

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: SEPTEMBER 12-19, 2005

Churches urged to renew action for peace and healing

19/09/05

Ekklesia, UK

Churches have a special responsibility to further reconciliation in broken societies and to promote peace, say the leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which brings together the major Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican faith communities across the globe, and associates closely with the Roman Catholic Church.

The 25-member WCC executive committee was meeting at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, near Geneva, from 13-16 September 2005, in its last full gathering prior to the WCC 9th Assembly in Brazil in 2006.

In a policy statement on the dangerous proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the WCC urged churches to exercise their “unique potential” to curb demand for guns and “to affirm God's vision of life in peace and fullness” by “changing public attitudes, shaping community values and becoming a public voice against gun violence.”

Small arms are used in the vast majority of the estimated 350,000 of violent deaths throughout the world annually. In 2006, the WCC will lead an ecumenical delegation at the United Nations Small Arms Review Conference.

Referring to the critical situation in Haiti, the WCC also expressed its solidarity with the churches there and its “concern for the current unstable political situation”, as well as the extreme poverty, violence and human suffering experienced by the population.

The World Council of Churches has closely followed developments in Haiti in recent years and has led ecumenical efforts for mediation and healing in the divided society. The WCC general secretary, the Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, met with church and political leaders in Haiti in August 2005.

In his report to the WCC executive on the consequences of Hurricane Katrina, which ravaged the southern USA in early September, Dr Kobia declared: “The disaster ... exposes profound weaknesses and wounds in American society, and pertinent questions of racism, poverty and the impact of global warming, which need to be addressed with urgency and determination.”

He concluded: “The disaster confronts us with the vulnerability of power, and should challenge states to shift policies and reconsider international relationships.”

In 2001 the WCC launched a Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), to work with the churches in taking the public vocation of peacemaking with renewed seriousness.

Drug trial to begin for former Haitian anti-narcotics chief

By CURT ANDERSON

Associated Press Writer

Gainesville Sun

September 19, 2005

The top Haitian police official in the government of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide is facing trial on charges that he accepted thousands of dollars in bribes to help Colombian drug lords move huge loads of cocaine through the impoverished Caribbean country.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin later this week in the case against Evintz Brillant, the only one of four former senior Haitian police officials who has not pleaded guilty in the investigation of drug trafficking inside the Aristide government.

The three who pleaded guilty are expected to cooperate in the U.S. government's case against Brillant, who has pleaded innocent and faces a life sentence if convicted. The trial's scheduled Monday start before U.S. District Judge Marcia Cooke was delayed a few days by the approach of Tropical Storm Rita.

According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Brillant used his post as head of Haiti's top anti-drug police unit from 2001 to 2004 to help drug traffickers ship thousands of pounds of cocaine through Haiti, including the airport in the capital of Port-au-Prince, to the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

Brillant and other top Haitian police officials, DEA Agent Noble Harrison said in a court affidavit, "agreed to look the other way when shipments of cocaine were in transit" in exchange for bribes, some of which he used to pay lower-level police officers to provide security and protection for the drugs.

On occasion, Brillant "stopped and arrested drug traffickers for the purpose of receiving payments and bribes," prosecutors said in court papers.

The investigation has produced no evidence implicating Aristide, even though some convicted drug dealers have insisted that the former president was intimately involved in trafficking through Haiti. Aristide was ousted in February 2004 and is now living in exile in South Africa.

"There was never any evidence and there remains no evidence of it," said attorney Ira Kurzban, who represents Aristide in Miami. "They've been trying for two years. There is no case."

Brillant is specifically accused by U.S. prosecutors of being involved in the drug network controlled by convicted Haitian drug trafficker Sergo Edouard. Brillant was paid \$10,000 in one instance for agreeing to protect drug shipments and got a share of \$150,000 from another trafficker to provide similar security.

Although the Haitian police arrests were trumpeted as a major success in the war on drugs by the Bush administration, a U.S. State Department report issued earlier this year says that the flow of Colombian cocaine and other drugs through Haiti continues virtually unchallenged.

The report says that Haiti, with its 1,125 miles of virtually wide open coastline, clandestine airstrips, uncontrolled seaports and police corruption make it difficult for the Haitian government to stop the drug trade.

"Haitian drug trafficking organizations continue to operate with relative impunity," says the March report. "Haiti remains an important transit country for Colombian drug traffickers."

Freighters are most often used to transport the drugs directly from Haiti to the United States, concealed in shipments of legitimate items such as cement or in hidden compartments. Aircraft are also used, and some drugs are driven over the border with the Dominican Republic to be sent to Puerto Rico and elsewhere, the report says.

The other Haitian police officials who have pleaded guilty are Jean Nesly Lucien, the former national police director; Rudy Therassan, a former commander with the police; and Romaine Lestin, former police chief at the Port-au-Prince airport.

Therassan was sentenced in July to 15 years in prison, while Lucien and Lestin are scheduled for sentencing in November.

Amorim calls for open, democratic elections in Haiti
Sept. 19, 2005
Keite Camacho
Agencia Brasil

New York – Minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, will arrive in Haiti today with an important message: "We should stick to the election calendar and ensure that the elections are open, transparent and as democratic as possible." Amorim will visit Brazilian troops which have led the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti since it was established last year. There are 1,200 Brazilian soldiers in Haiti, in a peace force of 7,500, which is commanded by Brazilian army general, Urano Bacellar.

Amorim will also meet with local authorities, including the prime minister, Gerard Latortue, and members of the Election Board.

Elections are scheduled for November 15, with a runoff election on December 18 (as there are 54 presidential candidates, a runoff is most probable). A new Haitian government should take office on February 15, 2006.

Translator: Allen Bennett

19/09/2005

Local Nurses Volunteer in Haiti
WHBF TV, Illinois
Sept. 19, 2005

Deb Stockton is a registered nurse at Genesis Medical Center. She's taking her experience on the road and heading to Haiti where healthcare is a luxury for most.

"Healthcare is not at the top of their list," says Stockton, the team leader for a medical mission group. "If you can't feed your kids that day, you're not going to take what little you have and go see a doctor."

Deb will lead a 10-person team to the small country in the Atlantic Ocean. They will set up what's called a 'Bush Clinic' and treat people who walk for days to see them, for a small fee.

"They pay a minimal amount," says Stockton, "primarily because Haitians consider things that are free not to be valuable and we want them to place some value on this."

The group will set up in the small mountaintop village of Bonados where they expect to treat about 500 people and help them with construction projects. The team is aware their mission comes at a time when some in the U.S. think resources should be used here at home.

"The people in Haiti don't have the government bringing them food and water and providing them shelter and medications," says team member Jolene Draheim. "If we turned our back on them because there are needs here, it would be devastating to them."

If you would like to help, you can contact Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Davenport.

Haiti, Rape and Repression
The Bahama Journal
Sept. 19, 2005

Haiti is suffering. Haiti is bleeding. Today the Haitian people –particularly its women- are being devastated. True, too, is the fact that the Haitian people were being devastated yesterday.

There is a new twist, which is that we are today learning and being horrified at the news that there are Haitian women who are being raped and brutalized. We are learning that rape –that vilest of crimes- is being used as an instrument of political repression and torture.

This is wrong. And for sure, Haiti's neighbors should see to it that it is stopped.

And let there be no mistake about it, the United States of America, Canada, France, Jamaica and The Bahamas –among other concerned nations- can and should move to help bring the nasty miscreants to justice.

We admit that we were horrified when we became aware of the extent to which Haitian women in Haiti are being abused and the extent to which that abuse engulfs other family members.

Take for example, one story about one young Haitian woman who was abused. As Lyn Duff describes the scene: "It was the middle of the night when masked men armed with semi-automatic assault rifles burst into the Cap Haitian home of 14-year-old Marjory, the oldest daughter of a local trade unionist.

"The men were members of the disbanded Haitian military who reformed into the armed gangs who overthrew democratically-elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide one year ago. When they discovered that her father, who the political opposition sought because of his support for the pro-democracy movement, was in hiding, Marjory says, the armed men did the unthinkable.

"For three hours different men raped Marjory, her mother and an 11-year-old cousin.

A ravaged Marjory's plaintive lament was that, "They violated me. [When it was happening] I closed my eyes and waited for them to finish... One of the men told me to open my eyes and look at him while he [raped me]. I didn't want to look at him. They hit me when I cried."

We are told that Marjory was targeted because her father's trade union organized against a wealthy businessman and because her parents are members of Lavalas, the political party led by Jean Bertrand Aristide.

We note that other victims say they were targeted because they or their family members belong to other pro-democracy political organizations or because they work with peasant unions or local women's groups.

"Rape is becoming a common tool of oppression," explains attorney Mario Joseph whose organization Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) has investigated hundreds of human rights cases in the past year. Joseph, who assisted in the prosecution of the human rights crimes committed during the last

coup says that it is discouraging to see the number of convicted human rights violators who are now walking free and serving in the new American-installed interim government.

"Women and young girls are raped because their father or another relative is a member of Lavalas or is targeted [by the political opposition]. They are raped as a form of punishment. The victims do not feel they can go to the police for help with their problems because in many areas the people who victimized them are the ones running the show; they are the ones patrolling the streets as if they are police, committing crimes with impunity under the eyes of the UN. And even in Port-au-Prince, the former military has been hired into the national police force."

According to Charles Leon, chief of the Haitian National Police, 500 former members of the Haitian Army have been integrated into the police force, with plans for an additional 500-1000 former soldiers to be hired within the next year. Haiti's army was disbanded in 1994 by then President Jean Bertrand Aristide after soldiers committed numerous human rights violations, including mass rapes, during the 1991-94 coup.

United Nations soldiers have also been accused of participating in sexual attacks. Damian Onses-Cardona, spokesperson for the UN mission in Haiti, announced this week that they are "very urgently" investigating a case in which Pakistani soldiers were accused of raping a 23-year-old woman at a banana plantation in the northern town of Gonaives.

And the bloody beat goes on.

To say that we are perturbed by this situation would be an understatement of the first order. We are mad as hell and sincerely pray and hope that The Bahamas would take the lead in sounding the alarm about the extent to which rape is being used as one of the more infernal instruments of repression in an already distressed land.

IDB approves \$12.6 million for transportation infrastructure in Haiti
Additional resources to rehabilitate roads and improve Port-au-Prince's port and airport
Inter-American Development Bank
ReliefWeb
Sept. 19, 2005

The Inter-American Development Bank today announced the approval of \$12.6 million in concessional financing to support Haiti's efforts to rebuild its transportation infrastructure. The new resources will supplement a \$50 million loan approved earlier this year.

The program is aimed at assisting Haiti's recovery by addressing a key sector of its economy. The loan will help finance the rehabilitation of 170 kilometers of the primary network and 300 kilometers of secondary and tertiary roads, as well as a signage program on main highways.

Under the same program, the main runway, the taxiway and the apron of Port-au-Prince's Toussaint L'Ouverture international airport will be repaired. At the capital city's port, the main channel will be dredged, piers will be repaired and a perimeter fence will be built.

