

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for February 22 – March 13, 2007.

Reuters and CNN report one unintended outcome of recently violent UN raids in Cite Soleil: uncaptured gang leaders are escaping to Haiti's rural areas. Gang leaders and their men are showing up in Haiti's remote northern and southern cities beyond the reach of police or UN forces. The apparent dispersal of gang leaders could offer an opening for aggressive UN operations beyond Port-au-Prince slums. Oddly, the article's final quote "however, U.N. military officials said the primary goal of the security operations was not to capture gang leaders, but to take control of areas held by gangs and to give residents a sense of security." USA Today heralds the UN takeover of "the last remaining gang stronghold in Haiti's largest slum....giving the international force sole authority over the lawless area for the first time, according to one U.N. official." Brazilian military commander Colonel Magno Barroso boasted that "in terms of territory, 100% of Cite Soleil is now controlled...by MINUSTAH with the support of the Haitian government." Reuters spotlights increasing reports of rape in general and particularly among female kidnap victims. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reports skyrocketing numbers of rape victims treated in January (26) and February (44) over only five reported in the previous September.

The BBC's Nick Caistor blames "Poverty and gangs" for Haiti's ills while uncritically heralding UN peacekeepers "get tough" policy in the slums. Similar to Caistor's previous report, he lacks quotes from citizens or evidence of visiting Cite Soleil himself. UN deputy special representative Joel Bortroue is quoted in an International Herald Tribune article demanding more international support for Haiti. Bortroue urges 'bolder' international support for Haiti saying "there is an urgency...to show the population there's a difference between the time when gangsters used to run the show and when the government runs the show now." The article fails to mention that Haitians regularly demonstrate against the current international support for Haiti.

An AP report, picked up by only a few major papers including the San Diego Union Tribune, follows up on the earlier London Review of Books interview between Peter Hallward and President Aristide. The article hones in on the few remarks Aristide made regarding his future plans to return to Haiti as well as Aristide's version of his ousting on February 29th, 2004.

A report from the Inter-American Development Bank estimates Haitians sent more than \$1.65 billion back to relatives in Haiti last year alone. This amount is twice Haiti's national budget and 30% of its GDP. Another estimated \$400 million is sent home in food and other gifts bringing the total to close to \$2 billion.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visited Haiti on March 12th. Chavez announced a \$20 million humanitarian fund for Haitian health care, education, housing and other basic needs. Chavez's visit was part of an orchestrated shadow tour of Latin America/Caribbean countries corresponding with George Bush's similar tour in the southern hemisphere. Chavez was given a 'hero's welcome' in the streets of Haiti given the generosity he and his government offer the Haitian people through programs such as Petrocaribe and offering \$120 million in grants for construction projects and social programs. The Venezuelan government also donated five electricity-generating plants to Haiti.

The Washington Post wrote a bleak expose of the Fort Dimanche prison housing roughly 120 young boys. "Haiti's dysfunctional criminal justice system offers no formal process for freeing

child inmates” says the head of the PRODEV foundation working to improve conditions for the children’s jail.

A Boston Globe story on the deportees describes the multiple social, economic and political hurdles facing Haitian deportees from the perspective of the criminal deportee advocacy organization Alternative Chance.

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1. Haiti's slum gangs terrorizing rural areas

February 28, 2007

Reuters

CNN.com

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) -- Heavily armed gangs, fleeing Haiti's dangerous slums in the face of U.N. peacekeeper raids, have established new bases in provincial areas, creating panic in rural populations, officials and witnesses say.

A gang leader known as Belony, who was recently chased from the capital's slum of Cite Soleil by U.N. peacekeepers, now leads a group of about 100 gunmen near the northern town of Saint-Michel, according to Patrick Joseph, a lawmaker representing the area.

"The government and security forces should act now to avoid a deterioration of the security situation there," Joseph said, adding that the gang members were making no effort to hide.

"They take refuge near a mountain, walking in the dozens with assault weapons in their hands, and the population of Saint-Michel is frightened to death."

The U.N. peacekeepers, who were sent to Haiti shortly after then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in an armed rebellion three years ago, have stepped up operations against slum gangs in recent weeks.

Hundreds of soldiers raided the capital's giant Cite Soleil slum in early February, spurring a gunbattle in which thousands of rounds were fired, at least one person was killed and several were wounded.

The U.N. Security Council voted two weeks ago to extend the peacekeeping mission for eight months and asked troops to step up operations against gangs. The U.N. force stands at 6,800 troops and nearly 2,000 police.

