

Dear colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for April 27 – May 22, 2007.

The sentencing of former FRAPH paramilitary leader, Emmanuel “Toto” Constant, in his New York mortgage fraud trial was postponed as the NY State Supreme Court received and considered claims from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR). Lawyers for the state attorney general’s office and the Dept. of Homeland Security advocated a plea deal of ‘time served,’ in this case 10 months, instead of the proposed one to three year sentence to speed Constant’s deportation. CCR lawyers argued that “Haiti’s justice system was too unstable to prosecute Constant” and “the proposed sentence in the fraud case was too lenient, given Constant’s background.” The judge rejected the plea agreement, now requiring Constant to stand trial (date set for Sept. 24th) for mortgage fraud, facing a maximum of 15 years in prison. Haitian lawyer, Mario Joseph, appeared before the judge advocating against Constant’s deportation and less leniency in sentencing.

Two weeks following the disastrous capsizing of a boat of Haitian migrants off the coast of Turks and Caicos Islands, claiming at least 90 lives, 59 recovered corpses were returned for mass burial near Cap Haitian. The 78 survivors accuse a Turks and Caicos patrol boat of towing the migrant boat to deeper waters, ramming and causing their boat to capsize, preventing those in the water from entering the patrol boat and even running over people in the water. T & C authorities claim the boat capsized while being towed to shore. The Turks and Caicos government launched an investigation along with a British investigation of the incident and the migrants’ claims.

Marc Lacey of the New York Times wrote a feature story on the Turks and Caicos Haitian migrant tragedy. Lacey sympathetically presents the Turks & Caicos as increasingly inundated with Haitians using their islands as an initial (and relatively close) stopover on their way to Miami and otherwise “badly straining relations with their neighbors.” The tourism industry in Turks and Caicos is booming and low-wage, low-skill jobs are plentiful for Haitian migrants. As the islands’ largest migrant population, Haitians are enduring increasingly aggressive crackdowns from T & C authorities. Lacey mentions the fact that Haitians are not granted TPS in the US like visitors from neighboring countries such as Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

A proposed deal for unfreezing Jean-Claude Duvalier’s Swiss accounts (worth \$6.2 million) is under discussion with the Haitian government. Swiss authorities are proposing to return a large portion of the funds for Haitian humanitarian projects and return the remaining (undisclosed sum) to Baby Doc, living in exile in France. The funds, blocked since Duvalier’s departure in 1986, will be released June 3 “unless the government in Haiti produces last-minute evidence tying the money to corruption or crime.”

The AP and Los Angeles Times reported on the ambush and murder of another Gonaives-based journalist, Alix Joseph, director of private Radio Provinciale. Suspects and motive have yet to be identified, although a fellow Radio journalist of the station suspects “some

people were unhappy with the station's reporting on local crime." This follows last month's killing, also in Gonaives, of journalist Johnson Edouard.

The "New life is no life for U.S. ex-cons in Haiti" South Florida Sun Sentinel story exposes the complex dilemma facing Haitian criminal deportees. Haitian government officials blame the recent wave of 2,000 deportees as major contributors to the kidnapping and crime wave. Such public accusations due little to smooth public acceptance or stigma facing deportees as they adjust to living in Haiti, in some cases for the first time in their lives. Both the US embassy and UN downplay, if not completely debunk, the deportees role in the crime wave. The UN claims "not a single criminal deportee is among the hundreds of Haitians arrested in recent months during a major crackdown by UN troops against Haiti's powerful street gangs." The UN's statement assumes that their arrests and killings actually targeted known culprits with specific ties to kidnappings in crime when in fact many testimonials confirm widespread killings of civilians and random arrests of suspicious young men. While it is also known that kidnapping and criminal rings exist all over Port-au-Prince but have yet to be pursued on anywhere near the scale of assault on Cite Soleil.

President Rene Preval's three day visit to Washington DC included meetings with President Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and several Congressmen. Preval's objectives were to influence U.S. lawmakers to commit more resources in the battle against drug trafficking, support debt relief, extend preferential trade incentives beyond those approved under the HOPE bill and offer Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians in the U.S. to prevent further deportations.

