, to choose a new president and a legislative body. If necessary, a run-off is scheduled for Feb. 15, and municipal and local elections will be held on Mar. 5.

Just over a month before election day, the vast majority of the 3.5 million Haitians that have registered to vote are still waiting to receive the ID card required to cast their ballots. The council has yet to start the process of hiring and training about 40,000 election helpers. Only two weeks ago, consensus was reached over the list of candidates; people are only starting to learn the names and faces of those running. Hopefully, they will also know shortly what they stand for.

Besides technical and organizational problems, security remains a delicate issue in the Caribbean country. Gun violence, allegedly justified by political differences, reigns on the streets. Last month, troops from the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH) were caught in an eight-hour battle with street assailants in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

Haiti is considered the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. It has a history of violence and political instability that includes American invasions and local paramilitarism. The long regime of dictator François Duvalier—also known as "Papa Doc"—and the more recent one of general Raoul Cedras left a tradition of oppression through personal armies and political violence that is now embedded in Haitian culture.

In early 2004, Catholic priest and then president Aristide faced a wave of violence and accusations of corruption. It was said at the time that Aristide was promoting the political violence by using the national police as his personal army. In February 2004, Aristide left the country in obscure circumstances and exiled in Central Africa. The president denounced back then that the American and the French kidnapped him and forced him to flee Haiti.

Since Aristide was ousted, the United Nations Security Council authorized the presence of a multinational force in Haiti to stabilize the situation. An interim government was installed and is now led by Alexandre and prime minister Gérard Latortue.

The situation in Haiti is delicate. Violence is still rampant on the streets of big cities, as well as in rural areas. The UN has reported on massive human rights violations, including the fact that thousands of

prisoners remain in custody without a fair trial. Many of them are former members of Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party or used to work for his government.

The next general elections are of major importance for Haiti, but many critics think that the country is not ready yet to hold a successful ballot. Some of them suggest another delay; they say Haitians require more time to become informed, the Electoral Commission and the international observers need to figure out the technical obstacles they have faced so far, and the security issue must be addressed and controlled. Others say the election is not enough to solve the nation's key issues, such as violence and poverty. They demand the international community take more concrete actions to tackle these problems.

Non-governmental organizations monitoring Haiti, such as the International Crisis Group (ICG), suggest that MINUSTAH should implement immediately the existing UN Security Council resolution regarding the demobilization and disarmament of all armed groups. The ICG has also urged all parties participating in the ballot to sign a reconciliation pact; this could stop any attempt of a violent uprising once the victor is known after the election.

The electoral campaigns have started amid all these complications, and it is too early to know how Haitians will vote next month. In the meantime, a curious development has emerged. At least eight candidates have decided to campaign abroad. Although Haitians are not allowed to vote outside the country, these contenders are hoping the thousands of Haitians living abroad will influence the votes of their friends and relatives in the island.

MONTREAL: Yves Engler Jailed
The New Socialist Group
Dec. 2, 2005

Activist jailed at least four days for heckling PM

Haiti Action Montreal condemns 'criminalizing dissent' during election campaign

Yves Engler, a member of Haiti Action Montreal, is being kept in jail over the weekend after he disrupted a speech by the Prime Minister Thursday morning shouting "Paul Martin lies, Haitians die."

Crown prosecutors refused to grant his release when Engler appeared in court Friday, thirty hours after being detained. He will be in court again Monday.

"Keeping someone in jail for at least four days because he heckled a politician during an election campaign is completely outrageous," said Nikolas Barry-Shaw, spokesperson for Haiti Action Montreal. "Has shouting at a politician become a crime in Canada?"

Noting that other people heckled Martin at the same time as Engler and that the PM has faced hecklers at many events, Barry-Shaw speculated the Liberal government is particularly sensitive about criticism of its policies in Haiti.

"Yves Engler has been extremely active in trying to make the Liberals accountable for their role in the overthrow of Haiti's elected government and the resulting human rights disaster," said Barry-Shaw. "He's obviously made some important people very angry."

Engler, who also threw pieces of a human rights report about Haiti into the air to symbolize the Liberal government's response to criticism from numerous respected organizations, said he was surprised by amount of time he was spending in jail.

"It's a strange world when Conrad Black is accused of stealing \$80 million but has spent no time behind bars, while I heckled the Prime Minister and get locked up for at least four days."

Contacts:

Bianca Mugenyi or Nikolas Barry-Shaw (514) 969—2377

For background information, visit:

<http://outofhaiti.ca/>

Gunmen release kidnapped Haitian journalist after reporters pay ransom
CBC News, Canada
Dec 3, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Gunmen who kidnapped a Haitian journalist and his father released them Saturday after fellow reporters paid their ransom.

Wadson Desir, a journalist for radio Metropole and a contributor to Radio France Internationale, was kidnapped Friday - the day a U.S. missionary was released amid a wave of abductions in Haiti ahead of next month's national election.

"I'm all right now, it was more fright than harm," Desir, 27, said in a telephone interview about an hour after his release.

Joseph Guyler Delva, who heads the Haitian association SOS Journalistes, said he negotiated with the gangs to free Desir.

"I negotiated all night, they finally lowered their ransom from \$80,000 US to \$4,500 US," Delva said.

Fellow journalists had pooled money for the ransom.

Desir described how he was driving with his father on the main road heading north of the capital when about a dozen heavily armed gang members stopped the car and abducted them.

Bordering the highly volatile slum Cite Soleil, a base for gangs blamed for much of the violence in the capital, the area was the scene of several recent kidnappings - including those of the U.S. missionary and 14 schoolchildren released earlier this week.

The 7,600-strong UN force to Haiti has pledged to pacify the slum ahead of national elections scheduled Jan. 8.

Desir said he and his father were abducted within eyesight of a UN unit, who did not intervene.

Damian Onses-Cardona, spokesman for the UN mission in Haiti, said he was surprised to hear Desir's account and if troops had witnessed the kidnapping, they probably had not intervened because of heavy shooting in the area.

"Fighting kidnappings is an absolute priority for the UN in Haiti," Onses-Cardona said, noting UN troops have helped free hostages and arrest kidnappers in several operations.

Desir said a gang leader told him they were kidnapping people because they needed money to buy more ammunition so his men could fight off the UN offensive into the slum. About 1,500 UN troops in armoured vehicles are trying to reclaim the area.

"Of course, I didn't tell them I worked for radio Metropole, they would probably have killed me," Desir said.

A leading Haitian radio station, Metropole joined opposition to ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was toppled in February 2004.

Most armed gangs in the slums of the capital are believed to still be loyal to the ousted president and the UN said it fears some Aristide supporters could try to stir up violence ahead of the elections.

Desir was the second journalist to be kidnapped in recent months. Jacques Roche, who worked for the newspaper Le Matin and hosted a TV talk show, was found tortured to death last July after he was abducted. Roche had criticized Aristide in several editorials.

Delva said UN troops twice prevented him from entering Cite Soleil on Saturday to deliver the ransom and to free Desir, stating the shooting was too intense.

"What happened shows how perilous it is to be a journalist in Haiti," he said.

"Reporting in zones like Cite Soleil remains terribly dangerous and we are worried this will get worse ahead of the elections."

HAITI: Human rights activists seek end to massacres

Barry Healy

Green Left Weekly

Dec. 7, 2005

UN troops in Haiti are actively terrorising civilians, a coalition of human rights activists said in Washington on November 15, as they filed two legal petitions with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

The petitions seek legal redress from the US and Brazilian governments for the wave of recent massacres and human rights violations in Haiti. Both countries are members of the Organization of American States (OAS) and have obligations to uphold minimum standards of human rights in their dealings with other OAS members, such as Haiti.

Since the occupation of Haiti following the February 29, 2004 coup that ousted democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, suspected sympathisers with his political party Fanmi Lavalas have been targeted. There have been extrajudicial killings, incarceration without charges, torture, and large-scale police raids.

Such extreme human-rights violations have been carried out primarily by the Haitian National Police (PNH). However, the PNH would not be able to conduct such atrocities without the financial backing of the US government, in spite of its own arms embargo against Haiti, and the assistance or acquiescence of Brazilian-led UN peace-keeping forces.

The human-rights activist coalition said that Brazil's leadership role in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) does not supersede its responsibilities under the American Convention of Human Rights, a human-rights pledge Brazil signed as part of its membership in the OAS.

Since Brazil took leadership of the UN peacekeeping forces, MINUSTAH has participated in raids on low-income neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, the traditional base of support for Fanmi Lavalas and Aristide. While these missions are reportedly designed to quell gang violence in "slum" neighbourhoods, video and eyewitness documentation shows indiscriminate targeting of civilians, including children and the disabled.

An example of this presented in the petitions involves a July 6, 2005, MINUSTAH raid on Cite Soleil, wherein more than 300 heavily armed troops stormed the neighborhood before dawn, killing at least 63 people and injuring at least 30 more.

"MINUSTAH's role is to protect Haitian civilians", said Kasey Corbit, an attorney with the National Lawyer's Guild who helped draft the petitions. "Instead, the troops are actively participating in campaigns of terror on the Haitian people or turning a blind eye to atrocities committed by the PNH in conjunction with members of the former military. This kind of impunity cannot be allowed to continue, which is why we are seeking intervention by the IACHR."

From Green Left Weekly, December 7, 2005.

China Sends 3rd Riot Police Force to Haiti

China CRIENGLISH.com

Dec. 5, 2005

30 Chinese riot police have arrived in Port-au-Prince on Sunday.

They are the advance team of a 125-member Chinese peace-keeping forces deployed to Haiti.

The force is specially trained for riot and crowd control.

They join up with a multinational force on the troubled island.

"As soon as we step onto the soil, our mission to combat terrorism and social turmoil has begun."

They are to spend the first three months training after having just passed United Nations administered exams.

China had sent the first two forces last fall. Each force remains stationed on the island for half a year.

Hostage in Haiti

Political violence results in the kidnapping of a shaky peace, the lives of the poor, and one Bulgarian journalist.

Gergana Koleva / Port-au-Prince, Haiti

In The Fray Magazine

Monday, December 5, 2005

The short angry gusts of wind that bend the branches of the palm trees and blow the miasma of the meandering sewage into the nostrils are a welcome — if feeble — respite from the debilitating heat of Port-au-Prince. Market women in old floral dresses shield themselves from the sun as they balance brimming baskets of produce. Men squat under the shade of trees, selling paintings, cell phone chargers, and tubes of car oil. Children hawk plastic pouches of water out of burlap sacks perched on their heads like oversized turbans, letting the cool contents slide over their brows and ears.

“Dlo, dlo, dlo, dlo, dlo,” shriek the young vendors as they try to lure thirsty pedestrians. When a customer comes they raise an arm, dive crooked fingers inside the sack, and pull a pouch out of the lot. A sachet of water costs 10 cents.

“Delmas, Delmas, Delmas, Delmas,” echoes another army of kids, urging pedestrians to board colorful tap-taps headed to an uphill neighborhood. A ride in one of those is an experiment in patience and humor, at twice the price of water.

It is the daily pulse of Haiti’s capital city. The patter of gunshots that sometimes rips the early evening haze and dies beneath the shouts of the kid-merchants does not seem to rattle anyone anymore. Homebound workers might quicken their step, honking drivers might lower their din, but panic is only a thought, not a reaction. Moments of public danger rarely stand apart from the normally frenzied pace of this town.

It has been a full year since the killings and kidnappings of civilians began, and the staggering number of the victims — more than 1,200 killed since last September and over 500 abducted since mid-February — seems to have dulled the survivors’ capacity for shock. In July, when violence peaked and at least six people were being plucked from the streets of Port-au-Prince each day, a couple of shots from a distance seemed more salute to the dead than threat to the living.

This is the kind of thing that battles common sense: in downtown Port-au-Prince the bustle of daily life lends an illusion of security — an illusion sustained by the cacophony and the ant-like collective movement on the streets. Police officers in black uniforms ride six deep in dusty pickups with the rear doors flung open, brazenly pointing the barrels of their automatic rifles against the river of cars. Blue-helmeted U.N. troops cruise along atop snow-white armored personnel carriers (APCs), the turret mounts swiveling about jammed intersections. The proximity of cops and soldiers diminishes the immediate danger, and so the illusion grows, despite the alarming statistics.

But the pushing crowds, panting traffic, car horns and compas rhythms rapidly thin out as one leaves the heart of the city, and the illusion vanishes too. On the potholed road to Toussaint L’Ouverture International Airport, and past its peeling marquis on to Bel Air, the air hangs empty and the haze thickens like a membrane of concentrated sunlight.

A tap-tap headed to an uphill neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. The cheerful colors of its facade and the contagious compass blaring from the car radio make up for a sweaty, bumpy ride in this distinctly Haitian public bus. (Gergana Koleva)

The situation

I arrived in Haiti last July to acquaint myself with a culture of dashing beauty, contagious vitality, unassuming playfulness — and joltingly stark contrasts. Although the purpose of my trip was journalistic, I had no badge, no press credentials, no letter of introduction from an important news organization. Instead, I arrived for my first dig into foreign freelancing with a modest research grant from my university in New York and a handful of local contacts given to me by a generous friend.

The check-in clerk at John F. Kennedy airport's international departures surveyed my face, furrowed her brow, and questioned, "United Nations?" I shook my head. She studied my passport. While I waited for her to finish and tag my bags, I noticed that my line, for Flight 837 going to Port-au-Prince, was the thinnest of all surrounding Caribbean destinations.

"The situation," as Haitians refer to the political impasse generated by the strain between the wealthy ruling elite and the masses of Haiti's poor, had reached hysterical proportions.

Violence between *chimères* — the name of the mythical two-headed monster given militant supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide — and the equally militant members of the opposition has been escalating since February 2004, when Aristide left Haiti amidst a bloody popular rebellion. After his departure, hordes of admirers blocked city roads and highways with barricades of burning tires and protested the leader's removal in chanting processions from their slum homes to the National Palace.

But if those were disparate attacks intended to inject terror during the spring and summer months, September saw the beginning of uninhibited street war. Prime Minister Gerard Latortue dubbed it "Operation Baghdad" after the rebels' alleged use of Iraqi insurgent tactics in trying to pressure the U.S.-backed transitional government to restore Aristide. Slum residents viewed the police- and U.N.-orchestrated raids seeking to take out gang leaders in their neighborhoods as mass murder. Women, children, and elderly citizens living in proximity to alleged rebels' homes were often killed in special operations. The *chimères* — who are said to be financed by the former president himself — responded by killing or kidnapping cops, civilians, and those they thought aligned with Latortue's government and the foreign brain trust behind it. The violence claimed more than 1,000 lives and sent those who could afford it packing.

It broke off on September 30, 2004 — the 13th anniversary of the first coup d'état against Aristide only seven months after he was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of Haiti.

The priest

A young, charismatic Roman Catholic priest who spoke the language of the poor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide emerged from his pulpit in the slum of La Saline as a beloved leader of the masses during the long-overdue disintegration of the Duvalier dictatorship in the 1980s. In 1990, he won a landslide victory in unprecedented free elections, but his fiery rhetoric for empowerment of the poor did not sit well with the elite of wealthy mulattos, who to this day own most of Haiti's natural and industrial resources. Neither did Aristide appeal to U.S. business and ideological interests in the region, or the Bush Sr. administration.

Thus in the fall of 1991, Haiti's popular leader was overthrown. Re-installed three years later under Clinton's presidency and with the help of 20,000 U.S. marines, and re-elected in a sham election in 2000 after sitting out a term, he was again forced to resign on February 29, 2004. But this time it was his own former partisans, backed by awakened voices from his own electorate, who insisted the humble priest had become a vicious dictator. There were marches, there were popular protests. Blood was spilt. Aristide quit.

Securing his safe exit to South Africa, where he is now in exile, the Bush administration — backed by the Canadian and French governments — asserted that Aristide stepped down voluntarily. Aristide said that American officials forced him to sign his resignation on the steps of his departing jet and “kidnapped democracy” as they shut the door behind him.

Welcome to Bel Air

Bel Air's name is a cruel joke. It hails from the colonial era when it used to be the capital's fanciest neighborhood, and at the turn of the century its most prominent popular settlement for migrants from Haiti's countryside. Today, tainted by a corrosive mix of human waste, rotting garbage, and burnt metal, life in this slum of Port-au-Prince is anything but fresh. Seared car skeletons line the streets. Heavy bolts lock the invisible denizens inside single-story cinderblock shacks. Palm trees poke defiantly among the tin roofs and tilted electric poles, but no friendly breeze stirs the broken spirit of the place. It is said that armed kidnapers guard its roads so as not to miss a good catch.

My translator Herby categorically refused to accompany me on this trip. My Haitian friend Garaudy who splits his time between New York and Port-au-Prince rolled his eyes and thought I should concentrate on interviewing local businessmen. My landlord Matt, a young American and former Peace Corps volunteer here, shot me a bemused look when I mentioned my plans. I won over one Haitian journalist, Reuters news service correspondent Guy Delva, but he said that we'd have to make it quick.

As we approached the house, the group of young men and women who sat on its tiny porch interrupted their talk. Some 15 pairs of eyes followed us from our car to the open door, jammed with more people, leaning, standing, and crouching at the threshold. Inside, Solange was serenely seated on the edge of the bed in a white eyelet dress and tattered flip-flops, dwarfed by a throng of neighbors around her, as if she had already been waiting for us. Her granddaughter, a solemn-faced three-year-old, sat in a chair next to her, eating a peanut butter sandwich and glancing at the floor.

Solange's 34-year-old son, Enok, had vanished six days ago. She learned from a neighbor that police had arrested him. She didn't know why, nor where they had taken him, so she went to inquire at the police precinct in Port-au-Prince. Nobody there knew anything about him either.

The Haitian National Police (PNH) have a bad reputation among many of Port-au-Prince's poorest residents for the summary executions of civilians that unidentified police officers have carried out in recent months while trying to ferret out feared gang leaders. But the police are also the arch-nemesis of gangsters who see themselves as local heroes avenging the deaths of their fellow citizens.

"I knew there was one place left to look," Solange continued. "I took my husband and we went to the morgue, and there we found him. He was killed. I know that police in black uniforms arrested him. I think the police killed him too. I don't know who did, but he was in their hands."

Solange doesn't use words like "good" and "evil" when she talks about her son. She is sad and her eyes are empty, but dry. Look, look at his picture on the dining table, which has worn the same plastic tablecover for so long that the wooden corners are poking through. Its cheap metal frame is the only object in the house new enough to have a glint of luster. Other ornaments are an old mirror conquered by patina, a tattered map of Haiti, a couple of exposed sockets with dangling wires. Oh, but the walls — such bright blue fills the eye with the pristine brilliance of a postcard beach. No, he wasn't formally employed, but he often found odd jobs at the port. He used to count the boats coming to dock at night. He was a quiet man. No, he never was involved with any of those gangs out there. Maybe he just happened to be on the street when the police came, looking for something. You see all these guys out there? They were all his friends. There's a bunch of them who got arrested before him. It is a massacre. They bust into people's houses and kill them.

The crowd that sat outside Solange's door had been listening closely. They had been respectfully quiet, despite drawing more and more passers-by, until she and I breached the topic of the police. Now the narrow steps to the house are jammed with lean young men, some shirtless, some fingering their guns, and all with Aristide on their minds. As they hear us discuss the police, they begin elbowing each other for a better look.

"Look, journalist!" one of them yells as I strain to hear my friend's translation of Solange's words above the din on the street. I lift my eyes to see him drawing a black pistol out of the back pocket of his jeans. He points it up in the air to amuse me, to give me, the blan, as Haitians half-humorously, half-pejoratively call white foreigners, what he believes I have come to see. Or perhaps to convey his opinion of the police.

Bel Air, day two

July 20th — the day I was kidnapped — dawned as a typical day in Port-au-Prince, filled with stifling heat, shoving crowds, and ubiquitous transistors crackling with incessant news bulletins. It was the 10th day of my first foreign trip as a freelancer. Tomorrow, the streets would clog with people

attending the public funeral of Jacques Roche, a journalist at the daily newspaper *Le Matin* who had been kidnapped and brutally murdered one week earlier after his family came \$240,000 short of paying a \$250,000 ransom. Many of his colleagues believe he was killed less for failing to pay up than for his adamant opinions against Aristide.

I'd never met Roche, but he had been my friend Dario's high school teacher in Haiti almost 20 years ago. The two had remained close over the years and, following Dario's suggestion, I emailed him last spring. He promised to help me once I got to Haiti. He was kidnapped on July 10th, the day I arrived.

The spate of kidnappings that erupted in Port-au-Prince last February have been attributed to political and criminal gangs with loyalties to Aristide and the lucrative side of a climate of insecurity. An Indian businessman and a Russian contractor were kidnapped in May, but were released after paying a ransom. A local doctor, a police officer, a Red Cross worker, and Jacques Roche were also kidnapped last summer, and killed.

Despite such alarming statistics, I had visited Bel Air to speak with Solange, and then, testing my luck, decided to go a second time into the neighborhood known to belong to the *chimères*. In Haiti's 200-year history, the urban poor, whose interests these urban soldiers claim to defend, have never been regarded as worthwhile citizens by the country's successive oligarchies, except for a few brief moments during Aristide's presidency — first in 1991, then in 2000. Despite the fact that during his second term Aristide too had stripped the poor of the fragile hope for getting their voices heard in the hallways of the National Palace, many still regarded him as the humble Catholic priest who had fanned the flames that ended the Duvalier family dictatorship in 1986, and as their personal and only savior. I went to Bel Air in the hope of learning from those people why they still put their trust in him.

The whipping rain, huge potholes, and heaps of rotting garbage made navigating the narrow streets a daunting task for me and Guy, so at first I thought the young man who jumped in front of our blue Nissan Saloon needed help. That was before I saw his gun, ordering us wordlessly to pull up and step out.

My camera, tape recorder, cell phone, and sterling silver earrings quickly vanished in the pockets of the angry-faced men who stood us against a cement wall. But it was only when a skinny youngster grabbed my wrist and pulled me inside an inner alley that I fully realized the danger. Prodding me onward, he brought me to an empty crumbling shack, where several others soon surrounded me, wrapping strands of my hair around their fingers and uttering obscene remarks.

As one of the men stared at me, I thought, desperately, to ask him about his name, using one of the few Kreyol phrases I knew. "Komoun ou rele?"

"Poshu," he answered. He was a character out of a Miami gangster flick — muscular, barechested, with the smell of marijuana on his breath. "We're Haitian mafia, baby," he said in unaccented English. I wondered if he was one of those Haitian-American deportees angry at losing their place in the promised land, as some of Haiti's criminals are said to have been. "It's revolution," he added.

"Revolution against whom?" I asked, but Posu only repeated, "Revolution."

Ultimately, I was not as important to the chimères' cause as Roche and the men who shared his fate. I was also fortunate to have been captured along with a veteran Haitian journalist, whose reputation went a long way with the urban gangsters he frequently writes about. They did not get the \$100,000 they requested for my release, though they did get the contents of our wallets. The confluence of these circumstances allowed me to walk out of my three-hour confinement miraculously unharmed, but they also allowed me a profoundly intimate look at the possible effects of attempting to document the lives of people whose self-appointed guardians do not want to be documented.

Haitian Prime Minister Says UN to Provide Security for January Elections

By VOA News

03 December 2005

Gerard Latortue

Haiti's prime minister says the U.N. peacekeeping force there has given the government assurances that all necessary measures will be taken to secure polling places and protect candidates and voters during the January 8 presidential and legislative elections.

In an exclusive interview at VOA's Washington headquarters Friday, Prime Minister Gerard Latortue said election security will primarily be provided by the U.N. force. But he said the Haitian national police will play a major role.

He went on to say that after the elections, he would support a constitutional amendment allowing Haitians with dual citizenship to run for all offices and vote.

The January eighth election date was posted after Haiti's electoral board postponed the voting for the fourth time, citing poor organization and a lack of resources for the poll.

If no candidate wins an absolute majority, a runoff election will be held February 15th. According to a recent electoral decree, the president-elect will take office on February 24th, but Prime Minister Latortue said his government will function in a caretaker capacity on February seventh if no one wins outright.

Earlier, Mr. Latortue met with the secretary-general of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, who voiced confidence in next month's electoral process.

Haitian migrant drowns off coast

A group of migrants, dumped at night along Palm Beach County's coast, swam toward a lighted replica of the Statue of Liberty at Don King's house. One didn't make it.

BY ROCHELLE E.B. GILKEN

Palm Beach Post

Nov. 29, 2005

A Haitian woman got off a smuggling boat in the dead of night and tried to swim in rough waters to the Manalapan shore, engulfed in darkness except for an eight-foot lighted replica of the Statue of Liberty.

A police officer discovered the woman's body in the surf around 2:30 a.m. Monday, about 30 yards away from the statue behind boxing promoter Don King's house that is a monument to his catchphrase, "Only in America."

"It's kind of an omen, isn't it?" said Clay Walker, police chief in the wealthy central Palm Beach County community of Manalapan, referring to the white stone statue with a three-watt torch.

"The seas were rough, really sloppy at that time. The winds were heavy. [Smugglers] leave them to their own design to get from the boat to shore. It's a desperate person that tries to enter this country that way."