Residents of Saint-Michel told local Radio Metropole that they feared attacks by the armed gangs.

"We wonder what the Haitian police and U.N. troops are doing. We call on them to come and help us," a resident who was not identified told the radio station. "They [gangs] are walking with their heavy weapons, they seize cattle, they have been panicking the population."

Inspector Wismane Desmangles, a spokesman for the Haitian police in the area, said measures were being considered to counter the gangs, but he provided no further detail.

Reports from other provincial cities, including the southern city of Les Cayes, also indicate armed gangs hunted down by U.N. soldiers in the capital have tried to set up shop in rural areas where police or U.N. presence is absent or very weak.

Gang members have attempted to flee across the border to the neighboring Dominican Republic as well.

The gangs, some of which remain loyal to Aristide, have been running many of Port-au-Prince's poorest neighborhoods for years.

U.N. officials said they have arrested about three dozen gang members in the raid three weeks ago and have confiscated a few weapons and some ammunition in Cite Soleil, where three notorious gang leaders, Belony, Evans and Amaral Duclona, were forced to flee.

Critics blamed U.N. troops for failing to capture the gang leaders.

"U.N. operations are a failure because they never lead to the arrest of gang leaders or the confiscation of their weapons," former army Col. Himler Rebu said.

"When you chase them away and leave them with their weapons and the potential to take the violence elsewhere, you don't solve anything."

However, U.N. military officials said the primary goal of the security operations was not to capture gang leaders, but to take control of areas held by gangs and to give residents a sense of security.

2. U.N. seizes gang stronghold in Haiti

2/28/2007

USA Today

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — U.N. peacekeepers and Haitian police seized the last remaining gang stronghold in Haiti's largest slum on Wednesday, the latest in a series of military crackdowns aimed at stabilizing the impoverished and divided Caribbean nation.

No shots were fired as scores of U.N. troops entered the seaside slum of Cite Soleil in armored vehicles and on foot, giving the international force sole authority over the lawless area for the first time, according to one U.N. official.

The soldiers took over the gritty Bois Neuf quarter, a base for armed gangs blamed for a wave of kidnappings and killings. Seven suspected gang members were arrested in the raid but their leader, known as Beloney, managed to escape.

It was the last gang stronghold in Cite Soleil not occupied by the 9,000-strong U.N. force, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH. Peacekeepers seized two other gang strongholds during raids earlier this month.

"In terms of territory, 100% of Cite Soleil is now controlled ... by MINUSTAH with the support of the Haitian government," Brazilian military commander Col. Magno Barroso told The Associated Press.

But U.N. spokeswoman Sophie Boutaud de la Combe gave a more conservative assessment, saying only that peacekeepers "had established a presence everywhere that gangs had controlled," but do not have full control over the entire slum.

Wednesday's raid coincided with the third anniversary of the uprising that toppled former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected leader. Aristide went into exile in South Africa.

At the United Nations in New York, U.N. deputy special representative Joel Bortroue said the Haitian government desperately needs the support of the international community if the fledgling democracy is to stay afloat.

He said that countries such as Haiti, which are coming out of long periods of conflict, have a strong tendency to relapse unless there is "strong and coherent support from the international community."

Bortroue said funds must be "injected" into impoverished areas in the form of food distribution and school funding, as well as labor intensive projects such as rebuilding schools and cleaning canals that could spur economic development.

"There is an urgency ... to show the population there's a difference between the time when gangsters used to run the show and when the government runs the show now," Bortroue said.

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3. Poverty and gangs curb Haiti progress

By Nick Caistor

In Port-au-Prince, Haiti

BBC News

Wednesday, 28 February 2007

The blue-and-white United Nations flag flutters over a half-destroyed building on a corner in Cite Soleil, the sprawling slum down at the water's edge in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince.

Things are said to be getting better in Cite Soleil

United Nations troops have moved into the slum, where almost a quarter of a million people live, as part of a new "get tough" policy against the armed gangs based there.

In the three years since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted from power, some 9,000 UN peacekeepers have been struggling to break up the gangs - often armed thanks to money earned from the illegal drugs trafficking - and arrest their leaders.

A new Brazilian commander was appointed earlier this year. Major General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz told reporters he was pleased at the progress being made.

"Now it's possible to walk in Boston [a neighbourhood in Cite Soleil] without fear, without problems, without criminals circulating freely," he said.