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1. Haitian ex-paramilitary leader to stand trial-NY judge

22 May 2007

Reuters

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N22474911.htm>

NEW YORK, May 22 (Reuters) - A Haitian former paramilitary leader accused of rape and murder in Haiti will stand trial in New York for mortgage fraud, a state judge ruled on Tuesday after a human rights group argued he could escape justice if he were to return to Haiti.

Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, 50, was to have served a reduced prison term in return for pleading guilty in February to fraud and grand larceny.

But State Supreme Court Judge Abraham Gerges rejected that plea agreement based on detailed information he recently received regarding Constant's leadership role in the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, known as FRAPH.

"These allegations, if true, are heinous, and the court cannot in good conscience consent to the previously negotiated sentence," the judge said in a written ruling. "The court also cannot consent to time served, as that would be a travesty."

The judge set a trial date of Sept. 24. If convicted, Constant faces a maximum of 15 years in prison.

The Center for Constitutional Rights told the judge by letter that Constant should not be deported but instead serve a full sentence for economic crimes in New York because it was likely Constant "could evade justice in his home country" for human rights violations.

The legal rights group said the ex-death squad leader of FRAPH, which formed to undermine former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, fled to New York in 1994 soon after Aristide returned to power and issued his arrest warrant.

The group said Constant was a former paid CIA informant and had directly conspired in the assassination of Aristide's Minister of Justice, Guy Malary, but had been allowed to stay in the United States.

2. Ex-Haitian Strongman Willing to Go Back

Wednesday May 16, 2007

By TOM HAYS

Associated Press Writer

The Guardian Unlimited, UK

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uslatest/story/0,-6636421,00.html>

NEW YORK (AP) - After trying to stay in the United States for more than a decade, a former Haitian strongman said Tuesday that he is willing to return to the Caribbean nation, where he faces murder and torture charges.

"I have no fear to be deported to Haiti," Emmanuel "Toto" Constant said in state Supreme Court in Brooklyn, where he had been scheduled for sentencing in a mortgage fraud case.

Lawyers for the state attorney general's office and the federal Department of Homeland Security urged Justice Abraham Gerges to sentence Constant in the fraud case to time served, about 10 months of a proposed 1- to-3-year sentence, to speed his deportation.

Gerges postponed the sentencing after the Center for Constitutional Rights claimed that Haiti's justice system was too unstable to prosecute Constant. The civil rights group argued the proposed sentence in the fraud case was too lenient, given Constant's background.

The Haitian government has "clearly demonstrated" it can fairly prosecute Constant, said Ajay Bhatt, an attorney with the Department of Homeland Security.

The judge suggested he might kill the deal, forcing Constant to withdraw a guilty plea and go to trial on charges he defrauded lenders out of more than \$1.7 million. If convicted, Constant would face five to 15 years in prison.

After demanding to speak to the court, 50-year-old Constant stood at the defense table and complained that the allegations in Haiti were "purely political" and "should have no bearing on the case here."

Another hearing was set for Monday.

Constant, the 6-foot-4 son of a military officer, emerged as the feared leader of the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, or FRAPH, after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's presidency was toppled in 1991.

Human rights groups allege that between 1991 and 1994, FRAPH terrorized and slaughtered slum-dwellers loyal to Aristide. When Aristide returned to power in 1994, Constant fled to the United States.

Despite a 1995 deportation order, Constant was allowed to remain because of instability in Haiti. He kept a low profile, living with relatives in New York until being jailed last year in the mortgage fraud case.

3. Haitian Cites Fear of Return in NY Court

Tuesday May 22, 2007

By TOM HAYS

Associated Press

The Guardian Unlimited

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6650685,00.html>

NEW YORK (AP) - A former paramilitary leader wanted in Haiti on murder and torture charges insisted Monday that he has become a scapegoat for atrocities in the Caribbean nation and would be killed if he were forced to return.

"If I ever touch Haiti, I will be executed at the airport," Emmanuel "Toto" Constant said in a rambling, emotional plea to a judge overseeing his mortgage fraud case in state Supreme Court.

The dire warning was a switch from last week, when Constant, 50, told the judge he did not fear going back because he had done nothing wrong.