Another \$50 million IDB loan is financing a project to improve rural roads. A separate \$70 million loan supports a fund for small and medium-size infrastructure projects. Using resources from that fund, U.N. peacekeeping forces are currently carrying out road projects linking cities and small communities in the north and northwest of Haiti.

The IDB has the largest loan portfolio in execution in Haiti, with a balance of nearly \$450 million. These operations finance programs involving basic infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, water and sanitation, basic education, health, job training, flood prevention, urban rehabilitation and community development. IDB loans also support public sector reforms to strengthen economic governance and transparency.

IDB loans to Haiti are for 40 years, with a 10-year grace period on amortizations. The annual interest rate is 1 percent during the first decade and 2 percent thereafter.

Interim Haiti Leader Seeks Peaceful Vote

By MICHELLE FAUL

Associated Press Writer

Newsday.com

September 19, 2005

UNITED NATIONS -- Despite bouts of violence and a climate bordering on chaos, elections in November should return the long-troubled Caribbean nation of Haiti to democracy, the country's interim president said Monday.

Still, he said, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere will need international help "to emerge from the miasma of underdevelopment, extreme poverty and squalor ... (imposed under) the bedrock of all dictatorships."

President Boniface Alexandre also appealed to nearby nations where Haitians have sought refuge to resolve tensions that have led to attacks.

He appeared to be referring to neighboring Dominican Republic, where months of tensions and deportations of thousands of Haitians reached new heights last month when three Haitian immigrants were burned alive.

Nov. 6 elections would replace Haiti's first democratically elected leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in a February 2004 rebellion. The United States and France sent troops to restore order and installed an interim government now supported by a U.N. peacekeeping force.

"The elections will be completely inclusive, all sectors and all political parties will be included in the vote," Alexandre told the assembly.

But critics say that hundreds of Aristide supporters and officials have been detained for months and the candidate of Aristide's Lavalas Family party, the Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, was detained July 21 and officials have refused to register him as a presidential candidate, even though he has not been charged.

"I continue to be hopeful that the election campaign will take place in a peaceful climate," Alexandre said. "For months now the country has been living in a climate bordering on chaos. Armed gangs have been holding a number of parts of the capital hostage."

Hundreds of people have died since Aristide militants and armed gangs loyal to the ousted leader stepped up a campaign to demand his return from exile in South Africa.

Haiti vote attracts 30 candidates

Friday, 16 September 2005

BBC News

There are reports that ex-ruler Jean-Claude Duvalier will run

At least 30 candidates have registered for Haiti's elections, the first since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted, officials say.

Former Presidents Rene Preval and Leslie Manigat, as well as ex-PM Marc Bazin, are among the candidates.

There has so far been no confirmation of reports that former Haitian leader Jean-Claude Duvalier, known as Baby Doc, is one of the contenders.

Preparations for the elections have been overshadowed by violence.

Mr Aristide's Lavalas Family party - which has widespread support, particularly in the capital's poorer neighbourhoods - has threatened to boycott the elections.

Violence is threatening to destabilise the electoral process

Earlier this week, it was barred from registering its chosen candidate, Gerard Jean-Juste, a Roman Catholic priest who has been in jail since July.

Mr Jean-Juste has been accused of involvement in the killing of a prominent Haitian journalist. He denies the allegations and has yet to be charged.

Some elements of the Lavalas Family party have joined forces with former Prime Minister Bazin, who leads the Movement for Democracy in Haiti.

Also in the running for the presidency is a wealthy businessman, Dumarsais Simeus, who has lived in the US for nearly 40 years.

HAITI: ANNAN CHAIRS HIGH LEVEL PANEL TO HELP PREPARE FOR ELECTIONS, DEVELOPMENT

Sept.18 2005

Press Release - U. N. News Center

As Haiti prepares for elections in November and December with United Nations help, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called on the world community to provide necessary aid to help to re-establish order and spur development in the impoverished country, which has been plagued by unrest for many years. "Countries in all parts of the world, from time to time, face grave challenges that they cannot address on their own. This is such a time for Haiti, and the country's people and leaders have turned to the international community for help," Mr. Annan told a high-level ministerial meeting at UN Headquarters in New York yesterday, which included interim Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue.

"The United Nations and its partners must not let them down. And we must work alongside them for the long term," he added at the session of the Core Group, established by the Security Council last year to help the country recover after an insurgency forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile in February 2004.

The group includes Mr. Annan's Special Representative Juan Gabriel Valdés, who heads the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), MINUSTAH Force Commander and representatives of the Organization of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), other regional and sub-regional organizations and the international financial institutions (IFIs).

Mr. Annan said it was essential for the Haitian authorities to work closely with the international community to resolve outstanding technical impediments to the elections. "More fundamentally, we must do our utmost to ensure that the elections are inclusive, and that they contribute to reconciliation and stability," he added.

On promoting security and the rule of law, he noted that MINUSTAH's military and civilian police components, working with the Haitian National Police, "are tackling difficult tasks with courage," but the emergence of an effective rule-of-law culture will depend upon Haiti's leadership. Provision of technical aid by the Core Group must be linked with the development of appropriate professional standards to ensure that abuses of human rights by those charged with law-enforcement will not be tolerated.

Stressing the need for development, he said: "Haiti will not achieve stability without a concerted attack on poverty and deprivation. This is a long-term project, of course, but people will be especially anxious for concrete progress in the days after a new administration takes office. Assistance from the Core Group can make an important difference."

MINUSTAH has more than 7,660 uniformed personnel in Haiti, including 6,263 troops and 1,401 civilian police, supported by 423 international civilian personnel, about 443 local civilian staff and 147 UN Volunteers. Its mandate ranges from ensuring a secure and stable environment to helping to organize free and fair elections to promoting human rights.

One year after Jeanne, Haiti still needs aid
Clarens Renois | Gonaives, Haiti
19 September 2005 12:48
Mail & Guardian Online

A year after Hurricane Jeanne ravaged Gonaives in Haiti, killing 3 000 and leaving 300 000 homeless, residents still await emergency food aid and fear they have been forgotten.

At the sight of four-wheel-drive jeeps bearing the logo of the World Food Programme (WFP), women pour out of their ramshackle homes, their eyes full of hope.

In less than 10 minutes, the jeeps are surrounded by a throng of people from one of the areas hardest hit by the storm, which pummelled this north-western city with powerful winds and torrential rain on September 18 2004.

The children, scrawny and half-naked, never stray far from the WFP's premises, where for six months last year more than 750 families were served free meals.

"Are they going to start the distribution of rations again?" asked an anxious Mariejean Sylverain, mother of four. She was waiting to feed her children, including a five-year-old who showed clear signs of malnutrition.

She described how aid workers after the storm used to hand out a sack of rice, cooking oil and beans regularly.

"Since they stopped this aid, we are living on close to nothing," she said.

"We are trying to help ourselves," said another storm survivor as she leaned against a picket fence amid corrugated metal shacks.

After Hurricane Jeanne struck, the WFP delivered food to more than 30 000 families, or about 160 000 people, for six months.

"We have completed this programme to resume our normal activity to deliver a daily meal to 300 000 school children," said Anne Poulsen, spokesperson for the WFP.

At the moment, less than 10% of the eight million inhabitants of Haiti receive aid from the organisation. The latest projects focus on development rather than direct assistance, Poulsen said.

Pierre Edner, who helped distribute emergency food aid to storm survivors, said people are desperate in this immense township on the coast.

"There is nothing for them to eat, there is no hope for them. Government officials have never set foot here. People fear hunger and disease," Edner said. "Their wish is for the resumption of assistance."

An octogenarian, Valbrum Valcius, raised a chair in a kind of salute to the WFP representative. Since the last visit, the old man wouldn't have eaten except for the generosity of his neighbours.

When he saw Poulsen, he believed for a moment that the monthly rations had resumed. But he heard nothing that promised a return of the regular hand-outs.

A year after Hurricane Jeanne hit Haiti and despite extensive assistance from NGOs and generous donations from Western governments, the needs remain enormous. The populations of the affected areas of Gonaives live in the hope that fresh assistance from the outside world is on the way.

But now, the television cameras are gone. The international media have turned their attention to the southern coast of the United States, where Hurricane Katrina killed more than 880 people last month.

Poulsen fears that Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, is no longer a priority.

"I want to say: don't forget Haiti. Don't forget Gonaives." -- Sapa-AFP

Party told it can't file for jailed priest to run
BY ALFRED DE MONSTESQUIOU
Associated Press
Miami Herald
Sept. 15, 2005

Haiti's election council said the Lavalas party -- party of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide -- could not register a jailed priest as its presidential candidate because he had to register in person. The party vowed to go to court.

PORT-AU-PRINCE - Haiti's electoral council barred ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party from registering jailed priest Gérard Jean-Juste as its presidential candidate, saying he has to enter his candidacy in person.

Louis Gérard Gilles, a former senator with Aristide's Lavalas Family party, said he showed the council a letter from the jailed priest authorizing party members to register his candidacy, but the council refused to enroll him. Provisional Election Council official Jaccillon Barthélemy said Tuesday Jean-Juste had to register his candidacy in person.

PARTY WILL APPEAL

Gilles said the party would challenge the election's council decision in court.

"The council has no authority to prevent a candidate from registering," Gilles said. "Nothing in the constitution requires he should be present in person."

Council president Max Mathurin said last week that Haiti's electoral law required candidates to register in person.

Jean-Juste was arrested in July on suspicion of involvement in the kidnapping and slaying of prominent Haitian journalist Jacques Roche. Jean-Juste, who was in Miami when Roche was killed, has denied involvement. He is under investigation and he has not been charged yet.

Lavalas leaders have called Jean-Juste's detention an attempt by the interim government to keep the party from participating in the elections -- the first since the February 2004 uprising that helped topple Aristide.

BOYCOTT OR NOT?

Although Lavalas has been split over whether to boycott the vote, the prospect of Jean-Juste's candidacy has raised enthusiasm among Aristide militants for participating in the elections. The party's participation is considered key because it still has widespread support, especially in the vast slums of Port-au-Prince.

Charles Henri Baker, a prominent businessman who supported the 2004 revolt, also registered his candidacy for president. Several others, including former rebel leader Guy Philippe, have announced

their intentions to run, but it was unclear whether they had registered. The deadline for entering candidacies is today.

U.S. businessman joins crowded Haiti field

ALFRED DE MONTESQUIOU

Associated Press

San Jose Mercury News

Sept. 15, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A crowded presidential field grew more diverse Thursday as a Haitian-born U.S. businessman, a former prime minister and failed coup leader joined those seeking to be the first elected president since the ouster of Jean Bertrand Aristide.

The Provisional Electoral Council office was at times chaotic as a parade of former officials from Haiti's tumultuous past, accompanied by bodyguards, registered as presidential candidates in the Nov. 20 election - the first since a violent rebellion forced Aristide into exile in February 2004.

