

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: NOVEMBER 14-16, 2006

Small steps help pull Haiti back from the brink

By Stevenson Jacobs

The Associated Press

South Florida Sun Sentinel

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<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/caribbean/sfl-hhaitisteps16nov16,0,2816137.story?coll=sfla-news-caribbean>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti · Young men with pistols roam the fetid slums of Haiti's capital, but now many are looking for jobs instead of victims. Children in checkered uniforms walk to school on dusty streets where stray bullets used to whiz past.

Five months into Haiti's latest attempt at democracy, small but important improvements have pulled the Caribbean nation from the brink of collapse. Perhaps most notably, an unprecedented wave of kidnappings finally seems to be leveling off.

A year ago, Haiti was engulfed in violence that began with the February 2004 rebel uprising that toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Hundreds, possibly thousands, died in almost daily clashes among well-armed gangs, former rebels, rogue police and U.N. peacekeepers.

Today, a new government led by elected President René Préval has passed a budget, begun to collect taxes, raised \$750 million in foreign aid and launched a campaign to disarm hundreds of gangsters.

The economy is starting to show small but encouraging signs of life. Double-digit inflation that soared after the revolt is starting to fall, while vital cash sent home by Haitians working abroad has increased and overall growth is expected to reach 2.5 percent this year.

"It's a very different place today," U.S. Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson said.

"There are some real accomplishments and some real things that, when looked at over a year, are encouraging."

Peace and stability are far from assured. Huge challenges remain, from employing slum dwellers and rebuilding shattered infrastructure, to equipping Haiti's police.

"This is a country where almost everything is broken," Sanderson said.

A drive across the capital, along streets cratered with giant potholes, underscores her point.

Street children with swollen bellies beg for money, crying "I'm hungry" in Creole as they cluster around stopped cars. Few Haitians have electricity or running water. Jobs are scarce. Acrid black smoke rises day and night from burning tires thrown on trash heaps.

Haiti ranked 153rd of 177 countries in the United Nations' most recent report on global quality of life, behind Sudan and Zimbabwe and ahead of countries including Nigeria, Congo and Sierra Leone. A recent World Bank report lists Haiti as one of 26 states at risk of collapse.

But buoyed by its modest progress, the government is wooing foreign investors, even touting Haiti as a Caribbean vacation spot.

"There is some kind of window of opportunity and the sense of stability that the country has some future," said Edmond Mulet, the U.N. special envoy to Haiti.

"It's still a fragile situation. I wouldn't say we've turned a corner yet, but I think in the next months we'll be able to assume that, hopefully."

The key will be security.

After the revolt, gangs loyal to Aristide launched a wave of killings and kidnappings aimed at destabilizing a U.S.-backed interim government, which was accused of persecuting Aristide supporters. Everyone was a potential victim, including foreign missionaries, security guards and even former first lady Lucienne Heurtelou Estime, an elderly widow shot dead at a jewelry store in May.

The number of reported kidnappings fell from about 80 in August to half that last month, Mulet said. Officials attribute the decrease to government-led negotiations with gangs and increased police and U.N. patrols.

Last month the government unveiled a U.N.-administered program to disarm up to 1,000 low-level gangsters in exchange for food grants, civics courses and training for such jobs as mechanics and electricians.

So far, 109 Haitians have been enrolled, Mulet said, and dozens of weapons recovered.

But gang leaders wanted for murder and other serious crimes aren't eligible for the program, and Haitians fear gang members will return to kidnapping if they don't get jobs, which are scarce.

Haitian police commander resigns after ignoring arrest warrant

The Associated Press

International Herald Tribune

November 15, 2006

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/11/15/news/CB_GEN_Haiti_Police_Commander.php

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A top Haitian police commander who has refused to appear before a judge to face a charge of involvement in kidnappings has resigned as head of his division, police said Wednesday.

Inspector General Michael Lucius, who led an office that investigates kidnappings and other serious crimes, quit his post Tuesday and will be transferred to another unit, police spokesman Frantz Lerebours said.

Last month, a judge indicted Lucius for allegedly conspiring with kidnappers and ordered his arrest. Lucius denied the charge and refused to surrender to authorities. He alleged that the judge, Napela Saintil, was biased against him — a charge Saintil denied.

Kidnappings for ransom flourished in the capital of Port-au-Prince after a February 2004 revolt ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the impoverished Caribbean country's first democratically elected leader. Most of the crimes have been blamed on street gangs — including some loyal to Aristide — but corrupt police have also been implicated.

Lucius' refusal to answer the kidnapping charge has tested a weak justice system already hobbled by corruption, chronic case backlogs and lack of funds.

He told reporters he stepped down to prevent his case from becoming "a handicap for the work of the legal and police institutions."

But Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis said the government asked Lucius to resign "so that justice can be restored to this case." He said Saintil had also been removed from the case, opening the door for a new judge to be assigned.

"This crisis has advanced sufficiently to oblige the government to intervene," Alexis told reporters.

Reached for comment, Lucius said "it was my personal decision" to resign, but added that "maybe the government wanted me to take that decision."

Earlier this week, Port-au-Prince prosecutor Claudy Gasant called Lucius a "fugitive" and vowed to arrest him.

Lucius said he's "ready to answer all the questions of the judicial system" now that a new judge will replace Saintil, whom he accused of seeking to discredit him on behalf of drug and arms traffickers and money launderers.

"I think he has some people behind him. My position is difficult in that it gives me many, many enemies ... because I have some sensitive information," Lucius said by phone, declining to give details.