On Monday, Constant repeated claims that he had worked with the CIA while head of a Haitian paramilitary group in the 1990s. He also said he was "promoting reconciliation" at the time but has become a target of political persecution.

Last week, prosecutors urged Justice Abraham Gerges to sentence Constant to time served, about 10 months of a proposed sentence of one to three years, to speed his deportation to Haiti to face charges there.

Gerges postponed the sentencing after the Center for Constitutional Rights claimed Haiti's justice system was too unstable to ensure Constant's proper prosecution. The civil rights group also argued the proposed sentence in the fraud case was too lenient, given Constant's background.

The judge has suggested he might reject the plea deal, forcing Constant to withdraw a guilty plea and go to trial on charges he defrauded lenders out of more than \$1.7 million. If convicted at trial, Constant would face five to 15 years in prison.

Constant's attorney, Marie Pereira, argued that the deal was reached "with full knowledge of these frivolous allegations" and should be honored.

The judge said he would rule Tuesday.

Constant, the 6-foot-4 son of a military officer, emerged as the feared leader of the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, or FRAPH, after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's presidency was toppled in 1991.

Human rights groups allege that between 1991 and 1994, FRAPH terrorized and slaughtered slum-dwellers loyal to Aristide. When Aristide returned to power in 1994, Constant fled to the United States.

Despite a 1995 deportation order, Constant was allowed to remain because of instability in Haiti. He kept a low profile, living with relatives in New York until being jailed last year in the fraud case.

4. New Routes and New Risk, as More Haitians Flee

Reuters

By MARC LACEY

New York Times

May 19, 2007

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/19/world/americas/19haiti.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

PROVIDENCIALES, Turks and Caicos, May 16 — There is no conceivable way to get from this island to Miami by bus. But the traffickers who ply Haiti's northern coastline in search of those willing to risk their bleak lives for better ones abroad tell some tall tales to fill their rickety boats.

Turks and Caicos authorities are unhappy with the Haitian influx.

They describe this island chain, 150 miles off Haiti's northern coast, as being an easy hop to Miami, the ultimate goal of most migrating Haitians. Sometimes they tell migrants from Haiti's interior that the United States is a bus ride away as they talk of the big paychecks and full stomachs that await them.

The reality is different, of course, as was made clear when an overloaded Haitian sloop capsized off the coast of Turks and Caicos recently. As many as 90 migrants may have died in that episode, which passengers on the vessel blamed on the aggressive tactics of the local police.

They were part of a swelling number of Haitians abandoning their country this year, apparently disillusioned with the slow pace of change coming from Haiti's year-old government. But with patrols along the Florida coastline making it increasingly difficult to land there, desperate Haitians are "island hopping," as the United States Coast Guard calls it, looking for alternative routes and badly straining relations with their neighbors.

Turks and Caicos is hop No. 1, and it is not altogether happy about it. Local Haitians charge that authorities' efforts to combat illegal migrants have become so aggressive that they believe accusations that a police boat may have caused the capsizing of the Haitian vessel on May 4, despite official denials.

Haitians now make up a huge percentage of the population here, exceeding the number of other residents, according to government estimates. With migrant boats landing regularly, authorities here and across the Caribbean are struggling to contain them.

“It’s a tremendous strain on the government, and we’d appreciate international assistance,” said Lee Penn, who runs the detention center for illegal migrants in Providenciales, the financial capital of Turks and Caicos. “We’re feeding them and housing them and repatriating them — and it’s costing us.”

What exactly happened at sea on May 4 remains uncertain, and is still under investigation by maritime authorities from Britain, which administers the territory.

But it is clear that the voyage was hellish. After a day and a half packed together in a tiny craft, with nothing but water all around, the migrants finally saw lights on the horizon as they approached Turks and Caicos. Excitement grew, and then dreams turned to nightmares.

With a police boat on the scene in rough waters, the Haitian boat went over on its side. Screams filled the air and bodies hit the water. In all, 61 dead Haitians were plucked from the sea, some of them with shark bites. Twenty or so others were never found.

“The closest thing I could compare it to was Katrina, with that many people floating in the water,” said Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Arko, a Coast Guard helicopter pilot who responded to the scene and who had done search-and-rescue work over post-hurricane New Orleans.