The new tougher policy shows signs of producing results. Three important gang leaders from Cite Soleil were captured in the last week of February, and the UN says it now controls a quarter of the slum area.

Fears

The Security Council mandate for the Minustah forces to remain in Haiti was recently extended, but only until mid-October 2007.

Many Haitians fear more violence when the UN pulls out. This was a compromise between members such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France, who wanted the troops there longer, and China, who argued they should be pulled out much sooner.

The UN Security Council wants to see Haiti move on from "peace-keeping to peace-building", but Minustah spokesman David Wimhurst told reporters last week: "We cannot complete the job in eight months."

Haiti has no army, and the police force is only some 5,000-strong. It has been accused of widespread corruption, and of being in league with the gangs.

A new police force is being trained at the rate of 500 personnel every six months, but they are as yet untried on their own.

This has created fears among many Haitians that when the United Nations pulls out, there could be renewed violence.

Aid lacking

Mr Aristide himself is living in South Africa, and still maintains that he and his family were forced onto a US aircraft in the middle of the night, because the US wanted him out.

Very little of the aid pledged to Haiti has materialised

He is cautious about any plans to return to Haiti, where his former colleague Rene Preval won a landslide victory to return as president in February 2006.

Mr Aristide says he would like to go back and teach at the University of Tabarre, the area of Port-au-Prince where he used to have his residence.

So far, the 63-year-old President Preval has shown no great desire to invite him back.

He is very different from the charismatic, dynamic Mr Aristide. He prefers to talk quietly and to negotiate, and not make many public statements.

His critics say he has been far too quiet in the first months of his five-year term in office. But President Preval insists that progress is being made.

"The people are not looking for a miracle. They only want to see an improvement in their lives," he told The Miami Herald newspaper.

This improvement is largely dependent on foreign aid reaching Haiti and being used effectively.

A November conference of aid donors in Madrid heard that almost none of the US\$750m (£382m) pledged to Haiti had reached its target.

By the time the UN pulls out in October, more visible results of improvement are needed if Haiti is not to slide back into complete lawlessness and despair.

4. Haiti kidnap wave accompanied by epidemic of rape

Friday, March 9, 2007

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: - Haiti's violent gangs are increasingly using rape to terrorize hostages and other victims, government officials and health workers say.

Sexual assaults of women appear to have become a fixture of the kidnappings for money carried out by gangs in a crime wave that developed after the ouster in February 2004 of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Myriam Merlet, an official at the Department of Women's Affairs, said almost half of women kidnapped had been raped.

"It is hard to say exactly what is the motive for those rapes, but rapes have always been used in Haiti as a weapon for social and political repression," Merlet said.

Rape has been used in Haiti before by government death squads intent on sowing terror in the poorest country in the Americas, which has long been rocked by political instability and violence.

A recent effort by UN peacekeepers to drive gangs out of the sprawling slums in Port-au-Prince where they held sway, and where they have also imprisoned many of their hostages, appears to have reduced the kidnappings.

But health workers report the number of rape victims is increasing.

Doctors and aid workers estimate that more than 800 women were raped between February 2006 and February 2007 in just the capital of this country of 8 million people.

Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, a French humanitarian organization which operates three medical centers in Haiti, treated 70 rape victims in the first two months of the year.

"The number of women raped has constantly been increasing over the past months," said MSF medical coordinator Dr. Maria Guevara. She said the number of monthly rape victims seen by the group had grown from five last September to 26 in January. Another 44 were treated in February.

Joanne, a 25-year-old resident of the capital's Delmas district, said she was kidnapped late on Jan. 17 by two men who forced open her door and took her away in a pick-up truck.

"They held me for 3 days. They raped me several times and demanded \$50,000 from my aunt to whom they talked on the phone," Joanne said. "When they realized my aunt was not able to find any more money, they agreed to release me for \$2,000."

The government of President Rene Preval, elected just over a year ago amid widespread hopes that he could bridge the divide between the poor masses and a wealthy elite, and also bring an end to crime, has vowed fight sexual assaults.

But health workers say many rapists go unpunished because most victims refuse to go to the police and probably do not even tell their husbands.

5. Senior U.N. official in Haiti urges more international support to stabilize the country
The Associated Press
February 28, 2007
International Herald Tribune

UNITED NATIONS: The Haitian government desperately needs the support of the international community if the fledgeling democracy is to stay afloat, a senior U.N official in the country said Wednesday.