Saintil wasn't immediately available for comment.

The post held by Lucius has been marked by high turnover, with 10 people holding the position since it was created in 1997. Lucius was appointed to the job in March 2004.

U.N.: Murders in Haiti unacceptable
UPI
November 16, 2006

UNITED NATIONS -- A top U.N. official deplored the Nov. 10 murders of two U.N. Jordanian peacekeepers in Haiti.

Ambassador Jorge Voto-Bernales of Peru, November's president of the U.N. Security Council, read out an informal statement Thursday acknowledging the council's condolences.

"The members of the Security Council deeply regretted the deaths of two Jordanian peacekeepers, occurred last Friday while serving the cause of peace in Haiti," Bernales said.

He continued, saying the council "reiterated their sustained support to the government of Haiti and to the U.N. mission of stabilization in that country in their quest for peace, stability and progress for all Haitians, particularly in the fight against gang violence."

The peacekeepers, two of nearly 8,000 stationed in Haiti, were approached by gunmen in a targeted attack while in their truck, the U.N. said.

The Security Council plans to continue its mission in Haiti, which will include facilitating the upcoming municipal and local elections on Dec. 3.

UN appoints Brazilian as special representative in Haiti
Brazil-Arab News Agency
Agência Brasil*
November 16, 2006

Brasília - The Ministry of Foreign Relations (MRE) received the nomination of the Brazilian Luiz Carlos Costa as Alternate Special Representative for the United Nations in Haiti. He will replace the Guatemalan ambassador Edmundo Mulet-Lesieur.

A career worker for the United Nations (UN) who has been on peace missions in Liberia and Kosovo, Luiz Carlos Costa was appointed directly by the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan. He claimed that the Brazilian's "experience" makes him fit for commanding the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah).

Kofi Annan also pointed to the fact that Brazil remained committed to contributing to the safety, institutional strengthening and socio-economic reconstruction of the Caribbean country. Two and a half years ago, when the peace force was established, Haiti found itself in an extremely unstable situation.

Ever since, Brazil has remained a constant presence in the country, commanding the international force, driven by the sense of regional solidarity and by cultural and ethnic affinities. Solidarity has also justified the sending of troops from Argentina, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Ecuador, Paraguay, Guatemala and El Salvador, among other countries.

*Translated by Gabriel Pomeranclum

Dominican-Haitian activist hopes U.S. award will help fight against discrimination
The Associated Press
International Herald Tribune
November 16, 2006

BATEY LECHERIA, Dominican Republic: Sonia Pierre was just 13 when she was arrested and threatened with deportation for leading her fellow residents of Haitian descent in a march for sugar cane-cutters' rights.

In the three decades since, that lanky teenager has grown into the 6-foot tall champion of a beleaguered minority in this Caribbean nation. Her tireless work securing citizenship and education for Dominican-born ethnic Haitians has made her the target of threats here, but has earned her recognition from overseas as a fierce defender of human rights.

On Friday, Pierre was to receive the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award at a ceremony in Washington, a prize of US\$30,000 (€23,450) and a promise from the center founded in honor of the late senator to help her cause.

"We hope to keep the international pressure on," said Monika Kalra Varma, acting director of the RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights.

An estimated 500,000 to 1 million ethnic Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, many in isolated village slums that dot the countryside. Most born here are descendants of Haitians who crossed the border fleeing violence or seeking economic opportunity.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island of Hispaniola. While Haiti has been plagued by poverty, violence and political instability, its eastern neighbor, with a population of 9 million, grew out of its own early struggles to be seen as a comparative land of opportunity — even as many Haitian migrants are exploited as cheap labor.

Haitians face deep-seated challenges integrating into Dominican society. Dominican independence is measured not from Spain's departure in 1864 but from the end of a Haitian occupation two decades earlier. The Dominican Republic emphasizes European ties over its African ancestry, distinguishing itself from its darker-skinned, poorer neighbor to the west.

In 1976 when Pierre led her fellow Haitian-Dominican neighbors in a march to demand rights for those who cut sugar cane, police arrested her. She was jailed for a day and threatened with deportation to Haiti, where her mother was born.

"I was crying because I didn't know anyone in Haiti," Pierre recalled.

At 43, the towering Pierre's high cheekbones and weary eyes have become a public face of her people. As head of the Dominican-Haitian Women's Movement, she has garnered acclaim from abroad, including a previous award from Amnesty International in 2003.

But her advocacy also has made her and her family targets. She was chased out of her Santo Domingo office by a man waving a pistol and punched at a stop light by a man who said only, "I know who you are." Her children — 16-year-old twins and two older children — have been repeatedly threatened, she said.

Pierre insists she is trying to help her people, not malign the Dominican Republic. "I am not a critic of my country — and this is my country," she said. "I am a critic of my government."

In Pierre's mountain-ringed hometown of Batey Lecheria, an hour's drive north of the capital, her efforts have helped secure government aid, including the installation of running water and electricity. Citrus trees have replaced the state-owned sugar fields where she mobilized residents to demand better pay and housing.

But Pierre, who now lives in Santo Domingo, says about half the 76 families in Batey Lecheria lack Dominican citizenship, despite a constitutional provision granting full legal status to anyone born in the country.

Those without papers can't attend school or take jobs in the free-trade zones that pay better than the 100 pesos (US\$3, €2.35) a day earned by workers picking fruit.

Last year, Pierre helped shepherd a landmark case through the Costa Rica-based Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which ruled that all those born in the Caribbean country must be granted citizenship and receive schooling.