Of the 69 men and nine women who survived, none would succeed in escaping their desperate lives back home. All were flown back to Cap Haitien, a city on Haiti’s northern coast and a major departure point for migrants.

Inspector Hilton Duncan of the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force said it was a fierce storm, not the police, that forced the Haitian sloop to capsize. He acknowledged that the crowded boat was being towed to shore by the police when it went over. Immediately, he said, a rescue effort ensued, involving the police, other government boats, good Samaritans and the Coast Guard.

“For five officers on a boat, at that time of morning, with that type of weather, rescuing 78 people ought to bring a commendation,” said Inspector Duncan. “But people don’t see it that way.”

But before they were returned home, the surviving Haitian migrants charged that the Turks and Caicos police boat had not responded to their capsized vessel, as the police originally said.

The migrants charged that the police had rammed them in the rough waters and that the overloaded sloop went over when it was being hauled farther out to sea by the police boat.

“We fell into the water and many people drowned,” Marcelin Charles, 37, one of the passengers, told The Associated Press. “I was swimming past dead bodies left and right.”

The tragedy focused attention on the growing exodus of Haitians in recent months and the increasing enforcement efforts to thwart them. In April alone, the United States Coast Guard picked up 704 Haitians at sea, almost as many as the 769 migrants interdicted during all of last year.

President René Préval took office last May amid high expectations that he would end a long bout of violence and economic stagnation. But reversing course has proved challenging: after a spike in kidnappings at the end of 2006 that terrorized residents of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, the United Nations peacekeeping force in Haiti has only recently begun to make headway in controlling the insecurity there. Meanwhile, hunger and joblessness linger.

The Haitian migrants follow the wind to the Bahamas, to Bermuda, or here in Turks and Caicos, any place that might offer a way to make a living or might take them closer to the United States.

It is a pattern similar to that of other Caribbean migrants. Cubans, for instance, are trying alternative routes to escape that island. The emerging route: west to the Mexican coast and then overland to the United States border.

But Haitians have it harder than others. They are not allowed to stay if they reach American soil, like the Cubans. They are not granted temporary protected status while their countries recover from war and natural disasters, like those who have fled Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

And if they make it ashore on Turks and Caicos, their efforts at escape have just begun.

Immigration agents are on the lookout for illegal Haitians throughout the eight inhabited islands that make up Turks and Caicos, demanding proof of legal residency from everyone they stop.

"We're a small country, and if these people are continuing to come, it causes problems for us," Mr. Penn said. "We've become a stepping stone."

Residents here speak of the need to maintain their identity. A British territory, the islands have a governor appointed by Queen Elizabeth as well as a local premier. One government survey estimated the population at 33,000, only a third of whom are longtime residents. Haitians make up the bulk of the foreigners.

In recent months, immigration agents in search of illegal Haitians have waited outside Haitian churches on the island to grab parishioners without papers. In one case, they barged inside All Saints Baptist Church and took five migrants out. Legal Haitians who hire or house a migrant — or even allow one into their homes — face legal jeopardy, local Haitians say.

Residents recall that back in 1998 another boatload of escaping Haitians died off the shore here, after the police fired at the boat. Authorities say they were firing warning shots and did not cause that vessel to capsize.

“We’re still human and ought to be treated that way,” said James Prosper, a Haitian-born pastor who has lived in Turks and Caicos for 24 years and who complained to the government recently about the rough treatment endured by those caught without papers.

“If a Haitian is mistreated, I feel it, because it’s in my blood,” said Ronald Gardiner, a Haitian-born businessman who is now a “Belonger,” as citizens of Turks and Caicos are called.

On Turks and Caicos, Haitians pick up trash and sweep the streets. They make the hotel beds and pour the concrete.

The tourism industry here is booming, a far cry from the 1990s when a Gallup poll found the islands had the lowest name recognition in the world. Now, Hollywood stars vacation in hidden bungalows. Other well-heeled sun worshipers fly in on tickets that can cost less than the several thousand dollars some Haitians pay to get a spot on a sloop.