Those filing their papers on the last day to register included Dumarsais Simeus, the owner of a Texas-based food processing company who has said he wants to use his business savvy to help resurrect the economy of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

"In all that I have done, I have always been successful," Simeus said after registering his candidacy. "I'm a perpetual winner, and I will win these elections."

The 65-year-old businessman, who was born in a two-room shack and became the owner of a major food processing firm in the United States, has drawn attention because of his wealth. Critics, however, have questioned whether his candidacy will be certified by election officials because he has lived outside of Haiti for 44 years.

Simeus says he can run because he never gave up his Haitian citizenship.

Also registering on the final day were former President Rene Preval and former Prime Minister Marc Bazin.

In a surprise announcement, Bazin said his small Movement for the Installation of Democracy in Haiti had united with Aristide's Lavalas Family party to choose him as their presidential candidate.

"I believe Lavalas remains by far the strongest party in this country," Bazin said. "The goal of our union is to win."

A moderate Lavalas leader, however, disputed Bazin's claim of an endorsement, saying the party still supported the Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Roman Catholic priest who has been barred by the council from registering his candidacy because he is in jail.

"Jean Juste remains the one and only candidate for Lavalas," said Louis Gerald Gilles, a former Lavalas senator.

More than 30 candidates have registered to run for president to replace the interim government established after Aristide's ouster. Candidates also registered for 129 legislative seats.

Those who have registered to run for president include former President Leslie Manigat, who was ousted by the army in 1988 after five months in power; Evans Paul, a former mayor of Port-au-Prince who was arrested and tortured several times under former dictatorships; and former Sen.

The list also featured Guy Philippe, a former soldier who helped lead the rebellion that toppled Aristide; Hubert Deronceray, a minister in the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship who has run for the presidency four times; and Himler Rebus, a former army colonel who led a failed coup in the 1990s.

The deadline has been postponed several times, amid violence that has claimed more than 1,000 lives since Aristide was forced into exile.

A Jan. 3 runoff will follow if no candidate gets more than 50 percent of the vote.

Kevin Pina jailed in Haiti, and Recollections

Note:Kevin Pina has since been released by the Hatian police.

By Derrick O'Keefe

Left Hook

Sept. 16, 2005

Haitiaction.net has posted an urgent appeal for action, after journalists Kevin Pina and Jean Ristil were jailed by Haitian authorities on September 9:

International journalist and Flashpoints Radio correspondent Kevin Pina was arrested at about 5:00 PM today according to Jean Ristil, another Haitian reporter, who was arrested shortly after he reported on the situation from St. Claire's Church in the Delmas district. Haitian Lawyers Leadership chair Marguerite Laurent stated that Kevin Pina is in "extreme danger" and concerned people should call the U.S. Embassy (011-509-222-0200 / 011-509-222-0354) and demand his release and safety.

Activists in Canada are asking for letters to be written to Members of Parliament because Ottawa is, shamefully, centrally involved in maintaining the coup government.

I first met Kevin Pina late one dreary Vancouver evening last winter. Local activists had arranged a brief meet-and-greet with the independent journalist to inform him of his schedule of events for his couple of days in town, which included forums and screenings of his documentary footage from Haiti. His eyes were bloodshot after a long cross-continent day of travel, but, after introductions and an infusion of caffeine, he was soon elaborating on the latest developments, and energetically giving advice for the planned events.

Kevin Pina gives the impression of a person in a real hurry, and indeed he is. Having reported from Haiti on and off since 1989, he has been one of the precious few voices reporting from on the ground since the February 29, 2004 coup d'etat that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Over Flashpoints Radio, through the Haiti Information Project, in film, photos and print, he has been a leader in disseminating the news that the mainstream media in North America has ignored or grossly distorted.

Recently, Pina has compiled much of his footage taken since the coup into a new documentary, Haiti: The Untold Story, which includes shocking footage of a massacre on July 6, 2005 in Cite Soleil. The film breaks through the veneer of "peace-keeping" attached to the occupation being headed up by a multi-national United Nations mission.

Pina's work has been instrumental in breaking the media blockade on Haiti; here in Canada, he has been a valuable source of information for journalists and activists working to uncover the truth about Canada's role in Aristide's ouster. In fact, Anthony Fenton and Yves Engler have just released a book on the subject, Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority, with a Toronto launch event slated for this Friday, September 17.

Engler and Fenton present an extensive study in the ways in which the overthrow of Haitian democracy was planned and executed with Canadian taxpayers' money, through both CIDA-funded "civil society" and, later, armed intervention.

At present, Canada is heading up the sham elections scheduled for October and November aimed at legitimizing the regime change against Aristide. The de facto government of Latortue, the country's tiny elite, and the coup sponsors in the United States, France and Canada all realize that Aristide's Lavalas Party remains the only political organization with mass support in the country. Given this, the brutal repression and terror against Lavalas supporters in the destitute slums of Port-au-Prince, like Cite Soleil, is bound to continue and intensify.

And that's all the more reason that we need to urgently demand the release of Kevin Pina. Furthermore, in addition to calling for the safety of journalists and others bearing witness to the brutal suffering of Haiti's poor, we here in Canada need to step up efforts to hold our own government responsible for their ongoing crime against Haitian democracy.

For more information on efforts in Canada to have Kevin Pina released, see <http://canadahaitiaction.ca>. To obtain a preview copy, or to arrange a screen of Kevin Pina's documentary, Haiti: The Untold Story, email HIP@teledyol.net.

Derrick O'Keefe is an editor of Seven Oaks (www.SevenOaksMag.com), a weekly on-line journal of politics, culture and resistance.

**Crowded presidential field on final day to register for Haiti election
Aristide's party choice Rev Gerard Jean-Juste barred
AP**

Jamaica Observer

Friday, September 16, 2005

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Eighteen candidates have registered to run for president of Haiti, and more last-minute hopefuls were expected to come forward yesterday - the deadline to participate in the November 20 elections.

The election will be the country's first since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced from power following a violent uprising in February 2004. It was also the last day to register to vote, but the deadline has been extended several times amid the violence that has paralysed the country.

Most of the registered candidates so far are officials from past regimes. The Provisional Electoral Council has barred the candidacy of the Rev Gerard Jean-Juste, a prominent figure in Aristide's Lavalas Family Party, because he is in prison and can't register in person.

Those who have registered to run for president include former President Leslie Manigat, who was ousted by the army in 1988 after five months in power; Evans Paul, a former mayor of Port-au-Prince who was arrested and tortured several times under former dictatorships; and former Sen Paul Denis, who headed a committee investigating corruption in Aristide's government.

In addition, the list features Guy Philippe, a former soldier who helped lead the rebellion that toppled Aristide; Hubert Deronceray, a minister under the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship who has run for the presidency four times; and Marc Bazin, who served as prime minister after Aristide was ousted the first time, in 1991.

Radio newscasts said former President Rene Preval and Dumarsais Simeus, a wealthy US businessman who was born in Haiti, were expected to register before the end of the day.

The deadline has been postponed several times, amid the politically related violence that has claimed more than 1,000 lives since Aristide was forced into exile.

Some 2.2 million people, about half of those eligible, have registered to vote in the election, which will be followed by a runoff on January 3 if no candidate gets more than 50 per cent of the vote.

UN Secretary General commends Sri Lankan troops in Haiti
Sunday Observer
Online Edition, Sri Lanka
Sept. 17, 2005

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Haiti, Mr. Juan Gabriel Valdes, conveyed the deep appreciation of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, for the productive contribution made by the Sri Lankan troops to peace building in Haiti when he called on Foreign Affairs Minister, Anura Bandaranaike in New York.

Commending the high discipline, professionalism, and commitment of the Sri Lankan troops in the UN peacekeeping operations in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Mr. Valdes briefed the Minister that they were also engaged in multifarious tasks, such as helping to rebuild the country's conflict-damaged infrastructure, and providing humanitarian support in times of natural disasters.

Mr. Bandaranaike thanked Mr. Valdes for conveying the appreciation of the UN Secretary General. Emphasizing that Sri Lanka's relations with the Central American region were expanding steadily, he expressed the hope that Haiti, assisted by the international community and the United Nations, would re-emerge as a free democratic nation in the near future.

Haiti: OAS meetings at the United Nations

Source: Organization of American States (OAS)

ReliefWeb

Date: 15 Sep 2005

One of the key issues discussed was the pre-electoral process underway in Haiti, under the supervision of the United Nations. The European representatives told Secretary General Insulza they were willing to support institutional reform efforts in that Caribbean country.

Insulza participated in the meeting convened by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to discuss the situation in Haiti with various international authorities.

Insulza also met with Juan Gabriel Valdés, Chief of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

Thousands still struggling to rebuild in Haiti

Sept. 16 2005

Press Release - World Food Programme

Harold Doan and Associates Ltd

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - If Marie Jean Sylverin, survivor of last year's tropical storm Jeanne in Haiti, had a TV in the one-room shack where she lives with her four daughters, she would watch in awe as massive rescue and recovery efforts fanned out over the United States, reaching areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

With the outpouring of generous assistance now available to help the victims, American hurricane survivors - some, like Sylverin, poor and homeless - are assured adequate resources to rebuild their lives, their homes, their dreams. In fact, they face prospects of an even better life in the future.

Shelter built from rubble

Marie Jean Sylverin, however, has no such hopes. Her shelter was built with the rubble from houses destroyed when tropical storm Jeanne hit Gonaïves, a northern coastal town, on 18 September 2004, leaving a trail of death and devastation still felt today.

It was a massive blow to Haiti, which was already suffering from decades of social and economic degradation, political crisis and recurrent natural disasters.

Sylverin, 42, still has no means to build a new house. She and her children still live in their shelter, just big enough for one bed where all five of them sleep.

Huge task of rebuilding

The huge task of rebuilding the homes and lives for thousands and thousands of people – like Sylverin – still remains one year after the disaster, which set off one of the most important emergency operations for WFP in Haiti.

Just two days after the floods had left 3,000 people dead and close to 300,000 in need of assistance, WFP convoys were on the road to assist the survivors with humanitarian food aid.

During the six-month-long emergency operation, up to 160,000 people – the vast majority of them women and children – regularly received WFP food distributions to help them survive the disaster.

Height of the hurricane season

With the hurricane season now at its height, the ability to respond fast and adequately to emergencies like the Gonaïves floods is crucial in a country like Haiti, where other natural disasters will inevitably follow.

Climate changes have doubled the number of hurricanes in the last 15 years, and this year tropical storms and hurricanes could claim even more lives in the region – one of the most disaster-prone areas of the world – because it is still ill prepared to cope with natural disasters.

Environmental degradation

Haiti in particular – the poorest country in the western hemisphere – is highly vulnerable to floods and mudslides because of environmental degradation.

Intense deforestation has stripped the hills and mountains of trees – more than 98 percent of the country has been deforested – leaving nothing to hold back the floods. Even small storms and rains can cause major catastrophes and result in severe economic setbacks.

Targeted distributions

WFP is currently assisting almost 850,000 people in Haiti with targeted distributions to malnourished children, pregnant and nursing mothers, and people affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as providing food to primary school children under its school feeding programme.