But as the court does not have authority to alter laws or enforce its decisions in the Dominican Republic, changes have not been implemented and even the plaintiffs are yet to receive their full court-ordered compensation.

Dominican officials who oversee Haitian affairs declined to comment on the court's decision or answer questions about its implementation.

The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial has assigned an attorney to work with Pierre on ensuring the ruling is carried out and is working to draw attention to her cause. She is the 23rd recipient of the award honoring the former senator, U.S. attorney general and presidential candidate.

CARICOM exempts certain countries from CARICOM visa requirements
Radio Jamaica
November 16, 2006

With preparations for World Cup Cricket in full gear, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has exempted visitors from key markets from a common visa that will be in place for the duration of the Cricket World Cup next year in all member countries of the common market, except Haiti.

They include nationals of the United States, Britain, Canada and South Africa.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, spoke to reporters after a meeting in Georgetown, Guyana on Wednesday.

“We have tried in the choice of territories that do not need visas to take into account the economic considerations of our respective territories. The majority of these territories still rely on tourism for their primary foreign exchange earner,”

“Many of the countries which I have referred to as being exempt from visas are in fact the major countries from which our tourists come within the Caribbean community and in another instance have been the ones responsible for significant investment in the region,” said the Deputy Prime Minister.

The visa will cost US\$100 and will be administered by Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados.

Rights failures of Haiti transition government are detailed
An independent Haitian group's report criticized Haiti's former U.S.-backed interim government on human rights.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

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<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/haiti/16013227.htm>

From the prolonged jailing of thousands of Haitians to the nearly 2,000 killed under its watch, the U.S.-backed interim government that led the country following the 2004 ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide failed to protect the rights of the country's people, according to a report Tuesday.

"Even if it is true that this government did not commit crimes of a political character like the former regime, one is forced to admit that it failed in its obligation to protect the rights of everyone," the Port-au-Prince-based National Human Rights Defense Network said in the report.

The independent group's report examines the situation in Haiti following Aristide's ouster amid a bloody rebellion to June 2006, when the country's newly elected legislature swore in new cabinet ministers.

The report points out that during the two years interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a Boca Raton resident, and interim President Boniface Alexandre governed Haiti, hundreds of Haitians were jailed, close to 2,000 were killed in "assassinations" and the country experienced a rash of kidnappings and rapes.

"The general human rights situation under the administration of the transitional government was catastrophic," the report says.

Latortue, contacted by The Miami Herald, said he would not comment on the report but added, "This government never attacked a political leader or the press, but they never mention that."

Latortue was appointed in March 2004 and promised to return security to the troubled Caribbean nation, revamp a police force that had just about collapsed and reconcile the country's bitterly divided political factions.

"They didn't do anything to improve the situation," said Pierre Esperance, executive director of the human rights group. "They were implicated in the corruption, too."

Before leaving office, Latortue announced a broad probe into allegations of official corruption. At one point, several judges were placed under investigation for allegedly accepting thousands of dollars in bribes to grant bail to jailed kidnapping suspects.

The investigation into the interim government continues amid promises by President René Préal to tackle corruption. A group in the legislature is investigating the ministry of foreign affairs, and the High Court of Accounts and Administrative Disputes is also conducting probes.

Crime wave provokes vigilante killings in Haiti village

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

November 14, 2006

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/haiti/16005895.htm>

As a crime spree hit a small Haitian village this summer, residents struck back and lynched two suspects.

PLICHE, Haiti - The peasants bound the wrists of the neighbor they suspected of two murders in this remote mountain village, and herded him to the side of a deserted dirt road.

As the man wept, they grilled him about his alleged crimes. Then they handed him a shovel, forced him to dig his own grave and hacked him to death with machetes and picks.

"It was a lot of blows," recalled Renold Cherestant, 34, a Pliché resident and radio reporter who witnessed the lynching, one of two in this region in late July of alleged gang leaders suspected of leading a months long crime spree.

The killings illustrate not only the growing outrage of Haitians with the illegal armed gangs that have long terrorized the capital city of Port-au-Prince, but the vulnerability of even remote and usually peaceful parts of this troubled Caribbean nation.

It also points to the challenges facing President René Prével, six months in power, as he struggles to return security to a country with a small and ineffective police force, dysfunctional justice system and decades of political and economic upheavals.

In the past two years, an unprecedented spate of for-ransom kidnappings and other violent crimes has transformed life in the capital, where private security firms now flourish and well-to-do businessmen and government officials ride in bullet-proof vehicles with armed guards.

"What people want is peace," said Brinó Benice, 50, who moved from Port-au-Prince to Pliché in hopes of finding the security that eludes both rich and poor in the capital. "There are areas in the country that are still peaceful, but there are areas where we are seeing increased violence."

Benice and others in the Pliché area believe their recent crime wave is related to a summer spike in violence in Port-au-Prince that forced the Haitian government and U.N. peacekeepers to beef up security in the capital. Neighbors said the two Pliché lynch victims ran groups of young thugs who moved from the capital.

U.N. FORCE

Scores of blue-helmeted U.N. troops were redeployed from the countryside to the capital to help bolster the National Police, 32 additional street checkpoints were established and 11 more armored vehicles were sent to patrol the capital, said Edmond Mulet, overall head of the U.N. mission here.

The focused attention appears to be paying off. Police have entered previously no-go parts of Cité Soleil, the capital's main slum and stronghold of gangs well armed from the spoils of Haiti's political upheavals. Kidnappings are trending down, and a campaign to disarm the gang members has netted about 110 people who turned in guns in exchange for food grants and job training.