The police here say some migrants smuggle drugs and guns, which means every sloop is considered a security threat. In fact, the recent deaths revived a call among local officials to create a defense force to better patrol the surrounding waters.

“These are poor people seeking a better life but among them are criminals,” Inspector Duncan said in an interview. “We believe some of them may be former members of the Tontons Macoute,” a reference to the armed thugs who ruled the Haitian countryside during the long years of the Duvalier dictatorships.

The Haitian authorities hope the tragedy may help keep more Haitians home. They are considering using photos of the latest overturned vessel and the resulting bodies thrown into the sea as part of a public education campaign to discourage others from making the trip.

“The answer to migration is economic development and, as you know, that won’t happen overnight,” said Louis Joseph, who is Haiti’s ambassador to the Bahamas. “When you don’t have money to eat or to send your children to school, you don’t know what to do. So you leave — or you try, like these people did.”

5. Haitian survivor: ‘They just left us out there’

BY STEVENSON JACOBS

Associated Press

Miami Herald

May 11, 2007

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti -- Survivors of a capsizing that killed at least 61 Haitian migrants said a Turks and Caicos patrol boat rammed them, towed them into deeper water and abandoned their overturned vessel.

"Our boat flipped over and they just left us out there," said Dona Daniel, 23, one of a half-dozen survivors interviewed by The Associated Press on Thursday after they were repatriated to Haiti from the nearby British territory.

The survivors said some migrants tried desperately to pull themselves aboard the patrol boat but were beaten back with wooden batons.

Others were run over by the patrol boat after they were flung into the shark-filled waters as their boat capsized, said Lovderson Nacon, 19.

Many of the migrants did not know how to swim and were screaming "God help me!" in the darkness, Nacon said.

The Turks and Caicos government has said it will not comment until two investigations are completed. Britain's Foreign Office also declined to comment on the capsizing in its island territory. One probe is being conducted by the local government, and three government experts from Britain are carrying out an independent investigation.

MINUTES FROM SHORE

The Haitians said their sailboat, loaded with an estimated 160 people, was minutes away from the shore of Providenciales, one of the Turks and Caicos Islands, on May 4 when the patrol boat rammed them before dawn.

"When they hit us the first time, water rushed into the boat and everybody screamed," Daniel said.

The patrol boat crew ordered the migrants to lower their sails, threw them a line and began towing them into deeper water. The boat then capsized, he said.

"We thought they were bringing us to shore, but they took us further out to sea," said Daniel, whose two brothers drowned.

Minutes after towing began, the migrants' boat jerked violently and tipped over, flinging everyone into the water, several survivors said.

"They were towing us but they pulled too hard and the boat flipped over," said another migrant, Marcelin Charles, 37. "We fell into the water and many people drowned. I was swimming past dead bodies left and right."

News of the alleged ramming and subsequent repatriation angered Haitian activists in South Florida.

"I believe if that's the case, it's a crime," Miami activist Lucie Tondreau said. "I want to know if they were able to file for political asylum in the case of political persecution. And we still maintain that we need a full investigation on behalf of those who died."

Haitians have been organizing a delegation to visit Turks and Caicos to try to prevent migrants from being deported before it's determined whether they qualify for asylum.

The Turks and Caicos government has criticized Haiti for not doing enough to stem illegal migration. About 400 Haitians arrive monthly in the British territory of 20,000, many having been duped by migrant smugglers into thinking they were being taken to the United States, officials say.

After being flown back to Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city, the surviving migrants, wearing maroon T-shirts and athletic pants, were driven on a school bus to a gymnasium where about 100 relatives, many weeping, greeted them.

The relatives called out their loved ones' names, not sure if they had survived the worst disaster to hit Haitian migrants in years. More than a dozen are still missing and presumed dead.

WAITING IN THE WATER

Nacon said he was in the water for more than 15 minutes before a smaller Turks and Caicos patrol boat came out to pull survivors from the water. Other migrants said they were in the water for more than 40 minutes as they waited for the rescue boat to make a return trip.

"They heard us screaming so much, they finally came and helped us," Nacon said. "The people who knew how to swim lived. The people who didn't drowned."

Jeanne Bernard Pierre, director general of Haiti's National Migration Office, said Tuesday that the Haitian government would consider the ramming of a migrant boat to be a "criminal" act.