This operation allows the agency to reserve 15 percent of its resources to respond to emerging crises. Unfortunately, it now faces a funding shortfall of more than 75 percent – or US\$30.6 million.

One year after Jeanne, WFP urges donors to continue to show the same generosity as they did then, to enable the agency to respond as quickly for the victims of the next natural disaster.

Unfinished Country examines decades of neglect in Haiti

By Katherine Stapp

Sep 16, 2005

FinalCall.com News

Haiti: One year later (FCN, 03-17-2005)

How the U.S. impoverished Haiti (FCN, 03-17-2005)

NEW YORK (IPS/GIN) - The world may be focused on Iraq's Oct. 15 elections, but an equally critical vote will soon take place in the first country in the Americas after the United States to declare its independence.

On Nov. 13, Haiti will hold its first national polls since President Jean-Baptiste Aristide was forced from office on Feb. 29, 2004. A new documentary by Wozo Productions and New York's Two Tone Productions, *Unfinished Country*, which premiered on the U.S. public television series *Wide Angle* on Sept. 6, examines Haiti's uphill struggle to create democracy from decades of violence and neglect.

In its 200 years of independence, Haiti has had 44 leaders, the filmmakers note, and just seven have served out their terms.

Jane Regan, a former IPS correspondent from Haiti and producer of the documentary, told IPS that the goal was to find four or five people who would, together, "offer a partial picture of the kaleidoscope of Haitian society."

"We only made it part-way, because there is no peasant or person representing what Haitians call the 'country outside the country'—the rural world," she added.

We meet Butteur Metayer, who believed Pres. Aristide was behind the gruesome murder of his brother, Cuban Metayer. In 2004, Mr. Butteur took over Cuban's gang and took to the streets. He was joined by Guy Philippe, a Haitian army officer exiled by Pres. Aristide in 1997 for attempting a coup.

A key figure in the civil strife that led to Pres. Aristide's departure and exile in Africa, Mr. Philippe is now running for president under the banner of a new party called the "National Front."

We also meet Patrick Fequiere, a prominent Haitian businessman and head of operations for the Provisional Electoral Council, charged with getting 424 polling stations up and running in the next three months, chosen because of his "incorruptible reputation."

"Even with a brand-new computer system provided by the UN, registering four-and-a-half million voters, half of whom have no identification of any kind, will be a challenge," says Mr. Fequiere, a bearish and disarmingly plainspoken man.

And we meet Serge Cantave, a member of the insular Haitian upper class, who runs a tree-planting project on Haiti's decimated hilltops. Unrestricted logging has left the land 97 percent treeless, while neighboring countries are still almost half-forest, the narration notes.

“From the U.S.—they were referring our Haitian elite as M.R.E.s: ‘Most Repugnant Elite.’ At first, I was really hurt by my feelings, because I’m a proud Haitian,” he says. “But when you really get in really deep in what M.R.E. means, looking at the Haitian elite, it is so true.”

Daniel Morel, a co-producer of the film, told IPS, “I think that it is the first time in decades that at least some younger members of the elite are starting to think about more than their pockets. I think they finally understand the danger that is threatening their country.”

But with escalating violence in the capital—as many as 30 people were reportedly killed at a football match earlier this month as police stood by—the fate of the elections remains in doubt.

“People in general don’t trust anyone, they don’t trust the little they know about so-called ‘democracy,’ since there have been coups and violence and failed or crooked elections and lies and betrayals, and they don’t trust politicians, the UN or the U.S.—and the U.S. and UN are the ones really pushing the elections,” Mr. Regan said.

While some of those interviewed are determined to participate—one elderly man says he came to the registration site “as a citizen to do my duty”—others are angry and full of despair.

“They’re talking about elections,” says Elizna Nicolas, a former Lavalas organizer and resident of the garbage-strewn La Saline slum. “But 80 percent of the people live in places like this. Can we vote in these conditions? No way.”

Ms. Nicolas shares a dark one-room shack with her seven children. They all share a single bed, the oldest three on top and the little ones with their mother on the floor beneath. She used to earn a decent living as a street vendor until, she says, the ex-rebels stole the truck with all her goods.

“I’m not going to do an elections card. I’m not doing anything,” she says as her young son, who has not been in school since Pres. Aristide’s ouster, untangles copper wire to sell. “Because we struggled so much to bring democracy. And this democracy has only made things worse.”

Ms. Nicolas and thousands of others refuse to accept that Pres. Aristide is gone, insisting that he must finish his term before fresh elections are called. They have vowed to boycott the polls, and could be a decisive factor in the success or failure of the November elections.

Health Officials Urge Use of Drug When Traveling to Haiti
Bianca Symonette
The Bahama Journal
Sept. 15, 2005

Health officials say the transmission of infectious diseases in the country has been significantly reduced over the last five years, and they are hoping that this trend continues.

It's why they are urging persons traveling to Haiti and other countries with endemic diseases to take prophylactics before travel.

Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis said that over the years the drug has proven to notably reduce the amount of persons returning with traces of infectious diseases.

"The malaria cases are very few with seven being the largest amount of imported reported cases in one year," Dr. Dahl-Regis said.

"What we have done in the last three years to bring the numbers down is [get] the support from the travel agencies to disseminate the message that if you're traveling to a endemic area or you're going home for the holidays, take prophylactics before you go and that has impacted the number of returning cases."

Dr. Dahl-Regis said it's important that the message gets out because the majority of cases, such as the malaria cases, occur during February and March when many persons are returning from trips to Haiti.

Minister of Health Dr. Marcus Bethel recently said that the ministry's activities in disease surveillance, prevention and control have reduced incidences of transmission of infectious diseases.

According to statistics released by the health minister, Haitian immigrants currently represent approximately 28 percent of HIV/AIDS infections, 21 percent of tuberculosis infections and 67 percent of malaria infections in the country.

A health report outlining the "Impact of Haitian and Other National Origins on Healthcare and Environmental Services", pointed out that The Bahamas is not an area where malarial activity is great, but due to the large number of uncontrolled immigrants, there is a danger of the disease being imported or introduced.

The report said this has resulted in the Vector Control Unit of the Department of Environmental Health Services instituting vigilant methods to control and eliminate risk factors.

From 2000 to 2003, there were 10 reported laboratory confirmed cases of faliparum malaria, the report said.

This is regarded as a significant decline from the 1999 total of 30 cases, in which 22 were imported and eight introduced, six of which were Bahamian resulting in one death, the report added.

For the three confirmed malaria cases in 2003, the report states that two were Haitian nationals, returning from Haiti, and one was a Bahamian who also imported the disease.

The report also says that up to September 2004 there was a total of 1,825 Haitians living with HIV infections in The Bahamas. That figure represents 28 percent of all reported cases.

The report also revealed statistics on tuberculosis. Pointing out that it declined since 1986, with 450 cases reported between 1985 and 1993.

The reports states, "Mechanisms implemented to address concerns have shown sustained achievement, with 42 reported cases in 2002. Migrants continue to contribute to this problem."

Data from the Prison Health Services show that out of 1,997 prisoners screened for tuberculosis, 543 or 27 percent had positive mantoux, with 17 percent being Haitian nationals and 12 percent Jamaican nationals.

The mantoux skin test is a tuberculin skin test in which purified protein derivative is injected under the skin to test for sensitivity to the tubercle bacillus. A positive reaction indicates previous infection with TB.

Data from the Disease Surveillance Unit for 2003 showed that out of the 38 confirmed cases, 20.5 percent was Haitian nationals while 73.6 percent was Bahamians.

Haiti priest barred from election
BBC News
Sept. 14, 2005

Gerard Jean-Juste has been under arrest without charge for two months

The party of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has been barred from registering a jailed Catholic priest as its presidential candidate.

Gerard Jean-Juste was arrested two months ago on suspicion of involvement in the murder of journalist Jacques Roche. He denies the accusations.

The Lavalas Family party said it would challenge the ban in court and warned it could boycott the November poll.

The party's participation is seen as key because of its widespread support.

Mr Aristide - who is in exile since being ousted in 2004 - still has many supporters, particularly in the poorer areas of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

'Unconstitutional'

Hundreds of his supporters tried to march to the electoral council on Tuesday, to back Mr Jean-Juste's candidacy, but were stopped by UN peacekeepers and Haitian police.

Jean-Juste supporters were prevented from holding a march

The Lavalas Family party was told by the electoral authorities that the jailed priest had to register his candidacy in person.

But Louis Gerard Gilles - a former senator - said the electoral council had no authority to stop the registration.

"Nothing in the constitution requires he should be present in person," Mr Gilles said.

The party says Mr Jean-Juste's detention is an attempt to keep it from taking part in the elections, Haiti's first since Mr Aristide was ousted in February 2004.

Mr Jean-Juste has not been charged and says he was in Miami at the time of the killing.

Haiti has been riven by gang warfare and political violence, especially in Port-au-Prince, where supporters and opponents of the exiled Mr Aristide regularly fight bloody battles.

Pols, celebs gather to support environment
Associated Press
Tallahassee Democrat
Sept. 16,2005

NEW YORK - Several leaders attending a U.N. summit joined international celebrities to support programs to preserve the environment as a means to help end poverty.

Camera flashes lit up the night Wednesday as the VIPs headed into a restaurant in Central Park for a program by the Poverty-Environment Partnership, a network of organizations promoting U.N. goals to promote development and save the world's natural habitat.

"Undermining and not understanding the environment is the problem," said Angelique Kidjo, who was born in the African country of Benin.

The singer explained that destruction of the environment creates natural disasters, leaving the poor stranded.

As guests dined, Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds announced that her country will invest \$150 million in environmental protection for the poor.

The solution is not new for Scandinavian countries "who were conducting research in the early 1960s" on how poverty is affected by the environment, said Freivalds.

Media mogul Ted Turner, whose visit with leaders in North Korea last month included discussions over environmental issues, attended as a guest. "I'm only here to support the cause," Turner said.

Former Vice President Al Gore sat at a table near Turner. The president of Gambia, officials from Finland and Norway, and actresses Rosario Dawson, Sophia Bush and Kerry Washington were also in the audience.

Wyclef Jean, a former member of the Fugees, was at the event endorsing a campaign to plant trees in areas of Haiti destroyed by Hurricane Jeanne.

Jean has also founded Yele Haiti, a nonprofit aid group that provides food and scholarships to his native country.

"Sometimes you don't have to wait for government to change before you make the change yourself," said Jean, who performed after dinner.

Evacuees' spirits aren't dampened after hurricane

By DONALD LEE

2theadvocate.com News

Sept. 17, 2005

Advocate columnist

Tuesday evening, I got a chance to hang out at the River Center for a couple of hours, and I talked with some of the people staying there who were evacuated from the hurricane-ravaged New Orleans area. And I must say that after the past few weeks of seeing images of New Orleans residents losing their homes, going without food, water, medical supplies and even hope, it was a breath of fresh air to talk to a few people from the area who apparently have resolved in their hearts not to let this setback caused by Hurricane Katrina dampen their spirits.