The woman, believed to be 29, arrived with at least 18 other migrants. An officer had spotted one of them, soaking wet, running down the 1200 block of S. Ocean Boulevard. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Coast Guard soon joined a search for the rest when an officer spotted the woman's body on the beach behind the 900 block of S. Ocean Blvd.

Officials detained 18 people: 10 Haitian men, seven Haitian women and a woman from Trinidad. They are all being questioned and detained by the U.S. Border Patrol for illegal entry. They will be processed for deportation, said Steve McDonald, assistant chief patrol agent for U.S. Border Patrol. It is unclear how many people evaded capture, but officials suspect one or two.

The woman had an identification card, but her name is not being released until her identity is confirmed and next-of-kin is notified, said sheriff's spokesman Paul Miller.

Building an Antiwar Movement in Canada

by Derrick O'Keefe

Seven Oaks

ZNet, Canada

December 01, 2005

The Canadian Peace Alliance recently held its 20th anniversary conference in Ottawa, November 11-13, gathering close to 200 anti-war activists from across the country. Convened under the slogan of 'Challenging Canada's Role in Empire', participants came out of the weekend resolving to make March 18, 2006 – the 3rd anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq – the largest day of protest against the occupation since the massive pre-war rallies of 2002-2003.

Peace and justice coalitions and organizations in Canada are also gearing up to campaign against war and occupation during the federal election. Foreign policy issues that need to be highlighted – and that have yet to be consistently raised by the federal New Democrats (NDP) or any other major party – include Canada's stepped-up role in the occupation of Afghanistan, the overthrow of democracy in Haiti, and the Liberal government's refusal to come out in support of U.S. war resisters' right to stay in Canada.

So as we set out on the anti-war campaign trail, towards both mass rallies on March 18 and the goal of having a meaningful impact on the discourse surrounding the election, it is useful to consider the obstacles in our path.

The first, already alluded to, is that the NDP – unlike in the period before the launching of the Iraq war – has failed to aggressively raise any of the key issues, with the possible exception of the war resisters. Jack Layton's refusal to condemn General Rick Hillier's bellicose and racist remarks regarding the Afghanistan war in July 2005 was an ominous signal; the NDP's silence on Haiti, with some important exceptions, has also hurt efforts to disseminate the truth about Canada's role in throwing out a democratically elected president in the hemisphere's poorest country. The sheer scale of the human rights disaster in Haiti, and the growing exposure of Canada's role, may just compel the NDP and Layton to make this a campaign issue.

There are, though, larger and more deeply rooted causes behind the lack of awareness of Canadian complicity in policies of war and Empire. The generalized corporate media blackout, of course, almost goes without saying, but it has been particularly galling with respect to the lack of substantive coverage on Haiti.

The single biggest impediment to getting people mobilized around war and occupation issues is the widespread perception that Canada's hands are clean in the world; that unseemly regime changes are things carried out by George W. Bush and that at worst we are benevolent bystanders or well-meaning peacekeepers coming in after the fact.

Perhaps one under-utilized way to get around this pervasive myth is to highlight the blatant war profiteering of massive Canadian corporations. While the sordid operations of the likes of Exxon and Halliburton are internationally known, equally rapacious war companies based north of the 49th parallel are getting away with scant attention. The two that stand out are Gildan Activewear and SNC-Lavalin.

For commuters in the Vancouver area, in particular, these two mega-corporations are becoming downright ubiquitous. SNC-Lavalin has been awarded the contract for the largest P3 (public-private partnership) in British Columbia's history, the multi-billion dollar construction of a rapid transit line from downtown to the airport and the suburb of Richmond (the RAV-line). Meanwhile, SNC also partners with the public sector wherever the Canadian and American armies venture, holding a contract to supply the U.S. army with hundreds of millions of bullets each year, building the new Canadian Embassy in occupied Port-au-Prince, and receiving 'reconstruction' contracts in Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere.

Gildan Activewear is a massive garment manufacturer, controlling 40% of the North American t-shirt market. Following the coup against Aristide, and the de facto government's decision to overturn minimum wage increases brought in by the Lavalas Party government, Gildan announced that it would be moving some operations from Honduras to Haiti. The company is currently engaged in a massive publicity campaign, with ads on hundreds of bus shelters in Vancouver proclaiming the sweatshop label 'A part of your life'. It has been speculated that they are building their public profile with an eye to winning the Vancouver 2010 Olympics clothing contract. The cases of Gildan and SNC are not unique in terms of Canadian corporations, but only two of the most blatant examples that belie the quaint notion of a harmless, innocent big business community, and the related myth of a political policy pursuing lofty, disinterested 'humanitarian' objectives.

Nearly two years ago now, at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, acclaimed author and activist Arundhati Roy made a widely discussed call for the anti-war movement to take aim at the corporate backers of Empire:

I suggest we choose by some means two of the major corporations that are profiting from the destruction of Iraq. We could then list every project they are involved in. We could locate their offices in every city and every country across the world. We could go after them. We could shut them down. It's a question of bringing our collective wisdom and experience of past struggles to bear on a single target. It's a question of the desire to win. ('The New American Century', The Nation, February 9, 2004)

No such coordinated global campaign has really taken flight. This doesn't, however, diminish the importance of identifying and exposing the corporate machinations behind war.

Here in Canada, we should focus on explaining the very real business interests behind our government's foreign policy, beginning with the profits of Gildan and SNC-Lavalin. These corporations are indeed 'a part of our lives'. It's high time we made them, and their government allies, pay a political and financial price for the destruction they have wrought, from Iraq to Haiti and far beyond.

Today's system of empire is much more than the demonic image of Dick Cheney and his Halliburton gang. As we head into a federal election campaign, and build towards the March 18 rallies across Canada, we would do well to remember that there are more than enough warmongers with addresses much closer to home.

**The Vicious Cycle of AIDS, Poverty, and
The Global Politician, NY
Bernardo Useche and Amalia Cabezas –
12/3/2005**

World maps illustrating areas of high poverty largely overlap those of high HIV/AIDS prevalence. It's no coincidence that both poverty and the HIV-AIDS pandemic have run rampant in these last two decades of neoliberalism, since the root causes of both can be found in the economic model.

The most recent United Nations figures show the true magnitude of the tragedy: approximately 40 million people are currently living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or are suffering from illnesses associated with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In 2003 alone, five million people joined the list of those who tested HIV-positive and nearly three million others died from complications associated with AIDS.

Faced with a tragedy of epic proportions, the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS launched a plan to provide antiretroviral medications to three million AIDS patients in the next two years—approximately half the patients currently estimated to need this kind of treatment. The WHO strategy incorporates plans recently proposed by the World Bank and the U.S. government.

At first glance, this global strategy appears to be a humanitarian gesture and a decisive intervention by the international health organizations and the White House to control this devastating disease. However, to thoroughly understand the true dimension of the AIDS pandemic and the possible scope of the WHO-World Bank-Bush government plans, it is essential to consider the socioeconomic world context in which the disease has been gestating over the last two decades.

This context continues to be defined by the prevalence of multinational pharmaceutical companies' interests above those of the patients who are supposed to benefit from their medicines. Neoliberal economic policies in recent decades have created conditions in which it has proven impossible to detain or reduce the number of infections, despite the efforts of scientists, the investment of billions of dollars, and the work of innumerable organizations in prevention programs.

Epidemics and Economics

Social epidemiology, defined initially as “the study of the role of social factors in the etiology of an illness,” grew out of Friedrich Engels' study of the living conditions of English workers in the 19th century. Today this area of public health looks at how historical, political, and economic tendencies influence the dissemination of an illness among different populations and how social forces and factors affect individuals' bodies and generate pathologies.

In the case of HIV/AIDS, Nancy Krieger has pointed out that “neoliberal economic policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which result in economic austerity plans, environmental degradation, and growing intra- and inter-regional social disparities in health, are of particular concern.” The study of the effect of health service organization and coverage, and of drug production and marketing systems on a specific society's most vulnerable population is also important to epidemiology and social medicine.

All studies agree that the AIDS pandemic is concentrated in the poorest countries and among the poorest sectors of wealthy countries. But very few works analyze the close relationship between the causes of the affected nations' socioeconomic reality and the so-far uncontrollable advance of the epidemic during the last two decades. With a few very valuable exceptions, most research simply describes the situation without clearly defining the fundamental responsibility of the economic globalization model imposed on nations in these times of AIDS.

British epidemiologist Thomas McKeown demonstrated that progress in controlling a population's illnesses cannot be attributed to vaccines, antibiotics, and improved medical treatments alone, given that socioeconomic conditions and their effects on nutrition constitute an essential health factor. Without denying the importance of advances in biomedicine, epidemiological studies currently confirm that health expectations are directly associated with quality of life, which in turn is determined by environmental health, nutritional status, water quality, housing, education, working conditions, and emotional and psychological factors that benefit human development throughout the life cycle.

Health in a given country depends not only on inhabitants' income, but also on the degree of equality within the society. Health expectations are greater in countries with relatively less income and social inequality among the population. This explains the differences in life expectancy and other health indicators among industrialized countries. Sweden, Switzerland, and other developed countries, for example, have better health rates and higher life expectancy than the United States, a country that despite having the most powerful economy on earth also has abysmal social inequalities, with 46 million citizens currently unprotected because they cannot afford health insurance.

Blaming the Victim

The undeniable link between health problems and social inequalities presents an ideological dilemma. Are the sick to blame for their illnesses or do they result from social inequality? The social history of AIDS has largely been one of apportioning blame to the victims. At the beginning, AIDS was even defined as the disease of the four Hs: homosexuals, Haitians, hemophiliacs, and heroin addicts—to which one could more recently add “hookers.” All these categories carried implicit derogatory social connotations.

Blaming the victims hides the fundamental role socioeconomics plays in generating and propagating illnesses, instead placing the “cause” on the victims and saddling them with the responsibility for prevention and treatment. The state's obligation to care for its population's health is obscured.

Yet the causes are closely interlinked to social factors beyond the victims' control. Poverty often creates the alienating conditions that lead to a culture of intravenous drug use. And in the concrete case of Haiti, Paul Farmer established that, contrary to the widely disseminated stigma that blames Haitian immigrants for introducing the AIDS epidemic to the United States, it was the sexual tourism of U.S. citizens to Haiti—fueled by the poverty that left Haitians with no other means of livelihood—that started the AIDS epidemic on the island.

As a result of viewing AIDS transmission as essentially a problem concerning the individuals involved, prevention efforts focused on trying to modify individual risk behaviors and attitudes for the

first 20 years of the pandemic. This unilateral approach, which ignored the socioeconomic factors behind AIDS, predictably failed in stopping the epidemic. But it succeeded in blocking in-depth debate on the responsibility of the neoliberal economic model implemented throughout the world during this period, and the social consequences provided a breeding ground for the epidemic's progress.

Neoliberal Famines and the Spread of AIDS

Neoliberalism is the set of economic theories and policies developed by contemporary monopoly capital to consolidate its global expansion and achieve control of the world markets it needs to survive. The distribution of the HIV/AIDS infection matches the current world socioeconomic order. In this era, health problems have been polarized along with distribution of wealth, as born out by Paul Farmer's theory that the health of the world's poor is affected primarily by infections and violence, while the rich suffer from chronic illnesses associated with aging. The 21 nations with the highest AIDS prevalence in the world are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where dramatic poverty largely resulted from the neoliberal measures imposed by the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Famine and AIDS go hand in hand on the African continent. As UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa Steven Lewis explained, when the body has no food to consume, the virus consumes the body. When the body's immune system is weakened by lack of food, the illness progresses much quicker and people die faster. The main cause of the recent famines, with their inevitable malnutrition and death, are not the droughts and other natural disasters that frequently afflict Africa, but rather the elimination of agricultural subsidies, privatization of public services, and complete opening up of the economy, measures that are an integral part of the structural adjustment programs demanded of the African nations by the international agencies since 1986.

Zimbabwe: A Tragic Case

Zimbabwe sadly illustrates the point. According to a study by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, the average real economic growth in Zimbabwe during the 80s was 4% a year. During those years, food security developed somewhat and the manufacturing sector was strengthened, which contributed to a diversification of exports. At the same time, health services increased and life expectancy rose from 56 to 64, while child mortality fell from 100 to 50 live births.

In 1991, Zimbabwe received a US\$484 million loan conditional on the structural adjustment of its economy. The demands of the adjustment included reducing public spending, deregulating the financial market, eliminating manufacturing protections, liberalizing the labor market, reducing the minimum salary, and eliminating labor stability, all to guarantee reduction of the fiscal deficit. Zimbabwe's economy entered into recession a year later and between 1991 and 1996 per capita private consumption fell 37%, salaries fell 26%, and unemployment rose, while food prices skyrocketed.

The IMF's recipe, which required the Zimbabwean government to slash spending by 46%, above all by cutting health workers' salaries, had disastrous effects on public health. The vast majority of the population was left without access to health services or medicine. Malnutrition and the incidence of illnesses such as tuberculosis rose dramatically. Life expectancy is currently down to 38, between five and eight million people—around 70% of the population—depend on international food aid to survive,

and 2,500 people die of AIDS every week. Even so, the IMF has initiated procedures to expel Zimbabwe for not having consistently accepted all of the economic reforms it “recommended.”

Social Catastrophes Feed the AIDS Epidemic

The situation is similar in the other African nations. Zambia , where AIDS left some 600,000 children orphaned in 2001, liberalized its economy, including agriculture, in 1991 under World Bank-imposed conditions. It is currently in its fourth consecutive year of food crisis and over three million inhabitants have nothing to eat. Malawi and Mozambique are also suffering from chronic food insecurity.

In 1991, the Malawi government had grain deposits in even the most remote parts of the country and could sell cheap food, saving a large part of the population from famine. The IMF “recommended” selling part of these food reserves to guarantee payments on the country's foreign debt, at the same time enriching private traders. Ten years later food costs ten times more and with the elimination of agricultural subsidies, the price of maize rose by 400% between October 2001 and March 2002. Peasants started eating unripe maize, resorting once again to the diet responsible for the disease pellagra, and there was generalized famine. In 2002, seven million of Malawi's total population of ten million suffered from pellagra. Between 2001 and 2005, an estimated 125,000 children under the age of five died of AIDS in Malawi .

Even in the United States, where neoliberal measures also increase social inequalities, new HIV infections are concentrated among Afro-Americans and Latinos. In neoliberal Russia an estimated three million people are intravenous drug users—one of the most important AIDS risk factors—and half that number are infected with HIV. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the lack of social and economic equity provides a favorable context for the AIDS epidemic to reach disastrous proportions in the coming decades, according to the UN's adviser for Colombia, Ricardo García. The worst cases so far correspond to the region's most economically depressed countries or regions. In Colombia , it is predicted that 1.6% of the population will be infected with HIV by 2010.

The Current Anti-AIDS “Crusades” of the IMF, World Bank, WHO, and Bush Administration

Ninety-five percent of AIDS cases occur in the pauperized Third World . In response, the U.S. government and the World Bank, which are the main bodies responsible for the neoliberal reforms that have destroyed national economies and starved vast sectors of the world population, have launched a worldwide campaign to combat the pandemic.

In January 2003, President Bush announced a US\$15 billion program to provide antiretroviral drugs to two million people infected with HIV in 12 African countries, Haiti, and Guyana. For its part, the World Bank began financing projects and developing an AIDS policy in 1986. In 2000, the World Bank and the IMF jointly decided to incorporate their anti-AIDS plans into their development assistance programs, arguing that AIDS is increasingly delaying economic growth by reducing productivity and the work force. At that time, the Bank illustrated its point using the case of Zimbabwe , a country whose 1% drop in economic growth was attributed to the fact that 25% of its adults were HIV positive.

In December 2003, the WHO urged that these projects be coordinated with the UN Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, established in 2001, and launched an initiative known as “Treating three million by 2005.” As its name suggests, the WHO campaign proposed providing antiretroviral medicines to three million AIDS patients in the next two years.

It is worth analyzing the origin, philosophy, and political and economic content of these anti-AIDS crusades to assess if they will indeed translate into relief for those people and regions in the grip of the epidemic.

Is AIDS the cause of poverty?

World Bank Director General Mamphela Ramphele categorically stated on June 1, 2003, that “our dream is a world free of poverty. But we now know that that mission will remain only a dream until the world is free of AIDS.” Paraphrasing the title of Doctor Ramphele's speech that day—“HIV/AIDS: Turning Adversity into an Opportunity”—it could be said that the adversity of the AIDS tragedy has represented an opportunity for the agencies of international capital to blame the epidemic for the poverty caused by their own policies. Worse still, they attempt to postpone any hope of economic recovery in impoverished nations until AIDS has disappeared from the planet.

Such words are not isolated. World Bank documents have been insisting on this idea for some time now. One stated that while it is still not clear if poverty increases the probability of HIV infection, there is strong evidence that HIV/AIDS causes and increases poverty. The U.S. government also defends the idea the AIDS is a cause of poverty. As U.S. Secretary of Health, Tommy Thompson, recently stated, “Poverty, unfortunately, is a common symptom of AIDS.”

Given these tendencies, it's no surprise that the introduction to the document in which the WHO set out its strategy establishes that “HIV/AIDS is destroying families and communities and sapping the economic vitality from countries. The loss of teachers through AIDS, for example, contributes to illiteracy and lack of skills. The decimation of civil servants weakens core government functions, threatening security. The burden of HIV/AIDS, including the death toll among health workers, is pushing health systems to the brink of collapse. In the most severely affected regions, the impact of disease and death is undermining the economic, social, and political gains of the past half-century and crushing hopes for a better future.”

The champions of “free trade” seek to blame economic ruin, loss of political conquests, illiteracy, destruction of health systems, and social problems on a biological agent—the virus—rather than on their imposed structural adjustments, privatization programs, and other reforms.

A World of Clients, Not Patients

Hundreds of millions of poor people in the world suffer and die from infectious diseases for which there are almost no cheap and effective medicines, despite the existence of the scientific and technological knowledge to develop them. Likewise, while North America, Europe, and Japan consume 82.4% of the medicines produced in the world, Asia and Africa consume just 10.6% of those available on the market, despite accounting for two-thirds of the world's population.

Patrice Trouiller and colleagues have documented the reason for this criminal inequity: in the neoliberal economy it is not the population's health needs but rather the financial interests of the large-scale pharmaceutical industry that influence both the research to develop new drugs and the production and marketing of available medicines. In a world with no patients, just clients, and in which the state is abandoning its public health responsibility, the drug transnationals don't invest in medicines to treat illnesses affecting poor people with no money to pay for them; their production and sales strategies focus on the market sector from which they can obtain greater profit margins.

Although there is currently no cure for AIDS, anti-HIV medicines can delay the disease's progress and reduce mortality by up to 80%. The “free trade” policies that have allowed the drug-producing corporations to make record profits off these medicines have also intensified the misery of people who need them. In the case of the AIDS pandemic, neoliberalism has been responsible for exacerbating to the extreme one of the basic contradictions of the capitalist economy: It created an immense potential market for the new antiretrovirals—42 million people with HIV/AIDS—among a population without the capacity to buy them.

Only 8% of the six million AIDS patients who currently require medicines to improve their health have access to antiretrovirals, a figure that in countries such as South Africa is as low as 1%. It is estimated that the current cost of treating a person with HIV/AIDS in the United States is about \$20,000 a year, including the value of antiretroviral therapy, lab tests, medical visits, and medicines to prevent or treat opportunistic illnesses.

WHO believes this situation can now be resolved: “The prices of antiretroviral drugs, which until recently put them far beyond the reach of low-income countries, have dropped sharply. A growing worldwide political mobilization, led by people living with HIV/AIDS, has educated communities and governments, affirming treatment as a human right. The World Bank has channeled increased funding into HIV/AIDS. New institutions such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and ambitious bilateral programs, including the United States Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, have been launched, reflecting an exceptional level of political will and unprecedented resources for the HIV/AIDS battle. This unique combination of opportunity and political will must now be seized with urgent action.”

But despite all the “political will” a fundamental obstacle remains—the pharmaceutical patent monopolies. Since 1995, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement established by the World Trade Organization (WTO) has backed up the patents of the transnational pharmaceutical corporations, guaranteeing them a market monopoly and exorbitant profit margins. As is the norm in neoliberal strategies aimed at eliminating competition by national products to benefit big capital, mainly from the United States, the WTO initially allowed its member countries to produce generic medicines during the first years after intellectual property rights came into force. A few countries, including South Africa, India, and Brazil, used this regulation to start producing generic versions of medicines used to treat AIDS and demonstrated that companies run by the state or national capital could substantially reduce prices and generate profits while at the same time attending to the health needs created by the epidemic in their own countries.

The U.S. government and representatives of the pharmaceutical companies soon started pressuring for “respect” for the patent monopolies. In 2000, 39 companies sued the South African government.

During the 14th International AIDS Conference in Barcelona in 2002, there were mass protests rejecting transnational corporations that deal in these medicines while millions of poor people throughout the world are dying without access to them. On August 30, 2003, in a measure to forestall a repeat protest at the WTO meeting in Cancún, México, the Bush administration and the large-scale pharmaceutical industry agreed that poor countries could temporarily continue buying generic medicines, while adding a clause stipulating that all member countries would soon only be able to buy medicines patented by the transnational companies.

The Bush Plan: Big Business for the Transnationals

At the same time it is promoting its own commercial interests in the WTO, the United States is continuing to push bilateral agreements and regional treaties such as NEPAD in Africa, CAFTA in Central America, and the FTAA in Latin America as a whole. This ongoing attempt to impose its neoliberal policies includes increased patent protection. President Bush's anti-AIDS initiative was launched independently of the existing Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria with the evident aim of directly controlling both the project's philosophy and the money that Washington will invest in the campaign.

Bush named Randall Tobias to run the program in Africa. Tobias had no experience either working in that region or managing AIDS-related programs, but he is a major Republican Party contributor and former general manager of Eli Lilly, a powerful pharmaceutical company.

In Bush's plan, the U.S. government will subsidize capital investments in anti-AIDS medicines by buying up the medicines the companies can't sell to the impoverished nations of Africa and the Caribbean due to their high prices. In the words of South African finance minister Trevor Manuel, there is a risk that most of the budgeted \$15 billion announced by Bush to fight AIDS will end up directly in the coffers of U.S. pharmaceutical companies. It is hence no surprise that big laboratories such as Bristol-Myers Squibb, which controls the patent of the antiretroviral drug Stavudine (Zerit®), support the initiative and are competing to obtain their share of the \$15 billion, or that the giant corporations that produce anti-HIV drugs are financing lobbying of Congress to support the White House anti-AIDS plan. Under this plan, 130 transnational companies have joined a Global Coalition against AIDS.

The Bush administration's fight against AIDS is governed by its policy of globalizing the free trade agreements that benefit its own interests. This was made clear by former U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, when he stated that they aren't thinking of discussing new economic development models for African countries; they are simply looking at how to apply development based on market laws in very poor regions. The aid dedicated to the fight against AIDS will be conditioned on the nations accepting the economic measures prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF.

Washington's initiative to take antiretroviral medicines to countries in Africa and the Caribbean also contains a strong ideological component that promotes sexual abstinence as the basis for HIV-prevention. In May 2003, the U.S. Congress introduced an amendment to the Bush initiative obliging it to invest a third of the millions earmarked for prevention into projects whose only objective is chastity. This is yet another of the neoliberal paradoxes: the very promoters of economic policies that leave millions of people unemployed and force many women into prostitution are now the standard bearers

of a sexual morality that the vast majority of the population finds impossible to fulfill in real life. But this does not stop them proclaiming it as the most effective way of combating the AIDS pandemic.

Any attempt to illuminate the reasons behind the promotion of sexual abstinence as a means of prevention needs first to clarify certain questions about how sexual life affects HIV transmission.

With a few exceptions, most scientists believe that the main form of HIV transmission is via sexual relations with an infected person. Since the virus was discovered, it has been insisted that the highest-risk behavior is anal intercourse between homosexuals or heterosexuals and that in vaginal intercourse the virus is most easily transmitted if the infected person is male. Researchers believe that the number and concurrence of sexual partners and the frequency of sexual activity with new partners also play an important part in increasing the probability of transmission.

In the United States, the AIDS epidemic was initially identified among male homosexual drug users. Not until 2003 was it estimated that heterosexual contact produced a third of all new infections in the United States and Canada, while intravenous drug users sharing infected needles caused 25%. In Africa, in contrast, the epidemic was associated from the start with heterosexual transmission. Lately other possible means of transmission, such as use of needles and other medical instruments and equipment that do not comply with basic biosecurity norms due to the deteriorating health services and terrible conditions in which they are provided are being examined.

The problem with the abstinence approach to AIDS control is that it doesn't work. In sex education offered to young people in the United States, current programs promote abstinence, despite the lack of any definitive demonstration of their effectiveness. A systematic evaluation of these programs by Douglas Kirby concluded that "the weight of the evidence indicates that abstinence-only programs do not delay the onset of intercourse."

How the AIDS Virus Incubated in Inequity

Neoliberalism expresses the interests of big capital concentrated in the giant monopolistic corporations. Based on the thinking of neoclassic economics, it proposes reduction of the state including eliminating or privatizing many public services, public sector workers, and government housing, education, food, and health programs. In recent decades, the U.S. government and its allies have promoted globalization under neoliberal principles and "free trade" economic policies and imposed them on the nations of the world mainly through the international agencies under their control—the IMF and the World Bank—as a supposed panacea for all social problems.