Countries such as Haiti, which are coming out of long periods of conflict, have a strong tendency to relapse unless there is "strong and coherent support from the international community." U.N. deputy special representative Joel Bortroue told reporters.

The Haitian government is "truly committed to getting out of the dead end where it was until recently," he said. "It has really tried hard to get ownership on its development."

The U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, an Caribbean nation of about 8 million people, has stepped up patrols recently to quell violence and rampant kidnappings in its dense slums.

Some have criticized the 9,000-member force, however, for being slow to restore order after a bloody February 2004 revolt ousted then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

"These actions are good, but if we don't right away distribute the peace dividends to the population in these slum areas, the population will very, very rapidly lose confidence or trust in its government," Bortroue said.

He said funds must be "injected" into impoverished areas in the form of food distribution and school funding, as well as labor intensive projects such as rebuilding schools and cleaning canals that could spur economic development.

"There is an urgency ... to show the population there's a difference between the time when gangsters used to run the show and when the government runs the show now," Bortroue said.

Last year, the U.S. government awarded a US\$492 million (€372 million) aid package to Haiti that is to be disbursed over three years. The funds are meant to address a bevy of problems including a stagnant economy, lack of health care and education.

Bortroue urged the international community to "have a bolder vision" for Haiti, which is the Western hemisphere's poorest country.

"Everybody knows the suffering of the Haitian people, everybody knows the level of deforestation, everybody talks about the rural exodus to the city, but what are we doing about it?" he said. "We really need to be more proactive, I would say aggressive."

6. Aristide says he will return to Haiti 'once conditions are right'

By Stevenson Jacobs

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The San Diego Union Tribune

February 23, 2007

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20070223-0548-haiti-aristide.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's ousted former president, said he will return to the Caribbean nation "once the conditions are right" but has no plans to go back into government.

In a wide-ranging interview published Thursday in the London Review of Books, Aristide said he and his family are staying in South Africa "as guests, not as exiles." However, he said the timing of his return will be up to President Rene Preval, his former ally.

"Once the conditions are right, we'll go back. As soon as Rene Preval judges that the time is right then I'll go back," Aristide said in the interview, conducted in July 2006 by Peter Hallward, a philosophy professor at Britain's Middlesex University.

Aristide, ousted in a bloody uprising three years ago this month, said his return depends on "judging the security and stability" of the impoverished country.

Preval has said Haiti's constitution allows Aristide's return but has refused to say if he will welcome home his one-time mentor. The two reportedly have not spoken in years. Preval's office gave no immediate comment on Aristide's remarks.

Aristide said he would like return to teaching in Haiti, not government.

"I will serve the people again, from outside the structure of the state," he said. "I would like to go back to teaching. As for politics, I never had any interest in becoming a political leader 'for life.'"

He also ruled out a return as leader of his deeply divided Fanmi Lavalas political party, which still enjoys wide support among Haiti's poor.

“I will not dominate or lead the organization, that is not my role, but I will contribute what I can,” Aristide said.

Aristide was flown out of Haiti on a U.S.-supplied jet as rebels neared the capital, Port-au-Prince. The U.S. government has said Aristide left voluntarily, but the former president alleges he was kidnapped in a coup.

In the interview, Aristide said the rebels never posed a serious threat to the capital even though they managed to seize several northern cities.

“There was no great insurrection. There was a small group of soldiers, heavily armed, who were able to overwhelm some police stations (in the north), kill some policemen and create a certain amount of havoc,” Aristide said.

“But the city was a different story. The people were ready, and I wasn't worried,” he added.

Aristide said the U.S. decided to remove him on Feb. 29, 2004, after a shipment of South African arms was sent to aid the Haitian police force, tipping the balance in favor of Aristide's security forces.

“They (the Americans) knew that in a few more hours, they would lose their opportunity to 'resolve' the situation,” he said. “They grabbed their chance while they had it, and bundled us onto a plane in the middle of the night.”

The U.S. government has denied Aristide's account, saying that he asked for help.

7. Haitians abroad sent \$1.65 billion home last year

Wednesday, March 7, 2007

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

Caribbean Net News

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haitians living abroad propped up the economy of their impoverished Caribbean homeland by sending more than \$1.65 billion in cash to relatives last year, according to a report from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Donald Terry, manager of the IDB's Multilateral Investment Fund

That sum represented twice Haiti's national budget and 30 percent of its gross domestic product, said Jean Geneus, Haiti's minister in charge of Haitians living abroad.