For instance, there was 13-year-old Frederick Washington, leaning back in a chair beside his friend, Travell McGee, 17, playing a game featuring National Football League teams playing sandlot football (players -- dressed in street clothes -- can knock each other into brick walls).

Washington, who went to Laurel Middle School in New Orleans but is now enrolled at Scotlandville Magnet School, engaged in a little (friendly) trash talking with McGee, who was a senior at Marion Abramson High School in New Orleans but is now enrolled at Capitol High here in Baton Rouge.

"He says he's going to get (Michael) Vick, (but) Vick can't do nothin'," boasted McGee, whose Pittsburgh Steelers were beating Washington's Atlanta Falcons team 41-12. "He can't stop me."

When you first walk up to these boys and see them playing the game, you'd think they were old friends from the same neighborhood.

But the two told me they've known each other only since their families have been staying in the River Center.

"We've been here for so long, it's like we're all one big family," said McGee, who said they've been at the River Center for two weeks.

Asked whether the game they were playing and the TV it was plugged into were furnished by the River Center or Red Cross volunteers, Washington was quick to say, "I will not leave my valuables at home, knowing (flood) water will come."

The eighth-grader was letting me know that if he didn't grab anything else before evacuating his home, he wasn't about to leave his game.

Demar Washington (no relation to Frederick Washington) was watching the boys play, enjoying it as if he were watching a real NFL game on TV.

Washington, 36, who works offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, also has been at the River Center for two weeks. Hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans area on Aug. 29.

Washington, his mother and sister-in-law are all at the shelter. He says he hasn't heard from his daughter (who lives with her mother) since the hurricane.

"I haven't heard from nary one of them," said Washington, who's prayerful that they're somewhere safe. "I talked to them probably a good three or four days before this happened, and I haven't talked to them since. (But) I trust that they're still alive. And when you've got that kind of faith, you know nothing's wrong."

As I walked around the shelter, introducing myself to other displaced residents, I talked with 27-year-old Jeany Joseph and her mother, Yanick Joseph. The daughter sat on the floor between two cots as her mother sat in a chair and braided her hair.

Jeany Joseph, her mother and her 23-year-old brother, Scott Joseph, are from Haiti. They have been living in the New Orleans area so Jeany and Scott can finish their education at seminary school.

Jeany Joseph, whose father is in Haiti pastoring a church, said she, her mother and brother are grateful to be at the River Center.

"It's OK because if we weren't here, we wouldn't know where we would be," she said. "We don't know where else to go; so we stay here."

Theophilus White, 56, said though his home in Metairie's 6th Ward is intact, he had to evacuate "because the drinking water and lights were gone, and there was no means of communication."

"You're away from home, and they're trying to make you as comfortable as they can," White, a welder, said of volunteers at the shelter.

From what I could see, many of the displaced residents at the River Center are doing a wonderful job of keeping one another encouraged despite their misfortunes. Indeed, that's noteworthy.

Major party being iced out in Haiti elections

Sept. 17, 2005

Tim Pelzer

People's Weekly World Newspaper

With the first round of elections set to begin in about eight weeks, Haiti is still not ready to hold free and fair multiparty elections. More than half of Haiti's population remains unregistered to vote. Further, the country's largest political party, Famni Lavalas, remains unofficially banned. Local, regional, national and presidential elections are scheduled for Nov. 20, with a runoff on Jan. 3 if needed.

The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) reported Sept. 1 that it has only registered 2.2 million out of 4.5 million eligible voters. As a result, the council announced that registration will likely be extended beyond the Sept. 15 registration deadline. However, Brian D. Concannon Jr., director of the Oregon-based Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, charged, "Registration is disproportionately among voters that might support the government. For example, in late July there were three registration offices in upscale Petionville, which supports the government, none in [the poorer] Cite Soleil or the entire Central Plateau Department. There will be a maximum of 427 centers, which isn't enough in a country where most people don't have cars. Many people will have more than a day's walk to register."

The United Nations, which is sponsoring the elections, says that 45 political parties will take part. "We believe in an inclusive electoral process because it confers a profound legitimacy," said UN Mission head Juan Gabriel Valdes. However, the Lavalas party says that the government is blocking its participation in the elections.

"This government has carried out a violent repression of Lavalas with the goal of eliminating it as a viable party," said Lavalas leader Moïse Jean Charles. He points out that of the election commission's nine members, seven are members of the anti-Lavalas Group of 184, and two are nonaligned. "Over 45 percent of Lavalas leaders have been either imprisoned, driven into hiding or killed. How can anyone support an election under these conditions?" he asked.

As another illustration of the political climate, Haitian police recently arrested Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a high-profile Lavalas activist. While police searched Jean-Juste's presbytery Sept. 9, they also arrested two journalists covering their actions. Kevin Pina, a U.S. filmmaker, and Jean Ristil, a Haitian journalist, were jailed for two days until the Haitian authorities yielded to domestic and international calls for their release.

Lavalas spokespersons said that the party will only participate in the elections if the government and CEP resigns, exiles are allowed to return, political prisoners are freed, police raids against poor neighborhoods cease and all armed groups are disarmed.

Critics charge that the government's repression of Lavalas is part of a broader plan to appease world opinion while keeping Lavalas out of power. Concannon calls the election plan a process of "electoral cleansing" in which the U.S., Canada, France, the UN and the Haitian government want to have elections with as much participation as possible, "as long as there is no risk that the voters will make

the wrong choice (again),” added Concannon, alluding to Haiti’s three previous national elections where voters chose Lavalas.

“They need to have elections that satisfy lightly informed world public opinion,” Concannon said. “They are working on both the supply and demand ends, putting good candidates in jail, while getting a skewed voter pool.”

In related news, four former Lavalas parliamentarians registered Lavalas with the CEP on Aug. 8 for the upcoming elections. The party’s exiled leadership quickly condemned the registration. The Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network’s Marguerite Laurence stated, “Three [of the] parliamentarians who registered Lavalas were in jail at some point and, unlike the rest [other jailed Lavalas leaders], were released. The speculation is that they made a deal amenable to the powers that be.” A human rights monitor in Haiti said anonymously, “I would be prepared for some surprises, including the possibility of a U.S.-supported ‘Lavalas’ candidate. If they did this, they would finish off much of what is left of the movement [Lavalas] and still have control over the government.”

tpelzer@shaw.ca

Haiti journalists Kevin Pina and Jean Ristil released from jail after international campaign to protest arrests
Haiti Action Committee
Sept. 12, 2005

On Friday, September 9, American journalist Kevin Pina was arrested in Haiti, because he insisted on filming a search at the church of political prisoner Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste. A Haitian journalist, Jean Ristil, was arrested because he photographed Pina's arrest. Both spent the weekend in prison (articles about their arrests are below).

Thanks to a mobilization in Haiti, the US and throughout the world, pressure was put on the Haitian government to stop this political persecution. Thanks to attorney Mario Joseph of the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, who represented Pina and Ristil, Judge Jean Paul Peres has released both journalists, with no further charges against them. Ristil was released early Monday, Pina was subjected to 3 and 1/2 hours of interrogation, and released just after 5 PM Haiti time.

We will have more on this in tomorrow's action alert, including, we hope, an account by Pina of the conditions in the prison that he has left behind, but which are still filled with people who have not been charged with any crime.

The Bureau des Avocats Internationaux urgently needs financial support, so that it can continue to represent political prisoners like Ristil, Pina, and Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, and the families of those killed by police and death squads. Please send contributions to the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, Box 806, Key Biscayne, FL 33149.

You may also donate on IJDH's website, www.ijdh.org, although the website is down and we do not expect it to be working until Wednesday.

Caribbean nations, except until now Haiti, will benefit Venezuelan oil agreement
Thursday 15 September 2005
AlterPress

On 6 September, 2005, nine more Caribbean nations signed up to the PetroCaribe cooperation agreement, under which Venezuela will provide oil to Caribbean countries on concessionary terms.

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez had already signed bilateral agreements with Jamaica and Cuba, and, under the deal signed earlier this month in Montego Bay, Jamaica, he entered similar arrangements with the heads of State or delegations from Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname.

Caribbean governments are already calculating millions of dollars in savings arising out of the PetroCaribe oil agreement with Venezuela.

The beneficiary governments will pay 60 per cent of the market price up front, and can finance the remaining 40 per cent by way of a soft loan over 25 years at one per cent interest. The governments can also pay for part of the cost with services or goods such as rice, bananas or sugar.

Venezuela has agreed to supply some 185,700 barrel per day of oil to the region. In order to make this possible, Venezuela will put in place a regional supply, refining, transport and storage network.

Caracas political administration commits itself to invest in expanding existing refineries in order to permit the treatment of Venezuelan heavy crude oil (for example, in Jamaica, and Cuba), and will invest in fuel storage facilities in countries like Grenada, and Antigua and Barbuda, in order to increase their capacities.

Jamaican Prime Minister, Percival J. Patterson, welcomed the oil initiative by Venezuela, saying the agreement would serve to deepen and strengthen the bonds of friendship and the process of collaboration between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Caracas.

"It also represents an important vehicle for enhancing energy security, promoting capacity building and accelerating the development agenda at the national as well as the regional levels", said Patterson.

Two Caribbean nations declined to take part in the agreement.

Trinidad and Tobago has its own oil resources, and already supplies CARICOM member states with about 60,000 barrels a day in exchange for other resources. Owen Arthur, the Prime Minister of Barbados, which also stayed out of the agreement, said his country's existing energy arrangement with Trinidad and Tobago was effective.

David Comissiong, spokesperson for the Clement Payne Movement - a community-based, activist organization in Barbados - criticized the decision as a missed opportunity to reduce oil import costs.

"The only conclusion we can come to is that the Barbadian government has buckled to the pressure no doubt coming from the US government," he said.

"The kind of revolutionary thinking, that Chavez is bringing back to the Caribbean, is an alternative to the neo-liberal, globalizing free trade policies of the United States. We think Chavez is the man of the hour."

Progressive leaders, in the Caribbean countries that have signed up to the PetroCaribe agreement, celebrated the deal as a break from what they see as US imperialism in the region.

As part of the PetroCaribe deal, in which Venezuela will upgrade the oil refinery in Kingston, Jamaica, the government will be required to scrap attempts to privatize the complex.

Jamaica's National Workers Union vice-president, Danny Roberts, welcomed this development.

"Our union is of the belief that certain sectors of the economy shouldn't be subjected to the whims of foreign investors," said Roberts, whose union includes workers in tourism, communications, transport and the civil service.

Roberts welcomed the Venezuelan initiative as an alternative to the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which he described as "inimical to the sovereignty, welfare and democracy of the region."

Until date, Haiti didn't integrate Venezuelan oil agreement and provisional authorities didn't give any information about that opportunity.

Sources:

Barbados Nation newspaper - <http://www.nationnews.com>

Caribbean News Agency (CANA) - <http://www.cananews.com>

Los Angeles Times - <http://www.latimes.com>

PS:

'Eye on the Caribbean' is realised 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.

