

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti covering the period of August 22 – 31, 2006.

The damages hearing in the case against Emmanuel “Toto” Constant, former Haitian paramilitary leader and CIA agent, was heard in New York to determine if Constant owes “at least \$1 million in compensatory damages and unspecified punitive damages to each of three women named as plaintiffs.” One woman testified to being gang-raped in 1994 by soldiers loyal to Constant. The case is brought by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability. This Washington Post story does not mention that Constant was ordered deported from the US for human rights violations committed eleven years ago and was convicted of murder in a Haitian trial in 2000. He is now in jail in Long Island on charges of mortgage fraud.

An AP story reports on the Haitian government’s plans to immediately recall some diplomats, appointed under the US-backed interim government, on allegations of incompetence and/or corruption. Haitian legislators allege several million dollars (Haitian press report \$6 million) went missing from at least three foreign missions: the Haitian Embassies in Washington, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Receipts show that \$250,000 disappeared from Haiti’s Washington Embassy in June 2005. The Haitian Ambassador in Washington, Raymond Joseph, appointed by Latortue in 2004 and publisher of the New York-based newspaper Haiti Observateur, denies any wrongdoing and claims “money may have been used to pay bills owed by the government, including the purchase of weapons for Haiti’s police force.” Current Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Raynald Clerisme said the diplomats could be fired or punished depending upon their case reviews.

An AP article reported on the first lawmaker kidnapped since Haiti’s democratic return. Rodney Alcide, a Deputy in the lower house, was kidnapped and released unharmed, the same day. The article mentions President Preval’s order to the gangs to disarm “or face death” followed by the gangs’ refusal until UN peacekeepers halt their offensives on the slums. However, the article fails to mention one other key demand for the gangs: that all gangs be disarmed, including those formed under the interim regime and backed by Haiti’s elites.

Haiti was “spared catastrophic damage” from torrential rainfall and winds resulting from the August 27 passing of Hurricane Ernesto. There were two confirmed storm-related deaths and some seaside homes were lost. Rains were reportedly heaviest in Haiti’s southern peninsula.

Contents:

- 1) Woman Recounts Gang-Rape Horror in Haiti, The Associated Press, Washington Post**
- 2) Haiti recalls overseas diplomats, AP**
- 3) Gunmen in Haiti kidnap, release lawmaker, Associated Press**
- 4) Haiti spared devastation, South Florida Sun-Sentinel**

- 1) Woman Recounts Gang-Rape Horror in Haiti**
By TOM HAYS
The Associated Press
Washington Post
Wednesday, August 30, 2006

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/29/AR2006082901898.html>

NEW YORK -- One of three women who claim she was gang-raped by soldiers loyal to a former Haitian strongman testified Tuesday that one attack took place as her five small children watched.

Masked men burst into her home in Port-au-Prince in 1994 and raped her while her children saw "everything that was being done to me," she said through an interpreter and behind a large video screen to shield her identity.

The hearing was about whether Emmanuel "Toto" Constant owes at least \$1 million in compensatory damages and unspecified punitive damages to each of three women named as plaintiffs.

The witness, who fled to the U.S. in 2003, has accused Constant of sanctioning the systematic rape of women in the early 1990s to silence slum-dwellers still devoted to the ousted former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

U.S. District Judge Sidney Stein granted her anonymity based on fears she still could be targeted for retribution.

The defense table was vacant: Constant remains in jail on Long Island after being charged in July with mortgage fraud. His attorney in that case has declined to comment.

Constant emerged as the feared leader of a right-wing paramilitary group after Aristide was deposed in 1991. It terrorized and slaughtered Aristide loyalists between 1991 and 1994, human rights groups say.

The alleged rape victim testified that her ordeal began when her husband, a taxi driver and fierce Aristide supporter, vanished in 1992. She described taking to the streets and voicing her despair.

Even after being jailed and beaten, she remained vocal until five men arrived at her door in April 1994. They beat up her 8-year-old son and took turns raping her, she said. Two months later, the nightmare was repeated.

Three months later, she saw a doctor who delivered some shocking news: She was pregnant by one her attackers. A son was born on Feb. 12, 1995. He and the rest of her children still live in Haiti.

2) Haiti recalls overseas diplomats

AP

Thursday 24th August, 2006

<http://www.caycompass.com/cgi-bin/CFPnews.cgi?ID=1015855>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) – Haiti will recall several overseas diplomats for alleged incompetence, including some suspected of corruption, the foreign minister said Wednesday.

The diplomats, all appointed by the U.S.-backed interim government that ruled the Caribbean nation between 2004 and 2006, could be fired or punished upon a review of their cases, Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Raynald Clarisme told The Associated Press.

The announcement came a day after Haitian legislators alleged that several million dollars (euros) may have disappeared during that period from at least three foreign missions: the Haitian Embassy in Washington, and missions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

The move could open the door for the first major probe into alleged corruption under the interim government, which was appointed after a revolt toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Clarisme said the recalls "should happen very quickly" but declined to say which diplomats would be ordered home or from what countries. He said the move was first suggested by lawmakers, who recommended recalling diplomats for a review.

"The deputies have suggested we recall people who have been nominated by the interim government," Clarisme said. "I think it's a wise approach and I'm willing to do that."

"We are working on cleaning house and putting order in the administration," he added.

Clarisme said the Haitian consul in Barahona, Dominican Republic, was fired this month for selling entry visas to Chinese migrants. He said other diplomats will be disciplined, but noted that most are accused of incompetence, not corruption.