South Florida Haitians who say they had relatives aboard the boat worried about their fate.

"I haven't eaten since Saturday. I can't drink anything. I've been calling all over," said Myrtil Baptiste, 40, a chef in Fort Lauderdale.

Baptiste said family members in Haiti told him on Saturday that his 31-year-old brother, Jacquelin Pierre, boarded the boat. Baptiste's brother hasn't been heard from since.

Miami Herald staff writer Trenton Daniel in Fort Lauderdale contributed to this report.

6. Victims of Haitian Boat Disaster Buried

Sunday May 20, 2007

By STEVENSON JACOBS

Associated Press

The Guardian Unlimited

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6646371,00.html>

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti (AP) - The remains of dozens of Haitian migrants who died when their boat capsized off the Turks and Caicos Islands were returned to their homeland Saturday and buried in a common grave, angering relatives who were not given a chance to identify their loved ones.

Family members clutching photographs of victims wept as the 59 bodies - wrapped in black bags and marked "John Doe" or "Jane Doe" - were unloaded from a cargo ship in Cap-Haitien's seaport, two weeks after one of the deadliest disasters to hit Haitians in years. Officials said the bodies were badly decomposed and could not be readily identified.

"God will welcome each one of you, our compatriots. You should not have had to take to the seas and leave your country," the Rev. Hubert Constant, the archbishop of Cap-Haitien, said after blessing the 28 male and 31 female victims.

More than 160 migrants were aboard the overcrowded sloop when it capsized May 4, flinging them into choppy, shark-filled waters.

The bodies of 61 migrants were recovered and more than a dozen are missing and presumed dead. Some had been eaten by sharks. Two bodies were buried in Turks and Caicos.

The 78 survivors have accused a Turks and Caicos patrol boat of ramming their vessel as they approached shore and towing them into deeper water.

The Turks and Caicos government is investigating but has said the migrants were being towed toward shore when their boat overturned in rough seas.

The deaths provoked an outpouring of grief in Haiti and underscored the peril migrants face when they take to the seas in rickety boats.

"It's like trying to fly across the Atlantic in an airplane that hasn't had an oil change in four years," said U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer James Judge. "It's extremely dangerous and not worth the risk."

During a brief memorial ceremony at the seaport, a church choir sang hymns as the bodies were placed in simple wooden coffins and loaded onto trucks. As the coffins were driven to the cemetery, sobbing relatives ran alongside, yelling out their names.

“We came here to bring our brother home but the government hasn't told us anything,” said Max Metellus, whose brother, Jean-Baptiste Metellus risked the voyage after years of struggling to survive on meager earnings from selling lottery tickets.

The coffins were later buried in a common grave, stacked one on top of the other, in Cap-Haitien's St. Philomene cemetery as hundreds of people looked on from rooftops. Fifty-nine unmarked white crosses were placed above the grave.

“We never would have wanted him to be buried this way. This hurts us deeply,” Metellus said.

Georgemain Prophete, an official in the northern Haitian city, said many of the bodies were unrecognizable and were buried immediately “to spare relatives the emotional burden” of having to try and identify them.

Police arrested six suspected migrant smugglers and seized two migrant boats in an operation Friday, Prophete said.

7. Switzerland to return funds from Haiti's Baby Doc

22 May 2007

Source: Reuters

By Laura MacInnis

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L22237983.htm>

GENEVA, May 22 (Reuters) - Switzerland is set to return 7.6 million Swiss francs (\$6.2 million) next month which it seized in accounts belonging to former Haitian ruler Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, a senior Swiss official said on Tuesday.

Under an agreement proposed by Switzerland, a large portion of the frozen funds would be given to Haiti for humanitarian projects but the rest will be given back to the former dictator, exiled in France, and his family.

The funds, blocked since Duvalier was ousted in 1986, will be released on June 3 unless the government in Haiti produces last-minute evidence tying the money to corruption or crime, said Paul Seger, legal adviser at the Swiss Foreign Ministry.

"There is a glimpse of hope that we will find some kind of miracle solution before that date," Seger told Reuters in a telephone interview, noting Haitian investigators have promised to intensify their efforts as the deadline approaches.