World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs have devastated Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean over the last 20 years. Promoting privatization, fiscal austerity, deregulation, market liberation, and the cutting back of the state, these programs have increased and globalized poverty, migration, unemployment, and temporary work contracts, and produced extremely polarized income and living conditions across the world to the benefit of big capital.

AIDS was incubated and has been propagated in this system of social inequity and it will be impossible to prevent and combat it in any effective way without going after the conditions that are generating the pandemic. The anti-AIDS initiatives implemented by the Bush administration and the

World Bank are set within the U.S. government's strategy of neoliberal globalization, a strategy that also guides the projects of the United Nations and the WHO. All of these plans basically consist of creating funds for channeling money donated by the governments of developed countries and philanthropic organizations attached to the big corporations to be used mainly to purchase and distribute antiretroviral medicines and fund AIDS prevention programs that promote sexual abstinence. These anti-AIDS programs also serve to reinforce the implementation of neoliberal policies in the countries to which the "aid" is offered.

Advanced medicines must be made available to the patients who really need them, the vast majority of whom are from the poor countries. But the management of HIV is complex. As even those who defend antiretroviral therapy point out, the severe toxicity of these pharmaceutical agents must be seriously considered when prescribing their use, despite their notable effects so far.

It is important to insist that antiretroviral medicines are not a cure for AIDS and that there is not complete unanimity on their use. There are still many questions related to the use of this kind of therapy that science has yet to solve. The problems related to these pharmaceutical agents, just over 20 of which have so far been approved in the United States, include their high toxicity, the loss of effectiveness as the organism develops resistance after a certain amount of time, and the difficulty for patients to stick to the treatment adequately.

Prevention programs must be based on scientific knowledge about the AIDS epidemic, not on prejudices about sexuality or people's behavior. It is inappropriate for the United States to establish the standards governing the whole world, as it seeks to do in its abstinence programs. Each country, culture, and society has a right to maintain its own standards, rules, norms, taboos, and lifestyles.

Defeating the Neoliberal Model to Defeat AIDS

After 20 years of ignoring the relationship between poverty, economic models, and AIDS, empirical studies are finally beginning to emerge that demonstrate that the incidence of AIDS increases with economic impoverishment and that to reduce the syndrome's prevalence it is essential to expand and strengthen public health systems. Paul Farmer stated in his report to a U.S. Senate Commission that the fight against AIDS is the fight against poverty. And given that poverty in the contemporary world is of neoliberal origin, it will be impossible to defeat AIDS without defeating the neoliberal model.

An Alternative Proposal

An alternative proposal to confront the AIDS pandemic with any probability of success should include the following basic points:

Defend national employment and production to promote independent economic development, guaranteeing food security and adequate nutrition for the population. A population with severe malnutrition is easy prey for the illnesses that characterize AIDS.

Stop and reverse privatizations, particularly those that have eliminated public services and health systems, so the state can fulfill its responsibility to provide services and treat those affected.

Allow the production of generic medicines, eliminating patent monopolies conceded by the WTO to pharmaceutical transnationals under the guise of respecting intellectual property.

Expand prevention and treatment of drug addiction as an integral part of AIDS prevention and treatment.

Guarantee the necessary scientific debate on the causes, prevention, and treatment of AIDS.

Research cannot be limited to the commercial interests of a handful of companies that invest more money into publicizing a few profitable products than into basic research to develop the medicines that are really needed.

Resisting the discrimination and stigma attached to people and communities affected by the epidemic must be an integral part of confronting the AIDS pandemic. Stigmas fuel, reinforce, and reproduce existing inequalities related to class, race, gender, and sexuality.

Bernardo Useche is a professor at the University of Texas' School of Public Health and Amalia Cabezas is a professor in the Women's Studies Department of the University of California, Riverside. The full version of this article appeared in the August 2005 issue of Revista Envio www.envio.org and this version is reprinted with permission. The IRC Americas Program www.americaspolicy.org thanks our partners at Envio in Managua for the translation from Spanish.

Rum: Fuel For the Modern World
By Laura Barcella, AlterNet
December 2, 2005.

The author of a history of our favorite Caribbean libation discusses how rum affected slavery, Indians, and culture as a whole.

Ian Williams knows rum, and he knows it far better than you, or I, or anyone we know.

His interest in the libation began as a boy growing up in a Liverpool, England council estate -- the American equivalent of a housing project. Williams' dad couldn't afford much at Christmastime, but he always scrounged up enough to buy a sole, special bottle of rum ("Usually Demerara," Williams recalls) to help stay warm during the snowy season.

A frequent AlterNet contributor and a U.N. correspondent for The Nation, Williams delves into the drink's remarkable history in his latest book, *Rum: A Social and Sociable History of the Real Spirit of 1776*.

Hopping the globe from Haiti to Cuba to Boston to explore various countries' unique rums and their backgrounds, Williams uncovers historical connections most Americans never knew existed. He studies the liquor's sordid ties to the slave trade, and the ways rum contributed to the decimation of many of New England's native populations. Most importantly, he examines how rum "put a whole new light on the motives of the Founding Fathers of the American Republic."

From his New York home, Williams spoke with AlterNet about his beloved beverage -- he collects bottles of rum from around the world, as well as labels, advertisements and paraphernalia -- and its distinguished role as "the lubricant and fuel for the whole engine of commerce that made the modern world."

Where did you find the inspiration for this book?

I have always associated rum with Christmas, for reasons to do with post-war rationing in Britain and my father's time as a merchant seaman. But I was recently in the Caribbean, and as I was sampling the fine rums of Martinique, I realized that the island was filled with graveyards of British soldiers. It occurred to me that the 18th-century Caribbean was the Persian Gulf of its day. This is where hundred of thousands of foreigners came to fight each other for control over small islands. And the reasons were similar: sugar was money. It was sugar and rum that made the British Navy what it was. It allowed the British treasury to pay the national debt and to effectively win wars with the French.

How did you go about researching the book?

I don't really regret to say that a lot of the research I did was absolutely irrelevant to the book, but it taught me a lot about rum. It was fascinating because it took me into a lot of history -- particularly about the American Revolution. I developed an appreciation for how the modern world developed the way it did around the Atlantic seaboard.

Rum was such an integral part of it. This has been written out because of Prohibitionism and temperance. The founding fathers' connection to booze was omitted from American history books, along with the whole role of rum in the American Revolution, the development of the northeast colonies, and its tie-in with slavery. We all in the north look down on the south as the old slave-holding stronghold, but the north actually transported most of those slaves and paid for it with rum.

Can you explain the north's role in this trading cycle?

The northeast is very barren. Agriculturally, it has very low productivity. The Yankees traded all over the world and often doubled as smugglers. They smuggled molasses from the French colonies that they made into rum. They drank prodigious quantities of it themselves on a per capita basis, because it was a major food item, especially in the winter.

Then they would use some of it to trade with the Native Americans, and a significant portion of it was taken to the west coast of Africa where they traded it for slaves with the local kings. That was where the American triangle trade came in: rum from New England for slaves, and molasses up from the Caribbean. It was a pretty unholy commerce, but it was what developed the northeastern states, both commercially and industrially.

What role did rum play in relation to Native Americans?

Well, to some extent it was a cultural thing. They had never been introduced to hard liquor on this scale before, and they had completely different ideas about it. It was a sort of spiritual experience. They just knocked the stuff back, and from what I can gather, in Native American tribal custom, a person who was drunk was not responsible for his actions. In fact, the British colonial officials also made it a rule that they wouldn't recognize any treaties or land sales that were conducted with Native Americans when they were drunk.

Basically, the Native Americans' economic role was to provide furs from trapping. They paid for that in rum. The traders' excuse was that if they paid the Native Americans in clothes and food that they had enough of, they wouldn't do it. Whereas rum was a desirable commodity that they had access to, and there was no end to what they could drink.

This also devastated the ecology because they trapped out and had to go further and further infield. It was unsustainable for the Indians because they were at the tail end of massive harvesting.

And getting drunk messed up their society as a social structure, making them vulnerable to diseases, attacks, cheating and takeover. Benjamin Franklin actually described it as something that was pretty much designed by providence to clear "the savages" away from these territories.

Where did you travel to research your book?

In my travels, I picked up rum from India, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Croatia, Czech Republic - rum from almost everywhere. But most of the research was in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, you have this sort of microcosm of the world. You have the Dutch, the French, Spanish, Portuguese, British, Americans,

and Danes. They all had colonies in the Caribbean. And the region shares this common thread of rum - that's the bedrock similarity. The development of the drink varies from place to place.

The English-speaking countries were way ahead, because there was no serious domestic spirit industry for them to compete with. The French, Spanish and Portuguese inhibited rum production in their colonies because it competed with brandy production back home. They didn't get in to the better quality stuff until much later on, which left the field free for the British and the Americans to develop, drink and appreciate it.

What impact do you think rum has had on the modern world?

It's just another commodity. In America, in particular Bacardi -- during Prohibition and afterwards -- developed a huge position as a very bland spirit to be used for mixing. [Bacardi has] basically used their monopoly position to swamp out other entrants into the market, which is a shame.

Rum could be a development tool for the Caribbean. The islands can do much better by selling their high value-added premium spirit than they could by trying to sell sugar onto a world market dominated by heavily subsidized high-fructose corn syrup and European beet sugar. It makes much more sense for these islands to make rum, brand it and sell it on the world market. But always, with the world trade stuff, they meet a lot of resistance. Such was the case of Bacardi and Fidel Castro with Havana Club.

Can you discuss the feud between Castro and the Bacardi family?

Bacardi and several of the other big rum producers actually supported Castro financially when he was up in the mountains. When Castro marched into Havana with his column with Che Guevara, there was a big banner on the Bacardi building in downtown Havana with a placard saying "Gracias a Fidel," for getting rid of Batista. And the first trade delegation to the U.S. actually included several leading members of the Bacardi family.

But when things fell out, and Fidel took a pro-Soviet turn, he nationalized Bacardi. It's interesting because it didn't have that much of an effect. Bacardi was the original trans-global corporation. It had already shifted its headquarters to the Bahamas so that it got British Empire preferences. It had also opened its biggest plant in Puerto Rico so that it had that point of access to the American market.

Cuba was already almost just a branch office for the actual industrial empire because they had distilleries around the world and technically they were headquartered elsewhere. But there was a grudge. Bacardi bankrolled the Cuban American National Foundation for many years, thereby buying Congress.

It came as no surprise that when Havana Club was launched onto the world market, with the help of the French spirits company, Bacardi did everything they could legally in the U.S. to frustrate it -- hence the big battles about the trademark for Havana Club, which Bacardi keeps losing in the courts and then winning in the Congress because they keep buying an amendment that covers whatever case they lost.

Talk a little bit about how rum is marketed and advertised.

It's almost the subject for another book -- an illustrative book. I've collected a lot of labels, and some of them, especially the French ones, are not at all politically correct. There are caricatures of black people - that's one whole line of iconography. Then there is the nautical connection: sailors and pirates. And the Spanish have this conquistador image which is slightly strange because the conquistadors didn't drink rum until much later, but what the hell, we're talking marketing here.

Do you think trends in rum's marketing and advertising has shifted over the years? Are there different images now?

Well, Captain Morgan has been transformed from the iconic pirate into a swashbuckling, romantic, and mischievous figure. Now he's a sort of lifestyle model for the young 20s-to-30s set who are supposed to drink high-value-added spirits.

There are lots of rum companies coming along now which are struggling with how to market it, how to get these people to buy rum as opposed to vodka. Vodka is essentially alcohol and water. That's always a triumph in marketing: when you can take something that is two very simple ingredients and persuade people that this bottle is better than the other.

With rum, you really can taste the difference. There are so many different ways of making it and ageing it.

What I really like is sipping rums -- the ones that you don't need to mix. You can roll them around your mouth and drink [them] like a single malt.

Of course, when you taste rums, you're supposed to roll it around your mouth and then spit it out. But I always feel that part of the tasting experience is to feel it hitting the esophagus, the liver, and then the brain cells. The experience isn't complete without it.

What are some of your favorite rums? How do the mainstream liquor-store versions like Captain Morgan and Bacardi stack up?

Personally, I think they're awful... My particular favorite is Rum Barbencourt from Haiti. I went to the distillery in Haiti, which is pretty much the only industry working there. They produce this brand that you actually have to strain hard just to get the "rum-ishness" out of. It could almost be old single malt or a cognac.

The French Islands -- Martinique and Guadalupe -- make some really nice aged rums. Venezuela, Nicaragua and Guatemala also produce some really good rums. I tasted one last night from Venezuela called "Diplomatico" and I wondered if, post-Chavez, they were going to introduce a brand called "un-Diplomatico."

What's rum's connection to folklore?

Rum has a lot more history than any other drink. And it's still the biggest, most widespread spirit in the whole world. My slogan, which I haven't charged the Caribbean Tourism Organization for, is "rum is the global spirit with its warm, beating heart in the Caribbean."

The biggest myths are all connected with pirates. I thought it was all summed up with Johnny Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, when he's wandering around saying, "It's the sun, sand, and rum ... it's the Caribbean," and then he falls over backwards.

I was in upstate New York this time last year, going to a friend's house, and I tried to buy a bottle of rum for him but the liquor store owner had sold out, and he said, "Oh well; it's winter."

It's self-explanatory. The people bought rum in winter. There's a strong folklore that it's good against colds and flu, and that it keeps the winter chill out.

The French government in WWI actually nationalized the entire stock of rum in the Caribbean for use for the troops to fight the Spanish flu. It was official endorsement. For many years in America, British rum was regarded as specific for colds -- a spoonful of rum with sugar or black currant juice to fight off a cold. I don't think it actually does anything about the virus but it certainly makes you feel a lot better.

What about rum's connection to the navy?

The British instituted rum by giving rum rations to the sailors. At the height of the British Empire, British sailors were given over half a pint of rum every day. It's always been a great mystery to me how they got the ships out of port, let alone won battles.

It was a big bonding ritual on the ships as well. It was an entitlement. The British admiralty resisted interfering with the sailors' sense of entitlement. The American Navy swapped rum for whisky in the early 19th century, during the Civil War, and then abolished the ration entirely.

But the British didn't abolish it until the 1970s. One of the convincing things they did for a PR stunt was to breathalyze the people who were driving the nuclear submarines for Britain. After they'd had their rum ration, they weren't fit to drive their cars home from the naval base, but they were being considered fit to drive around with submarines filled with nuclear missiles.

What was most surprising thing you discovered in your research?

With the Puritanical, self-righteous image of America, the idea that the founding fathers were a bunch of luses doesn't sit well. Even when I've done readings, I've said that people think that the standard of American politics has declined, and present-day politicians don't match up to the founding fathers. Well, they do.

The founding fathers were rogues and scallywags. It's a different look from the Disney World version of American history and world history. One of the particular points that came up, and hasn't really been picked up, is just how much of colonial American institutions came from the Caribbean.

It was Barbados in the mid-17th century that first produced the slogan, "No taxation without representation." "The President" was the title of the leaders of the legislatures in all of these colonies. They were all fairly autonomous, and people like George Washington visited Barbados and actually

considered settling there. It was actually in Barbados that the British Empire first legalized black slavery.

Up until then, they were indentured -- people signed up for five or seven years and worked for one person. They were considered free, but they couldn't run away. That's how they originally staffed the colonies in the south before they started bringing slaves. British law had ruled in the 16th century that there was no such thing as slavery in Britain anymore.

So after Barbados, the colonies actually began to develop a black code which ruled that Africans, by their very nature, were unfit to be free. This put them in a separate position from the white indentured servants. They basically invented slavery in the Anglo Saxon sense. And it was from there that it went north along the coast and up into the southern colonies. It all came from the Caribbean, and it all came on the trade winds along with the sugar and molasses.

Laura Barcella is an associate editor at AlterNet.

**U.S. Southern Command chief gives Fernandez a report on the border
Deny mission was to supervise DR-Haiti border
The Dominican Today
December 2, 2005**

SANTO DOMINGO.- President Leonel Fernandez clarified yesterday that the head of the United States Southern Command, general John Craddock, came to the country to formally give the study on border security that the Dominican government had requested to effectively fight drug trafficking.

He said that the study is concluded and that will be submitted with recommendations of specific actions to bolster the border's security.

The chief executive stated that he asked for the Southern Command to conduct the study because throughout the years, it has been seen that "the problem of drugs in Dominican Republic has come from Colombia towards Haiti, and from Haiti to Dominican Republic."

Faced with that situation, it is necessary that "we adopt new measures that allow us to assure that situation in the Dominican-Haitian border," he said.

Did not come to supervise

For his part, Armed Forces minister admiral Sigfrido Pared rejected that Craddock came on a mission of border supervision. "He does not have a reason to supervise our border; nobody has to supervise us. The supervision of the border is by the Armed Forces," the military official said.

Pared added that it is not as some of the press has reported, on a supposed supervision of the border. "he took advantage of the fact that he is in the island to bring the report to the President."

Both statements were made in the ceremony to mark the 161st anniversary of the National Army.

Immigration authorizes census on foreigners
The Dominican Today
December 2, 2005

Santo Domingo.- The Migration Council approved yesterday a regulation whereby foreigners will be subject to census surveys.

The entity informed that the measure would be implemented as soon as pertinent norms are established, in accordance with article 2 of the new legislation that is to be submitted to president Leonel Fernandez for final approval.

The entity cautioned that any foreigner not surveyed is liable to be deported from national territory. The same fate would apply to aliens illegally residing in the country, or outsiders not bearing proper travel or identity documentation.

However, any deportation procedure is to be handled strictly respecting all human rights.

As to neighboring Haitian citizens, the approved document is consonant with the protocol signed on December 2nd, 1999 between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, whereby all Haitian citizens illegally residing in the country are subject to repatriation.

The Migration Council endorsing the new measure is headed by Franklin Almeyda, Interior and Police Ministry chief, and is also integrated by Armfed Forces minister Admiral Sigfrido Pared Perez and Carlos Morales Troncoso, Foreign Relations minister, among other officials.

Election Deliverables
Stabroek News, Guyana
Friday, December 2nd 2005

Elections in all countries teach lessons. Whether anything is learnt is an entirely different matter. Take Haiti for example. With one month to go before elections were due ballots have not been printed, over 2,500,000 identification cards have not been delivered, elections workers are still to be trained and 9,000-odd polling places are not yet operational.

Faced with these incomplete tasks, Haiti's nine-member Electoral Council announced last Friday that elections could not be held on December 27, the date announced last week by Prime Minister Latortue. The Council has now set January 8, 2006 as the new date for elections in that tortured Caricom member state. In Guyana ROAR leader Ravi Dev recently conducted a television interview with Hugh Cholmondeley, a Guyanese and retired UN veteran of many conflict countries and experienced with election systems. Cholmondeley currently coordinates Caricom's assistance programme for Haiti.

Asked what makes for free, fair and transparent elections Cholmondeley said that such elections happen when a specific number of concrete products are produced on time; when they meet previously agreed standards of quality; and when they are sequenced so that on election day these products come together and provide for a successful election. Pressed for an opinion in Guyana's case, Cholmondeley felt there were at least 20 such critical products or, as he called them 'deliverables.'

We understand these deliverables to include the following: the list of new registrants resulting from continuous registration; the list of 2001 electors without names of dead persons and others no longer qualified; the list of electors qualified to vote in the 2006 elections; the completed claims and objections period; printed election manuals accessible on GECOM's web-site; election workers trained, capable and enabled to perform their functions; an implemented voter education programme; identification cards delivered to all qualified voters; polling places identified in all regions and made fully functional; the method for counting ballots and security systems tested and in place; Fully operational communication systems between all offices; approved nominations from contesting political parties and finally, the system for counting ballots and disseminating election results tested and in place.

Haiti's concrete products are similar to ours, as they are for every other country where free, fair and transparent elections are conducted. However it is worth noting that after the fourth postponement of Haiti's elections, their elections council has admitted that four critical 'deliverables' still have not been produced - printed ballots, delivered identification cards, competent election workers and operational polling places.

We understand that our Elections Commission has already worked out indicative dates by which its concrete products or critical 'deliverables' will be produced.

These dates should be made public as soon as possible. In this way, all contesting political parties, stakeholders, donors, voters and the media would be able to track and monitor GECOM's progress in preparing for our elections that must meet the highest possible technical standards while providing no reasonable basis for complaint when the results are known.

At all costs we must avoid the dislocation, disruption and destruction in the periods before and after our last three elections.

We must learn from the lessons that were taught by our own experience and are now being taught by the faltering preparations for Haiti's elections next year.

Haitian Gunmen Release 14 Schoolchildren

Friday December 2, 2005 2:31 pm

By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU

Associated Press Writer

Guardian Unlimited

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Gunmen released 14 children whom they kidnapped aboard their school bus in the capital but an American missionary who was abducted in a separate incident remained in captivity, Haitian police said Friday.

The gunmen released the children and the driver unharmed Thursday night, said police Commissioner Francois Henry Doussous, chief of the country's anti-kidnapping unit.

Haitian radio reported that an unspecified ransom was paid, but Doussous said the gunmen received no money. He said they released the children and driver because of intense public attention on the case and because police checkpoints prevented the kidnapers from returning with their hostages to their base in the Cite Soleil slum.

There were no arrests.

``Mercifully, the gangs didn't manage to bring them to Cite Soleil," police spokesman Frantz Lerebours told The Associated Press.

Gunmen kidnapped the children, aged 5-17, earlier Thursday - the same day that U.S. missionary Phillip Snyder was also abducted as he was driving on a road north of the capital.

Snyder is the president of Glow Ministries International, based in Zeeland, Michigan.

The kidnappings came five weeks before national elections to restore democracy to the troubled nation, which has seen a sharp increase in kidnappings amid the chaos following the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Doussous said police were working to secure Snyder's release.

``We have strong hopes that we will get him released today, that's our goal," Doussous said.

14 children abducted; missionary seized
Chicago Tribune news services
December 2, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI -- Gunmen hijacked a school bus carrying 14 children Thursday, and a U.S. missionary was abducted while driving outside Haiti's capital, police said.

The bus was taking the children to school when several armed men stopped it, boarded it and drove off down a main road heading west from Port-au-Prince, the capital, police said.

Police said the captors contacted the children's families and demanded \$50,000 for their release.

Also Thursday, police said gunmen shot and kidnapped missionary Phillip Snyder as he was driving north of the capital. Snyder, 48, is the president of Glow Ministries International, based in Zeeland, Mich.

Haitian gunmen release 14 schoolchildren

By ALFRED DE MONTESQUIOU

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Seattle Post Intelligencer

December 2, 2005

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**U.S. soldiers brutalize Haitians
Americans arrest, handcuff, shackle, hood, beat and hold innocent Bel Air residents without charge
by Lyn Duff
San Francisco Bay View, CA
November 30, 2005**

Since the 2004 coup overthrowing the democratic government of Haiti, international observers have reported an overwhelming increase in the number and severity of human rights violations against Haiti's poor majority. These rapes, targeted killings, illegal arrests and jailhouse beatings have received little attention from the mainstream press.

When the media covers human rights violations, the victims themselves often find that their voices are ignored. San Francisco Bay View reporter Lyn Duff spoke with Rico Serve, 36, from the jail cell where he had been held for nearly a week without being charged with a crime. Here is his story:

I live in Bel Air. That's a neighborhood near the center of Port-au-Prince. It's one of the popular neighborhoods, which means that a lot of people live there, and the police and the foreign military come to our zone more often than they go to other places.

The other day, the American soldiers came to our area first at three o'clock in the morning. They went from house to house, pulling people out of bed.

The American soldiers made us sit in the mud, but after a while they had to release us because they had no charge against us. We had not committed any crime.

The Americans came back at four o'clock in the afternoon, to the street near my family's house. I was shocked – they came to arrest us again.

The American soldiers shackled me and they arrested me. There was a police officer that was also arrested by the Americans at the same time as us. They hit him on his head after he was shackled because they did not believe him when he said he was an off-duty police officer, even though he showed them his I.D. card.

To hit a man when he is shackled – what kind of craziness is that? Hitting us, that I can understand, because the Americans have no respect for the people in our zone. But to hit a police officer, and to hit him while he is handcuffed, that behavior shows the true brutality of the soldiers.

The American soldiers made us sit for three hours on the ground. We were all shackled and they still hit us! At the time that the American soldiers hit me, I was already shackled as well and I was no danger to anyone.

After they hit us, the Americans took us to the (National) Palace (the Haitian equivalent of the White House), where we were held for a while. People hit us there too, but we could not see who hit us because at that time the soldiers had covered our heads with black bags.

The American soldiers gave us no explanation for what they were doing. There was a man, an informant for the Americans, who gave them information, and he claimed that I was someone I am not and said that I was going to kill an American soldier – at least that's what the Americans told me he said.

My identification card says that I am not the man the informant claimed I am, but the Americans do not care about my real name. They don't care about the truth, or that the accusation against me is not true.

I would not be able to kill a marine because my hand is damaged. Look at it – I am a cripple. I am not able to hold a gun. Besides, if I were put in the position of having to kill someone, I would rather take poison and kill myself instead. I say before God that I would never kill someone.