But there remain occasional clashes between U.N. peacekeepers and residents in Cité Soleil, as well as street protests by university students opposed to the presence here of some 9,000 U.N. military and police personnel. Friday night, gunmen killed two Jordanian peacekeepers.

"This is still a very fragile situation; it's wait-and-see," Mulet said.

Préval says the September lynching of a suspected kidnapper in the Port-au-Prince slum of Bel-Aire, and the two in Pliché, show Haitians are fed up with the ``weakness of the justice system."

"If there was a justice system, it would not have arrived at this point," he told The Miami Herald in an interview.

But fixing the problems won't be easy.

The National Police claims it has 7,476 agents -- others estimate 4,000 -- in the nation of eight million. New York City, which has the same number of residents, has 37,000 police officers.

All agree that police are under-equipped, poorly trained and often corrupt.

A report last week by the Washington-based International Crisis Group (ICG), an independent think tank monitoring Haiti, called for vetting police officers and urged the U.N. force here be expanded from 1,700 to 1,900 officers and include anti-gang, SWAT and organized crime experts.

It also noted that millions of dollars have been spent in the past decade on reforming Haiti's justice system, still mired in corruption and a huge backlog of cases. Meanwhile, the country's laws are antiquated and the judges are underpaid.

"You cannot do a stand-alone police reform. You have to do it parallel to a justice reform so when the police do pick up people for violating the law, there is a judiciary that is going to deal with the cases on the merits and not based on who knows whom, or who paid whom," said ICG Haiti analyst Mark Schneider.

Crime, he added, is not going to go away. But the government can restore the population's faith so that ``they can look at the police and the justice system as the answer."

The residents of Pliché, 85 miles southwest of the capital, know all too well the reality of Haiti's understaffed police force. When the crime spree in their village began, they say, they met with police and a government prosecutor.

"The insecurity was bad. The people could not sleep at home, they were afraid. They could not come to church," said The Rev. Ignace Coissy, a Catholic priest who took part in the meetings.

PATROL REQUESTED

Residents asked for a police patrol in the Pliché area and perhaps even their own police station. They were told neither was possible.

"I don't have a car, a motorcycle or even a bicycle," said Tertilian Adelson, the officer in charge of the police station in Cavaillon, responsible for Pliché and its surroundings. Cavaillon is a several-hours walk from Pliché on a mountain road.

"There are times I borrow money, or take my own money to borrow a motorcycle to go to the mountain to check on the population," Adelson said, adding that his station has only six officers, including himself.

Adelson, who confirmed the two vigilante killings in Pliché, said that after the incidents authorities immediately opened an investigation. It has gone nowhere, he said.

"They've hidden the information," he said. ``They are afraid to talk. They believe if they talk, there will be arrests and the bandits will return."

Residents say one of the men lynched was a prison escapee known as Theophile. He and the other victim, known as Rigaud, led several gunmen. In the killings' aftermath, other gang members have left and peace has returned to this cocoa and coffee farming community.

But Coissy, the priest, cautioned that the situation can quickly change.

"It's a dynamite that can explode at anytime," he said. ``The situation in the country is out of control. The misery, the crime. Things like this will happen more and more as long as people's conditions don't improve."

Haiti business climate is `getting worse'

Factory closings and job losses underscore the grim reality of Haiti's economy as business owners and middle-class families continue to flee abroad.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

November 15, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE - Six days a week Laula Jean eked out a living inspecting hems and sweatshirts in a sprawling garment factory near one of this city's most volatile slums.

"I enjoyed what I was doing," said Jean, 31, who supported herself and her mother on her \$121 a month salary at the A.G. Textiles factory.

But three weeks ago she became the latest casualty of Haiti's weakening economy when the factory closed and she joined the millions of others in this desperately poor nation without a paycheck.

"I've been looking, but I can't find anything," Jean said.

Georges Sassine, owner of A.G. Textiles and vice president of the Haitian manufacturer's association, says he shuttered his factory after 35 years under much the same pressures that closed 15 others in the last two years and cost 5,000 jobs.

These include the political turmoil of 2004 that led to the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, steep loan interest rates and global competition. The street violence prevalent in the capital has made an impact too: Six of Sassine's workers were wounded on the job when gunfire interrupted in the neighboring slum.

The final straw: His main client, Canada's Gildan Activewear, temporarily cut back orders, costing Sassine \$12,300 in lost income per week.

The closings and job losses underscore the grim reality of Haiti's economy as business owners and middle-class families continue to flee abroad. Those left behind say they are steadily losing the fight to stay afloat after years of political instability, violence and negative economic growth.

`A ROUGH TIME'

"We are going through a rough time," said Maxime Condé, 55, who added that his own company may soon become the fourth factory to close in three months. His factory, which makes hospital scrubs for a Florida company, has gone from 1,000 workers to 200 in the last two years.

Haiti's apparel assembly industry, largely using U.S. textiles for duty-free export to the U.S. market, once employed 100,000 and had replaced agriculture as the nation's economic backbone. Today, it employs 20,659, reports the Association of Haitian Industrialists. Yet it is still viewed by some as the key to reviving Haiti's economy, if the country can get trade preferences from Washington more beneficial than those it currently enjoys under the 24-year-old Caribbean Basin Initiative.

Haiti's apparel exports to the United States rose from \$328.8 million in 2004 to \$405.8 million last year. But businessmen here say the increase results from changing the way of measuring the value of the goods rather than any export growth.