STRING ALONG WITH ME

Sept. 16, 2005 edition

Christian Science Monitor

By Amy Bracken | Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor

As many flee Haiti, an orchestra's tour brings balm

CAP-HAITIEN, HAITI – It hardly seemed the time or place for an international symphonic tour. In recent months in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, kidnappings, carjackings, and murders have been on the rise - increasingly targeting foreigners. A Canadian development expert was seized in May, and later released. The US Embassy cautioned Americans to stay away, and withdrew nonessential personnel. In July, Haitians were shocked when a Haitian journalist not only was kidnapped, but then was tortured and murdered.

Virtually the only foreigners entering the Caribbean nation are UN peacekeepers, now numbering more than 8,000.

Yet in August, musicians from Austria's Arpeggione Orchestra and the US Symphony of the Americas (SOA) flew from Florida to Cap-Haitien for a week-long tour that took them to venues ranging from movie theaters to a small concrete church.

Safety was a concern. But naysayers also argued that the orchestra would find it hard to move around in a country where roads are poor. Others said that Haitians wouldn't warm to classical music.

Still, the orchestra persevered. The visit "made us stronger in our souls," says Irakli Gogibedashwili, Arpeggione's leader, calling it one of the most important experiences in his group's 15 years. "We played [in Labadee], in this little village, in this little church, like we were in Carnegie Hall ... because we felt this was a very big moment of our lives."

The trip grew out of a casual encounter. Last spring, James Brooks-Bruzzese, conductor of the SOA, sat next to Eddy Remy at a Rotary Club meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He told Mr. Remy - president of Fort Lauderdale-Cap-Haitien Sister Cities - about Summerfest, when the SOA performs with a European orchestra in Florida and two Latin American countries. Remy invited the group to Haiti.

In some ways, the invitation marked a watershed for Remy, who moved to the US from Haiti as a child and grew up thinking his birth country was a place to avoid.

But five years ago, his grandmother died. A New Yorker, her wish to be buried in Haiti impelled Remy to return - and to reassess his homeland.

"This is an incredible country," he says, "and all that I'd been hearing for the 30-something years of my life that I was out of the country was not the reality."

Still, Haiti's hold on security is tenuous. Last January, it was poised to celebrate its 200th anniversary as the world's first black nation, born out of a victory over slavery and French rule.

But violence was mounting. Dozens of foreign musical groups canceled performances. A day of pride was overtaken by shootings and burning barricades.

A year later, nonetheless, the orchestra decided to take the plunge - deciding to visit Haiti's far safer northern region.

The trip was not without hitches. When the group's charter plane proved too small, members who were not musicians stayed behind a day, allowing instruments to spill over into seats and the plane's one bathroom. A trip to the 19th-century fortress La Citadelle was canceled because of the heat. Harrowing roads posed a threat to delicate instruments.

The group's participation in one concert - in conjunction with Tropicana, which plays Konpa Direk, Haitian big-band music - was canceled because of patchy phone communications, disappointing some of the estimated 2,000 people who showed up.

And some musicians were taken aback by its extreme poverty. "I understood for the first time what it means 'to not believe your eyes,' " says Hungarian violinist Toth Tamas.

Despite the obstacles, the group says the trip was a feat.

"When you think about the logistics of bringing a symphony orchestra to Cap-Haitien, they really look impossible," Remy says. "Every night I go to sleep here, I'm asking myself, how in the world are we pulling this off? But it's happening!"

For Haitians, it was equally amazing. Band leader François Levy wrote scores for the orchestra to play with a voodoo "roots" band. "People abroad think Haiti is only bad things," says Mr. Levy, who had never worked with classical musicians before, "and I think a cultural exchange is a great way to make people know exactly what Haitians have, what the country is all about."

The final performance of the Levy-Brooks-Bruzzese troupe took place in the fishing village of Labadee. When electricity comes on a few hours daily, boom boxes blast music everywhere, and villagers shimmy and shake as they go about their work. The orchestra arrived on rickety wooden outboards, drawing curious gazes.

The venue, a small church, is a concrete structure with wooden pews. The audience of about 100 grew steadily, with villagers filling the floor and even open windows.

A mother nursed her baby. A toddler asked about the musicians. Muscular 20-somethings in tank-tops and do-rags clapped vigorously. Brooks-Bruzzese later said one approached him afterward with tears in his eyes.

By the end, more than 200 people had squeezed in for their first orchestral concert. And the musicians, feeling victorious, joined in celebration later by planting trees to the beat of voodoo drums.

Two-day visit of French minister to Haiti comes to an end

by Vario Serant
Caribbean Net News
Tuesday, September 13, 2005

PORT AU PRINCE, Haiti: Brigitte Girardin, the French Minister of Cooperation, Development and French-speaking Communities ended a two-day visit to Haiti on Saturday.

Girardin took the occasion to renew the support of her country to the reconstruction process afoot in Haiti.

During talks with her counterparts, including Haitian interim President, Boniface Alexandre, and Prime Minister, Gérard Latortue, Ms Girardin laid stress on three crucial spheres of the assistance of her country in Haiti. These fields concern maintenance of law, health -- the struggle against HIV in particular -- and education.

Speaking to the French community in the evening, Minister Girardin referred to the French aid (facilities and training) to the Haitian national police and the assistance for the creation of a legal medicine institute.

Girardin signed two conventions with the Haitian government. One for 1.5 million euros is dedicated to the building of an infectious and sexually communicable disease institute. The other one for 1 million euros is for the financing of school reopening. She has emphasized that France is now, before the United States, the largest contributor of the Global Funds against AIDS.

The delegation included three deputies from the Overseas French Region, Gabrielle Louis-Carabin (Guadeloupe), Juliana Rimane (Guyane), and Alfred Almont (Martinique). Girardin hopes the contacts they have made will strengthen the links between Haiti and its nearest French environment.

After the conference in Washington where many donors promised to bring massive aid to Haiti, France had attempted to gather a number of donors around cooperative projects.

At the end of her first visit in Haiti, Girardin declared her satisfaction concerning the improvement in the security situation through the country in the space of a few months. However, the French minister has admitted that this easing of the situation is precarious.

"Prior to major terms for this country, the process does not have to be threatened by insecurity and the UN force (MINUSTAH) has to play fully its part," stressed the minister, extending her encouragement to Juan Gabriel Valdes, representative of the UN General Secretary in Haiti.

USTDA GRANTS SUPPORT HAITI'S MAIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Sept. 13 2005

Press Release - U.S. Trade and Development Agency

Harold Doan and Associates

The development of a modern and secure international airport in Port-au-Prince is the goal of two U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) grants totaling \$450,000 that were awarded to the National Airports Authority (NAA) of Haiti.

To confer the grants, USTDA Deputy Director Barbara Bradford and NAA Director General Lionel Isaac signed agreements on behalf of the U.S. government and NAA, respectively. The grants follow USTDA's award of a \$350,000 technical assistance grant to Electricité d'Haiti earlier this month and reflect the agency's on-going commitment to support Haiti's economic growth through the development of critical infrastructure.

The international airport serving Haiti's capital is the country's primary entry and exit point for both passengers and air cargo. As a result, the airport's modernization and security capabilities are critical components of Haiti's ability to integrate into the global economy as a means of fostering the country's development.

The first grant, in the amount of \$300,000, will be used to assess and recommend enhancements to airport operations and management functions such as ground operations, control tower management, flight operations, passenger and cargo terminal management, communications and air navigation systems, airline and concession operations, aircraft maintenance and fuel operations, security systems, and customs and immigration operations. The second grant, valued at \$150,000, will be used to assess training needs and to develop a security training program for ten officials from the international airport. The training plan will cover security management and airport operations, communications systems, documentation and reporting systems, response systems for security breaches, traffic management, and management of passenger, baggage, and cargo movements.

The opportunity to provide assistance to NAA under the grants announced today will be competed separately on the Federal Business Opportunities website at www.fedbizopps.gov. Interested U.S. firms should submit proposals according to the instructions contained in the Federal Business Opportunities announcement. NAA will select the U.S. contractors that will provide the assistance.

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency advances economic development and U.S. commercial interests in developing and middle-income countries. The agency funds various forms of technical assistance, feasibility studies, training, orientation visits, and business workshops that support the development of a modern infrastructure and a fair and open trading environment. USTDA's strategic use of foreign assistance funds to support sound investment policy and decision-making in host countries creates an enabling environment for trade, investment, and sustainable economic development. In carrying out its mission, USTDA gives emphasis to economic sectors that may benefit from U.S. exports of goods and services.

Haiti : Voters and candidates

Tuesday 13 September 2005

By Ericq Pierre [1]

AlterPresse

This year the number of candidates for election, all told, will be higher than ever. Many Haitians prefer to start their own political organization rather than join existing ones. However, in order to avoid having too many candidates, the electoral decree seeks to encourage parties to link up and consolidate. Yet up to now only a small number of political factions have formed such coalitions. To parody the armed forces, some would rather be commanders of a small army than sergeants in a big one.

Worse, despite the large number of parties, there are still likely to be a lot of unaffiliated candidates (a better term, I think, than “independent” candidates). Some parties think they are much more important than others, and much better equipped to run the country. So they do not see the need to form coalitions in the run-up to the elections. Of course they have the right to think that way. The problem is that it’s very hard to measure the real weight of these different parties.

It will also be difficult to decide between candidates according to the priorities they espouse. Circumstances in the country are such that all candidates are virtually condemned to deal in common places and issue declarations of principle about the need to create jobs, to fight unemployment and the high cost of living, to reduce poverty, to protect the environment, to build roads and schools, to combat illiteracy, and so on.

It may not be a bad thing that so many Haitians want to stand for election, but there are some legitimate concerns about having too many candidates and too many political parties. The proliferation of candidates runs the risk of trivializing a process on which Haiti’s chances for a new start may well depend. It might also seem surprising that organizations that call for national reconciliation and talk about building consensus cannot even reach agreement on a common platform and a common slate of candidates.

Another effect of this proliferation is that many candidates will not be risking much in the coming selections. Some of them have absolutely nothing to lose. That’s what makes them a real threat to the clarity of the process. They will do anything to get themselves talked about. They will put up the grandest theoretical defenses of national sovereignty, they will be the greatest champions of the “dignity” of the Haitian people. They will carry on in general terms about every topic under the sun, and say just about anything.

They will use all kinds of tricks in their campaigns. Like the one-time candidate for deputy in the commune of Croix des Bouquets, who exclaimed indignantly, “This country is going straight down the drain. In the right triangle of Croix des Bouquets even the hypotenuse has not been paved.” After he became deputy, he confessed to his colleagues that, in reality, Croix des Bouquets was more diamond-shaped than triangular, so he could not in good conscience demand paving of a hypotenuse that did not exist.