I don't know most of these people being held in the police station with me. I have never met them before. They were just passing by when the American soldiers arrested them. This is insane, because the Americans say we are all in a plot together to make a disaster for the government. But before we were arrested we didn't even know each other's names!

For myself, the only real soldier I know is God on earth. The American soldiers say they are here to free us. Instead we are being held in the cell at the police station.

We have not seen a judge – even though the Constitution says when a person is arrested he must see a judge within two days. We have no opportunity to plead our case.

We sleep on the ground. We are not allowed to wear shoes. I have not been told why I am here. I still have not been charged with any crime.

Still, the American soldiers say they came to Haiti to free us. What a joke!

Lyn Duff (LynDuff@aol.com) is a reporter currently based in Port-au-Prince. She first traveled to Haiti in 1995 to help establish a children's radio station and has since covered Haiti extensively for Pacifica Radio's Flashpoints, heard on KPFA weekdays at 5 p.m., and other local and national media.

Urgent action alert: New attacks on Cite Soleil residents by UN troops

The Haiti Action Committee has received eyewitness reports over the past week from Cite Soleil that UN troops have launched a new round of attacks on the residents there, killing at least three civilians and gravely wounding others. According to the preliminary reports:

On Wednesday, Nov. 23, UN troops killed one man, a maker of kitchen utensils, when they fired into his shop near his home. Five additional residents were reportedly wounded.

Over the weekend, UN troops — led by Jordanian soldiers — killed two more residents, a husband and wife, in Cite Soleil and wounded at least eight more people. Further investigation is required to determine the total killed and wounded in this attack.

Residents in Cite Soleil once again find themselves trapped and under siege. A massacre-in-the-making could be underway as we send out this alert. Unfortunately, UN troops demonstrated on July 6, as well as on other occasions, they will shoot and kill men, women and children in their homes, in their beds and as they go about their daily chores. Now is the time to act – to let them know the world is watching and to demand an end to the killings!

Contact Deputy Director Craig Mokhiber, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at (917) 367-5208 or mokhibr@un.org and demand he intervene to stop the siege on the residents of Cite Soleil. Go to www.haitiaction.net for more officials to contact.

Schnorr: Building hope for a nation
By Dan Schnorr/ Messages from Haiti
The Sudbury Town Crier, MA
Thursday, December 1, 2005

Editor's note: This is the first of a possible monthly column by L-S graduate, Dan Schnorr about his experiences in Haiti. Feedback is welcome on the article at sudbury@cnc.com

Well at least I am not the only one here struggling with the language, I thought; apparently the local U.N. Peacekeeping force has been having an equal amount of trouble learning Haitian Creole. As we all strived to find a way into the Port au Prince Airport, I amused myself by supposing that maybe the airline had misplaced their bags as well. But for the time being I was at least happy to have someone with whom to share my current predicament, even if the soldiers' inability to communicate in either of Haiti's national languages was a bit disquieting. They are, after all, charged with the task of maintaining order in this country.

In Haiti, one must learn to maintain a sense of humor and to make the most out of whatever experiences this beguiling country might offer. As a Sudbury native trying to settle in to eight months of volunteer work in the poorest and most unstable country in the Western Hemisphere, this is the most important lesson I have learned thus far. For instance, had the airline not misplaced my bags, I would never have found myself back at the airport two days later, striking up a conversation with that group of soldiers from the Argentine military. Their blue helmets, characteristic of U.N. forces the world over, were reminiscent of news highlights I had seen from faraway places like Somalia and Bosnia, and they served to remind me of the unique period in history at which I encounter this country.

In upcoming elections, Haiti will try to reinstitute civilian government and in the process leave behind its status as one of only two non-democracies in this Hemisphere, a dubious distinction currently shared with Cuba, its Caribbean neighbor. Since shortly after February, 2004, when armed insurrection for the second time prevented the democratically elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide from finishing his term of office, Minustah, the UN peacekeeping force assigned to Haiti, has done its best to maintain order. [continue]

But by now Haitians have long since accustomed themselves to such circumstances. Since a slave rebellion made Haiti the second free state in the Americas in 1804, the realities of civil unrest and marshal law have been edged out in their constancy only by the reality of debilitating poverty, which has remained virtually unchanged for two centuries. The Human Development Index (HDI), which considers indicators such as literacy and infant mortality rate along with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in order to more accurately determine a country's comparative wealth, places Haiti as the 153rd most developed nation out of 177. At such a position, Haiti ranks more similarly to many counties in Sub-Saharan Africa than to any other nation in the Western Hemisphere, whose second poorest country (Guatemala) ranks 117 on the HDI.

How can such misery exist at just a two-hour plane ride from Miami and the largest economy on the planet? The often politically motivated answers of politicians, academics, and international workers rarely coincide. Regardless, a more pertinent and productive question to pose right now might be, 'How do we begin to fix it?' Unfortunately, consensus answers to this question have been just as infrequent,

which is why many 'first world' policy makers seem to have long since written off the prospects of ever developing Haiti.

However, this in no way entails that answers are not to be found elsewhere. "Why not build a University?" responds one visionary Catholic priest. Unlike a good portion of the developed world, Father Joseph Philippe is not yet ready to give up on his native country. Indeed, having already founded a successful peasant development organization and the county's first successful micro-credit foundation, he has shown what a few good ideas and a lot of hard work, commitment and faith can accomplish in a country like this [continue]

But even with such a proven track record, it still seemed a little outlandish to propose the construction of a University in the middle of one of the poorest sections of the country. This is not to say that the need for such an initiative was not palpable. According the World Bank, Haiti ranks third worst in the world at maintaining a skilled work force, losing 83.6 percent of its professionally qualified citizens to emigration per year. It would seem that the country simply has nothing to offer in return for their skills.

The proposed University would try to curb this telling statistic. Geared at the rural poor, it would train professionals in specialties designed to enable them to work in the development of their own communities. However, noble though the idea may be, it seemed destined for failure. Haiti had never before seen a rural University. How would the students, mostly the sons and daughters of poor farmers, ever afford the tuition needed to pay professors and other costs? Universities in Haiti have typically been reserved for the elite minority. Classes are taught in French, the language of the aristocracy, rather than Creole, the only language spoken by 90 percent of the population.

Nevertheless, the University of Fondwa opened its doors to its first class in the Spring of 2004. Its twenty students hailed from rural areas across the country and the cadre of specialized professors came from four different countries. Funded mostly with private donations from American contributors, the first year of classes was a success. Due to a lack of funds, however, the University was unable to accept a second class this year. Additionally, during the current semester, students are participating in internships in lieu of taking classes, gaining practical experience before hopefully returning to the classroom in February, 2006.

To the untrained eye, the University of Fondwa might appear to be teetering on the brink of collapse. Anyone who would draw such a conclusion, however, drastically underestimates the level of commitment of the staff and students here. Universities like this one, founded in other countries in Latin America, have been called revolutionary tools for the eradication of poverty. While some of those institutions now boast hundreds of students and million-dollar budgets, most started just like this one, as not much more than an innovative idea.

This brings me to my role in this story. I arrived in Fondwa about one month ago to learn from the people here and to lend my support in making the dream a reality. I will be writing regular columns from rural Haiti, in which I hope to mix a dose of humor into the telling of an inspirational story. Please stay tuned, and if you want to know more, visit www.UNIF2004.org (soon to be revamped) or www.piphaiti.org.

By the way, in case you were wondering, after a few days of sharing a few T-shirts and a single razor with my only friend in the country, I eventually did recover my bags from the airport.

Dan Schnorr is a member of L-S's class of 2001. He currently works in Fondwa, Haiti, as a field researcher for the Association of Peasants of Fondwa and as an English and Computer Technology Instructor at the University of Fondwa.

MINUSTAH in Cite Soleil

by Isabel MacDonald

ZNet, Ca

December 01, 2005

PORT AU PRINCE - Luckson Docius, a 48-year old metalworker who supported his family of seven by making saucepans was at work on November 24 when a bullet fired by a UN “peacekeeper” working with the UN Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTAH) ripped through the metal wall of his studio and killed him. The bullet, which a MINUSTAH soldier in a tank-like armoured personnel carrier (APC) fired from an automatic gun, blasted through his right arm, tore into the right side of his abdomen and came out the other side, to lodge itself in his left arm; moments later, Docius was lying dead in a pool of blood before his co-workers’ eyes.

A few days later, Harold, a youth from the Port-au-Prince slum of Cité Soleil (or Site Soley, as it is known in Krèyol), was strolling up the main road into his neighbourhood on a Sunday afternoon when a MINUSTAH “peacekeeper” shot him in the stomach.

Speaking from a hospital bed two days later, where he was strapped up to an IV machine, the bullet hole in his stomach visible through a transparent plastic cover taped over it, Harold said that he had been walking along the main street into the Site when MINUSTAH shot him. He had been passing by MINUSTAH’s largest base in the Site, which is located at the entrance to the shantytown, when he heard gunfire off in the distance. The Jordanian soldiers manning the MINUSTAH’s tank-like APCs outside the base responded by opening fire with automatic weapons in the general direction of the distant shooting. One of MINUSTAH’s bullets tore through Harold’s abdomen and lodged near his back.

I visited Harold with a Haitian law school student and journalist who is a friend of his. Harold had been on his way to a meeting organized by this law school student-- a youth meeting focused on strategies for promoting progressive community development and education through neighbourhood associations—when he was shot.

The Associated Press (AP) has reported that 15 residents of Site Soley have been killed, and Doctors Without Borders has confirmed that 28 more have been shot, amidst heavy firing by MINUSTAH in the last week. Site Soley is a Port au Prince slum with a strong base of support for Fanmi Lavalas (FL), the popular Haitian political party; the Lavalas leaders are either in exile or imprisoned by the defacto Haitian government without charges in the wake of the US, France and Canada-backed February 29, 2004 coup d’état that overthrew the FL government of Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Since MINUSTAH was established by the UN Security Council four months after the coup to support the de facto Haitian government, its troops and police have had a strong presence in the shantytown, and in another poor Lavalas-supporting neighbourhood, Belair, where they have joined forces with the Haitian National Police, allegedly in the name of stamping out “gang violence”. MINUSTAH controls the movements of residents through checkpoints established at each main entry point to Site Soley, and the UN forces have established military bases in many of the rare multi-storey buildings in the neighbourhood of tiny low-lying corrugated tin and stone dwellings.

At a press conference on November 28, Juan Gabriel Valdes, the head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, denounced the journalists and critics who have represented MINUSTAH as a repressive force that is killing civilians. However, regardless of MINUSTAH's stated official intentions, the killing of civilians seems an almost inevitable by-product of the military strategy MINUSTAH is using—namely going with tank-like machines and automatic weapons into a densely populated civilian neighbourhood and opening fire.

I witnessed the MINUSTAH open fire among civilians in two other parts of the Site on the Sunday that Harold was shot. In the Site Soley neighbourhood of Pele, Brazilian “peacekeeping” troops opened fire shortly after 2 pm on the corner of a main thoroughfare and the main Pele road, which is lined with street vendors, and filled with women and children. Standing only four feet away from the street corner where about five of the soldiers were stationed—close enough to hear the orders blasting over their radios, I neither saw nor heard any bullets coming at them. Yet they opened fire, blasting consecutive rounds of automatic gunfire across the road, as people carrying heavy loads of produce tried to walk by. After a few minutes, about twenty more Brazilian MINUSTAH soldiers arrived on the scene, with one of MINUSTAH's tank-like APCs, and the UN gunfire intensified. After a full twenty minutes of firing, the troops did a 180, swiveling around to open fire in the opposite direction—in the direction where a dozen street vendors, and bystanders civilians had taken cover, pressed up against a wall behind MINUSTAH's original line of fire. Again, I had heard no gunfire coming from this direction before MINUSTAH opened fire. When MINUSTAH finally stopped shooting and moved away, a heap of women and children streamed out from behind a barber's shop. They looked at me, a blanc with a press pass across the street, and started to yell “Gen problem!” There is a problem.

Less than an hour later, we were passing through Bwa Nèf in the heart of Site Soley, near Route 9, where MINUSTAH had killed the metal worker just a few days earlier; journalist Jean Ristil and I walked through the sea of tiny homes made of corrugated tin and stone, along the long, straight alleyways which separate the huts, which provide routes for foot-travel within the neighbourhood as well as spaces where people congregate to talk, wash clothes, and children play. Suddenly, we saw four UN APCs—also manned by Brazilians--drive slowly up along the largest road in the vicinity. MINUSTAH bullets were suddenly whizzing by our heads. In the street alley we were in, people frantically flew in all directions, ducking into doorways, hiding behind ledges of the long concrete walls lining the alleyway. I took cover with a half dozen residents hiding behind a ledge of the wall that jutted out about six inches. The MINUSTAH APCs continued to fire rounds in our direction for about ten minutes.

The emergency ward at St. Catherines hospital, the main hospital in the Site, reported that there had been seven people, in addition to Harold, who were hospitalized for gunfire injuries on Sunday. According to the local Red Cross office in Site Soley, this is not unusual—if anything, the number of gun injuries in the Site is now lower than it had been. On July 6, 2004, dozens of Site Soley residents—including women and children--were killed in an early-morning raid by Jordanian MINUSTAH forces, who claimed that they were searching for “gang leaders”, and there have also been many attacks by the Haitian National Police.

Valdes claimed at the November 28 press conference to be promoting dialogue with the community of Site Soley. The MINUSTAH Director of Political Affairs, John Bevan, told me that MINUSTAH has held a series of meetings with non-violent leaders in Site Soley. However, many ordinary Site Soley

residents do not appear to even be aware of the “dialogue” that MINUSTAH claims to be engaged in with them. “What has MINUSTAH ever done for us?” demanded Luckson Docius’ brother. He told me that he thinks Site Soley does need security (which is what MINUSTAH is after all supposed to provide). However, the forces have only increased the insecurity of his family. Luckson has left behind five children, including a six year old. Luckson’s brother approached MINUSTAH to demand that something be done for the family but has had no response.

I recall one elderly woman leaning out of her doorway as I passed down an alley in Bwa Nèf ; “Are you not scared of MINUSTAH?”, she asked me. I saw people of all ages cheering for a young guy running by with a large gun. Harassment at checkpoints and unexplained firing on neighbourhoods by troops, most of whom—at least in the case of the “peacekeepers” and police that I have encountered in the Site--do not speak Kreyol is, to say the least, uncondusive to dialogue. Moreover, a popular Haitian radio station, Radio Ginen, recently reported that women in a part of Site Soley close to the Jordanian MINUSTAH base were complaining about rapes and harassment by the MINUSTAH troops.

At the press conference on the 28th, Valdes referred to the Site as “a scar on the body of Haiti”, and stated that the MINUSTAH presence is going to be increased in the Site; MINUSTAH forces will take control and establish order, block by block. According to Valdes, these renewed MINUSTAH forces will be used to stamp out the “gangs” who they anticipate will seek to disrupt the elections, the first round of which is scheduled for January 8, 2006. However, when I asked people in Site Soley about whether there were any political groups in the neighbourhood who were advocating disrupting the election—the rationale that MINUSTAH is giving for its renewed attention to Site Soley in the lead up to the election--people looked at me blankly. “Of course not. [Former Lavalas President and Lespwa candidate Rene] Preval is going to win”, I heard. Since Preval’s candidacy in the election was accepted, Lavalas supporters have renounced their earlier call for a boycott. I sought in vain for graffiti denouncing the election and calling for a boycott amongst the plethora of political messages scrawled on the walls of Site Soley. Instead, I found a myriad of calls to “Vote Preval”. Perhaps this should not be surprising; Site Soley was a strong base of opposition to the coup d’etat that had eliminated the government that the majority of Haitian people had elected; the residents of Site Soley appear to care very much about their right to vote. The apparently erroneous premise of the UN’s actions in Site Soley in the lead-up to the election raises the troubling question--put best by the elder brother of the late Luckson Docius--“What is MINUSTAH doing in Site Soley?” As a citizen of Canada, a country that has played a leading role in the replacement of Haitian democracy with a sham illegitimate and brutal government backed by the “international community”, I ought to have an answer, he suggested.

Pax Christi International statement on HaitiRef.: AM.67.E.05

Source: Pax Christi International

ReliefWeb

Date: 30 Nov 2005

Brussels, 30 November 2005 - As the Haitian people, especially the residents of impoverished neighbourhoods continue to suffer under extreme violence and rampant poverty; as the political situation in Haiti continues to defy a just resolution; and as the human rights situation in Haiti remains catastrophic, Pax Christi International wishes to express clearly our solidarity with the people of Haiti.

Based on the observations of a Pax Christi International delegation to Haiti in July 2005; the guidance of Pax Christi International partners in Haiti; and Pax Christi International's own commitment to reconciliation and peace, we support the call of those sectors within Haitian society for clear steps toward a just, peaceful and reconciled society.

- We plead for all sectors of Haitian society to renounce publicly the use of violence for political or economic gain; for all armed groups in Haiti disarm immediately.
- We urge that the government of Haiti, in coordination with the international community, implement immediate measures consistent with international human rights standards to quell the violence and restore security in Port-au-Prince and throughout the country.
- We insist that an independent, thorough and transparent investigation into violent attacks on civilian communities and popular neighbourhoods, such as on July 6 and August 20, 2005, be completed promptly, with those groups and individuals accused being brought to justice.
- We recommend that the international human rights community conduct an independent, thorough and transparent investigation into accusations about the practice of politically motivated arrests and detentions in Haiti; that all political prisoners be released immediately or charged and brought to a fair trial for criminal activity about which there is credible evidence.
- We support national elections as a necessary step toward reconciliation, but insist that all Haitian citizens, including those living in popular and marginal neighbourhoods, be able to participate fully, freely and without fear. Political parties should make minimal commitments and agreements prior to the elections.
- We urge that independent sources of investigation and accurate information be strengthened to replace rumour, hearsay and biased reporting; that human rights investigators and journalists be protected from harm and arbitrary arrest.
- We plead that a process of national dialogue be initiated that will give voice to all sectors of Haitian society and identify steps toward a new, inclusive political consensus built on truth and reconciliation.
- As a step toward national reconciliation, we encourage competent and independent authorities to investigate and report publicly on events immediately surrounding the irregular departure of the

elected Haitian president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, as earlier was urged by some Caricom member countries.

At the same time, Pax Christi International commits to

- Accompany and support the people of Haiti as they move toward reconciliation, political peace and social justice;
- Support concrete peacebuilding and conflict resolution programs in Haiti;
- Denounce the abuse of power by national or international authorities (both in and outside of the country), as well as by local, violent individuals or organizations;
- Support the dissemination of accurate information about Haiti in Haiti and internationally;
- Accompany whatever national dialogue process is initiated, facilitating support, as needed, from Pax Christi International through its network of relations;
- Act in solidarity with Pax Christi International partners in Haiti.

Executive Committee Pax Christi International

AIDS therapy found viable in Haiti in spite of turmoil

The first large-scale AIDS drug study in Haiti showed significant increases in survival, in spite of a political upheaval typical of poorer nations.

By JACOB GOLDSTEIN

Miami Herald

December 1, 2005

Antiretroviral drugs have achieved spectacular success in prolonging the lives of Americans with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

But can they work equally well in a country with wretched poverty, social unrest, political upheaval and a dearth of doctors and medical clinics?

A new study out of Haiti says they can.

The study published today -- World AIDS Day -- in the New England Journal of Medicine found that the drugs tripled the survival rates of Haitians with AIDS. It highlights the promise of bringing AIDS therapies to the developing world, where the epidemic is exacting its harshest toll.

"It can be done almost anywhere in the world," said Dr. Jean William Pape, one of the study's authors. "We don't need the excuse of the political situation, social unrest. These things exist; they should not be an excuse for not delivering care."

The study of 1,004 patients was the first large-scale test of AIDS therapies in Haiti. The drugs boosted one-year survival rates from 30 percent in both adults and children to 87 percent in adults and 98 percent in children. The results were comparable to those in U.S. clinics.

Haiti, where annual per capita income hovers around \$400, is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Three percent of Haitians are infected with HIV, the highest rate outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

Skeptics have argued that the high cost of AIDS drugs, the complexity of administering them properly and the lack of medical infrastructure would make delivery of drugs unrealistic in poor countries, said Dr. Andre Vulcain, who coordinates AIDS care for the University of Miami's program in Cap-Haitien.

"For many years, the international community had a lot of reservations in promoting treatment for HIV/AIDS in developing countries," he said.

STANDARD THERAPY

Standard AIDS therapy, known as highly active antiretroviral therapy, or HAART, involves taking at least three drugs per day. In patients who fail to take the drugs consistently, the AIDS virus often mutates to become drug resistant. And in the developing world, AIDS patients must often be treated for a wide range of other problems, ranging from malnutrition to tuberculosis.

Despite those challenges, Haitians in the study fared well: The amount of virus in their blood decreased and their immune systems grew stronger at rates comparable to those of patients in the United States. "This study will allow the international community as well as the government of Haiti to advance with more confidence toward access to HIV care for infected people," Vulcain said.

The rate of HIV in Haiti has fallen in recent years. And since 2003, when the price of AIDS drugs fell dramatically in the developing world with the introduction of generics, the number of Haitians on antiretroviral therapy has increased steadily.

Of the estimated 200,000 HIV-positive Haitians, 20,000 probably need antiretroviral therapy, Pape said.

Five thousand are on therapy now, and the number could be twice that by the end of 2006.

The increase is being driven by millions of dollars in international aid, which funds the purchase of the drugs and several programs that train personnel to administer the drugs throughout the country.

Treating the patients in the study cost \$1,600 per patient per year, which includes, among other costs, \$600 for drugs, \$450 for personnel and \$300 for lab costs.

MORE THAN DRUGS

The study's authors emphasized the need to address poverty and political conditions as well as deliver drugs.

Some patients were given rice, beans and cooking oil along with their medicine. In the days leading up to the overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, the clinic sent drugs home with staff who lived in different parts of the city so that patients who could not travel to the clinic could pick up their pills at the homes of the clinic staff.

"It can be done this way," he said. "All you need is the will to do it."

Haiti drug trial is found to slow AIDS
Treatment works as well as in US, researchers say
By Stephen Smith
The Boston Globe
December 1, 2005

AIDS sufferers in Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, benefit just as much from potent drug cocktails as patients in the United States, researchers reported today. The finding has implications for controlling an epidemic infecting 40.3 million people across the globe.

A team of Haitian doctors and nurses working in the slums of Port-au-Prince amid floods, political coups, and economic embargoes, found that a year after 1,000 AIDS patients began taking the pills, 87 percent of adults and almost all the children were still alive. Without medication, barely one-third of the patients are expected to survive a year.

The report, prepared with doctors from Weill Medical College of Cornell University, provides the most powerful evidence so far that campaigns to provide medications to AIDS patients in Africa and the Caribbean can reverse the tide of deaths, specialists said.

The experience in Haiti, detailed in today's New England Journal of Medicine, also appears destined to amplify the clamor for less expensive generic medicines in the developing world. About 90 percent of the medications given to the Haitian patients were generic equivalents, a finding that physicians said should dissolve any lingering resistance by the US government to purchasing generics as part of its global AIDS strategy.

The Bush administration had resisted purchasing generic AIDS drugs, rejecting pleas that overseas authorities had validated their safety. But lately, the US government began buying generics for use abroad after the Food and Drug Administration assured their safety and effectiveness.

Powerful, three-drug AIDS treatments have been a standard feature in the medicine cabinets of US patients for a decade, spawning a steep decline in deaths. But health authorities had long wondered whether the pills would achieve similar results in the poorest corners of the world: Would patients in developing nations take the medicine? Would poverty negate their beneficial effects?

"We know we have a worldwide catastrophe on our hands, and there have been proposed reasons for why therapy wouldn't work as well in developing countries," said Dr. Calvin Cohen, research director for Community Research Initiative of New England, which does AIDS drug trials. "What this report confirms is that the hesitation to treat is not warranted for any medical reasons."

The Caribbean has disproportionately borne the burden of HIV, with 300,000 people now infected. No country in that region has been devastated more than Haiti.

For more than two decades, a band of Haitian healthcare workers collaborating with Cornell doctors treated AIDS patients, with few advanced medicines

That began to change in recent years as money for treatment began arriving from global sources.

The report released today, believed to be the most extensive published account of AIDS drug treatment in the developing world, chronicles the care of patients starting in March 2003.

Their life circumstances were dire: Dr. Daniel Fitzgerald, senior author of the report, said patients dwelled in cramped, tin-roofed shanties, many without running water or sewage service.

"When they first came into the clinic," said Fitzgerald, a Cornell specialist, "they were so sick and scared and thinking they were going to die."

The patients got medications, but they also received counseling, food, and vitamins. And they received care for other diseases, including tuberculosis.

The extent of services provided to the Port-au-Prince patients demonstrates the scope of resources needed, said Dr. Ken Mayer, a Boston AIDS specialist involved in treatment in India.

"This shows what is feasible in a very difficult environment," said Mayer, medical research director at Fenway Community Health.

. "But," he added, "it's not something you just add water and shake." Crucially, Mayer and other specialists said, the treatment documented in the report was provided by other Haitians. That is a model used most famously by Partners in Health, the Boston nonprofit group that works with doctors in rural Haiti.