A U.S. bill giving Haiti duty-free access to the U.S. market for clothes made here with fabric from third countries has languished in the U.S. Congress for two years, opposed by textile groups that argue it will cost U.S. jobs. A delegation of Haitians and Haitian Americans hopes to push Congress to approve the so-called HOPE bill during the session that began Monday.

"While we've been diddling, a terrible economy has gotten worse," said former Florida Sen. Bob Graham, an original sponsor of the Senate version that passed in 2004.

Graham, who recently visited Haiti as part of a four-member assesment team, said ``Préval has got the same problem Franklin D. Roosevelt had in 1933. He's got a country in deep economic and psychological depression, and he needs to show some immediate action that will be seen by the Haitian people as signs of improvement in their lives."

Incoming House Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel, D-NY, has said he wants HOPE to pass in the lame duck session. But Haiti will first have to get the support of the legislation's opponents, and it will have to compete for attention with all the other trade bills the Bush administration is pushing. Even if HOPE does pass, it's not a panacea for Haiti.

"Countries tend to think that passage of these trade measures alone in the U.S. is enough to revive their economies," said Daniel Erikson of the Inter-American Dialogue think tank in Washington D.C. ``The reality is a lot of work on the ground has to be done. That is especially true in Haiti."

Critics say HOPE would quickly outlive its usefulness in the fast-paced world of globalization.

STAYING COMPETITIVE

Despite its wealth of cheap labor, Haiti still needs to address a host of other problems -- security, stable electricity and good roads among them -- to make itself truly competitive.

Haiti's economy is indeed improving. Inflation has dramatically decreased, though still high at 13 percent. Government revenues are up, and the International Monetary Fund projects the economy will grow 2.5 percent this year, up from 1.8 percent in 2005.

But that growth, said Haitian economist Pierre-Marie Boisson, is not being generated by private investments but mainly by the \$1 billion in remittances Haitians living abroad sent back last year to relatives. While it helps send kids to school and keeps food in the stomach, it also fuels inflation as domestic production lags.

The same \$200 wire transfer from the States three years ago buys much less today because "prices have gone up by 60 percent while the gourdes [Haiti's currency] has kept the same parity with the U.S. dollar," said Boisson, who runs Sogesol, the microlending affiliate of Haiti's largest commercial bank.

All of this creates a bleak reality for people like Kettle Civil, whose job of five years at A.G. Textiles allowed her to temporarily rise out of the 78 percent of Haitians who live on less than \$2 a day.

"When you have a job, you wake up in the morning and you know you have a job to go to. You know you will be able to eat and drink that day," said the 43-year-old mother of two. Like the overwhelming number of Haitians who voted for President René Prével, Civil believed life would have vastly improved by now.

She was hopeful when he and Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis spoke of wanting to create jobs; and she was optimistic when they vowed to tackle the lawlessness that has scared many entrepreneurs out of Haiti.

But like millions here, Civil is still waiting.

If things are moving slow, it's because "everything is a priority," said Alexis, adding the government has created a clearinghouse to help investors, sent out tax letters to collect \$525 million in revenue and approved a \$1.6 billion budget.

He acknowledged his government has "to help the private sector to change, to become more progressive so they can see the advantages of investing in their country."

In Haiti, the loss of one salaried job can have a catastrophic ripple effect for the 80 percent of people who work in the informal economy such as street vending.

"I don't know what I am going to do. I am just waiting," said Ademene Charles, 43, who used to offer daily home-cooked chicken and rice specials to the A.G. Textiles workers from a makeshift kiosk nearby.

Today, A.G. Textiles is a lifeless building.

"I haven't dismantled the factory, just in case HOPE passes," said Sassine.

HOPE for Haiti
By James Morrison
Embassy Row
The Washington Times
November 15, 2006

Haiti's finance minister and two leading businessmen are in Washington to urge Congress to reduce tariffs on its garment industry in a desperate attempt to save jobs in a country gripped by armed gangs that attack U.N. peacekeepers and kidnap foreigners and Haitians alike.

Finance Minister Daniel Dorsainvil and his colleagues, Richard Coles, former president of the Haitian Manufacturing Association, and business consultant Lionel Delatour, plan to meet with members of Congress, including Rep. Charles B. Rangel, New York Democrat and likely chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. They want Congress to pass the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act, also called the "HOPE" bill.

"HOPE is very important for us," Mr. Dorsainvil said over lunch at The Washington Times. "It would send the right signal that Haiti is back in business. HOPE and debt relief will provide Haiti with the relief needed to foster growth."

Beside the increase in gang violence and kidnappings, Haiti suffers from an unemployment rate of up to 70 percent. HOPE would remove all tariffs on apparel made in Haiti from imported U.S. fabric. Supporters say HOPE would create as many as 60,000 jobs.

"It's about making a better partner and extending areas of cooperation," Mr. Dorsainvil told our correspondent Sharon Behn. "The political philosophy of the government is good, pragmatism is good," he said.

The minister said political leaders recognized that the only way forward for the country's 8.5 million residents was to put politics aside and focus on reducing violence and improving infrastructure to attract investment that is being lost to more competitive Asian economies.

Haiti's textile industry, which in the 1980s employed about 150,000 people, now employs about 20,000. Mr. Coles, president of the Multitex apparel company, said he employed 6,000 workers until he lost major contractors such as J.C. Penney Co. Inc. and had to lay off 3,000 employees.

Mr. Coles warned that without some forward movement on the job front, Haiti could collapse under the force of criminal violence.

"If nothing changes in 12 to 18 months, if there is no momentum, the devils will come back," he said.