"Some will be recalled, but we have to take it on a case-by-case basis," he said. "People involved in corruption will be severely reprimanded for their behavior."

In a legislative session Tuesday, Sorel Francois, a deputy in the lower house and president of the Commission on Foreign Affairs, said receipts showed that US\$250,000 vanished from Haiti's Embassy in Washington in June 2005.

He said another US\$1.9 million was transferred from the same embassy to a nongovernment account in October 2005.

Reached by phone in Washington, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Raymond Joseph denied embezzling any funds.

"No money disappeared in Washington," Joseph said. "It didn't go into my pocket or the pocket of anyone else."

Joseph, appointed by former interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue in 2004, said the money may have been used to pay bills owed by the government, including the purchase of weapons for Haiti's police force.

"If there is a full audit of this embassy I have no doubt that everything will be very, very clear," he said.

Joseph said he didn't know if he would be recalled, but said he would be present for an audit.

Joseph is the publisher of the New York-based weekly newspaper Haiti Observateur, and was an outspoken critic of Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas political party. Francois, the legislator who alleged that funds disappeared, is a member of Fanmi Lavalas.

Joseph declined to say whether he thought the allegations against him were politically motivated.

3) Gunmen in Haiti kidnap, release lawmaker

August 27 2006

Associated Press

CTV.ca Canada

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060827/haiti_gunmen_060827/20060827/

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Gunmen kidnapped and briefly held a Haitian legislator before releasing him unharmed, local radio reported Saturday.

Rodney Alcide, a deputy in the lower house of Parliament, was seized late Friday in a suburb north of the capital of Port-au-Prince along with his driver and bodyguard, Kiskeya radio said.

Alcide was reportedly freed unharmed two hours later, but the driver and bodyguard were still held Saturday.

It was unclear whether a ransom was paid to free Alcide, the first lawmaker to be kidnapped in a recent spate of abductions sweeping Port-au-Prince.

Kidnappings surged to their highest level in months in July, with at least 60 abductions reported. Authorities say many more go unreported, as families prefer to negotiate with kidnappers rather than notify police.

Authorities blame the kidnappings mostly on well-armed street gangs based in the capital's violent slums. The crimes have raised fears of a return to the lawlessness seen in the aftermath of a bloody revolt that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Earlier this month, President Rene Preval ordered gangs to disarm and rejoin society or face death.

The gangs have said they won't lay down their weapons until U.N. peacekeepers patrolling the Caribbean nation halt offensives in the slums.

The United Nations, which has 8,800 troops and police in Haiti, has said it won't change its operations.

4) Haiti spared devastation Some seaside homes lost; few deaths are reported

By Ruth Morris

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

August 29, 2006

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/broward/sfl-cernhaiti29aug29,0,7592210.story?coll=sfla-news-broward>

Pelted by torrential rains, but spared catastrophic damage, Haiti awoke from Ernesto's passage Monday to reports of at least two storm-related deaths and seaside homes carried out to sea.

Dr. Michaele Gedeon, president of the Haitian Red Cross, confirmed the storm system had caused two deaths, one in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, and one in the southern peninsula, where rains were heaviest.

She said the relief agency was looking into reports of a third victim on Gonave Island, opposite the capital.

In South Florida, meanwhile, Haitian-Americans entered a wearisome routine of redialing phone numbers disconnected by the storm, hoping for any scrap of information about loved ones, while simultaneously preparing for Ernesto's arrival themselves.

Bito David, a Haitian-born public-relations officer for Palm Beach County, tried repeatedly to reach friends in southern Haiti on Monday, even as he prepared a news release for the U.S. media saying schools would be closed as South Florida residents hunkered down.

David said he repeatedly tried to help a friend contact his mother in the Haitian city of Les Cayes, on the wide southern finger of land that had fallen into the storm's path.

"We've made 15 calls," he said. "It's not easy to get in touch with them."

David said he still worried about Ernesto's potential to wreak havoc, mindful that Hurricane Jeanne did not come ashore in 2004 but caused more than 2,000 deaths in Haiti.

The flooding that followed knocked the country back for months.

Natural disasters tend to affect Haiti disproportionately because the country is ill equipped to respond.

Rampant deforestation means mudslides are common after storms. Phone service is patchy and rebuilding materials scarce.

David was optimistic about Ernesto's aftermath in Haiti, as it shed most of its rain in the south, where mountainous terrain gives way to a fringe of coastline, helping drainage.

But Haitian Americans in South Florida were nevertheless concerned.

Dr. Aldy Castor, a physician living in Weston, said he owns a 12-room hotel in a southwestern Haitian town called Aquin. He called the manager Monday morning to learn a nearby river had overflowed.

"He said they had a lot of wind, about 60 kilometers per hour," Castor said. "They had some crop damage."

Haitian physicians in South Florida would meet soon to assess the situation and prepare to respond if necessary, said Dr. Yves Jodesty, a native of Les Cayes,.

"The first basic necessity they would need now is food and water, and down the road there may be medical problems," he said.

Gedeon, of the Red Cross, said that relief organization evacuated some 30 families Sunday evening in the southern quadrant of Port-au-Prince.

There was also flood damage to homes in the western part of the city, she said.

"Our goal was zero deaths," Gedeon said in a phone interview. "The poverty is a crucial problem, but we are rich because we have so many volunteers who come to help us."

Staff Writer Alva James-Johnson contributed to this report.