"It has to be owned by the local community," said Dr. Mark Dybul, chief medical officer for the US global AIDS campaign. "The communities are saying, 'We may not be able to do something about the floods, we may not be able to do something about the political situation, but we can do something about AIDS.' "

The researchers tracked the health of 100 patients in detail. Tests showed that as levels of the AIDS virus in their blood dropped, their army of disease-fighting cells added new battalions. Those findings, researchers said, show that the patients were assiduous in taking their medications.

"There still is this sense that poor people don't have the organizational skills in their lives to follow complicated therapy," said Dr. Joia Mukherjee, medical director for Partners in Health. "This shows that, in fact, that's a prejudice that's just not true."

Stephen Smith can be reached at stsmith@globe.com.

Haiti says cuts HIV cases by half in 10 years

02 Dec 2005

Source: Reuters

Reuters AlertNet

By Joseph Guylor Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Dec 1 (Reuters) - Haiti has cut the prevalence of HIV infection by half in the past decade, largely through education programs, a leading health official in the western hemisphere's poorest nation said on Thursday.

Haiti General Hospital Director Dr. Albert Camille Archange said 3.1 percent of the population carried the human immunodeficiency virus, compared with 6 percent in 1995.

That still leaves it with the highest infection rate in the western hemisphere.

"We've made considerable progress as shown by the figures. We only have to continue to work hard to bring the HIV prevalence rate even lower," said Archange, who manages the largest public health center in the troubled Caribbean nation of 8 million people.

Haiti is one of 15 countries targeted for \$15 billion in AIDS relief assistance over five years under a U.S. emergency plan.

The United States donated about \$40 million this year to help Haiti implement programs aimed at educating Haitians, particularly the youth population, about the disease and providing medical care for people infected by the virus that causes AIDS.

The U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince said the United States would devote \$48 million in 2006 to support programs set up by the Haitian government and by local and international nongovernmental organizations to combat HIV/AIDS.

Haiti's public health minister, Dr. Josette Bijou, said several studies showed that more Haitians, particularly the young, were using condoms and had adopted more responsible sexual behavior.

**Where's the money in Haiti to sue President Aristide?
Congresswoman Waters demands to know how the coup government of Haiti is paying for its
lawsuit against President Aristide
Haiti Action Committee
December 1, 2005**

Washington, D.C. - Today, Rep. Maxine Waters (CA-35) sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, asking her to explain how the interim government of Haiti is financing the civil lawsuit it filed in a U.S. District Court against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and several co-defendants for allegedly stealing money from the Haitian treasury.

"I want to know how the interim government of Haiti is financing this lawsuit," said the Congresswoman, "and I want to know whether the interim government's allegations against President Aristide have been investigated sufficiently by the U.S. Government to justify the expenditures for this lawsuit."

President Aristide, the democratically-elected president of Haiti, was forced to leave Haiti in a coup d'etat on February 29, 2004. The interim government of Haiti is in the process of organizing elections, but these elections have been postponed several times. The elections are currently scheduled for January and February of 2006.

"The interim government of Haiti has promised to hold elections," said Congresswoman Waters. "Why can't these allegations be investigated by a government that has been freely elected by the people of Haiti?"

Congresswoman Waters' letter specifically asked Secretary of State Rice whether any U.S. government funds, such as grants from the Department of State, the Department of Justice, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or the National Endowment for Democracy, are being used to finance the lawsuit against President Aristide.

"Foreign aid is in demand for programs ranging from reconstruction in Afghanistan to AIDS in Africa," said the Congresswoman. "Meanwhile, the United States is facing record deficits, and Congress is considering major budget cuts in both domestic and international programs. We should not allow an un-elected government to use our foreign aid to pursue legal challenges to the elected government it replaced."

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release Contact: Mikael Moore (202) 225-2201

December 1, 2005

**Update on Fr. Jean-Juste
by Bill Quigley
Haiti Action Committee
December 1, 2005**

We wound our through the hills of Port-au-Prince up the road that Father Jean-Juste calls Gologotha to the Annexe Pententiaire Nationale, where he has been incarcerated the last several months. The Haitian National Police and U.N. soldiers from Senegal patrol the prison. Father's health condition continues to be serious and, in fact, has worsened since September, according to Dr. John Carroll who examined Father then and also today (12-01-05). Father is need of a complete medical work up and a surgical intervention.

As to his legal and ecclesiastical situations, he is waiting to hear from authorities on both. A judge in Haiti has his dossier and is reviewing the information. This "review" has been going on for months now. As there is no evidence that Father has committed a crime of any kind, we can only believe that he is being kept in jail until after the elections, which keep being postponed. They are currently scheduled for January 8.

Though Father is eager to leave jail, he hopes to hear from Rome first about his status as a priest. He was recently told by the bishops of Haiti that he could no longer officially act as a priest. "It would be a great hardship on me if I couldn't say Mass after I am released from prison," Father said. He has little support from Catholic priests and bishops in Haiti or abroad. "Many of the Haitian priests who would be supporters of mine are dead," he said. Bishop Gumbleton from Detroit has visited Father and advocates for Father Jean-Juste's release.

Father's spirits continue to be strong; no one can keep him from God.

The feeding program at his parish, St. Clare's is going strong, four days a week, feeding 750 people each time possibly the only meal they will eat that day. If you would like to donate to this absolutely vital cause, contact Margaret Trost at margarettrost@yahoo.com or visit the What If Foundation website at www.whatiffoundation.org.

Father appreciates the support he receives from people in Haiti and all over the world.

HAITI'S INTERIM PRIME MINISTER TO SPEAK AT OAS

Dec. 1 2005

Press Release - Organization of American States

The Interim Prime Minister of Haiti, Gérard Latortue, will address the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) this Friday to talk about the latest developments in his country and the elections scheduled for early next year.

OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza and the Chair of the OAS Permanent Council, Ambassador Izben Williams of Saint Kitts and Nevis, will also speak at the protocolary session.

The OAS has worked on a number of fronts to promote democracy and strengthen human rights in Haiti. In recent months, the OAS supported a massive voter registration drive conducted by Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), which registered more than 3.5 million citizens. Last week, Haitian authorities announced that the first round of presidential and legislative elections would take place on January 8.

Embassy Row
The Washington Times
By James Morrison
November 30, 2005

Hope for Haiti

The secretary-general of the Organization of American States concedes he is an optimist as he hopes for a free and fair election in Haiti, one of the poorest nations on Earth that is also wracked by political violence and gang warfare.

Jose Miguel Insulza this week said he is "cautiously optimistic" that Haiti's interim government with support from the United Nations can hold legitimate elections next year for president, the national legislature and local offices.

He noted that Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council set Jan. 8 for the first round of national elections and Feb. 15 for runoffs and March 5 for the local elections. The elections have already been rescheduled several times because of the continued violence that has spread throughout the country since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled into exile in February 2004.

The electoral council moved the elections to January after complaints that the previously scheduled date, Dec. 27, was too close to Christmas and the interim government was not adequately prepared.

"The OAS has supported the Haitian electoral process from its beginnings and can affirm [the electoral council's] concern is not only to hold elections but to hold good elections, which will enjoy the credibility of all actors in the process and ensure a good turnout of voters after the holiday period," Mr. Insulza said.

"Although the electoral process was slow to get off the ground, considerable progress has been made, which allows us to be cautiously optimistic about having organized, orderly and credible elections early next year."

Mr. Insulza praised the electoral council for a "massive voter-registration campaign" that signed up 3.5 million Haitian citizens, more than 80 percent of the total eligible voters. He said he was pleased that the council has recruited 36,000 poll workers.

He also expressed relief that interim President Boniface Alexandre and Prime Minister Gerard Latortue have "every intention of leaving office as soon as the electoral process is completed."

The International Crisis Group called on the United Nations to disarm and demobilize the Haitian paramilitary groups that are mostly divided between Aristide loyalists and those who deposed him.

The think tank, in its latest report on the country, called Haiti a "nation with a history of coups, unwieldy constitutions [and] failed elections."

It urged the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions against any warlord or politician who interferes with the elections.

"Given the many influential Haitians with dual citizenship in the U.S., France and Canada, the threat of that action might well encourage the kind of cooperation that has been lacking in the transition to date," the group said.

Elections to be held on time: Haitian PM
People's Daily Online
November 30, 2005

Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue said Wednesday in New York that his country's elections will be held as planned after three delays.

"Haiti will become a credible country," Latortue told diplomats of UN member states. "We have taken measures to ensure election cards are distributed in time."

Haiti's electoral commission last week decided to delay the elections as it needed more time. The commission set a new date of Jan. 8 for presidential and legislative votes, followed by a Feb. 15 runoff if needed. It is the third time that the elections had been delayed.

The elections will be the first since former President Jean-Bertrand was overthrown in a coup in February 2004.

Source: Xinhua

Interact in Haiti: Past, Present Members Continue Aid

By Pam Johnson

Shore Publishing, Madison, CT

12/1/2005

Guilford - In 1999, GHS junior Marie Bewley traveled to impoverished Jeremie, Haiti, to assist doctors and dentists doing their best to improve the lives of hundreds of rural poor. Since that first life-changing trip, Bewley has returned to Haiti as both a public health volunteer and professional.

On Nov. 23, the 2004 Yale grad (and new University of Michigan medical student) returned to Guilford to meet the group that made her first Haitian volunteer foray possible: GHS Rotary Interact.

For Interact advisor Bill Stableford, Bewley's visit with current club members added a link to the chain of support GHS Interact has been giving the Haitian Health Foundation for many years.

“While Marie was a high school student, she applied for the opportunity to travel to Haiti with [the foundation], and the Interact Club supported her...every year, Interact contributes money or food or clothes, which are shipped to the Haitian Health Foundation,” said Stableford.

During the 2004-2005 school year, GHS Interact purchased \$750 worth of vitamins and sent them to the Haitian Health Foundation, noted senior Matt Louis, GHS Interact co-president. GHS senior Michael Weston-Murphy is also club co-president.

Louis said club members were very interested in speaking with Bewley about her trips to Haiti and how her Interact membership enriched her life.

“We're where Marie was six years ago,” said Louis.

Bewley joined Interact as a sophomore and served as the club's vice president each year until her graduation in 2000. The trip she made to Haiti in her GHS junior year, sponsored with help from Interact, fulfilled a dream, said Bewley.

“While I was a high school student, I had this dream of becoming a physician and working with Doctors Without Borders,” she said.

Bewley called her first trip to Haiti “the crucial event of the rest of my life. It was one of my first experiences with medicine in the third world.”

Bewley's interaction with medical and health professionals working in Haiti was so positive that she knew she would return to help again. In September 2004, Bewley volunteered for a six-month stay, using her knowledge of Creole to work as a translator. In May 2005, Bewley was hired by AmeriCares and the Haitian Health Foundation to manage a new, soccer-based public health program. The program reaches out to 900 rural Haitian youths between the ages of 15 to 20. Bewley, who played soccer at GHS, will continue her work with the program through May 2006.

“There really is nothing for the youth in the area. They are overlooked; there are no after school programs. They're really excited about it. The feedback has been great,” she said.

The program created a soccer league with five teams from villages in mountainous regions of the southern tip of Haiti. Members of the league are taught good health habits, from the value of regular exercise to understanding the risks of sex.

“The way the program works is for students to play soccer and take a week-long sexuality course,” said Bewley.

Although the program has both male and female participants at present, Bewley said the goal is to create an all-female program in the near future, so that much-needed conversations on “women's and human rights issues” can be held.

“In Haiti, young women often have sex just so they can attend school,” she noted.

GHS Interact will continue to support the Haitian Health Foundation and its programs, including the soccer program, said Stableford. It will make a \$1,000 contribution this year to the Haitian Health Foundation.

At the University of Michigan medical school, Bewley said she will study public health and international medicine. She intends to then return to Haiti as a doctor, continuing along a humanitarian path begun six years ago, thanks to GHS Interact.

Haiti: Authorities urged to revive investigation on fourth anniversary of Brignol Lindor's murder

Fuente: © Reporters sans frontières

<http://www.rsf.org/>

December 1, 2005

[/noticias.info/](#) Reporters Without Borders today joins the French national assembly's France-Haiti Friendship Group in appealing again for justice to be done in the murder of a young radio journalist that has left Haitian society outraged and traumatised by its horrific nature and by the four ensuing years of unexplained impunity and judicial paralysis.

Almost exactly four years ago today, on 3 December 2001, Brignol Lindor of Radio Echo 2000 was stoned and hacked to death in the southern town of Petit-Goâve by some 10 members of Domi Nan Bwa, a local grass-roots organisation that supported then President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Reporters Without Borders and the France-Haiti Friendship Group would like to recapitulate the following points, for the most part based on a report which the Citizens Committee for the Implementation of Justice (CCAJ) handed in to the justice ministry in July of last year.

Four days before Lindor's murder, a press conference was held in Petit-Goâve on 29 November 2001 by several local figures linked to Aristide's party, Fanmi Lavalas, including Petit-Goâve mayor Emmanuel Antoine and his deputy, Bony Dumay, who launched into a violent verbal attack on the opposition Democratic Convergence coalition and Lindor, considered to be one of its allies. Another meeting was held on 2 December, the eve of his murder, this time between municipal officials and members of Domi Nan Bwa.

One of Domi Nan Bwa's chiefs, Joseph Céus Duverger, was attacked the next morning by presumed Democratic Convergence supporters. This incident was used as a pretext for the targeted reprisal against Lindor later in the day. Evidence of this comes from the fact that around 10 Domi Nan Bwa members were on the point of executing Democratic Convergence member Love Augustin at his home but, when Lindor arrived on the scene, they let him go and seized Lindor.

Despite all these facts, the indictment issued by judge Fritzner Duclair on 16 September 2002 failed to bring charges against any of the presumed instigators of Lindor's murder. No Petit-Goâve municipal officials were ever questioned or detained. Charges were brought against 10 Domi Nan Bwa members who took part in the murder but, according to the Lindor family lawyer, none of them was ever detained. One of the presumed killers, Joubert Saint-Just, was detained by the inhabitants of nearby Miragoâne on 30 March 2005 and handed over to the police, but that was for an unrelated reason.

The case is now held up in the supreme court, to which the Lindor family referred its request to be granted civil party status in the case on 21 April 2003 after being turned down by the appeal court. More than two years later, the supreme court still has not issued a ruling, although it should have done so within two months. Does this incredible delay indicate a desire to bury the case for good? We cannot resign ourselves to this hypothesis. At moment when the population of Petit-Goâve is getting ready to pay homage to Lindor and inaugurate a square bearing his name, we appeal to the Haitian authorities to relaunch judicial proceedings in this case as quickly as possible. This should be done so

that the truth can be known and remembered, and it should be done in tandem with the electoral process that will soon result in the installation of a new democratic government.

Jean-Louis Bernard, deputy in the national assembly and vice-president of the assembly's France-Haiti Friendship Group

Christian Paul, deputy and member of the France-Haiti Friendship Group

Robert Ménard, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders

United Nations Welcomes Haiti's Setting New Dates for Elections
Optimism growing for peaceful elections, U.N. peacekeeping mission says
By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer
US State Dept.
29 November 2005

Washington -- The United Nations has joined other members of the international community in expressing optimism that Haiti will hold free, fair and peaceful elections to choose the country's next president and national legislature.

In a November 28 statement, the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti, known by the acronym MINUSTAH, welcomed official new dates set by the country's Provisional Electoral Council for a first round of presidential and legislative elections on January 8, 2006, and a second round of run-off elections on February 15, 2006. MINUSTAH said previous informal proposals for earlier dates for the elections had "failed to take into account technical requirements" for staging the vote.

MINUSTAH said the new dates came after a "thorough analysis" by the electoral council and its international partners "of all the elements involved in the electoral process, from distributing voter cards to providing security.

Haiti's transitional government had set December 27 for the elections and February 7, 2006, for the inauguration of a newly elected president. MINUSTAH said that a delay in transferring power to a new president and legislature due to the new election schedule "should not be seen as an obstacle to the opening of a new democratic phase in the country's history."

The Organization of American States (OAS), expressing "cautious optimism" about the setting of new dates for Haiti's presidential and legislative elections, said more than 3.5 million Haitian citizens had registered to vote. That number represents over 80 percent of Haiti's total eligible voter population.

OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza said in a November 27 statement that although the electoral process in Haiti was "slow to get off the ground, considerable progress has been made, which allows us to be cautiously optimistic about having organized, orderly and credible elections early in the new year." (See related article.)

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a report, released November 14, that prospects for holding safe and fair elections in Haiti have improved as all key political parties have submitted their candidates to the country's electoral council.

The IMF said the better climate for holding safe elections in Haiti is reflected in the country's improved political and security situation. MINUSTAH and the Haitian national police have succeeded in bringing down violent crime in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince and reducing an atmosphere of insecurity, the IMF said. (See related article.)

Patrick Duddy, the U.S. State Department's deputy assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, has said the voter registration process for Haiti's elections is the "most comprehensive, transparent, and fraud-free ever conducted" in the history of the Caribbean nation.

Speaking at an October 20-21 international donors' conference for Haiti in Brussels, Belgium, Duddy said that the 3.5 million Haitians who have registered to vote set the stage for "broad participation" in the elections. Duddy led the U.S. delegation to the conference in Brussels. (See related article.)

The United States is providing \$15 million to support Haiti's upcoming elections; in 2004, it provided \$8.7 million to support Haiti's electoral process. (See related article.)

For more information on U.S. policy toward the country, see [Haiti](#).

Additional information on the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti is available on MINUSTAH's Web site.

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

UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti welcomes new dates for elections
UN News Centre
28 November 2005 –

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti has welcomed the official new dates set by the Caribbean country's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) for elections, saying informal proposals for previous dates had failed to take into account the technical requirements.

The Council has set 8 January for presidential and legislative elections and 15 February for run-off elections. The Transitional Government had previously set 27 December for the elections and 7 February for the inauguration of the newly elected President.

The new dates have come "after a thorough analysis – by the CEP and its international partners – of all the elements involved in the electoral process, from the distribution of the electoral cards to the security for the election dates," the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) said over the weekend.

"It is true that these dates for the first and second round may pose difficulty for the transfer of power to take place on 7 February. However, a delay of 10 days should not be seen as an obstacle to the opening of a new democratic phase in the country's history."

Preparations for a free, fair, open and democratic electoral process are set and efforts are being made to make sure that the vote takes place in a peaceful context, it said.

MINUSTAH previously said that up to last Wednesday 48 senior trainers had been deployed in the provinces and would train 1,325 electoral agents and 809 polling station supervisors once they had been identified. The electoral agents, in turn, would train the 37,000 polling station personnel.

The distribution of electoral cards began last Tuesday, MINUSTAH said.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General in Haiti, Ambassador Juan Gabriel Valdes, said he was encouraged that the population, by registering to vote in such large numbers, proved once again a firm desire to live in a democratic and peaceful country.

Haiti: New Attacks on Cite Soleil Residents by UN Troops
Haiti Action Committee
Nov. 28, 2005

Urgent Action Alert: The Haiti Action Committee has received eyewitness reports over the past four days from Cite Soleil that UN troops have launched a new round of attacks on the residents there, killing at least three civilians and gravely wounding others. According to the preliminary reports:

On Wednesday, November 23rd, UN troops killed one man who was a maker of kitchen utensils when they fired into his shop near his home; 5 reported wounded.

Over the weekend, UN troops led by Jordanian soldiers killed two more Cite Soleil residents, husband and wife, and wounded 8 people. More people could have been killed and wounded further investigation is required.

Residents in Cite Soleil are once again trapped and under siege. This could be a massacre that is in the making as we send out this alert. Unfortunately, the UN troops have already demonstrated on July 6th, 2005, and again on other occasions that they will shoot and kill men, women and children in their homes, in their beds, and as they go about their daily chores. Now is the time to act -- to let them know the world is watching and demands an end to the killings!

Contact the following officials and demand that they intervene to stop the siege on the residents of Cite Soleil:

* Craig G. Mokhiber

Deputy Director, NY Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ph: 917-367-5208 mokhiber@un.org

* Juan Gabriel Valdes

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Haiti

Phone: 011-509-244-9650 or 9660 Fax 011-509 244 3512

* Thierry Fagart

Human Rights Chief, UN Mission in Haiti

Ph: 011-509-510-3183 or 3185 - ext. 6360 fagart@un.org

* US Embassy in Haiti Telephones: 011-509-223-4711...222-0200 or 0354...Fax: 011-509-223-1641 or 9038 Email to Dana Banks, Human Rights Officer: BanksD@state.gov

OVER THE WEEKEND OR AT NIGHT -- Call 011-509-222-0200 and press "0" for emergency.

***Be sure to contact your local media, and ask that they cover these atrocities.

Please check www.haitiaction.net for updates on what is happening.

Politics at the point of a pistol in Haiti

By Mark L. Schneider,

MARK L. SCHNEIDER is senior vice president of the International Crisis Group.

Los Angeles Times

November 29, 2005

BEFORE THEY WOULD take me out to watch people registering to vote in Haiti's largest shantytown, my United Nations escorts insisted that I put on a bulletproof vest and helmet and climb into an armored personnel carrier. As we rumbled through the pothole-filled streets of Cité Soleil, I thought all the security seemed a little melodramatic.

"Do we really need this?" I asked the Brazilian peacekeepers who were taking me around. I had traveled through the same poverty-stricken neighborhoods a dozen years earlier without any thought of armed escorts. "Only if you don't want to be kidnapped," was the response.

With an average of two kidnappings a day, they said, it was not safe to travel unprotected. A few minutes later, the staccato sounds of gunfire brought home the reality that too many people in Haiti still use guns to settle political disputes.

Haiti is on the verge of holding its first elections since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced to flee into African exile in 2004. But the country is not ready. After putting the elections off twice, the transitional prime minister, Gerard Latortue, recently announced that the first round of presidential and parliamentary elections would be held two days after Christmas, and the second round a month later so that a new government could take office on Feb. 7, as required by Haiti's Constitution.

But the new schedule had not even been confirmed by the provisional elections council before a new date of Jan. 8 was announced.

Why are the elections being repeatedly delayed? The problems begin with all the guns in circulation and with the clear threat to candidates who may campaign in the wrong towns or neighborhoods. In many rural areas, ex-members of Haiti's dissolved military and other rebels who helped force Aristide out remain forces of intimidation. In the urban areas, the gangs that backed Aristide are at least as much of the problem.

After Aristide fled, the U.N. authorized a largely U.S., French and Canadian multinational force to restore order, which quickly ended any rebel ideas of marching into Port-au-Prince to take power. Unfortunately, the multinational force turned over security to U.N. peacekeepers without having disarmed or demobilized any of those groups.

That initial failure has been at the core of the inability to end the violence from political and organized criminal elements over the last 18 months. Only two weeks ago in Cité Militaire, another Port-au-Prince neighborhood, the U.N. peacekeeping force found itself in an eight-hour gun battle before it subdued assailants. Until the U.N. uses every inch of its Security Council mandate — acting aggressively to demobilize the gangs and to clean out killers within the Haitian National Police — politics in Haiti will be severely hindered. And whatever government takes office next will have less chance to succeed.

When I saw U.N. peacekeepers deployed around the headquarters of the newly appointed police chief, Mario Andrésol, and was told that he could not be sure of the loyalty of his own officers, it was clear that security for the average Haitian remains a distant goal.

But security is only one of the critical pieces that must be in place before elections can go forward. Haiti's election committee and the government barely managed to agree on the qualified presidential candidates two weeks ago. Haiti's voters need time to learn who the candidates are and what they stand for. Right now, not many voters know where they will vote, much less who they will vote for. The 809 voting centers have only just been identified, and most of the 40,000 election workers still need to be hired and trained.

When they do vote, the 3.5 million Haitians who have registered may not have the computerized identity cards they were promised because of the election committee's tardy actions and because of delays in production and delivery in a country where roads are often not maintained or are nonexistent. Without cards, voters can only hope they are not hassled at the voting booth.

For the election to be credible — and many of Haiti's elections have not been — independent, neutral international observers are essential. The U.S., the European Union, Japan and Canada — which are funding the election — should be urging the transitional government to put off the first round until late January, the second round until late February (including local elections) and the inauguration of a new president and parliament to early March. At least give Haiti a decent chance for a credible election.

Napoleon carried out 'ethnic cleansing' in Haiti, says French historian
Caribbean Net News
Wednesday, November 30, 2005

PARIS, France (AFP): On the French Caribbean island colony of Haiti, then known as Saint Domingue, a French author claims that Napoleon's troops launched a "vast operation of ethnic cleansing" in 1802, to stamp out a slave revolt.

"One hundred and forty years before the Holocaust, a dictator, hoping to rule the world, did not hesitate to crush part of humanity under his boot," Claude Ribbe wrote in "The Crime of Napoleon", which goes on sale Thursday.

Ribbe has taken a rare shot at one of the country's biggest heroes by casting Napoleon Bonaparte as a genocidal dictator and inspiration for Adolf Hitler in his incendiary new book.

As France prepares on Friday to mark the bicentenary of the Battle of Austerlitz -- considered the emperor's military masterpiece -- Ribbe's book lists a string of atrocities allegedly carried out under his rule.

A black academic who sits on a government panel on human rights, Ribbe accuses the emperor of "exterminating" part of the black population of France's colonial islands and of introducing a system of racial segregation.

Relying on written accounts from some officers in the Napoleonic armies, Ribbe writes that French troops used sulphur dioxide to suffocate slaves held in ships' holds and conducted wide-scale killings.