But they have other tricks as well, such as the one a presidential candidate used in 1999 in a campaign swing through the Grand Nord. It seems he had worked up a complete file on the social and economic

situation in the region: its farming potential, the main food crops, the health situation, the state of infrastructure. He had all the figures at hand at his rallies. When he arrived at Borgne, he saluted the thick throng that had turned out, paused, saluted them again, and paused again. Then, slowly sweeping his gaze over the crowd, he started to drone out the first notes of a very popular song of the time by Manno Charlemagne: “Tonnè kraze-m Michèl Benèt, I am sorry for you. Se lan videyo wa gade pèp aysyien.” The crowd and his own entourage picked up the refrain in a frenzy. The meeting lasted a few minutes.

Other candidates will not hesitate to take our long list of national heroes and pick out the ones they feel will best serve the cause of the moment. The day before yesterday it was Dessalines. Yesterday it was Toussaint-Louverture. Tomorrow it will no doubt be Pétion’s and Christophe’s turn. In any case, we should not be surprised if in a few years someone in power revives Lamour Dérance or Yayou and calls them the greatest heroes of our independence. (Candor compels me to reveal my personal preference, which goes to Petit-Noël Prieur).

But seriously, it’s time our politicians gave up this bad habit of throwing our ancestors into competition with each other by declaring preferences. This is nothing more than a subtle exercise in sowing discord, while they talk on about uniting all Haitians.

That said, and despite the proliferation of candidates, we must not lose sight of the fact that, once a party is legally recognized and once its candidate meets the conditions prescribed by law, no one can keep them from running. And they must have the same rights and the same privileges as all those who aspire to the same office. In the eyes of the law there are no big parties or little parties, and no one should presume to treat one candidate differently from the others because he lacks fame or qualifications.

There are no more zealous servants to banish. The elections are what will determine the ultimate ranking of the parties. No candidate, then, should be able to claim preferential treatment either because of his exceptional qualities or because of some monopoly on patriotism or popular sensibility. It is up to the voters to choose among the many candidates vying for their votes and to select those who in their opinion will best represent their constituency and will do the least harm to the country.

If they are to do that, the voters will have to help in a sense to educate the candidates. First, by showing them the respect to which they are entitled. These are fellow citizens who aspire to lead our country, each in their own sphere, either as president, as legislators, as mayors, or as casescs (local councilors). Showing them respect and courtesy can only encourage them to have greater self-respect and to put more effort into doing their jobs. At least that’s what we must hope.

This does not mean we have to take everything they tell us at face value. On the contrary, we must insist that they adopt clear positions on such sensitive issues as the army, the police, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the university, State reform, the environment, security and even the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF), to name just a few. Candidates must be the bringers of change, and the voters must insist that they put forward concrete and specific proposals.

The voters must also weigh the character of candidates, their qualities and their defects, bearing in mind that not having certain defects is sometimes more important than having certain qualities.

Journey into Haiti
By Natasha Haradhvala/ Special To The Town Crier
Wayland Town Crier, MA
TownOnline.com
Thursday, September 15, 2005

Joanna Lippmann's summer adventure began when she left from an airport of the wealthiest country in the world and arrived in one of the world's poorest countries.

Lippmann, who grew up in Wayland and is now a junior at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass., spent eight weeks in Haiti this summer aiding the locals in agriculture and farming and learning about Haitian culture.

Working with several American missionaries from ECHO, an organization that gives agricultural aid to Third World countries, her main tasks included planting and harvesting vital crops as well as educating the locals about various farming techniques.

Haiti is a country, as Lippmann describes, of "abject poverty." The houses are most commonly made of mud and sticks and occasionally of concrete. Most floors are packed mud.

She describes a typical meal as consisting of beans and rice; many people cannot afford meat.

As Lippmann points out, while we in the U.S. take our many brands and varieties of food for granted, in Haiti a family is considered "lucky" to be able to buy powdered milk.

"Most people don't ever eat three meals a day," she said.

She recalls a visit to a Haitian friend's house in which only she and her friend, among the friend's entire family, ate dinner.

A good education, in addition to food and comfortable housing, is difficult to come by. Although the tuition fee - about \$3.50 a month in U.S. dollars - seems like nothing to us, for many Haitians it is too expensive.

Furthermore, most colleges and universities are located in the "big city" (Port-au-Prince), which is considered by many college-aspiring Haitians to be too dangerous to live in.

Lippmann recalls a "big, elaborate party" held for a Haitian boy who had graduated from the first grade.

"I think because education is probably their only way to succeed in the world, they value it a lot more than we do," she said.

Despite living with minimal material possessions, Lippmann said that Haitians truly enjoy their lives. She remembers seeing them "playing cards in their front yard, and singing and dancing, and cooking over open fires."

"(I learned) that material possessions are not that important," Lippmann said. "You can have a very full life without very much ... It's a totally different lifestyle, but the way they live and what they enjoy and the things they value are so good."

She added, "Because of (the Haitians' lack of materialism), they value relationships and people so much more."

One aspect of the trip that Lippmann particularly enjoyed was meeting people and hearing about their experiences - "what they enjoy, and what they're scared of, and what they're struggling with, and what they value."

She became friends with a Haitian woman who tutored her in Creole, the language spoken by the locals, and also tutored a Haitian man in English.

"The way of life that people have in Haiti is completely different than we live here, but the people as people are so similar," Lippmann said, adding that she has discovered "the value of every person no matter what they're living like, no matter what situation they're in."

As an American in Haiti, Lippmann felt she was treated especially well.

"You're treated like a special guest," she said. "When you go and have dinner, it's like a feast. They feed you the best that they can."

She recalls what it was like to go to a nearby beach and be the only Caucasian there.

"It's kind of a strange feeling," she said, "because we don't have that at all here."

The Haitians, too, were unaccustomed to seeing someone who looked like Lippmann. She went home having received "four requests for my phone number and address and two proposals."

In choosing a method of supporting poor communities like Haiti, Lippmann said that avoiding dependence should be a major factor.

"If you just give someone money to buy some wood, or you give someone a house, it might help them in the short run, but in the long run they're just going to be in the same situation they were before," she said. "If you give them money to buy food, it will run out, and then they won't have food again and they'll want you to give them more."

"Instead of doing that, you can teach them better methods of farming so they can produce their own food, or help them get education so that they can get a different job and have enough money to buy food in the market."

For example, Lippmann suggested getting involved with programs in which you can sponsor a child to go to school.

"(With) those, you're not giving someone money and making them dependent on you for that, but you're giving them education and giving them a way to be able to provide for themselves," Lippmann explained.

Lippmann also believes that people here need to learn more about other countries and other people. She advises traveling and seeing "things that are different in the world."

"(Traveling) defines your world view, it changes the way you live, and then you can share that with people here," she said. "Just meeting people who live differently from you, who have different experiences from you, can make you appreciate what you have and make you more welcoming of people who are different."

Natasha Haradhvala, 15, is a Weston resident and a sophomore at the Commonwealth School in Boston.

World Bank and IMF must help us fight corruption
The New Nation, Bangladesh
Sun, 18 Sep 2005

Our corruption situation is so stable that it has not been deviating from its position for last many years. Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) last Tuesday disclosed in its report and showed that Bangladesh's position in first place in corruption has remained the same. The only exception is that Caribbean small country Haiti has found its place as joint-first with Bangladesh. But Haiti has its other distinctive features. The country is only one fifth of Bangladesh in size and its population is also small. But its per capita GDP is 1600 US dollars, while Bangladesh's is only 384 dollars. In that sense Haitians have more stamina than Bangladeshis to withstand government corruption. The other scourge Haiti faces is AIDS. Every year 30,000 people die of AIDS in the country. Thanks to the sheer luck and habit of Bangladeshi people that AIDS has not spread in the country like corruption.

People in the government question the accuracy of TIB report. TIB relies on newspaper reports. For the year 2004 the organisation found 1,754 corruption reports in 25 newspapers. It analysed those reports and conducted some investigation based on them and came to its conclusion. So, the question of its authenticity can be raised. But whatever may be the methodology, it is never possible to find out the accurate picture of corruption because people who commit corruption will not give the accurate picture of it. Hence, raising question about the accuracy of TIB report is immaterial. Moreover, government ministers raise questions about the accuracy of the report but they never claim the absence of massive corruption. Moreover, the questions come from some individual ministers. They are not formal official rebuttals. So, it is not hard to understand the soundness of those casual questions.

Corruption is everywhere in all ministries and all departments. But there is a difference in its volume and intensity. In some ministries it is thicker and wider, in others it is thinner and is of lesser dimension. That is natural because in all ministries pecuniary situations are not alike and not of the same magnitude. Their budget allocations vary widely.

For the year 2004, TIB found that the Ministry of Communication, the department of taxation, the police and NGOs are top corrupt places. But before that year, that is for 2003, TIB found police department as the topmost and the LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry as the second in corruption line. So, no minister or department is immune of corruption. There is only a variation of degree and that again also shifts from time to time.

The government's corruption is the main reason for discouraging investors. Not only that government policies cannot be implemented because of corruption among ministers and officials. Most disappointing is extent of corruption in police. The police must be given autonomy and independent accountability.

Donors, specially multi-national financing organisations like World Bank and IMF often caution Bangladesh to remove corruption or otherwise they threaten to stop or withdraw grants and loans. Though the ministers complain against such threats but they cannot categorically deny the allegations. Corruption is so widespread that such denials are meaningless. But World Bank and IMF must not stop at exposing corruption.

The government's anti-corruption mechanism has almost lost its efficacy. The Independent Anti-corruption Commission which has replaced the former Bureau of Anti-Corruption has failed to start to be active.

In the name of not framing rules by the government the Anti-Corruption Commission has become a laughing stock. It is true that because of insistence of World Bank and IMF the government had to agree to the formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission. But things are not moving in the right direction thereafter.

It is necessary that World Bank and IMF must now insist upon making the Anti-Corruption Commission meaningful against big corruption in the government. This cannot be acceptable that the donor countries will only call our government corrupt but will not ask the government to introduce effective ways of fighting corruption.

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Local Haitians look to improve homeland

By Doug McNamara

The Gazette Leader

Wednesday, September 7, 2005

Haiti is a nation on the brink of complete failure. Despite the presence of a United Nations stabilization force, armed gangs, encouraged by Haitian elite, have taken de facto control of Port-au-Prince, the country's capital. Looting, kidnapping, car-jackings and rape have become daily events.

As a result, many local businesses have collapsed, crippling the economy of what is already the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Just recently, in light of the continuing violence, the United States evacuated all "non-essential" embassy personnel.

Politically, Haiti is still under the nominal control of an interim government and hasn't recovered from a 2004 coup which deposed then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was accused of tampering with election returns in 2000.

According to a recent Village Voice article, in one of Port-au-Prince's most impoverished neighborhoods, the national police have freely distributed machetes to residents, encouraging them to attack fellow unarmed residents. The move is seen by some as an attempt to weaken the exiled Aristide's political base, which is primarily drawn from the poor.

The recent turmoil has only exacerbated the poverty gap, with more than 80 percent of the country's population below the poverty line, according to a 2003 estimate by the CIA.