"Remittances are the most important economic factor in Haiti today," said Donald Terry, the manager of the IDB's Multilateral Investment Fund. The study was presented on Tuesday to a group of political and economic decision-makers in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince.

Terry said an estimated \$400 million in food and other gifts were also sent home by Haitians living abroad, bringing the total remittances to more than \$2 billion.

Haiti, a former French colony trying to establish democracy after decades of violence, dictatorship and military rule, is the poorest country in the Americas. Most of its 8 million people scrape by on less than \$2 a day.

Haitians living abroad complain Haiti welcomes their money but not their participation in politics. Haitians abroad could not vote in the last election because there were no absentee ballots and those with dual citizenship cannot vote or run for office because the constitution considers them foreigners.

The study, conducted by Bendixen & Associates for the IDB, found 31 percent of adults living in Haiti, or 1.1 million people, receive remittances regularly.

"Eighty-one percent of Haitians living in the United States and Canada send money home on a regular basis," said Sergio Bendixen, who directed the survey. "No other national group anywhere in the world sends money home in higher proportion."

The report said 70 percent of emigrants from the neighboring Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, and 60 percent of Mexicans send money to their families back home.

The study found that about 1.5 million Haitian-born adults are living and working abroad and that 80 percent of them send money to relatives on a regular basis, with an average of \$150 at a time.

8. Venezuelan President to Visit Haiti

Saturday March 10, 2007

The Guardian Unlimited, UK

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6470320,00.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who has offered assistance and oil benefits to much of the Caribbean, will meet with Haitian President Rene Preval to discuss providing aid to the impoverished country, Preval's office said Friday.

Chavez is scheduled to arrive in the capital of Port-au-Prince for a one-day meeting Monday, Haiti's National Palace said in a statement.

Venezuela's state-run development bank said this week it will create a \$20 million fund to provide humanitarian aid to Haiti and develop joint cooperation projects. The money will pay for health care, education, housing and other basic necessities sorely lacking in the Caribbean nation of 8 million.

Haiti also benefits from Chavez's Petrocaribe initiative, which provides petroleum products and other aid to needy Caribbean countries to help them counter rising energy prices. Recipients are offered deferred payment and long-term financing for fuel shipments.

Petrocaribe is widely seen as an effort by Chavez - long at odds with Washington - to make inroads in a region where the United States is a major trading partner.

Chavez has said Venezuela will help its Caribbean neighbors fight widespread poverty and other social problems. Last month, Chavez visited the tiny Caribbean nations of Dominica and St. Vincent, where he toured the fuel facilities and public works projects his government has built.

9. Chávez shadows, taunts Bush on tour

By Stevenson Jacobs

Associated Press

March 13, 2007
The Boston Globe

http://www.boston.com/news/world/latinamerica/articles/2007/03/13/chvez_shadows_taunts_bush_on_tour/

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela shadowed his political foil President Bush on a tour of Western Hemisphere nations, stopping yesterday in Haiti after passing through Jamaica to promote aid packages and discuss development projects.

Chávez, who left Nicaragua as crowds greeted Bush in Guatemala, was met by President René Préval of Haiti and several thousand cheering supporters outside the Port-au-Prince airport.

Many waved Venezuelan flags, while some chanted "Down with Bush, long live Chávez!"

Chávez came to discuss a \$20 million fund announced last week by Venezuela's state-run development bank to provide humanitarian aid to Haiti and develop joint cooperation projects with the hemisphere's poorest nation.

Earlier, Chávez made an unannounced stop in Jamaica, which has taken advantage of Venezuela's Petrocaribe initiative to buy oil under preferential terms.

While in the resort city of Montego Bay, he had a "short working visit" with Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, said Wilton Dyer of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Haiti similarly benefits from Petrocaribe.

The program, widely seen as an effort by Chávez to make inroads in a region where the United States is a major trading partner, allows deferred payment and long-term financing for fuel shipments.

Préval, a Chávez ally, relies heavily on US aid. The United States, Haiti's largest donor, last year pledged a \$492 million aid package aimed at helping the country recover from a devastating 2004 revolt that ousted former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Chávez appears intent on spoiling Bush's tour of Latin America. In Nicaragua on Sunday, Chávez chanted his anti-Bush mantra of "gringo, go home" at a rally with President Daniel Ortega.