Although President Rene Preval has achieved some economic success and low-cost labor is attractive to investors, Mr. Dorsainvil acknowledged that Haiti still faces considerable challenges in security and infrastructure. Kidnappings and drug-related violence also are on the rise and need to be dealt with, he said.

He called on the 9,000 U.N. forces currently in Haiti to remain "for some time to come" and said the government hopes the troops can expand their mandate and do more to help stabilize the country.

Mr. Delatour said the return of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, while not forbidden by the current government, should not be encouraged. Mr. Aristide, he warned, "would be a major element of destabilization."

At least 14 peacekeepers have been killed since the deployment of the U.N. force in June 2004. Two Jordanian peacekeepers died in an ambush on Friday. Police reported 40 kidnappings last month, compared with 30 in September, although many abductions go unreported.

Army moving

The U.S. Army headquarters for operations in Afghanistan, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa will be relocated to a newly expanded base in Qatar, the U.S. ambassador to the Gulf emirate said yesterday.

"Qatar and the USA are cooperating on building a new forward headquarters for the U.S. Central Command," Ambassador Chase Untermeyer told reporters in the capital, Doha.

The headquarters of Centcom have been based in As Sayliyah since 2002, after moving from Saudi Arabia before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The new location will be at the al-Udeid air base, which also serves the Qatari air force.

- Call Embassy Row at 202/636-3297, fax 202/832-7278 or e-mail jmorrison@washingtontimes.com.

Dominican Born Haitian Rights Defender to Receive 2006 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award
Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Press Release
NOVEMBER 14, 2006

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WASHINGTON - November 14 - Sonia Pierre to receive 2006 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award for protecting the rights of Haitian immigrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic. The award will be presented by Ethel Kennedy in a ceremony hosted by Senator Edward Kennedy at the Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office Building (Room 325) at 10:30 am November 17th, 2006.

WHO: Award Winner, Sonia Pierre of the Dominican Republic, Director of the Movement of Dominican Women of Haitian Descent (MUDHA), the Dominican Republic's leading organization fighting discrimination, violent mass expulsions and the denial of citizenship and human rights to Dominicans of Haitian descent.

Sonia has received national and international attention for spearheading a campaign using international legal action and public education to end discriminatory practices which deny as many as 280,000 Dominicans of Haitian living in the country and 25% of children in the Dominican Republic their right to nationality and citizenship.

This is the 23rd Annual Award Ceremony and the award marks the beginning of a partnership between Sonia Pierre and the RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights

- Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy
- Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA)
- Kerry Kennedy
- Jim Wooten, Master of Ceremonies and former ABC News correspondent
- Lynn Delaney, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Executive Director
- Monika Kalra Varma, Acting Director, RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights

WHEN: November 17, 2006 - 10:30 am to 12:00, Reception to follow

WHERE: Russell Senate Office Building: Room 325, Caucus Room

WHAT: The Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award was established in 1984 to honor creative individuals from around the world who have dedicated their lives to overcoming serious human rights

violations. The RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights will engage in a partnership with Sonia to help her achieve her goals of legal equality for Haitians immigrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic.

Source: Robert F. Kennedy Memorial (<http://www.rfkmemorial.org/>)

Available for Interviews: Please call (202) 463-7575 ext 241 or email buchanan@rfkmemorial.org for availability.

Sonia Pierre (speaks Spanish -- will travel with translator), 2006 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award Winner and Director of Movement of Dominican Women of Haitian Descent (MUDHA). She will be available for comment via phone or meetings in Washington, DC November 12-17th.

Monika Kalra Varma, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights Acting Director and expert on human rights crisis facing Haitian people.

Jeffrey Buchanan, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Chief Spokesperson

The Nassau Guardian
Training Haitian Police Officers
November 14, 2006

Thousands of Haitians continue to flee their strife torn, poverty-stricken country every year, headed for The Bahamas, the United States of America and other countries. No one can blame them for escaping from their pitiful situations to seek economic relief and a better way of life than they left behind. But in that mix can be found ordinary peasants, educated people, professionals and some who belong to criminal enterprises.

The news that The Bahamas has agreed to train Haitian police officers at The Royal Bahamas Police Force College starting in January next year sounds good at the outset. It could be a tremendous feat for this small Bahamian nation with a population of a mere 300,000 people to train members of Haiti's police force, a country of more than eight million people.

The words of Minister of National Security Cynthia Pratt and Police Commissioner Paul Farquharson also sound good: A more stable Haiti will result in a more stable Bahamas. We believe that if there is a safe Haiti, there will be a safe Bahamas. If we are able to assist them in training, they will be better able to police their country, giving us an opportunity to curtail some of the problems that we are faced with.

Also cited as reasons for initiating the training program is the concern about the criminal element that comes to The Bahamas from Haiti and that training Haitian officers in The Bahamas will make The Bahamas safer.

There is no denying that it may be very historic in that no Bahamian police commissioner in the past has ever traveled to Haiti to discuss national security with the Haitian police commissioner. That alone can be commendable and it should be applauded.

But there has to be rationality in committing the country to that training regime. It cannot be taken for granted that The Bahamas will also accrue some benefit simply because the transaction will be beneficial to Haiti.

Where is the guarantee that the Bahamas training will make them better able to curtail some of the problems with which this country is faced, because of the huge number of Haitians that are coming here?

It could be good for the Haitian police officers to get the kind of training that the RBPF has to offer as they could be introduced to an aspect of policing that may not be readily available at home and which they would otherwise not get. That being the case The Bahamas should gladly be of this kind of service to a neighboring country. However, Bahamian officials should not dupe themselves into believing that it will help The Bahamas in the halt from Haiti of criminal elements.