Haiti's troubles, however, transcend domestic woes. As the country continues to spiral downward, Union County's large Haitian expatriate community, particularly those living in Elizabeth, are powerless to do anything.

Fred Lorquet, a Roselle resident and Elizabeth merchant who emigrated to the U.S. 30 years ago, explained, there's "always bad news" coming from Haiti. He recounted that his sister, who lived in Haiti, died in July. However, family members, citing the all-too-frequent kidnappings, cautioned Lorquet against attending the funeral.

Yves Aubourg, the Urban Enterprise Zone director in Hillside, recalled a similar experience. After his mother died in June, he too was warned not to set foot inside the country. Instead, he ended up having her body shipped to the U.S.

Both Aubourg and Lorquet added that in light of the recent violence, many native Haitians have abandoned their summer vacation plans to return to the island.

In addition to informal relief efforts such as Lorquet's, the Haitian community in the area has banded together to form the Haiti Solidarity Network of the Northeast, said Jack Martin, one of the founding members and a priest at St. Mary's of the Assumption Church in Elizabeth.

The network meets monthly at the St. Joseph's Social Service Center to "keep informed from trustworthy sources" and not the mainstream media, said Martin.

It also frequently sends delegations to Haiti. While there, they "build connections with villages" by providing medical relief, assisting in building infrastructure and helping to rebuild areas destroyed by hurricanes and other natural disasters all too common to the region.

Both Lorquet and Aubourg agree that the United States hasn't done enough to help Haiti. Saying he is "condemning the Bush administration," Aubourg faults the U.S. for turning a blind eye and, in some cases exacerbating, Haiti's problems.

In particular, he feels that though "people are dying everyday" in Haiti, "nobody's talking about it." Lorquet agreed, adding that the "government here doesn't really care."

Martin added that he was "quite unhappy" with America's role in the transition from Aristide government to the current one.

Staff Writer Doug McNamara can be reached at 908-686-7700, ext. 118, or gazetteleader@yahoo.com.

'Historic day': Haitian to guide health agency
BY GARY FINEOUT
Miami Herald
Sept. 16, 2005

TALLAHASSEE - Gov. Jeb Bush on Thursday named a Tampa doctor and Haitian immigrant to lead the state's Health Department.

Dr. M. Rony Francois, 47, is believed to be the first Haitian-American to be appointed to head a state agency, reflecting the growing clout and influence of Haitians who have moved to Florida over the past 30 years.

"This is a historic day for the state of Florida," Bush said. "But this appointment goes beyond symbolism. It represents a coming of age of a population that has made significant contributions to the state of Florida. Dr. Francois joins an incredible group of aspiring Haitian Americans who are making a difference in our state."

Francois, who will make \$155,000 a year in the state post, will succeed Dr. John Agwunobi as secretary of the Department of Health. Agwunobi is leaving Tallahassee to become an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Francois will take over on Monday.

NUMEROUS PROGRAMS

The Department of Health has more than 3,000 employees spread throughout the state, many of them in county health departments, and has a budget of nearly \$2.3 billion that is used for programs to help battle infant mortality, deliver healthcare to children with acute illnesses, regulate healthcare professionals, track infectious diseases and promote sexual abstinence among teenagers.

Francois, who speaks French, Creole, English and Spanish, is an assistant professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa in the College of Public Health and also serves as a medical director for Citibank in downtown Tampa.

A native of Port-au-Prince, Francois first came to the United States in 1979 and eventually earned a medical degree from USF in Tampa, as well as a master's degree in exercise physiology from the University of Central Florida and a doctoral degree in toxicology from USF.

Francois, who first went to UCF on a soccer scholarship, has had a wide-ranging career that includes evaluating individuals living near toxic pollution sites near Pensacola, and researching heart disease.

Francois said he wanted to continue to work on initiatives started by Bush and Agwunobi over the past several years, such as improving access to healthcare for minorities.

But Bush and Francois also acknowledged that other health problems, such as obesity, may demand more attention in the near future. The department this week issued a study saying that the number of high school students who are overweight rose more than 28 percent between 2000 and 2003.

"I am eager to take on the challenges of this mission with the help of our dedicated professionals," Francois said.

Francois described himself as a pro-life Catholic who is opposed to abortion, but added that he believed it was the mission of the state's Health Department to provide information and help to parents regardless of his views on birth control.

WITH FAMILY

Francois was surrounded by family and friends when Bush announced his appointment, which must be approved by the state Senate. Among those on hand was Rep. Yolly Roberson, a Miami Democrat and one of the first Haitian Americans elected to the Florida Legislature.

"It's quite an honor and a proud moment for the Haitian community," said Roberson, a former nurse.

Every immigrant is now a suspect
Review by Manijeh Moradian |
September 16, 2005
Socialist Worker Online

Tram Nguyen, *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant Communities after 9/11*. Foreward by Edwidge Danticat. Beacon Press, 2005, 208 pages, \$14.

TRAM NGUYEN'S *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant Communities after 9/11* exposes the brutality and racism of the domestic "war on terror" on some of the most vulnerable people in U.S. society.

The scale of the attacks is enormous, from the 10,000 people who have been detained and frequently tortured in the Northeast alone, to the more than 1,000 hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, to the thousands who have been deported--often back to the very life-threatening conditions from which they fled in the first place.

This book provides the harrowing details of lives turned upside down--or, in some cases, destroyed completely--through the personal testimonies from individual Pakistanis, Haitians, Mexicans and Somalis who have been targeted since September 11.

A Somali man caught up in the Islamophobic witch-hunts compares his experience in the U.S. to the refugee camps in Kenya from which he escaped. "There were flies everywhere," Abdullah Osman said of the county jail in Oklahoma where he was detained for three months out of his nearly two-year imprisonment. "There were 75 or 80 people in one room. It was worse than any refugee camp. I saw people vomit blood."

With chapters on Muslim communities in Brooklyn and Minneapolis, as well as one called "Crisis at the Border" about growing vigilante violence in the Southwest, Nguyen shows how anti-terrorist hysteria has affected all immigrants.

In a chapter called "The New Racial Profiling," Nguyen discusses the way racism pits oppressed groups against each other with disastrous effects. He notes that a poll taken immediately after September 11 showed 71 percent of Blacks in favor of profiling Arabs while at the same time "the number of Black men in prison now matches the number of men enslaved before the Civil War."

The scapegoating of immigrants in times of war is nothing new, and Nguyen sees the current round-ups as part of a long American tradition that includes the anti-immigrant Palmer Raids of 1919 and the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the Second World War.

He also points out that the laws requiring mandatory detention for immigration violations, as well as many other provisions that make today's xenophobic crackdown possible, were put in place under Democratic President Bill Clinton. He argues that the destruction of welfare, the strengthening of the criminal justice system and anti-immigrant legislation pushed through during the 1990s set the stage for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the FBI and now the Department of Homeland

Security to wreak havoc on the lives of tens of thousands of innocent people, who suddenly became suspects simply because of their race or religion after September 11.

Among the shattered dreams of so many immigrant families who came to this country to find a better life than the one they left behind, there is also cause for hope among the many voices included in this book. The profiles of activists like Bobby Khan of the Coney Island Avenue Project and Aarti Shahani of Families for Peace show that, even while their families and communities are under siege, it is possible for those targeted to fight back.

**Sisters Help Haitian Children Receive Critical Medical Care
Foundation Helps Children Have Surgeries For Tumors, Heart Problems
September 13, 2005
nbc6.net**

MIAMI -- Two sisters who have dedicated their lives to helping Haitians in need helped bring a special group of children to Miami Tuesday for some much-needed medical attention.

Twin sisters Gina and Ginette Eugene first find the children who are in need, then secure visas, pay for airline tickets, secure top surgeons at Jackson Memorial Hospital and find funding needed for critical care.

On Tuesday, the sisters brought 18 Haitians, their largest group to date, including seven children between 2 and 15 years old, to Miami International Airport.

"We see so many of them dying before we get to United States when the passport gets done," Ginette Eugene said.

"I'm crying out for help for the children that we need for them," Gina Eugene said.

The organization set up by the Haitian-born registered nurses, called The Good Samaritans for a Better Life, identified and received people suffering from deforming and life-threatening tumors and heart defects.

They secured funding for critical care through international and local sources.

"Our congregants and servants in the Fountain have done their part and will continue to do their part to provide financial support to aid the children," said Latessa Hall, of The Fountain Pembroke Pines.

Dahana David, 15, was one of the first 12 children the Eugenes helped. She had a 3-pound tumor removed from her face.

After spending their childhood in the impoverished nation of Haiti, Gina and Ginette Eugene decided to reach back in a labor of love.

"I just have a few but they are dying by the second in Haiti," Gina Eugene said.

The numerous surgeries and post care the children need can take months.

The Eugene sisters normally provide continuing care in their own homes in Miramar and West Park.

Seven people found ashore in Palm Beach

9/19/2005

Palm Beach Post

wpmi.com

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) - Seven people were found ashore on Palm Beach this morning.

Authorities say five men, two women and a boat captain were captured and turned over to the U-S Border Patrol.

Police spokeswoman Janet Kinsella says the passengers were from Haiti and the Bahamas. The spokeswoman adds that the seven washed ashore at Via Marina and then scattered.

The seven were reportedly picked up in wet clothing at several different locations on the island.

Woman Named No. 2 in Police

Radio Kiskeya,

Sept. 16, 2005

Haiti Democracy Project web page item #3234 (<http://www.haitipolicy.org>)

Jessie Cameau Coicou was promoted to the position of police chief inspector-general yesterday. Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, who made the announcement yesterday, hailed Mrs Coicou's integrity and courage. Her mission is to restore order in the Haitian National Police, PNH. Prime Minister Latortue spoke as follows at the microphone of Radio Kiskeya:

From now on, she is the police inspector-general, the second in command. It is a promotion that we give her for her courage, her integrity and her knowledge. She knows that it is her department that will restore order in the police. And we know that when a woman decides to put things right, nothing will stop her from doing so. Besides, she is a woman who has already proved what she can do. So, it is with pleasure that all of us in the High Council of the Haitian National Police unanimously accepted the recommendation made by the director-general. This is the main thing today. We now have another inspector-general at the head of the police to put things right in the police. She will be able to put things right where there are policemen who are involved in crooked dealings.

From now on, people will be able to see more positive changes in the police. This had already started with the appointment of the new director-general and will be improved even more now. Everybody is used to hearing her speak. People do not need to see her to know what she can do. Her voice alone is enough to show she means business.

Actually, the first time I heard Ms. Coicou speak, I said to myself, this woman definitely has a future in the police. So, today, I am pleased that I have the opportunity together with the police director-general to install her as chief inspector-general of the PNH. I believe that this will be an honor

for the national police. Actually, wherever she goes in the world, at conferences in Miami and in Montreal, people always hail her.

So, we now have a great team at the head of the police. These two officers will make us proud of our national police. The police were in need of that. And I believe that this appointment is going to enhance the prestige of the police not just in Haiti but also internationally.