As Bush traveled to Guatemala on Sunday evening, Chávez and Ortega went to the city of León, where they left flowers at the tomb of poet Rubén Darío and announced that Venezuela would build an oil refinery nearby. Cheered by thousands, Chávez said Bush's tour was a failure.

"Latin Americans are telling you, 'Gringo, go home!' " he said.

On Friday, he held a stadium rally in Buenos Aires and then headed to Bolivia's flood-ravaged lowlands Saturday to tout his pledge of \$15 million in disaster aid -- 10 times that sent by the United States.

10. Venezuelan leader gets hero's welcome in Haiti

13 Mar 2007

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, March 12 (Reuters) - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was cheered by crowds of slum-dwellers in Haiti on Monday after he arrived on a short visit to highlight Venezuelan aid for the impoverished country.

Chavez, who has been visiting a string of Latin American nations in an apparent parallel tour to a five-nation trip in the region by his ideological foe, U.S. President George W. Bush, waved to the cheering fans as he was greeted by President Rene Preval at the airport in Port-au-Prince.

"The Haitian people are an heroic people; so heroic but so downtrodden," said Chavez, speaking through an interpreter soon after his arrival. "I came here to confirm our affection and our commitment to Haiti.

"The fact that we could walk and run with these people is a great feeling," he added, referring to the warm welcome he received in the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Many in the welcoming crowd were supporters of ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and ran alongside Chavez's slow-moving motorcade through the cramped streets of the capital. Some reached out and touched the populist Venezuelan leader, breaking through a police escort to make contact, as he saluted onlookers.

"Long live Chavez, down with Bush!" the crowd chanted.

"When Chavez says he wants to help Haiti, he really means it and he proves it," said Magalie Demosthenes, waving a Venezuelan flag. "He does not do like some rich countries which have to humiliate you before giving you anything."

Bush is unpopular among Haiti's poor, many of whom believe the United States helped oust Aristide despite U.S. denials of claims by the populist former priest that he had been kidnapped.

Aristide fled Haiti in February 2004 in the face of an armed revolt and under U.S. and French pressure to quit. He is now living in exile in South Africa.

"President Chavez cares for the poor masses and he denounced the kidnapping of President Aristide," said Mesadieu Denis, a 30-year-old, pro-Aristide demonstrator.

Haiti has joined a Venezuelan program to provide preferential financing terms for oil, called Petrocaribe.

Preval said the Petrocaribe deal would help Haiti save \$150 million a year, money that could be spent on desperately needed social programs in the poorest country in the Americas.

Venezuela also has agreed to give Haiti about \$120 million in grants for construction projects and social programs.

Venezuela, along with Cuba, also will donate five electricity-generating plants to Haiti, which is starved of energy, officials said.

Chavez visited Nicaragua and Jamaica earlier on Monday before heading for Haiti. While he was doing that, Bush was in Guatemala on the second-to-last stop of his regional tour.

Concerned about Chavez's growing influence, Bush has used his tour to try to improve ties with leaders of the right and moderate left in Latin America, where the Iraq war and U.S. trade and immigration policies have made him deeply unpopular.

11. Children's prison reflects Haiti's woes Foundation has hopes of improving conditions

By Manuel Roig-Franzia

The Washington Post

March 8 2007

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/caribbean/sfl-haitikidsmar08,0,5512393.story?coll=sfla-news-caribbean>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti – In a small, walled courtyard ringed by coiled razor wire, a scrappy little boy punched and kicked at the humid air.

Mackenzy Sonson strutted one moment, cowered the next. Acted like a big man, then slipped into baby talk.

"I'm not tough," he said on a recent afternoon. Then he smacked a kid twice his size.

Mackenzy, better known as "Little Baron," lives in Cell C-4, back wall, bottom bunk, at Fort Dimanche prison in Port-au-Prince. Cellmates dubbed him Baron because his dark black skin reminds them of Baron Samedi, the Vodou spirit who is believed to guard passage to the underworld.

This place where Little Baron is growing up, where he discovered Donald Duck cartoons and is learning to read, is a gallery of Haiti's woes. The boys at Fort Dimanche are the products of poverty, abandonment, homelessness and an educational system that has failed to enroll 1 million school-age children.

Hardly any of the 120 boys at Fort Dimanche know when they will be released. Some were undoubtedly recruited to be child soldiers in gangs that lured them with food and shelter in return for help in kidnappings and robberies. Others are imprisoned for years for minor crimes or are innocents nabbed in neighborhood sweeps by a notoriously corrupt police force, children's advocates say.