The troops were under orders to kill all blacks aged over 12, he writes.

"It is no surprise that he (Napoleon) served as a model for Mussolini, who wrote a play in his glory, or to Hitler, who saluted him with a 'Heil Napoleon' at the Invalides (in Paris) on June 28, 1940," writes the historian.

"All the facts contained (in the book) are known to historians, but are willfully overlooked," Ribbe charges in his introduction.

Joined by a number of associations from France's overseas territories, Ribbe has been campaigning to bring such episodes to public attention, as France prepares to pay tribute to its legendary emperor.

The groups have called for a march on Saturday in protest at the emperor's "glorification" and the "historical revisionism" surrounding his rule.

"We cannot allow, in a supposedly law-abiding country, for history to be steered as it was done under the Soviet Union," they said in a joint statement.

MAN'S UGLY TRUTHS MADE KNOWN:

Nature can still win

And the veneer of civility is very, very thin.

By ROBERT P. KING

Palm Beach Post

Thursday, December 01, 2005

We were supposed to be immune.

Mass deaths from hurricanes? Bodies lying for days in the streets? Paramedics ducking gunfire? Americans huddling on their roofs, waiting for rescue while bureaucrats trade blame?

No way this could happen in the United States.

After all, we're the world's Big Kahuna.

We're not some sad-sack Third-World country like Haiti, where Hurricane Jeanne killed 3,000 people when it was a mere tropical storm.

Sure, these things used to happen to us — the 2,500-plus people who drowned in Belle Glade in the 1928 hurricane, for example. But we've made so much progress since then that Jim Lushine, a top meteorologist at the National Weather Service office near Miami, felt comfortable telling The Palm Beach Post on Aug. 22: "Odds are extremely unlikely that we'll have a hurricane death toll like that again."

Katrina hit New Orleans a week later.

All the Doppler radar in our high-tech universe could not have picked up what Hurricane Katrina revealed to be true: It can happen here.

Katrina stripped away the veneer of the advanced civilization that we pretend will insulate us.

In social and economic ways, Katrina was the perfect storm. Its Category 4 winds peeled away something far worse: An ugly underbelly of poverty, denial, government cronyism and flat-out incompetence - in spite of amazingly accurate forecasts from the National Hurricane Center.

The lesson didn't immediately set in. Two days after Katrina made landfall, MSNBC talking head Chris Matthews was still in full denial, telling his audience on his show, Hardball: "We are going to see what a superpower was built to do, save its people."

That we did.

The next night, CNN's Anderson Cooper was in Mississippi, chewing out a U.S. senator: "There was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats!"

The rest of it has already become legend: "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job." The schoolbuses left to flood because no local leader thought to use them to evacuate the poor. The New Orleans cops who deserted their posts or faced accusations they joined in the looting.

In the end, it was man's own bad behavior that spelled doom.

As disaster experts long have warned, mass deaths in hurricanes often occur for man-made reasons, not just from a roll of nature's dice.

Take Haiti. Last year, Jeanne was just a tropical storm when it unleashed the floods and mudslides that killed 3,000 people, many in the coastal city of Gonaives.

Most of those people died because for centuries Haitians and French colonialists had stripped the forests from the mountains, leaving the hillsides vulnerable to erosion. Canals silted, drains were clogged with debris, and as The Washington Post reported later: "When the floods came, the police in Gonaives fled, and no one was left to start the rescue effort."

In March, eight long months ago, National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield told an audience of storm experts that Haiti's death toll from Jeanne "is about the land use, the building codes, the communication and the education — a lot of the things that we've always taken for granted in our country."

Where was Mayfield speaking that spring day? In New Orleans.

Criticizes President Fernandez's stance on Haiti
Dominican Today, DR
November 28, 2005

Santo Domingo.- Haiti's prime minister Gerard Latortue openly criticized Leonel Fernandez for his foreign relations policy toward Haiti, and expressed disappointment, saying that he had believed that with Dominican Republic's current head of state, the golden age of Dominican-Haitian relations would ensue.

Meanwhile, ex-president Rene Preval advocated for improved relations between both neighboring countries that of late have been perturbed on account of clandestine Haitian migration and repatriation processes.

Latortue, while expressing his fondness for this country, notwithstanding affirmed that Dominican-Haitian relations are prone to hold surprises, in an allusion to the Dominican president's policy.

The Haitian prime minister and ex-presidents Preval and Leslie Manigat were interviewed by the Executive's press director Rafael Nuñez, who traveled last Friday to Haiti, to meet with personalities in Haiti's political sphere.

Latortue told Nuñez that he would prefer not to discuss future relations with the Dominican Republic, given that his great expectations that "the presidential term of Leonel Fernandez, would be a golden era in Haitian-Dominican Republic relations, unfortunately turned out not to be the case."

Election Fever In Haiti
The Bahama Journal
November 21, 2005

Election fever is not only in the air in The Bahamas. It is also being felt in Haiti. The similarity between the two countries ends right there. Whereas in The Bahamas election time brings with it a sense of the circus coming to town, carnival time and money to be made by many, the situation in Haiti is totally different. In Haiti, election fever brings with it promises fulfilled of gunfire and sudden death for many.

In a matter of no more than six weeks, terrified, desperate, hungry Haitian voters will choose from among about 35 candidates for president and hundreds of candidates for 129 legislative seats.

Contrast this with The Bahamas where despite the hype, hoop-la and plain old baloney that sometimes shadow elections in The Bahamas, they are widely seen as being both fair and free.

Not so in the Republic of Haiti where fraudulent elections are the norm.

Even now, there are observers in the United States, South Africa, and Haiti and around the world who are absolutely convinced that the elections planned by the U.S. and its allies for Haiti in the fall is a fiasco that is becoming impossible to conceal.

Today Bahamians who are 'in the know' so to speak, know that they have an interest in understanding and knowing what is happening in Haiti. This is so because of the large role Haitians and Bahamians of Haitian extraction play in the political economy of The Bahamas.

Since we do count ourselves as being first among equals in that mightily decisive band of those in the know, we turn our attention to some of the issues surrounding upcoming elections in Haiti.

Haiti's prospects and those of some of its neighbors will be decisively affected by whatever happens in that troubled land, thus their concern and ours about these elections.

Information reaching us from Haiti suggest that the Haitian elections will remain shadowed in intrigue no matter how many people go out to vote in that nation's political contests.

We hear say that Rene Preval, former president and Aristide supporter is getting a tremendous amount of support from people who would have normally voted for Jean Bertrand Aristide and his Lavalas grouping.

We note –albeit in passing- that on Thursday, November 3, 2005, we learned about the basis and class origin of some of Preval's supporters.

Reports suggest that demonstrators marched out of two Haitian slums and across the capital Thursday in support of former President Rene Preval's bid to regain the presidency in elections scheduled for next month.

We know that Preval, who was president from 1995 to 2000 and is a one-time ally of ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is running as an independent without the backing of Aristide's party, Lavalas.

News reports coming out of Haiti note that marchers chanted Preval's name and called for the release of political prisoners and the return from exile of Aristide, who was forced out of the country in February 2004 after a violent rebellion.

The elections, which have been postponed twice as Haiti struggles to organize the balloting, are tentatively scheduled for mid-December. The country will choose a new president and legislators to replace the interim government imposed following Aristide's ouster.

And we now hear say that the elections have been postponed again.

Late breaking news is being made by interim Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue who announced in an interview this Thursday past with The Associated Press that Haiti's first elections since the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide have been postponed for the third time this year.

As announced, the first round of the legislative and presidential vote will be Dec. 27 followed by a runoff Jan. 31. The new date, we are told, is "firm and final."

As he boasted, "We took our time to fix a date, but now we are fully confident we will achieve good elections," Latortue said. "All the problems have been anticipated, and we have a solution for each of them."

We also take note of the fact that Haiti's constitution requires the new government to take control Feb. 7, but the country has struggled to organize the election because of a lack of equipment and trained poll workers, crumbling infrastructure, and violence that has made it difficult to register voters.

In the ultimate analysis, then, there is very little reason for us to be optimistic about what will happen in Haiti on the day after the elections, or for that matter what will happen the night before. Haiti will remain cocooned in the chaos of choices made for it by powerful people in France, Canada and the United States of America.

Pioneer of the trade union struggle in Haiti
Scoop, NZ
Tuesday, 29 November 2005

Press Release: International Confederation Of Free Trade Unions

Spotlight interview: Yannick Etienne (A pioneer of the trade union struggle in Haiti)

"The workers' demands have been constantly backed by international solidarity"

Brussels, 28 November 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): A pioneer of the trade union struggle in Haiti, Yannick explains how the complex strategy combining local action and international mobilisation was organised. As one of the key players in the birth of Haiti's first collective bargaining agreement, she charts the lines of action which need to be taken in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to tackle the Caribbean manufacturing giant, Grupo M.

A collective agreement in a garment export processing zone in Haiti?

Until recently, the very notion would have been considered a vain fancy. Today, the Haitian workers making jeans for Levi Strauss and T-shirts for Sara Lee are on the verge of making it a reality. After two years of trade union repression, these Haitian workers have managed to earn greater respect, partly thanks to international solidarity campaigns in which the labour movement played an active role. Caution, however, remains warranted, as the collective bargaining process initiated in September is far from over.

Interview with Yannick Etienne, spokeswoman of the workers' federation, Premier Mai - Batay Ouvriye (E.S.P.M. BO), to which the local union Sendika Ouvriye Kodevi Wanament (SOKOWA) is affiliated. Over the last two years, the CODEVI EPZ factory workers have had to cope with a long succession of anti-union practices and demeaning treatment: forced overtime, mass dismissals targeting unionised workers, armed intimidation and even beatings. Have you seen any improvements in the working conditions since the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the management in February 2005?

The industrial disputes are undoubtedly being better managed. A week after the memorandum was signed, we secured the reinstatement of the trade union leaders. And over the last few months, virtually all of the dismissed workers have gradually regained their posts. There are just a few still waiting. A joint committee has also been set up, comprising three members of the management and three union members. But the principal breakthrough the workers tell us they have achieved is the management's respect. Previously, no exchanges or discussions were possible. Now, as soon as any kind of conflict arises, the workers call on the trade union representative to assist them. CODEVI's managers are making an effort not only to respect the memorandum of understanding, but also the right to freedom of association. Before, security officers - Dominican soldiers - would intervene in the disputes, maltreating Haitian workers on Haitian soil. It was unacceptable. Now CODEVI employs Haitian security officers. We do not see Dominican soldiers inside the factory anymore... although we know they are still not far away. In spite of these gains, we are still working hard to resolve several problems that still remain: the heat in the factories, access to drinking water, difficult access to the zone owing to the state of the road, and, above all, the wages. The workers are constantly having to turn out more work, but the salaries are not following suit. The memorandum of understanding between the

management and the union did not fall from the sky. What are the key factors that contributed to the opening of social dialogue? Local mobilisation? International pressure on Grupo M, which owns the zone? Firstly, the workers continued to mobilise in spite of all the difficulties. They came to the meetings, took part, discussed and made decisions. All the violations committed were rigorously documented, which gave us a very solid case. Secondly, CODEVI's managers were amazed at the international support for the workers. They never expected that. They never thought that anyone would be interested in this lost corner of Haiti. Thirdly, they made very serious cultural errors, not being familiar with Haitian culture and the historic problems between the two countries [Haiti and Dominican Republic]. Moreover, they were on territory that is highly sensitive to Dominco-Haitian tensions. The management of CODEVI was not prepared for dealing with all that. They had to do something to calm things down. "What was amazing was the massive mailing campaign. Letters of support flooded in from everywhere, especially the United States and Europe. CODEVI's managers didn't know what to do." What shape did international solidarity take during the months of struggle when the workers were out of work? A difficult balance had to be struck between applying sufficient pressure to break the deadlock but not too much, to ensure that CODEVI's clients would not cancel their orders... Absolutely. What was amazing was the massive mailing campaign. Letters of support flooded in from everywhere, especially the United States and Europe. CODEVI's managers didn't know what to do. They complained that they were still receiving letters even though the negotiations had started. Honestly, mailing campaigns are really very important. At least three European countries, Belgium, France and the UK, contribute to it through organisations such as the Clean Clothes Campaign (Belgium), Réseau-Solidarité (France) and the Haiti Support Group (United Kingdom). In the United States, organisations from the labour movement such as the Solidarity Center and the Workers' Rights Consortium were in contact with the companies like Levi's and exerted important pressure on the World Bank, which is financing the project, to prevent orders from being withdrawn. The support of North America students associations such as United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and the Haitian community abroad should also be mentioned.

-To download the Trade Union World Briefing "EPZs in Haiti and the Dominican Republic: Taking on Grupo M" (8 pages): [Union Briefing](#)

- To view the video portrait entitled "Georges' Hope", the account of a worker who sews the hems of Levi jeans for just 15 euros a week and his appeal to consumers around the world: [video portrait](#)

Haiti's Latortue wants UNIDO field office in the Caribbean

Monday 28 November 2005

by Charles Arthur

AlterPresse, Haiti

Vienna, 28 nov. 05 [AlterPresse] --- Haiti's interim prime minister, Gérard Latortue, today called on the UNIDO leadership to establish an office in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, "from where it can cover the whole Caribbean region".

Referring to UNIDO's past involvement in the Caribbean region, Latortue insisted that things must change. "The new UNIDO office in the Caribbean cannot be as it was in the past, when just one officer spent all his time traveling to five or six Caribbean islands, and was left with no time to do anything. The new office must be properly worked out."

Latortue also hailed the appointment of Kandeh Yumkella as the new Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

Addressing the opening session of the Eleventh UNIDO general conference in Vienna, Latortue said, "For a long time, I have hoped that the head of UNIDO would be a highly-qualified candidate from sub-Saharan Africa. Today, I am happy to see this dream realized with the designation of Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, a high-level professional who has studied and taught at the top US universities."

Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, from Sierra Leone, will be officially appointed the new Director-General of UNIDO on 2 December. He takes over from the current Director-General, the Argentinean, Carlos Magariños, who has lead UNIDO since 1997.

Latortue, who himself worked for UNIDO for twenty-two years (1972-1994), told the opening plenary session of the UNIDO conference, "I am happy to see a black African director". He appealed to the conference to give all possible support to Dr Yumkella and his team.

Latortue, who steps down as interim prime minister of Haiti in February 2006, said he believed that "UNIDO can play a leading role in the fight against poverty and help ensure wealth creation."

UNIDO helps developing countries and countries with economies in transition in their fight against marginalization in today's globalized world. It mobilizes knowledge, skills, information, and technology to promote productive employment, a competitive economy and a sound environment.

It was set up in 1966, and became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1985. As part of the United Nations, UNIDO has responsibility for promoting industrialization throughout the developing world. Its headquarters are in Vienna, Austria, and it is represented in 35 developing countries.

Latortue said UNIDO could help create wealth in developing countries by "creating jobs so that men and women don't have to emigrate," by utilizing natural resources in a responsible manner, by introducing norms and standards to assure the competitiveness of products made in the South, and by utilizing scientific and technological advances.

He added that all of the above "could only be achieved if we go beyond the normal framework. We need integrated programs and projects together with institutions such as the ILO (International Labor Organization), the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), and UNESCO." [ca apr 28/11/05 22:20

PS :

"Eye on the Caribbean" is realized by Charles Arthur, and is provided in a partnership between the Haiti Support Group and AlterPresse as a contribution to Haiti's greater integration within the Caribbean region.

U.N. official slams Haitian courts
CNN.com
Tuesday, November 29, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- A U.N. human rights official criticized Haiti's justice system for jailing hundreds of people without charge, including an activist priest he compared to a political prisoner.

Louis Joinet's comments Monday marked one of the strongest recent condemnations of Haiti's inefficient and corruption-prone justice system from a member of the international community.

The exact size of Haiti's prison population isn't known, but the overcrowded National Penitentiary in the capital of Port-au-Prince holds more than 1,700 inmates, only a few dozen of whom have been charged.

"If the Haitian judiciary does not have the means to try the people it detains, it should be compelled to release them," Joinet, the Haiti expert of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, told The Associated Press.

Joinet was speaking following a two-week visit to assess human rights conditions in the impoverished Caribbean nation of 8 million. He is scheduled to present his findings to the United Nations in April.

Joinet also condemned the jailing of several allies of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and popular Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste.

Neptune has spent more than a year in jail on accusations of masterminding the killings of political opponents. Jean-Juste has been jailed since July for alleged involvement in the abduction and slaying of a well-known Haitian journalist. Both men deny the charges.

Joinet said the charges against Jean-Juste "seem quite weak" and questioned the motives for detaining the priest, who had been seen by some as a potential presidential contender in upcoming elections.

"When a prisoner remains in jail longer than what the law allows, he becomes a political prisoner. This seems to be the case for Jean-Juste," said Joinet.

Haitian officials weren't immediately available for comment.

Joinet's visit comes as Haiti's interim government and the United Nations struggle to prepare for national elections scheduled for early next year, the first polls since Aristide fled into exile amid a February 2004 revolt.

The elections have been pushed back several times because of logistical snags and violence blamed on street gangs.

Haiti's Political Prisoners

World Human Rights Leaders Call for Freedom for Pere Jean-Juste and Yvon Neptune

By BILL QUIGLEY

Counterpunch

November 29, 2005

World Human Rights Leaders Call for Freedom for Pere Jean-Juste, Yvon Neptune and Other Haitian Political Prisoners

By Bill Quigley, Loyola University New Orleans School of Law. Bill is a volunteer lawyer for Pere Jean-Juste with the Institute for Justice and Democracy, www.ijdh.org assisting Mario Joseph of the Bureau des Advocats Internationaux. Bill can be reached at Quigley@loyno.edu

What do the UN Commission on Human Rights, Irish members of Parliament, and International Human Rights Lawyers in Bulgaria have in common? They have all recently called for the immediate release of political prisoners in Haiti, specifically for the release of Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste and Yvon Neptune.

Louis Joinet, the Haiti expert for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, investigated the human rights situation in Haiti over the past two weeks. Joinet condemned the jailing of Pere Gerard Jean-Juste and Yvon Neptune, former Prime Minister of Haiti.

Fr. Jean-Juste, often called the Martin Luther King of Haiti, was beaten by a mob in church and arrested by the police while participating in a funeral on July 21, 2005. He was immediately declared a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International and has been held in jail without formal charges ever since. Yvon Neptune, who was Prime Minister of Haiti, has been in jail since May 2004 also without trial. No trials are planned for either prisoner, or any of the other hundreds of political prisoners jailed in Haiti.

Joinet told the Associated Press the charges against Jean-Juste "seem quite weak" and questioned the motives for detaining the priest, who had been seen by some as a potential presidential contender in upcoming elections. "When a prisoner remains in jail longer than what the law allows, he becomes a political prisoner. This seems to be the case for Jean-Juste," said Joinet. "If the Haitian judiciary does not have the means to try the people it detains, it should be compelled to release them" he concluded.

The UN call for the release of Haiti's political prisoners follows two other international demands for their freedom.

The International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), meeting in Bulgaria recently in early November, called for freedom for all political prisoners in Haiti and singled out the case of Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste for special mention.

Later in November, members of the Irish Parliament called for the release of Fr. Jean-Juste, Yvon Neptune and all political prisoners. Parliamentarians of Sinn Fein, the Green Party, and Independents also called for full and free elections in Haiti.

The unelected powers of Haiti have labeled Fr. Jean-Juste "the most dangerous man in Haiti for his unrelenting calls for freedom for prisoners, his feeding of the poor, and his insistence on the restoration of democracy.

Meanwhile, elections in Haiti have been postponed yet again as criticisms of the fairness of the electoral process mount.

Supporters of real democratic elections criticize an election process which refuses to free hundreds of supporters of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, like Pere Jean-Juste and Yvon Neptune, who are jailed without charges or prospects of trial.

Supporters of real democratic elections note that even those who are willing to vote face real problems. Unelected Haitian authorities have reduced the number of polling places from over 4000 to only few hundred, with fewest in the poorer neighborhoods. Compare Los Angeles, a city with slightly larger population condensed in smaller geography, which has over 4400 polling places. How would the people of Los Angeles vote if their polling places were reduced by 90% and mostly located in high income areas?

Lethal mass violence by police and paramilitary groups continue to plague the poor neighborhoods of Port au Prince. UN troops have been accused of shielding police from accountability and even participating directly in violence in poor neighborhoods.

The people of Haiti deserve democracy as much as anyone else. Elections in this atmosphere will likely be viewed more as selections than elections. As Fr. Jean-Juste said frequently before he was jailed: "Free political prisoners, stop human rights abuses, and restore democracy. "

Irish leaders said in their statement all political prisoners must be released and all political exiles must be allowed to return in order to participate in Haitian elections. Everyone, not just the rich, must be given an equal opportunity to vote and have their vote counted in a fair and transparent manner. Most of all, the violent repression directed at the poor must stop. Elections should not be held unless and until these conditions are met.

Free political prisoners. Stop human rights abuses against the poor. Restore democracy. It is difficult to imagine legitimate free democratic elections otherwise.

Bill Quigley is a professor at the Loyola University-New Orleans School of Law. He is a volunteer lawyer for Pere Jean-Juste with the Institute for Justice and Democracy, www.ijdh.org assisting Mario Joseph of the Bureau des Advocats Internationaux. He can be reached at Quigley@loyno.edu

Haiti again postpones presidential voting

By Alfred de Montesquiou,

Associated Press Writer

The Boston Globe

November 25, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE --Haiti's electoral board on Friday again postponed the first elections since the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, saying it needs need more time to organize the vote in the impoverished country.

The nine-member Provisional Electoral Council set a new date of Jan. 8 for presidential and legislative elections, followed by a Feb. 15 runoff.

Council members said they would be unable to set up polling sites by Dec. 27 -- the election date announced last week by interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue -- because of crumbling infrastructure and a lack of trained election workers in the poorest nation in the Americas.

"Our main responsibility was to make sure that the vote did not turn to a fiasco," council member Patrick Fequiere told The Associated Press.

The postponement marks the fourth date Haitian authorities have set for elections to replace the interim government installed after a violent rebellion forced Aristide into exile in South Africa in February 2004.

"At least the government is taking the right steps," said Natacha Desroses, a 26-year-old mother of three. "But frankly, I'm going to keep my ears open, because I think they'll probably end up postponing the vote again."

International observers have urged Haiti to not hold the elections at the end of December, warning that the holiday season would result in lower voter turnout. Observers also said the country needs to do more to stem political violence that has killed more than 1,500 people since the rebellion.

But the latest postponement means Haiti will now miss an important deadline.

Under the constitution, the five-year term of the president is supposed to begin and end on Feb. 7, to mark the anniversary of the 1986 demise of the 29-year father-and-son Duvalier dictatorship. The new election date makes it impossible to have a new government installed by then, election officials said.

"For practical reasons, it was inevitable that we would miss the deadline," Fequiere said.

Council Secretary-General Rosemond Pradel said the council has not finished printing ballots, distributing more than 2.5 million voter identification cards and training poll workers. But he vowed that the elections will now certainly be held on Jan. 8.

"There was a series of practical points that needed to be addressed for the elections to take place in serene conditions," Pradel said. "These dates are the real dates, perfectly final and based on serious planning."

Several private organizations expressed similar views in recent days. In a report released hours before the election was postponed, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group urged Haiti to delay the balloting.

"Holding these elections over the holidays will mean low turnout and insufficient international observation," said Alain Deletroz, director of the group's Latin American Program. "And one month is not enough time to fix the serious organizational and security problems."

Voters will choose from about 35 candidates for president and hundreds of candidates for 129 legislative seats.

The revolt that ousted Aristide, a former priest hugely popular among the poor but who was accused of corruption while in office, was led by former soldiers linked to the repressive military regimes of Haiti's dark past.

Haiti poll postponed a third time
BBC News
November 25, 2005

Electoral campaigning is already under way

The first round of Haiti's presidential and legislative elections have been put back to 8 January, say officials.

This is the third time the vote has been postponed. Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue last week said a "firm" date had been set for 27 December.

These will be the first elections since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled into exile in February 2004.

The head of the electoral board said Haiti was unprepared to hold "serene" elections at the end of December.

A second round run-off is now set for 15 February.

Ongoing instability

"These dates are the real dates, perfectly final and based on serious planning," Rosamond Pradel of the Provisional Electoral Council told the Associated Press.

He said it was unrealistic to hold elections when all the ballots had not yet been printed, voter identification cards distributed and poll workers trained.

"There was a series of practical points that needed to be addressed for the elections to take place in serene conditions," he said.

Elections were first scheduled for 13 November, but were delayed because of organisational difficulties.

The impoverished Caribbean country has been blighted by political and criminal violence and instability over the last two years, despite an interim government and the presence of UN peacekeepers.

Under the country's constitution, a new government should be sworn in by 8 February.

Haiti vote delayed again
The Miami Herald
November 26, 2005

The latest change in the date for Haiti's first post-Aristide election has forced officials to abandon a Feb. 7 constitutional deadline.

PORT-AU-PRINCE - (AP) -- Haiti's electoral board on Friday again postponed the country's first elections since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a rebellion almost two years ago.

The nine-member Provisional Electoral Council set a new date of Jan. 8 for presidential and legislative elections, followed by a Feb. 15 runoff, council Secretary General Rosemond Pradel told The Associated Press.