Because of the large number of illegal Haitian nationals residing in The Bahamas, and because of the many backgrounds from which they come, the RBPF has to be doubly sure of every officer that comes

for training to ensure that none of them is being used to communicate with and to facilitate the Haitian underground here.

The Bahamians should not be naive to believe that training the Haitian police officers in The Bahamas would put an end to the criminals in that country migrating to The Bahamas. That is unlikely to happen. The Bahamas must go in with eyes wide open and knowing the score at the outset.

Deportation breaks apart a family

By DIANNA SMITH

Cox News Service

Grand Junction Sentinel

Monday, October 23, 2006

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — They are ages 5 and 3. Twin boys and a dainty girl too young to know about the impoverished country of Haiti, too young to be told that Haiti is where their mother is now trapped.

"My mommy, she's in the hospital," the boys often say to those who arrive at their cozy home, where photographs displayed on shelves give visitors a glimpse of a family with a happy, hopeful life.

And it was. Until seven months ago.

The boys point to a framed picture of a pretty woman in a yellow dress with long hair, smiling faintly for a camera. She's coming home, they say. But no one knows when.

Mommy is Marie Michou Daniel, deported earlier this year for disobeying a judge's order to return to Haiti, her native country she fled nine years ago. Her children are American citizens, simply because they were born on American soil. They are unaware that their mother, because she was born on Haitian soil, is no longer here.

"They used to cry a lot. So I told them she had an accident and is in the hospital," said their grandmother, Roselene Massolas, a legal citizen because of a political twist of fate. She is now living in her daughter's West Palm Beach home. "If they know she's at the hospital, the hospital is in the United States. If they think she's in Haiti, it is too far away."

Daniel was one of 153,026 people that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers deported between October 2005 and July. Of those, 3,572 were from Florida. Her children — twin sons Marvin and Garvin and daughter Cherby — are among the estimated three million children of undocumented parents who are U.S.-born citizens, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute, a non-partisan economic and social policy research organization.

And these children, who daily face the prospect that their parents will be suddenly swept away, are some of the more emotional threads that weave the fabric of the nationwide immigration debate.

Their grandmother cannot read, does not speak English nor does she drive, and though she's lived here for 11 years, she doesn't know how to do simple things expected from American mothers. Teaching the boys to count to 20 in English, how to celebrate their birthdays, what to do when they're sick.

The Immigration Advocacy Center in Miami learns of families like Daniel's frequently, said executive director Cheryl Little.

"We're seeing parents separated from their children on a regular basis," Little said. "Families are faced with having to make a difficult decision: Do they uproot their children and take them where they may not be safe or do they leave them in the United States? These are heartbreaking decisions to make."

Sinai Missionary Baptist Church in Greenacres is helping Massolas raise the children the way her daughter did before she was arrested in January. Members of the congregation help pay the bills, they take the children on outings, deliver boxes filled with American food that Massolas is learning how to cook and they teach the children how to speak Creole because, until now, English has been their language of choice.

Tears streamed down Massolas' face one evening this month as she spoke remorsefully of these things. She tried to wipe away each drop for fear the children would see, but her tears fell much too quickly, just the way her daughter left.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with them. I'm not part of the culture," Massolas, 44, said. "Every day they ask, 'When will my mother be home?'"

The Rev. Pierre Gregoire Saint-Louis of Sinai Missionary church plucked a phone card from a plastic bag and dialed one of the many phone numbers that Daniel has left with her mother. "Hello?" the pastor said, "Marie Michou Daniel?"

This is how her family contacts her now. The church donates phone cards so Massolas can call at least once a week. They have about 20 minutes to pack in as much conversation as possible, trying to avoid the tears and the heartache so Daniel can hear how her children are growing without her.

Marvin and Garvin have lost baby teeth, three from one, four from the other. Cherby is getting too big for her grandma to carry. She needs new clothes. The 5-year-old boys want help with their homework. They're already talking about Christmas and decorating a tree.

Sometimes, the children grab the phone from their grandmother, pressing it tight to their ears like they are hugging their mother.

"Mommy? I love you," Marvin said in his squeaky voice, pacing his living room floor like a grown-up on a business call. "How are you? Are they giving you a shot? Let me go with you ? I love you."

It's conversations like this one that makes Massolas' head spin. But it's phone calls like the next one that scares her even more.

From a friend's phone in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Daniel's voice trembles this night. She's quick to talk of the murder she witnessed in 1997. A man held a gun to her neighbor's head and shot three times. Daniel began receiving death threats. So she fled the country of an estimated 8 million where the uneducated and the poor outnumber the professionals and the rich.

Daniel came to the United States in 1997 with a photo-switch passport and was arrested as soon as she tried to make it through customs at Miami International Airport. She was paroled after stating she fled

Haiti because she feared for her life. Daniel filed paperwork for political asylum, obtained a work permit and started to work odd jobs in Palm Beach County.

She became a certified nursing assistant, eventually had her twins and then her daughter. She saved enough money to buy her own house and filled it with furniture and a family she had always wanted — all the while, not knowing how long she could stay.

"I didn't want to return to Haiti because of the political turmoil and because I'm a single mother," Daniel, 30, said on the phone that night. "I was very scared."

When Daniel's political asylum was denied in 1999, she appealed. And when she learned the appeal, too, was denied, she made a decision to remain in the U.S. anyway. By then, she'd had her children and was afraid to take them to a country where kidnappings are common and violence is the norm.