"The settlement will foresee that the majority of the money will be used for projects of a humanitarian and social nature in Haiti," Seger said, declining to specify the amount until the deal is signed.

Over the past 20 years, Switzerland has returned nearly \$1.3 billion in loot stashed by Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos, Peru's former spy chief Vladimiro Montesinos and Nigeria's leader General Sani Abacha to their homelands.

Legal and practical hurdles have so far prevented such a resolution in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, where authorities failed to gather adequate legal proof that the Duvalier fortune was ill-gotten.

Similar issues have also ground proceedings to a halt in the case of 8 million Swiss francs (\$6.49 million) belonging to the late Zairean strongman Mobutu Sese Seko, held since 1997.

Authorities in the country -- now the Democratic Republic of the Congo -- have not yet produced evidence that the funds were illicit. Swiss law requires the funds to be released by the end of 2008 if no resolution is reached in the case.

"We will have a bit of time," Seger said.

Judicial experts argue that poor countries, particularly those with institutions ravaged by war and unrest, need legal assistance to recover money stashed abroad by corrupt leaders.

Switzerland has argued for faster global implementation of a U.N. anti-corruption convention that criminalises bribery, money laundering and the embezzlement of public funds. The pact obliges countries to return illegally acquired assets.

8. Gunmen Kill Radio Journalist in Haiti
By STEVENSON JACOBS, Associated Press
Los Angeles Times
May 17, 2007

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Gunmen killed a journalist in northwestern Haiti, shooting him 11 times outside his fiancée's house, his radio station said Thursday.

Alix Joseph, director of private Radio Provinciale in the port town of Gonaives, was ambushed late Wednesday by two assailants as he sat in a car with his fiancée, who escaped unharmed, said Frantz Justin Altidor, a journalist at the station.

"She screamed 'Oh my God, they got us,' and started running. She thought Alix was right behind her," Altidor said. Colleagues returned hours later and found Joseph's body on the floor of the car.

Police have not identified suspects or established a motive.

Altidor said he did not know if Joseph, 38, had received threats, but said some people were unhappy with the station's reporting on local crime.

Altidor said Radio Provinciale and other stations in Gonaives went off the air Thursday to protest insecurity in the town, a base for armed gangs blamed for a string of recent killings.

Last month, gunmen in the city shot and killed a former journalist with ties to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide while he slept. His killers were not caught.

Attacks on journalists are common in Haiti, but they have dropped since the 2006 election of President Rene Preval, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

9. New life is no life for U.S. ex-cons in Haiti

By Gary Marx

Tribune foreign correspondent

South Florida Sun Sentinel

May 17 2007

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/caribbean/chi-070517haiti-story,0,3132189.story?coll=sfla-news-caribbean>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—In recent years, U.S. authorities have deported to Haiti some 2,000 criminals of Haitian descent under a controversial policy that some officials here say has helped fuel a wave of kidnappings and other violent crime.

The deportees, who have been convicted in the U.S. of crimes ranging from armed robbery to sexual abuse, often grow up in America and return to this impoverished land, instilling fear in other Haitians while facing their own hardship and discrimination.

"It's been rough," said Augustin Saint-Ville, 30, who said he was deported from the U.S. a decade ago after serving 5 1/2 years in prison for selling crack cocaine. "I want to go back. You've got to have money to be in Haiti, and there is no money."

The deportation of criminals has become a sore point between the U.S. and Haiti, which is struggling to absorb an increasing number of ex-cons at a time when the judicial system has collapsed, its prisons are overcrowded, the police force is weak and political stability is tenuous.

"It is a very sensitive issue," said Raymond Joseph, Haiti's ambassador to the U.S. "In the past, we've asked that they slow down the pace [of deportations] because some of the deportees are hardened criminals who learned their trade in America."

In December, Haitian Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis said U.S. authorities threatened to cut assistance to Haiti if it refused to accept the deportees.

U.S. diplomats in Port-au-Prince deny making such a threat and challenge the assertion that criminal deportees, known here as "DPs," imperil public security.