The change will make it impossible for Haiti to meet the Feb. 7 date established in the constitution for a change of government, council member Patrick Fequiere said.

"For practical reasons, it was inevitable to disregard that deadline," he said.

The elections council decided that Haiti was unprepared to hold the election on Dec. 27, the date announced last week by interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue. Council members met overnight to establish the new date, Pradel said.

"These dates are the real dates, perfectly final and based on serious planning," he told AP in a telephone interview.

It was the fourth date Haitian authorities have set for the elections, first scheduled for Nov. 13, to replace the interim government installed after Aristide's ouster in February 2004.

Under a constitution adopted in 1987, the five-year term of the president is supposed to begin and end on Feb. 7 to mark the anniversary of the end of the 29-year father-and-son Duvalier dictatorship.

"Our main responsibility was to make sure that the vote did not turn to a fiasco," Fequiere said.

The election plans were complicated by Haiti's lack of equipment and trained poll workers, its crumbling infrastructure and the violence that made it difficult to register voters.

Pradel said it was unrealistic to hold elections so soon when the council had not finished printing ballots, distributing more than 2.5 million voter identification cards and training poll workers.

"There was a series of practical points that needed to be addressed for the elections to take place in serene conditions," he said.

Several private organizations had expressed similar views in recent days. In a report released hours before the election was postponed, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group urged Haiti to delay the balloting.

"Holding these elections over the holidays will mean low turnout and insufficient international observation," said Alain Deletroz, director of the group's Latin American Program.

Group, Jean Align to Help Poor in Haiti

By ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU

Associated Press Writer

Newsday.com

November 24, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- U.N. peacekeepers venture into Cite Soleil with automatic weapons and armored personnel carriers. Haitian police, fearful of well-armed gangs, avoid the dusty streets of the seaside slum altogether.

But a new aid organization has managed to use the immense popularity of hip-hop musician Wyclef Jean to provide badly needed help to a desperate corner of his native country, the poorest nation in the Americas.

Yele Haiti, which Jean formed this year, has so far focused mostly on giving out scholarships. But after a few exploratory forays, it ventured into Cite Soleil this month to give out food -- backed by the pulsating beat of hip-hop blasting from speakers on a makeshift stage.

The music wasn't just entertainment. It was the way the aid group secured permission to enter the territory of gangs who dominate a slum that is home to more than 200,000 people.

"The gangs are really into my music, so we use that to connect with the population," Jean said by telephone from New York. "It helps us get in to help people that others may not reach."

The name "Yele Haiti" comes from a popular Jean song that has become a sort of anthem of hope following the violent rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

Jean, who left Haiti when he was 10 and gained fame as a member of the Fugees, said he was inspired to create his aid group by his own bitter memories of poverty.

"I grew up with no shoes and no pants," the 35-year-old musician said. "So, in the position I'm in today, I couldn't sleep if I wasn't giving back."

Most of Haiti's 8 million people live on less than \$1 a day. Unemployment is estimated at 80 percent. Locals struggle to survive coups, street-level justice, corrupt leaders and pervasive crime. Kidnappings are common.

Human rights groups and international organizations say at least 1,500 people have died in the violence in the capital in the past year, much of it blamed on the street gangs that allegedly support Aristide, now in exile in South Africa, and his Lavalas party.

Yele Haiti so far has distributed about \$1 million in grants and aid, mostly in the Gonaives region, which was devastated last year by Hurricane Jeanne. The organization has also taught sports to slum children and helped clear litter from the streets of Port-au-Prince.

"What you need is for people to participate in the aid programs, feel like human beings -- not just receive food like animals," Jean said.

Dozens of aid groups operate in Haiti. What makes Jean's unusual is its reliance on his celebrity to gain permission from the gangs to operate amid the violence of Cite Soleil.

"There's always an element of risk, but the community has a lot of respect for the musicians," said Hugh Locke, the manager of Yele Haiti.

A gang leader who calls himself General Toutou said he and others "have completely lost trust in the U.N.," whose blue-helmeted peacekeeping troops often engage in firefights with slum residents.

Mamadou Mbaye, head of the U.N. World Food Program in Haiti, said the agency doesn't allow its staff to enter Cite Soleil because of the danger -- so it provided food to Yele Haiti to distribute.

Mbaye praised Yele Haiti for its ability to "take the first step and pave the way," for other aid groups.

"People in dangerous zones have the same right to aid and food as the rest of the Haitian population," he said.

But even with the gang's permission and Jean's popularity, the first major food handout did not go off as smoothly as organizers hoped.

Yele Haiti volunteers and workers in bright orange and blue T-shirts arrived with hundreds of bags of rice, beans, salt and cooking oil. But the crowd had grown unruly under the hot sun, and people began to scramble for the food, fearful they might miss out.

Some gangsters could be seen striking people with belts and sticks while others ran off with food. In the distance, U.N. troops and gang members could be heard exchanging gunfire.

Ernia Saint Louis, who lives in Cite Soleil, said gang members stole her rice.

"It's great to bring food to the poor, but we never get any of it. The big guys take it all," the 26-year-old woman said as she picked beans from the dust and collected them in a fold of her dress.

Despite the problems, the World Food Program said it hopes to keep channeling aid through Jean's group.

"Yes, it was chaotic, but it was a learning process for us and Yele Haiti," said Anne Poulsen, spokeswoman for the U.N. agency in Haiti.

Jean said his group would learn from the incident, which he views as a reminder of why Haiti needs so much help.

"We can't just wait for things to improve before we get involved," he said. "It's because we are trying that things will get better."

Haiti again postpones presidential voting
ALFRED de MONTESQUIOU
Associated Press
San Jose Mercury News
November 25, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE - Haiti's electoral board on Friday again postponed the first elections since the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, saying it needs need more time to organize the vote in the impoverished country.

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The postponement marks the fourth date Haitian authorities have set for elections to replace the interim government installed after a violent rebellion forced Aristide into exile in South Africa in February 2004.

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But the latest postponement means Haiti will now miss an important deadline.

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"There was a series of practical points that needed to be addressed for the elections to take place in serene conditions," Pradel said. "These dates are the real dates, perfectly final and based on serious planing."

Several private organizations expressed similar views in recent days. In a report released hours before the election was postponed, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group urged Haiti to delay the balloting.

"Holding these elections over the holidays will mean low turnout and insufficient international observation," said Alain Deletroz, director of the group's Latin American Program. "And one month is not enough time to fix the serious organizational and security problems."

Voters will choose from about 35 candidates for president and hundreds of candidates for 129 legislative seats.

The revolt that ousted Aristide, a former priest hugely popular among the poor but who was accused of corruption while in office, was led by former soldiers linked to the repressive military regimes of Haiti's dark past.

UN increases funding for missions in Haiti, Cote d'Ivoire
People's Daily Online, China
November 26, 2005

The UN General Assembly approved on Friday more funding for missions in Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti over the year ending next June, in line with a Security Council decision to strengthen the UN peacekeeping missions there.

Acting on the recommendations of the Assembly's Administrative and Budgetary Committee (the Fifth Committee), the Assembly adopted without a vote a resolution raising the amount appropriated for the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) by 51.28 million US dollars, in addition to the 386.89 million dollars already approved for the July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006 period.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) already had a budget of 494.89 million dollars and that was increased by 46.41 million dollars.

The Security Council previously extended UNOCI's mandate through January 24, 2006 and authorized an increase in its strength of up to 850 additional military personnel and 725 civilian police.

The Council established the mission in May 2003 to assist the Ivorian parties to implement the peace agreement they signed in January 2003, ending their north-south civil war.

MINUSTAH's budget was revised because of the temporary increase in the mission's strength to help provide security for Haiti's presidential elections, currently scheduled for late next month, and the subsequent political transition.

Haiti's Elections: The Case for a Short Delay

25 Nov 2005

Source: NGO latest

International Crisis Group

Reuters AlertNet

International Crisis Group - Belgium

Website: <http://www.crisisgroup.org>

Port-au-Prince/Brussels, 25 November 2005: Haiti's forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections must be delayed once again in order to be credible.

Haiti's Elections: The Case for a Short Delay,* the latest policy briefing from the International Crisis Group, examines the situation on the ground in the run-up to the first round polls tentatively scheduled for 27 December and says that even with two earlier postponements, it still unlikely a legitimate government can be installed by the target date of 7 February 2006. The government and the international community should delay the process one month, with the transfer of power set for March 2006.

"Holding these elections over the holidays will mean low turnout and insufficient international observation", says Alain Deletroz, Director of Crisis Group's Latin America Program. "And one month is not enough time to fix the serious organisational and security problems".

Nearly 75 per cent of the eligible voters have been registered, campaigns are in motion, and a strong manager has finally been appointed to oversee the election. Unfortunately, a host of other factors has offset those gains. Few registered voters have received their voter ID cards, and violence and insecurity are daily concerns in many areas. In addition, last minute qualifying of candidates has added to public confusion, civic education has been minimal, and almost no one has been hired and trained to run polling stations and count ballots.

Once the first, essential step of a month's postponement is taken, action is needed on three fronts for successful elections:

Electoral restructuring: Immediate pressure is required, primarily from the UN and the governments forming the UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), to end the internal Haitian disputes and delaying tactics. If the process falters again, options begin with a new Security Council resolution mandating a virtual international takeover of the election process.

Security: The UN mission needs to begin implementing the existing Security Council mandate for disarmament and demobilisation of armed groups. Also, the UN police should exercise their vetting authority and direct the Haitian National Police to detain all officers responsible for criminal violence. If the transitional government continues to block that, the Security Council should give the UN mission full control of the police.

Political accords: If the elections are to be seen as opening a new chapter of political opportunity, efforts should be renewed to pursue a national governance pact. Reconciliation has been sorely missing from the transition process.

In a nation with a history of coups, unwieldy constitutions, failed elections and now an unpopular transitional government sanctioned by the outside world, rushing the final electoral steps risks creating

a perception that the voting is unfair and thus the resulting institutions of presidency and parliament are not legitimate.

“Credible elections and a widely accepted government are more important than meeting arbitrary target dates”, says Mark Schneider, Crisis Group’s Senior Vice President.

Haiti support hits the streets

By Yves Engler

Rabble News

November 25, 2005

Endorsed by an impressive list of groups, the demands of the Haiti Solidarity Demonstration week's actions were delivered on a large plaque to the Prime Minister's office in Ottawa.

“Haiti for the Haitians — Canada, U.S. out!” and “Canada Sortez d’Haiti” were two of the chants 350 protesters took to the streets of the nation's capital recently. The Haiti Solidarity Demonstration — Ottawa's largest in recent memory — kicked off a Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN) week of action.

The same day the streets were alive in Ottawa, 50 people rallied for a “die-in” outside RCMP Headquarters in Winnipeg. Blood-stained participants fell to the ground with signs reading: “Victim of RCMP-trained death squads.” Throughout the week, movie showings, talks and public leafleting sessions were organized in cities across the country. Fifty people held a mini- march through downtown Toronto and CHAN's actions concluded with 40 people taking to the streets of Halifax.

Endorsed by an impressive list of groups from the Canadian Labour Congress to Cuba-solidarity groups to the Canadian Peace Alliance the demands of the week's actions — delivered on a large plaque to the Prime Minister's office in Ottawa — were:

Withdraw the support of Elections Canada and all other bodies from any elections held under current conditions of repression, which include hundreds of political prisoners, police killings and terror, and the exclusion of the poor from participation;

Demand the immediate release of Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Father Gérard Jean-Juste, former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, the folksinger Annette “Sò Ann” Auguste, and all other political prisoners;

Discontinue all RCMP training and logistical support for the human rights-abusing Haitian National Police, and withdraw all Canadian logistical support for the UN “peacekeeping” mission-turned repression operation;

Announce Canada's support for the position of the governments of the Caribbean community countries (CARICOM) and the African Union, both of which are demanding an investigation into the circumstances of President Aristide's removal;

Withdraw and withhold recognition of Haiti's coup government until President Aristide is returned to oversee the holding of fair elections without repression.

Recent solidarity activities come on the heels of a 25-city book tour of Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority. In October, Haiti-based U.S journalist, Kevin Pina, brought his gripping documentary, Haiti: The Untold Story to eight Canadian cities and the powerful new film, Aristide and the Endless Revolution, has been screened on a number of occasions in Vancouver and Montreal. The film and book tours brought out more than 2,500 people and generated significant media attention.

Dozens of activists helped organize these events. Many more people have been plastering their communities with “Canada Out of Haiti” stickers (119,000 printed) and writing material for CHAN's online forums. CHAN's capacity — ten active chapters and counting — has grown substantially with recent efforts. There are now enough knowledgeable and motivated Haiti solidarity activists — combined with a good communication network — to have a presence at Haiti-related events everywhere in the country.

CHAN members have made sure to ask critical questions at recent conferences sympathetic to Canadian policy in Haiti, such as Montreal NGO Alternatives' panel, “Haiti: A Democracy to Build” or the Waterloo Centre for International Governance Innovation's gathering titled “Canada in Haiti: Considering the 3-D Approach.” Protesters have also been pestering Liberal cabinet ministers, especially Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew, wherever he speaks.

Some high-placed officials are beginning to admit what Canadian activists — who listen to grassroots groups in Haiti — are saying. Thierry Faggart, director of the human rights section for the occupying UN mission in Haiti, recently admitted that the post-coup human rights situation is “catastrophic.” (Dupliciously, he focussed on Haitian police misdeeds, failing to mention the UN's role in massacring at least 23 civilians on July 6 or a number of lesser UN crimes.)

While the UN distances itself from the well-documented brutality of the Haitian police, Pierre Pettigrew continues to boast about Canada's role in training and assisting the new police force, which is largely the reconstitution of the brutal army (created by the U.S during its 1915-34 occupation) Jean Bertrand Aristide disbanded in 1995. Pettigrew responded to repeated interruptions of a speech in Montreal recently by saying he is “proud” of Canada's police training and support for the de facto government.

Pettigrew and Paul Martin's uncritical support for the murderous installed regime of Gerard Latortue should be justification enough for toppling the minority Liberal government. Their role in destabilizing Haiti's elected government, planning the coup and sending Canadian soldiers to help oust the elected president makes the Liberal's intervention in Haiti even more scandalous.

Canadian intrusion in Haiti has been so disastrous that we should begin to talk about taking Pettigrew and Martin to the International Criminal Court. The people organizing the Canadian segment of the International Tribunal on Haiti, which screened video footage of police attachés chopping people to death in broad daylight during its second session in Boston, will hopefully help that process along.

Canadian policy in Haiti must change and the Liberals need to pay a political price for their crimes against Haiti. With Haiti's sham elections planned for December 27 and federal elections looming here, the time is nigh.

To contribute financially to the Canada Haiti Action Network or join the list-serve, e-mail Kevin Skerett.

Yves Engler is the author of two books: *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority* (with Anthony Fenton) and *Playing Left Wing: From Rink Rat to Student Radical*. Both books are published by Fernwood and available at rabble's bookstore.

Haiti As A Customer
Rupert Missick
The Bahama Journal
28th November 2005

How would you like to have five million customers coming into your store everyday? Big problem, right? You just couldn't handle the traffic. I understand.

Suppose these five million customers were in another country, say Haiti, and your store went to them, that would be more manageable wouldn't it? Of course!

Well, The Bahamas and Bahamian businesses have just such a customer in the country of Haiti.

Haiti, like most countries in the region imports the bulk of everything that they need and use, from medicines to shoes, from ice cream to steaks. Haiti wants and need what you sell or make and they are willing to buy. But can they pay?

Can the average Haitian afford the goods and services that you have to offer? Yes, Haitians can pay and they will pay. Here is how.

Let us find ten items that Haiti does well and buy those things from them and then let us find ten things that we do well and sell those things to Haiti.

Haiti needs houses. Can Frankie Wilson and Arawak Homes build houses in Haiti? Can Commonwealth Brewery sell Kalik in Haiti? Can Frank Hanna Cleaning Company clean Haiti? Can Barber J. show Haitians how to use those sailboats that come here – how to sail them in a regatta?

Can Haitian art, produce, coffee, woodwork, ingenuity and creativity work in our markets?

It's call trading really. We find things that both countries want and need and we do business with each other.

Inagua, with the cooperation of the American, Bahamian and Haitian governments can be set up as a duty free way station for the East to West trade.

Warehouses, pumping stations, manufacturing plants and security operations can flourish from this way station that can also do business with the Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos and Cuba. We could even go further and create a special currency for this market.

The Royal Bahamas Bank of Haiti? Why not?

The Bahamas and all small Caribbean countries are spending millions every year to lure tourist, mostly Americans, to their shores. Why not spend some of this money in the region with people who look like us and who can help solve some of our economic and social problems?

Every Haitian in New Providence doesn't want to be here. Most of them have families at home who they miss terribly. If there was work in Inagua at this way station these people could be productive, secure and be in closer contact with their families. Five million customers are worth fighting for. We can help keep Haitians at home, help to strengthen our business by doing business with them and reap the profits and benefits. This way everyone will win. Haiti will remain Haiti and The Bahamas will remain The Bahamas.

Why not? We are buying things all the way from China, so why not?

Why do we have to always wait for a white man with a proposal before we can get excited about business and jobs? Why can't we create our own markets, trading partners and jobs?

The white man has done a lot in this region for which we are thankful. It is high time that we do some things for ourselves; and why not?

CIDA: Canada Supports Projects in Haiti in Key Reconstruction Sectors

CCN Matthews

November 25, 2005

OTTAWA, ONTARIO-- Minister of International Cooperation Aileen Carroll, Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Pettigrew, Special Advisor for Haiti Denis Coderre, and Minister responsible for the Francophonie Jacques Saada today announced that Canada will provide more than \$33 million to maintain Canada's reconstruction efforts in Haiti.

The projects receiving funding will increase access to health and education services, improve the judicial system, and strengthen governance in public and civil-society institutions.

Under this new financial commitment, Canada will call on Canadian skills to strengthen reforms that have been under way since the Interim Cooperation Framework, implemented by Haiti's transition government.

"Canada will continue its commitment to Haiti by providing long-term support," Minister Carroll said. "The funding we are announcing today will address the basic needs of the population immediately and, with the participation of Canada Corps, will help to create the governance conditions needed to ensure Haiti's sustainable development."

"Canadian assistance reflects priorities established by the Haitian government, including security sector reform, social and economic reconstruction, national reconciliation and the resumption of the democratic process," said Minister Pettigrew. "As a result of discussions at the conference with the Haitian diaspora last December, Canada has continued to consult its Haitian community to identify further initiatives to support Haiti."

"By building on our achievements to date, Canada is reaffirming our commitment to support the renewal of democracy in Haiti," said Mr. Coderre. "We are prepared to work closely with the new government that will take power next February 7 to continue reforms begun in 2004."

Canada is also helping to put in place the Institut de la Francophonie pour l'administration et la gestion dans la Caraibe, an initiative of the Government of Haiti.

"The Government of Canada is proud to be involved in this project, which allows Haitian business leaders to receive training and stay in Haiti," said Minister Saada. "Haiti and its La Francophonie partners, including Canada, are contributing to this project, which represents a significant investment in efforts to re-establish and strengthen the institutions in that country."

The projects announced today are in addition to those already supported under the Interim Cooperation Framework. To date, Canada has provided \$120 million of \$180 million pledged over two years.

Please find below descriptions of the projects funded by CIDA for ongoing Canadian support to reconstruction in Haiti.

Funding for this initiative was provided for in the February 2005 federal budget and is therefore built into the existing fiscal framework.

HAITI PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Building capacity: \$13 million

- \$7.7 million will help build the capacity of Haiti's public institutions and civil-society organizations to improve their governance and become more effective. A consortium of four organizations will carry out this initiative: the Centre canadien d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI), the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), the Fondation Paul Gerin-Lajoie (FPGL), and the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO). This three-year project will call on the skills of about 250 Canadians, particularly members of the Haitian community. This initiative is in line with Canada Corps' mandate, which is to strengthen Canada's contribution to governance in the developing world.

- \$5 million will go to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to strengthen the rule of law and the judicial system. This project will improve the Ministry of Justice's ability to play a role in planning and coordinating national and international efforts and introduce an equitable, accessible and efficient criminal justice system. This project will also strengthen correctional administration to reduce security incidents, increase respect for the rights of detainees, improve detention conditions, and support their re-entry into the community.

- \$300,000 will help establish the Institut de la Francophonie pour l'administration et la gestion dans la Caraïbe, an initiative of the Government of the Republic of Haiti. The University of Sherbrooke will work with the University of Quisqueya and the State University of Haiti to support this international program centred around the creation of a next generation of entrepreneurs, continuing education for executives, strengthening management training at the Master's level in Haitian universities, and, creating the conditions to retain executives in Haiti. The Agence universitaire de la Francophonie- which strengthens cooperation and solidarity among universities working in the French language and contributes to the development of higher education and research- will be responsible for coordinating the institute's creation. It is expected that the institute will open its doors in April 2006 and begin accepting students in September 2006.

Basic needs: \$20.4 million

- \$19 million to support projects to improve the quality and accessibility of education and health care for poor communities, and to improve administration of these services.

- \$1.4 million will go to four projects carried out by Canadian organizations that will work with the Haitian diaspora to supply clean drinking water, protect the environment, and make it easier to access health care. These initiatives are a follow-up to the December 2004 Montreal Conference with the Haitian Diaspora and will be implemented by ESEE-Monde (Education-Health-Economy-Environment), the Groupe Intercal, l'Association des ingénieurs et scientifiques haitiano-canadiens; and the Carrefour d'entraide et des retrouvailles du Cap-Haïtien. These organizations will work in partnership with the following Canadian organizations: the Foundation for International Development

Assistance (FIDA), the Center Rural for the Rural Development of Milot (CRUDEM), Terre sans frontieres, and the Fondation Jules et Paul-Emile Leger.

UN-organized elections workshop in Haiti allows candidates to air views
UN News Centre
25 November 2005

More than 30 representatives of political parties, including a dozen women, took part today in a pre-electoral seminar organized by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) aimed at fostering a frank exchange of views.

Held in the capital, Port-au-Prince, just weeks before next month's election, the event served to enable candidates to discuss principles of local governance and other issues of mutual concern.

Over the course of “animated” debate, participants aired their frustrations regarding the electoral process, MINUSTAH said in a news release.

Charles Messier, of the Mission's civil affairs office, said the exchanges served to help MINUSTAH understand how better to respond to the needs of officials who will be elected in the months to come.

The seminar was one of a series being organized by MINUSTAH in various parts of Haiti.

Haiti's Elections: The Case for a Short Delay
Harold Doan and Associates Ltd.
November 25, 2005

Haiti's forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections must be delayed once again in order to be credible.

Haiti's Elections: The Case for a Short Delay, the latest policy briefing from the International Crisis Group, examines the situation on the ground in the run-up to the first round polls tentatively scheduled for 27 December and says that even with two earlier postponements, it still unlikely a legitimate government can be installed by the target date of 7 February 2006. The government and the international community should delay the process one month, with the transfer of power set for March 2006.

"Holding these elections over the holidays will mean low turnout and insufficient international observation", says Alain Deletroz, Director of Crisis Group's Latin America Program. "And one month is not enough time to fix the serious organisational and security problems".

Nearly 75 per cent of the eligible voters have been registered, campaigns are in motion, and a strong manager has finally been appointed to oversee the election. Unfortunately, a host of other factors has offset those gains. Few registered voters have received their voter ID cards, and violence and insecurity are daily concerns in many areas. In addition, last minute qualifying of candidates has added to public confusion, civic education has been minimal, and almost no one has been hired and trained to run polling stations and count ballots.

Once the first, essential step of a month's postponement is taken, action is needed on three fronts for successful elections:

Electoral restructuring: Immediate pressure is required, primarily from the UN and the governments forming the UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), to end the internal Haitian disputes and delaying tactics. If the process falters again, options begin with a new Security Council resolution mandating a virtual international takeover of the election process.

Security: The UN mission needs to begin implementing the existing Security Council mandate for disarmament and demobilisation of armed groups. Also, the UN police should exercise their vetting authority and direct the Haitian National Police to detain all officers responsible for criminal violence. If the transitional government continues to block that, the Security Council should give the UN mission full control of the police.

Political accords: If the elections are to be seen as opening a new chapter of political opportunity, efforts should be renewed to pursue a national governance pact. Reconciliation has been sorely missing from the transition process.

In a nation with a history of coups, unwieldy constitutions, failed elections and now an unpopular transitional government sanctioned by the outside world, rushing the final electoral steps risks creating

a perception that the voting is unfair and thus the resulting institutions of presidency and parliament are not legitimate.

“Credible elections and a widely accepted government are more important than meeting arbitrary target dates”, says Mark Schneider, Crisis Group’s Senior Vice President.

American Citizens Travel Warning to Haiti
Community Dispatch.com
November 22, 2005

This Travel Warning is being issued to warn American citizens of the continued dangers of travel to Haiti. Due to the volatile security situation earlier this year, the Department of State ordered the departure of non-emergency personnel and family members in May 2005. The Ordered Departure has now been lifted for non-emergency employees and adult dependents. Dependents under age 21 still are not permitted to travel to or remain in Haiti. In light of continuing instability, the Department of State warns U.S. citizens against travel to Haiti at this time and urges American citizens to exercise caution and security awareness if they must travel to or reside in Haiti. This Travel Warning supersedes the Travel Warning issued May 26, 2005.