But on Jan. 30, Daniel's happy, hopeful American life abruptly came to an end when she got into a minor car accident on U.S. 441 in West Palm Beach. She had just dropped the twins off at school and her daughter at day-care. Before they said goodbye, Cherby asked her mother what she was going to do. Daniel said she was going to work and planned to buy groceries to try a new recipe for dinner.

The police officer at the accident noticed there was a lien on Daniel's driver's license. She was taken into custody and then sent to Krome Detention Center near Miami, where she lived imprisoned for almost a month until a guard woke her at 3 o'clock one morning. He told her to gather her belongings because she was going home. Daniel, at first, was excited.

But "home" meant Haiti.

"We were devastated by this," said attorney Mark Citrin of Citrin and Goldstein, the Miami firm that handled Daniel's case. Citrin has practiced immigration law for 19 years. "We expected an officer to be sympathetic. We were dumbfounded the government could be that cold."

Paul Goldstein expected Daniel to remain in the U.S. under supervision, where she would be required to meet with immigration officers frequently. Instead, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security immediately denied the request to stay because she did not have a passport. Goldstein rebutted, explaining why there wasn't one.

A few weeks passed before Goldstein received a phone call from a friend of Daniel's informing him she was gone.

Daniel does not have a criminal record and was not a threat to anyone, he said.

"We basically said, 'Sending this lady back could be a death sentence,'" Goldstein said. "Your heart goes out to somebody like that. The children basically became orphans."

Children or not, parent or not, that doesn't matter to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Anyone who violates the law, regardless of their circumstances, will have consequences to suffer.

"It's really unfortunate the parents put their children in that situation by breaking the law," said Barbara Gonzalez, an ICE spokeswoman in Miami. "Someone who is ordered removed .??. our obligation as a law enforcement agency is to enforce that order."

Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said parents who break immigration laws deserve no sympathy.

"In any other situation in which a parent violates the law and the children suffer as a result, we hold the parents responsible," Mehlman said.

He said that FAIR, a national non-profit organization that advocates tougher immigration laws, questions the interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment that allows automatic citizenship to children born in the U.S. FAIR does not believe citizenship should be granted to children of illegal parents.

"There have been bills floating around Congress that would change the interpretation," Mehlman said. "We are certainly in favor of that."

Daniel is now living among friends in the country's capital. Like many Haitians denied political asylum who are forced to return, she doesn't stay in one place long because she's afraid those who once threatened her will come for her.

Work is scarce in Haiti, so Daniel doesn't have a job. She has few belongings, just what her mother and church have mailed the past seven months. That includes snapshots of her boys on their first day of kindergarten and the pre-school graduation she regretfully missed. The twins saved the red caps and gowns they wore that day for their mother to see. Just as they've saved the seven baby teeth.

"There's no peace for me right now," Daniel said in the phone call. "The children ask when I'm coming back. They say, 'Mommy you've left us.' I keep lying to them. I know I'm lying to them. I say I'm coming back. I have hope that I will. But I don't know how it's going to happen."

Massolas sat near the pastor and listened carefully to her daughter as the tears continued to fall. Daniel told the pastor that while traveling outside Port-au-Prince earlier this month, her bus was hijacked by men with machine guns. No one was hurt. Daniel was fine. But that may not be the case next time.

The pastor suddenly told Daniel they must say goodbye. Their minutes were up.

Massolas buried her head in her hands, while the children, so lighthearted, so innocent, tried their best to console her.

"It's OK, it's OK," said Garvin, stroking her hair ever so gently with his tiny right hand. "She's coming home soon."

Massolas fled to the United States in 1995 for political reasons, and she became a legal resident after President Clinton signed the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act in 1998. The law enabled

many Haitians who fled to America before 1996 to apply for lawful permanent resident status without having to first apply for an immigrant visa.

Because Haiti is politically unstable, Haitian communities and activists in the United States have repeatedly demanded the government grant Temporary Protected Status for Haitians. TPS has been granted to refugees from war-torn countries including Somalia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Sudan. It has never been granted to Haitians, even during the ravaging floods and mudslides unleashed by Tropical Storm Jeanne in 2004 that killed more than 3,000 people in the city of Gonaives.

The Immigration Advocacy Center has written numerous letters to government officials requesting TPS for Haitians, and even Gerard Latortue, a Boca Raton retiree, sent a letter of support while serving as Haiti's interim prime minister.

"Haitians don't have political clout that other immigrant groups do," said Little. "This administration knows full well they can discriminate against the Haitians and not many people are going to care."

The pastor said family and friends plan to seek legal action to see if Daniel can return on humanitarian parole, usually granted to people with special circumstances, such as the severely ill who need medical attention abroad.

But attorneys Citrin and Goldstein said it's doubtful that would work.

Daniel is banned from the U.S. for 10 years because she was ordered to leave. When the children turn 21, they can petition for her to return, but because Daniel committed immigration fraud when she used the photo-switch passport, she would need a waiver for the fraud.

"We've had three from Haiti just like this," Citrin said. "Nobody wants to give Haitians TPS."

Saint-Louis has sent letters to local congressmen pleading for help. He plans to visit Daniel during a trip to Haiti later this month.

"We are Christians and we are immigrants," he said of his congregation. "We understand."

"People, when they are facing safety problems in their country, they have a great perception of America as the land of freedom. You have to bring some hope for these people. That's all you can count on, prayer and hope."

Dianna Smith writes for The Palm Beach Post.