"I'm not sure I've seen any statistics that would bear out the allegations that deportees are responsible for the crime wave," Janet Sanderson, the U.S. ambassador to Haiti, said in an interview. "I think the crime wave in Haiti goes much deeper than that."

Role of deportees disputed

Fred Blaise, chief spokesman for the United Nations police force in Haiti, said not a single criminal deportee is among the hundreds of Haitians arrested in recent months during a major crackdown by UN troops against Haiti's powerful street gangs.

Diplomats and police say the gangs are largely responsible for the nation's 603 kidnappings in the past 16 months, along with many other serious crimes.

"People have had that big myth that there was a bunch of criminal deportees that were involved," said Blaise, who represents the police component of the UN's 8,000-strong peacekeeping mission in Haiti. "It ended up being not true."

Still, many deportees say the Haitian government's effort to demonize them has made it difficult to find jobs or achieve broader acceptance.

"Everyone is so afraid of us even though we haven't done anything here," said James Felix, 31, a Belle Glade, Fla., resident deported in January after serving 17 months in prison for cocaine possession and child neglect. "We are looked at as killers. We are public enemy No. 1."

Scorned as 'troublemakers'

Like many Haitians, businessman Georges Sassine said he would never hire a criminal deportee because he considers them "troublemakers."

"There are too many good people here," said Sassine, who owns a textile factory and is vice president of the Haitian Manufacturers Association. "Why am I going to hire a reject?"

The battle over criminal deportees dates back to 1996 when the U.S. changed immigration law to make it easier to deport aliens for crimes ranging from theft to drug possession.

Last year, U.S. authorities deported 88,662 criminal aliens, with the majority going to seven Latin American and Caribbean nations: Mexico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, Jamaica and Guatemala.

Politicians throughout the region blame the ex-cons for a surge in street gangs and violent crime. The Caribbean now has the world's highest homicide rate.

10. Haiti president pitches trade, foreign investment to U.S.

By William E. Gibson

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WASHINGTON · Despite a recent wave of desperate Haitians fleeing toward South Florida, President René Préval tried to assure U.S. leaders this week that conditions in Haiti are improving enough to encourage aid, trade and foreign investment.

Préval was warmly received during three days of meetings at the White House and Capitol, though officials made no commitments to bolster the poorest nation in the hemisphere. At the least, Préval raised his own profile and American consciousness of Haiti's concerns while meeting with President Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress.

"This trip was very important to establish ways for us to advance and ways for our American partners to help us," Préval said through a translator after meeting with Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Miami.

Meek cited a Haitian proposal to create dual-citizenship for Haitian-Americans as one way to encourage South Floridians to invest more money in Haiti. Creating jobs in Haiti is the best way to prevent another tragic mass exodus to Florida, Meek said.

But many Haitian-Americans have become impatient with the pace of progress in their homeland and with Préval's promises. "Talk is cheap. I want to see action," said Daniella Henry, a Haitian-American community activist in Delray Beach, who owns a travel-services business in Haiti. "Préval has been visiting everywhere and making promises. But I want to see something concrete."

"People can't invest in a country that doesn't have infrastructure -- things like roads and security. For three years, I've applied for a phone line; for three years, I've tried to get electricity. How can you invest in a country like that? We are sick of the way Haiti is."

Despite continuing problems, Préval told President Bush on Tuesday: "Peace has been restored, and the conditions for investment are here. Haiti is awaiting American investors."

Préval, elected in 2006 about two years after the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, had vowed to unify and stabilize the nation after waves of violence.

His main mission in Washington was to encourage expansion of trade incentives approved by Congress last year, which provided duty-free access to the American marketplace for clothing assembled in Haiti. He also sought relief from Haiti's debt payments and stepped up enforcement to block a Caribbean drug trade that fosters gang violence and creates political instability.

None of these proposals appears likely to prompt swift action in Washington, though Bush saluted his call for tough drug enforcement.

After their meeting Bush said Haiti had made progress. "The economy is improving," he said. "Inflation is down, exports are up."

Préval pressed Bush to provide "temporary protected status" for recent arrivals to prevent deportations of Haitians.

Bush made no promises but said he hoped a comprehensive immigration bill under consideration in Congress would help resolve Haitians' immigration status.

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