"This is where you see the total failure of the justice system," said Maryse Penette-Kedar, head of PRODEV, a foundation that is trying to improve conditions in the children's jail. "It's incompetence. It's total lack of management. People can't be in jail forever."

Haiti's dysfunctional criminal justice system offers no formal process for freeing child inmates, Penette-Kedar said. Those who have been formally charged are often accused of crimes as vague as "associating with bad people."

Penette-Kedar's organization -- backed in part by money from pop star Wyclef Jean's charitable foundation, Yele Haiti -- has begun a transformation of Fort Dimanche, hoping to make it Haiti's first child rehabilitation center. Young inmates who were once kept in lockdown 23 hours a day now get regular exercise and attend classes inside the prison.

The children's wing of Fort Dimanche, housing inmates up to age 17, is steps from a larger building where adult offenders are kept. There is always a line of visitors for the adult prison, but few come to see the children, most of whom are abandoned or orphaned.

The prison, for all its deprivations, can be a refuge from a hostile environment. Children have asked not to be released, Penette-Kedar said. A few parents have begged officials to imprison their children, even when they have not been accused of crimes, because they think Fort Dimanche is safer than the streets.

Little Baron was pushed into the streets by parents who couldn't afford to raise him, he says. By age 5, he was sleeping in abandoned cars and picking through garbage for food.

With no government social services to aid him, Little Baron gravitated toward "the big guys," his name for the young thugs who dominate the slums where he foraged. He ran errands that he won't talk about.

"I did favors," he said cautiously during a break between classes. "I did what I had to do to eat."

One of those favors -- he won't say which -- landed him a year ago at Fort Dimanche and Cell C-4. He shares the 20-by-12-foot cell with 28 other boys, 13 of whom sleep on the concrete floor because there are not enough bunks. The cell has its own hierarchy: One of the oldest boys at the prison, a lanky 16-year-old, decides who sleeps on the floor.

Outside the prison, a woman walked into the courtyard. This was a rare sight, a mother visiting her son.

Yola Aeme settled onto a bench and stared wordlessly at her son, Antoine Menchy, 16, who has been imprisoned for a year and a half. Aeme, 38, still seethes about the day her son was arrested. She was frantic when he didn't come home. No one had told her about the arrest.

"There's nobody I can see or talk to, no lawyer or anybody," Aeme said. "I have no hope that they'll release him."

12. Digicel to Rebuild 20 Schools in Haiti

The Houston Chronicle

The Associated Press

March 6, 2007

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4605968.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Mobile phone provider Digicel Group Ltd. pledged to rebuild 20 primary schools across Haiti during the launch of a charity Monday.

Two schools will be rebuilt in each of Haiti's 10 departments as part of the Digicel Haiti Foundation, the Jamaica-based company said in a statement. The schools were damaged by past hurricanes and flooding.

Digicel's chairman, Irish billionaire Denis O'Brien, called the initiative a show of appreciation for the impoverished Caribbean nation, where the mobile provider began offering service 10 months ago.

The company reached 1 million customers in December and has spent more than \$260 million in Haiti so far, the largest single private investment in the country's history.

O'Brien spoke at a ceremony inaugurating the first rebuilt primary school, a 240-student facility in the rural outskirts of the capital of Port-au-Prince.

Digicel is the largest mobile phone provider in the Caribbean, offering service in 22 countries and territories.

13. Influx of deportees stirs anger in Haiti Some believe US policy helped boost crime rate

**By Amy Bracken,
Boston Globe
March 11, 2007**

http://www.boston.com/news/world/latinamerica/articles/2007/03/11/influx_of_deportees_stirs_anger_in_haiti/

Harry Desiré helped found Alternative Chance, a criminal deportee advocacy organization, after he was deported to Haiti. Desiré spent five years in New York State prisons. (Michelle Karshan for the Boston Globe)

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- As the Haitian government struggles to bring security to its chaotic capital, many Haitians say the United States is aggravating the crime problem by quadrupling the number of criminal deportees to their native country.

Tensions have risen after a recent wave of kidnappings and high-profile slayings in Port-au-Prince, including the abduction, torture, and killing of a 20-year-old woman studying to be a teacher. It was in the midst of this rash of violent crime that the United States increased the deportation of Haitians, both illegal immigrants and legal-resident criminals who had served sentences, from 25 to 100 deportations per month, adding substantially to the more than 2,000 already deported to Haiti from the United States over the past five years.