Americans are reminded of the potential for spontaneous demonstrations and violent confrontations between armed groups. Visitors and residents must remain vigilant due to the absence of an effective police force in much of Haiti; the potential for looting; the presence of intermittent roadblocks set by armed gangs or by the police; and the possibility of random violent crime, including car-jacking and assault. Kidnapping for ransom remains a particular threat, with over 25 American citizens including children kidnapped over the past year. National elections have been scheduled for late 2005 and early 2006. These elections may become a stimulus for further social tension, which could include violence.

Travel can be hazardous within Port-au-Prince. Some areas are off-limits to embassy staff, including downtown Port-au-Prince after dark. U.S. Embassy personnel are under an embassy-imposed curfew and must remain in their homes or in U.S. government facilities during the curfew. The embassy has limited travel by its staff outside of Port-au-Prince and therefore its ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens outside of Port-au-Prince is constrained. The UN stabilization force (MINUSTAH) is fully deployed and is assisting the government of Haiti in providing security. They have challenged violent gangs and have moved into some gang enclaves.

U.S. citizens who travel to or remain in Haiti despite this Travel Warning must remain vigilant with regard to their personal security and are strongly advised to register either online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/> or with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince. The Consular Section can be reached at (509) 223-7011, fax number (509) 223-9665, or e-mail address acspap@state.gov. Travelers should also consult the Department of State's latest Consular Information Sheet for Haiti and Worldwide Caution Public Announcement at <http://travel.state.gov>. American citizens may also obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States or Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from overseas. In Haiti citizens can call 509/222-0200, ext. 2000.

The Politics of Money: Haiti and the Left

by Yves Engler

Global Research.com

November 24, 2005

Canadian Dimension November/December 2005 Issue

Since the U.S.-backed overthrow of progressive Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the severe level of political repression launched by the new government has left tens of thousands of Lavalas (Aristide's political party) supporters the victims of rapes, incarcerations, firings and murders. One tragic aspect of this story is the extent to which Canadian federal government money has been able to buy the support of supposedly progressive organizations and individuals. Today they continue to align themselves with Canada's brutal pro-coup policy.

The Politics of NGO Funding

In September, 2003, for example, Rights and Democracy, a Montreal-based NGO whose money comes from the federal government and which was formerly headed by the NDP's Ed Broadbent, released a report on Haiti. The report described Haiti's pro-coup Group of 184 as "grassroots" and a "promising civil society movement." The group says this even though the Group of 184 is funded by the International Republican Institute and is headed by the country's leading sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid. Apaid has been active in right-wing Haitian politics for many years, and, like G-184 spokesperson Charles Henry Baker himself, is white.

Moreover, several Quebec unions that received hundreds of thousands of CIDA dollars for work in Haiti through the Centre International de Solidarité Ouvrière (CISO) passed resolutions condemning Aristide's alleged anti-union activities. The FTQ and CSQ union federations and a half dozen NGOs are part of an informal group known as the Concertation Pour Haiti (CPH). Prior to the coup, they branded Aristide a "tyrant" and his government a "dictatorship" and a "regime of terror." In mid-February, 2004, CPH representatives told the Canadian Press, "We think there will not be a solution without Aristide leaving." This demand was made at the same time CIA-trained thugs swept across the country to depose Aristide.

Since Aristide's overthrow, these same Quebec unions have failed to criticize the installed government for its far more severe harassment of unionists. Last October, for example, Lulu Cherie, head of Haiti's CTH union, had his life threatened by the Haitian Police. No unions in Quebec have said anything about this or about numerous other post-coup affronts to union activity. In addition, Quebec unions also worked to dilute an anti-coup resolution proposed by a number of English-Canadian unions to the Canadian Labour Congress convention held in Montreal in June.

The CPH's antagonism towards Lavalas isn't merely a by-product of the political upheaval of February. In October, 2004 — after months of widespread political repression directed at Lavalas sympathizers — the CPH released a statement blaming the victims. The CPH repeated the claim first made by Haiti's ruling elite and ultra-right that Lavalas launched an "Operation Baghdad," which included beheading police officers. Numerous observers have noted that "Operation Baghdad" is

simply pro-coup propaganda designed to divert attention from the de facto government's misdeeds, particularly the murder of at least five peaceful, pro-constitution demonstrators on September 30, 2004.

Imperialism and the Rhetoric of Human Rights

In April, 2005, the CPH organized a delegation from Haiti to Montreal and Ottawa. Yolène Gilles, one of the speakers invited by the CPH, is the coordinator of the "human rights" monitoring program at the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), formerly known as NCHR-Haiti, which is funded by CIDA. This organization changed its name in mid-March, 2005, after its parent group in the U.S., itself pro-coup, condemned the blatantly partisan work of NCHR-Haiti regarding the imprisonment of constitutional Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. Immediately after the coup, Gilles, a "human rights" worker, went on elite-owned radio to name wanted Lavalas "bandits," contributing to a climate of anti-Lavalas terror.

The other delegate, Danielle Magloire, is a member of the "Council of Wise People" that appointed Gerard Latortue as interim prime minister. Latortue's appointment was a blatant violation of Haiti's constitution, since the U.S., France and Canada created the council after overthrowing the elected government.

The Funding of Anti-Class Struggle Feminism

Magloire's status as a "wise" person, moreover, arose largely out of her positions at Enfofanm (Women's info) and the National Coordination for Advocacy on Women's Rights (CONAP). Both of these organizations are CIDA-funded feminist organizations that would not have grown to prominence without international funding. In particular, CONAP is a virulently anti-Lavalas feminist organization that has shunned the language of class struggle in a country where a tiny percentage of the population owns nearly everything. It is also an organization that has expressed little concern about the dramatic rise in rapes targeting Lavalas sympathizers since the coup.

In mid-July, 2005, Magloire issued a statement on behalf of the seven-member "Council of Wise People" saying any media that gives voice to "bandits" (code for Lavalas supporters) should be shut down. She also asserted that Lavalas should be banned from upcoming elections.

Alternatives: The Politics of Money

Even the Montreal-based Alternatives, usually on the left of the NGO world, has helped to justify the coup. Alternatives is now working with 15 groups in Haiti, all of which are anti-Lavalas. They also support virulently anti-Lavalas AlterPresse, the most prominent on-line Haitian media outlet and newswire. In April, 2005, Alternatives received a share of a \$2-million CIDA media project to train Haitian journalists about covering elections — the very elections Canada hopes will legitimize its role in the February 29, 2004 coup. (A proper political parallel would be an organization receiving money from the U.S. government to cover elections in Iraq.) In late June an Alternatives supplement in *Le Devoir* featured a prominent report that parroted the neoconservative narrative about Haiti. Alternatives' reporting has omitted any mention of political prisoners, violent repression of Lavalas activists and the basic facts about the coup.

Canada's recent actions in Haiti may be Canada's greatest-ever foreign-policy crime. Among other things, Canada helped organize a meeting to plan the coup, sent troops to overthrow the elected

government, commanded the occupying UN police force, employed high-level officials in the installed government and trained the murderous Haitian police.

Nevertheless, Canadian Haiti solidarity activism is growing in response to the Liberal government's role in suppressing that country's democratic will. Solidarity Groups have sprouted up in half a dozen cities and the Canada Haiti Action Network listserve now has 200 members in 18 cities across the country.

Five cities held actions — from banner drops to marches — to commemorate Haiti's Flag Day on May 18. Six Canadian cities also joined worldwide protests on July 21, which prompted the United Nations to investigate a massacre committed two weeks earlier that left as many as 80 slum dwellers dead.

Haiti: Curbing sexual violence at a time of political turmoil

Source: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Relief Web

Date: 25 Nov 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Every day, Lovely (11) and Laura (12) hang out at the Champs de Mars, the main plaza in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. They beg for money, carry things for a small tip, clean windcreens on cars. Sometimes they sell sex. On an average day, they make up to 160 gourdes, or a little less than \$4. That money mostly goes to paying for clothes and transportation.

Lately, they have been showing up regularly at CAFA, a centre where street girls in the Haitian capital can come to eat breakfast, take a shower and learn things like making belts, arranging flowers, and skills needed to work in a beauty parlour. They also learn how to protect themselves from HIV and sexual violence, and pick up some of the basic knowledge they miss out on by missing school.

To boost stability in Haiti around the time of the upcoming elections, several United Nations agencies are carrying out 'rapid impact' projects ranging from election support to food aid. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is contributing to this effort by helping to prevent sexual violence and HIV.

"The idea is that by curbing sexual violence, which tends to accompany political and social unrest, we can contribute to a more stable society around the time of the elections and beyond," says Hernando Clavijo, UNFPA Representative in Haiti.

"Impunity is by far the biggest problem we face when dealing with sexual violence," said Adeline Chancy, Haiti's Minister of Women's Affairs. Her Ministry is now trying to address this problem through, among other means, a South-South initiative between Haiti and Brazil, which UNFPA is part of. This assistance is not only helping to train medical personnel and create public awareness about sexual violence, but also providing training for police officers and establishing institutions offering legal advice and health care for victims. Legislation against sexual violence is already in place; a better understanding of the problem, as well as prevention, care and enforcement of existing laws, is what's needed.

Dr. Nicole Magloire, a consultant working with the Ministry, says that organized gangs use rape and sexual violence as a weapon during times of political and social unrest. "It creates chaos in the country and leaves men feeling helpless since they are unable to protect their wives and children," she adds.

Another component of the UNFPA programme provides support to CAFA and several other institutions that offer medical, psychological and legal assistance to victims of sexual violence. Founded just over a decade ago, CAFA is the only centre for girls living and working on the streets of Port-au-Prince. It can accommodate daytime visits of up to 150 girls (about a third of them are prostitutes). In an emergency, a few girls can spend the night at the centre.

The girls also benefit from a national condom distribution programme supported by UNFPA. The programme provides \$500,000 worth of condoms per year, aimed at the most vulnerable population, and covering about 40 per cent of the national consumption of condoms.

"Nobody wants to care for adolescents," says CAFA's founder Kettely Marseille. The institution therefore serves a unique need, unmet almost everywhere else. An estimated 600 girls live and work on the street in the Haitian capital. Many of them have their own children, and many others are regularly exposed to violence and unprotected sex with clients and police officers.

But sexual violence in Haiti does not only affect the marginalized population. A study shows that seven out of ten women in Haiti have been victims of violence, and that 37 per cent of those cases were sexual violence. During the political and social unrest that has been ongoing since 2003, the rate of sexual violence increased several-fold. UNFPA is therefore confronting the problem on multiple fronts.

The GHESKIO centres represent another such front. GHESKIO is a non-governmental organization that runs two health centres and a network of 25 satellite institutions around the country. With support from UNFPA and other international and bilateral organizations, it provides HIV testing, counselling for persons living with the infection, and care for victims of sexual violence. All services at the centres are provided free of charge. "Our patients cannot even afford to pay for transportation. Sometimes people walk 2-3 hours to get here. They simply would not be able to pay if we charged for our services," says Dr. Marie Marcelle Deschamps, the organization's Secretary-General.

Twenty-one per cent of those tested at GHESKIO turn out to be HIV positive, and 80 per cent of those who are found to be disease-free belong to high-risk groups. Last year, GHESKIO received 140,000 patient visits. Out of those, 270 were victims of rape, and 111 were children of HIV-positive mothers. Last July alone, the centres received 29 victims of sexual violence, of which one third were 19 or younger.

Haiti is near the bottom (153 of 177 countries) of the 2005 Human Development Index, which ranks countries' level of development based on income, educational attainment and life expectancy. The overall HIV prevalence rate in Haiti, estimated at 3 to 4 per cent, is the highest in the Western Hemisphere. The Haitian population of 8 million is characterized by high rates of both fertility and mortality. Population growth is 2.3 per cent a year, while life expectancy is estimated at 52 years. Half of the Haitian population is aged 20 or younger. Women head more than half of the country's households. Migration to the neighbouring Dominican Republic, as well as to Canada, France, the United States and the Caribbean, is significant; up to 1.8 million Haitians are believed to live outside their homeland.

Congressmember Waters Contradicts Col. Wilkerson on U.S. Role in Haiti: "It Was a Coup D'Etat, it Was a Forceful Removal of Aristide"

Democracy Now!

November 23, 2005

On Tuesday's Democracy Now!, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson - Colin Powell's chief of staff from 2002 to 2005 - defended the US role in Haiti during the overthrow of democratically-elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide. We speak with Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Brian Concannon of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. [includes rush transcript]

Tuesday on Democracy Now! we interviewed Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, he served as chief of staff to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2002 to 2005. In an hour-long conversation we discussed the invasion of Iraq, pre-war intelligence and much more. We also talked about Haiti. During his time as Powell's Number Two man in the State Department, the democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted. On February 29, 2004, Aristide was flown out of Haiti on a US government plane to the Central African Republic.

I asked Colonel Wilkerson to describe what happened the day Aristide was forced out of the country.

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, interviewed on Democracy Now!, November 22, 2005.

In the interview, Wilkerson defends the U.S. role in Haiti during Aristide's overthrow and says Aristide's "will to power is excessive, even obsessive." We speak with two guests:

Rep. Maxine Waters, Democratic Congresswoman from California. She was part of the delegation of US and Jamaican lawmakers that flew to the Central African Republic in March 2004 to return President Aristide to the Caribbean.

Brian Concannon, director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

More Democracy Now Haiti Coverage

AMY GOODMAN: I asked Colonel Wilkerson to describe what happened the day Aristide was forced out of his country.

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: But this was a situation fraught with all kinds of chaos, and Secretary Powell and the United States government and our ambassador in Haiti, in particular, did a marvelous job, I think, under the circumstances, of preventing what could have been widespread bloodshed and getting Aristide out of the country.

One testimony to that was the fact that even though on the surface we had had all of these rancorous relations, supposedly, with France, much on the part of Secretary Rumsfeld's having stiffed the French on almost everything they wanted to do in the way of military liaison and so forth, the French were willing to come in and help us with the situation in Haiti and to provide troops for stabilizing that situation, because they, too, understood how desperate the situation was.

AMY GOODMAN: But this --

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: So I disagree completely with the characterization that TransAfrica put on this situation.

AMY GOODMAN: This all happened after the Aristides left. Why not bring in these forces before? We were only talking about a couple of hundred thugs that were moving in on the capital?

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: Aristide was the focal point. Aristide was the person who needed to be removed from Haiti, and even he understood that. In the conversation he had with our ambassador, he understood that. He knew that he was the lightning rod, and that if he didn't remove himself from the island, there was going to be a lot of bloodshed.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, of course, he would contest every point.

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: Of course, he would.

AMY GOODMAN: I went to the Central African Republic, and he told the story of basically what he described as being forced out of Haiti at the time, that you had this small group -- I mean, these were not a large number of people -- small group, known killers, people like Jodel Chamblain, who was found guilty of murder in absentia for the murder of the Justice Minister, Guy Malary, in 1993; Antoine Izmerly. These were people who were known -- certainly Colin Powell also knew them -- had been back during the first coup, had been there negotiating with those involved in the coup. This was not the overall sentiment of the Haitian people, and he said it was the U.S. that pressed him to leave, that pushed him out, that put him onto this plane with U.S. military and security. He had no idea where was going until he was dumped in the Central African Republic.

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: I can't imagine a man like Aristide, whose will to power is excessive, even obsessive, saying anything differently. Colin Powell, as you said, did know the situation in Haiti, probably as well as anyone in America. Colin Powell made the decision based on our ambassador in Haiti's very clear presentation of the circumstances, and the President made the decision ultimately, and it was a good decision, and I would stand by that decision.

Haiti is a situation that picks at all our hearts all the time. Haiti is right next to being a failed state. And because of its proximity to the United States, we know what that failure means. And Haiti is not apparently capable of coming out of that situation. It's a situation that, as I said, drags at all our hearts, but in this particular instance, I think a good decision was made, a decision that prevented further bloodshed that would have been widespread had it not been made.

AMY GOODMAN: Why say that the president, Aristide, had an obsession with power? This was a man who was the democratically elected president of Haiti, certainly got a higher percentage of the vote than President Bush got in this country.

COL. LAWRENCE WILKERSON: Please, don't refer to the percentage of vote as equatable to democracy, as equatable to the kinds of institutions we have reflecting democracy in America. Hitler was elected by popular vote.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. He served as Colin Powell's chief of staff when he was Secretary of State. It was interesting to end on this point of the comparison to Hitler. I just went to see a new documentary called *Aristide and the Endless Revolution*, a film by Nicolas Rossier, and he interviewed Gerard Latortue, the unelected prime minister of Haiti. And this is what he had to say.

GERARD LATORTUE: To tell you the truth, for me, President Aristide is already the past. I don't want to return to that, but nevertheless, he still exercises some power over his partisans. And maybe he will continue to exercise it, as Hitler still exercises influence over many extremists in the world today.

AMY GOODMAN: Gerard Latortue, the unelected prime minister. Elections are supposed to be held December 27th. Brian Concannon is with us from Boston. He's Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. And Congress member Maxine Waters joins us on the line from California. Brian Concannon, on the facts of what Colonel Wilkerson had to say.

BRIAN CONCANNON: Well, I think he did get some of it right. I think -- when he said that Colin Powell was working for reconciliation, I think that part-time that was right. On February 12th, Colin Powell actually said to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that, quote, "The policy of this administration is not regime change. President Aristide is the elected president of Haiti." Five days later, he said that we cannot buy into a proposition that would lead to the forcing out the elected president to be replaced by thugs who are inflicting terror on the Haitian people. Now, 11 days after that, on February 28th, all of a sudden, Secretary Powell, who had been talking about supporting democracy, all of a sudden, he says it's time for Aristide to go. And Aristide was, in fact, bundled off on an airplane to the Central African Republic.

Now, what happened in those 11 days between Colin Powell saying he respected democracy and President Aristide being pushed on the plane by the State Department? They didn't recount the votes. President Aristide wasn't unelected. The thugs did not stop their terrorizing of the Haitian population. What happened was that the hard-liners in the administration decided to pull the trigger on Haiti's regime change. And this had been something they had been planning for several years. And when they decided it was time to pull the trigger, Secretary Powell obediently pulled the trigger.

AMY GOODMAN: Colonel Wilkerson made the point that Aristide was afraid at the time, and I raised the issue of Aristide's personal security provided by the Steele Foundation, San Francisco, and them telling us that they weren't allowed to send in the last reinforcements, not allowed by the U.S. government. What about the U.S. military in Haiti, Brian?

BRIAN CONCANNON: The U.S. military had come down. There were -- a whole contingent of Marines had come in a few days before that. It was after President Aristide had asked for mutual support to defend the democracy that was under siege, and instead of sending troops to help the democracy, the troops were sent to secure the U.S. embassy and to be there in case they were needed, not to preserve democracy, but to help usher democracy out. And, in fact, when U.S. embassy personnel went to Aristide's house, and part of the reason why he probably was afraid, his house was guarded by former American soldiers, the U.S. embassy people went over with a contingent of 50 soldiers telling him he had to leave.

And one of the reasons why he had to leave was because there was a rebellion that had taken over much of Haiti, again by people trained and equipped by the U.S., who were killing police officers, who were killing innocent civilians and were letting all of the prisoners out. And so, of course, President Aristide was afraid under the situation. I think it's interesting that Colonel Wilkerson stressed the courage of the U.S. ambassador. It's hard to see where the courage is in going in with 50 people to -- 50 soldiers to someone's residence that's guarded by more former American soldiers and telling him to leave.

AMY GOODMAN: We are also joined by Congress member Maxine Waters. On March 1, it was Monday morning after the February 29th that the Aristides were forced out of Haiti, you broke the story on Democracy Now!, when you called to say you had just spoken to the Aristides in the Central African Republic. And you were the one who said that President Aristide said that he was the victim of a modern kidnapping in the service of a coup d'état backed by the United States. Now, Colonel Wilkerson says this isn't true, he changed his story, he wanted to go. Your response, Congress member Waters?

REP. MAXINE WATERS: I think Brian Concannon, you know, has given a correct version of it. Don't forget, the Congressional Black Caucus had been up to the White House and had asked the President to intervene, to keep Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe and those thugs from moving in to kill Aristide. Don't forget, Aristide didn't have an army. He was dependent on the private protection from the Steele Corporation, and they were not about to engage in battle with any United States Marines. So, he was left without any protection whatsoever. The United States could have easily put down and pushed back Guy Philippe and Chamblain and those guys. They told us that they were looking for a political solution, and they refused to intervene, because they wanted Aristide to be at risk and at danger and to be able to force him out, because he didn't have much choice. He didn't have any way of defending himself. So, it was a coup d'état, and it was a forceful removal of President Aristide.

And let me just say at that meeting that we had with President Bush, Colin Powell certainly was not in charge. Condoleezza Rice was in charge. As a matter of fact, Condoleezza Rice sat at the spot that the person who is going to be the facilitator for the President sat in that day at the table, and Colin Powell was sitting in at the end, you know, kind of at the table. She took charge, and at the point that the chief of staff tried to keep the President out of the meeting, it was Condoleezza Rice who saw that we would have none of that, and she went and got the President, but the President said exactly what the policy was, that they would not intervene, that they were looking for a political solution. So, the hard-liners had decided that, in fact, they were going to have a regime change, and they facilitated the regime change in the way that they handled it.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go to President Aristide's own words. I went on the plane that Congress member Maxine Waters and the founder of TransAfrica, Randall Robinson, organized to go to the Central African Republic to return the Aristides to this hemisphere and had a chance to ask Aristide himself about what he believed happened. This is just a clip on that plane back from the Central African Republic, back to Jamaica, where he went to consider his next move.

PRESIDENT JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE: No. I didn't resign. What some people called resignation is a new coup d'état or a modern kidnapping.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Aristide on the plane, saying, 'No, I did not resign, and that this was a coup.' Were you surprised, Congress member Waters, about Wilkerson's -- in hearing what Wilkerson had to say and the comparison with Hitler?

REP. MAXINE WATERS: Well, whenever someone uses that kind of comparison, you know, and uses it lightly, I don't pay much attention to that. I think that's what you resort to when you don't know what else to say and when you are, you know, trying to support whatever position you have taken. No matter what he says, they were not truly engaged in Haiti. As a matter of fact, I believe that Colin Powell didn't pay a lot of attention to Haiti, that he, at the point that we talked about the possible undoing of the democracy, he knew that that would be wrong, and I think he said and felt the right thing at the time, but I think that it was way past Colin Powell for several reasons. Number one, in describing that meeting that I just described to you, it was obvious to me that Colin Powell was not truly in charge of that policy. Noriega was basically influencing --

AMY GOODMAN: Roger Noriega.

REP. MAXINE WATERS: Roger, yes, Noriega was basically influencing what was going on with that situation, and the hard-liners believed him, and even prior -- probably prior to Powell even knowing that a coup d'etat or regime change was truly in the works, the decision was made, and it was done.

AMY GOODMAN: Congress member Waters, I want to just end with Brian Concannon on what's going to happen next, elections put off three times, latest set for December 27th. Your prediction and the situation now?

BRIAN CONCANNON: My prediction is that you're not going to have a very good process. It's been a flawed process so far. Under the constitution, the government had 90 days to run an election, if you count the current government as being legitimate. They had 90 days. We're now onto 21 months, and they still haven't had elections. What they're planning on doing now is saying we're going to have elections on December 27th, the first round, and by February 7th, we're going to count the votes from the first election, decide about any problems with it, run a second election, count the votes from that and inaugurate a new president, all in five weeks, when in 21 months they haven't even been able to effectively register people, they haven't been able to get the ballots or the voting cards distributed. Obviously, this is a fiasco. What --

AMY GOODMAN: We have five seconds.

REP. MAXINE WATERS: -- many are concerned about, this is going to be a justification for putting in anybody the United States wants.

AMY GOODMAN: We have to end it there. Brian Concannon, Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, and Congress member Maxine Waters, speaking from California.

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Aristide backers hold Forum on Haiti

By Matthew Burrows

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Local representatives of Haiti Solidarity B.C., a group raising awareness about alleged human-rights violations in that country, is bringing a Canadian of Haitian descent to a public forum on Friday (November 25) as part of ongoing discussion about Canada's role in that Caribbean island nation. On February 29, 2004, democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was toppled by the UN-sanctioned military force of the U.S., France, and Canada. He was replaced by Gerard Latortue, who had been in Miami for about 15 years and barely been back to Haiti. Aristide is now in exile and living in South Africa.

With Haitian elections coming up on December 27—they have been postponed twice—the picture is still foggy. Vancouver journalist Anthony Fenton and activist-journalist Jean St-Vil of the Ottawa Haiti Solidarity Committee will be here to present a talk to those wanting to know more. “Lavalas [the ruling party under Aristide] still has massive support,” according to Roger Annas, spokesperson for Haiti Solidarity B.C.

Annas said that St-Vil has also written in *Embassy*, an Ottawa foreign-affairs magazine, and has met with Haitian-born Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean in the past. The group is questioning Jean's silence on an issue that affects her country of descent, as the second anniversary of the coup and that country's elections are both approaching. The event starts at 7:30 p.m. at 65 West Cordova Street.