The deportees have caused fear and anger, and spurred a debate over how to deal with them. Government officials favor jailing -- at least temporarily -- all deportees arriving in Haiti. But human rights leaders argue that such detentions are illegal and harmful and that what deportees need is help getting a foothold in Haitian society.

Some of the government's detractors call deportees a convenient scapegoat for officials under fire for failing to bring stability to the capital.

Haiti is not the largest recipient of US deportees in the Caribbean; Jamaica has had a consistently higher rate in spite of its smaller overall population. And many countries in the region have seen a steady rise in criminal deportations since the United States passed the Antiterrorism Act in 1996, making it harder for convicts to appeal deportation orders.

But Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere, has a weak police force, a barely existent judiciary, and overcrowded and unruly prisons. It is widely seen as ill equipped to deal with any extra bad apples. That's why the United States suspended criminal deportations to Haiti from 2005 into 2006, during the interim government that followed the bloody uprising and ouster of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

So why resume -- and quadruple -- the deportations? The US ambassador to Haiti, Janet Sanderson, told the Globe in December that there was a backlog of 450 Haitians in US jails who had served their time and could not be released onto American soil. She asserted that Haiti was a more stable place than it was a year ago.

The United States provided a \$1 million grant for the International Organization for Migration and the Haitian government to provide services to deportees, including setting up a type of halfway-house program, to help them adjust to life in Haiti.

Despite such assistance, deportees are stigmatized as dangerous criminals. Although all of those convicted of a crime served their time in the United States, Haitian authorities continue to throw deportees deemed dangerous into prison and all others into police station holding cells upon arrival.

Government officials call the detentions a kind of "security quarantine" and say it is important for public safety. Some say this even while acknowledging that it violates the country's law against double jeopardy, and even as US officials urge the Haitian government to stop jailing deportees.

By the end of 2006, kidnapping and other violence in the already strife-ridden capital were soaring. In separate incidents in November and December, a senator and a former finance minister were kidnapped, a school bus was hijacked and the children on board abducted, and a 6-year-old boy and 20-year-old woman were kidnapped and killed. When the government came under attack from opposition political leaders and citizen protesters for failing to stop the terror, it had a new target for blame.

Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis told Parliament that he opposed the increase in deportations because, he said, deportees from the United States are significant contributors to Haiti's crime problem. And he announced that deportees were suspected in the high-profile murder of the 20-year-old student.

Foreign Minister Jean Raynald Clérisme, echoed Alexis's words. "These notorious criminals, were they not trained in the US?" he rhetorically asked Parliament.

But some Haitians condemn the anti deportee rhetoric, calling it baseless and harmful.

"We've been asking the Haitian government for the statistics" to back up allegations that the deportees are contributing to rising crime, said Pierre Esperance, who heads the National Human Rights Defense Network, based in Port-au-Prince. "No one has the statistics. . . . The Haitian government has created a drama out of the issue of deportees."

Cheryl Little, a lawyer and executive director of the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, said that deportees are often mislabeled when they arrive in Haiti because authorities often look at their arrest records, which show charges but not convictions.

Many Haitians see the deportees as Americans, with their Haitian citizenship a mere technicality. By some estimates, the average deportee left Haiti before age 8 and was returned at least 20 years later. Many speak little Haitian Creole and have minimal familial, cultural, or emotional connection to the country. These differences make adapting more difficult, and worse: they make deportees quickly identifiable.

Harry Desiré, 36, called the recent inflammatory rhetoric about deportees not only misleading but also "very, very dangerous."

Desiré was deported to Haiti 12 years ago, after serving five years in New York State prisons for armed robbery. He said he once felt deportation was worse than staying in a US prison because deportees are so often targeted as scapegoats.

Desiré, who said he avoided detention when he arrived in Haiti by giving a police officer two pairs of sneakers, helped found Alternative Chance, a criminal deportee advocacy organization, in 1996. He and other deportee advocates warn of a major problem with Haiti's detention of the deportees: In the absence of friends and relatives, a deportee who might not have pursued a life of crime may have to turn to others in jail for help, thereby putting him on a criminal path.

Desiré says it's hard for deportees to grow out of their negative image.

"Everybody, once they know you're a deportee, it's like you're automatically a criminal," he said. "So you could be innocent, going to church, but if you have a neighbor that doesn't like you, he can call the cops and tell lies, and the cops will believe him. . . . You really have to believe in yourself to survive."