

Dear colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for January 16-29, 2007.

The January 24th 3am raid by UN peacekeepers on a supposed gang stronghold in Cite Soleil was initially reported by UN spokespersons denying reports of deaths and injuries to citizens “or much of a reaction to the operation”, then recanted a day later revealing that in fact four deaths and six injuries occurred. Both the media and the UN deftly justify such brazen assaults as “expanding their [UN] presence” (BBC) with an operations center in Cite Soleil. MINUSTAH’s new Brazilian Commander, General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, in an interview with Agencia Brasil, justified the attack by demonizing Cite Soleil, saying: “a garrison of three or four heavily armed gangs who have unleashed unspeakable violence against the population” where “MINUSTAH troops patrolling City Soleil are dusted by thousands of shots each day. This proves that there is a large influx of arms and munitions.” This demonization is reinforced by media, such as the January 26th BBC report, claiming that “hundreds of people have died in Port-au-Prince in clashes between rogue police officers, ex-rebels and gangs.”

The AP/CBS report mentions the death of Jean-Remy Badio, a freelance photojournalist killed by gang members whom he had photographed a few days earlier. According to the Haitian Press Agency, the assassins were from the anti-Lavalas Little Machete Army of Martissant and not Cite Soleil.

The Miami Herald reports on Representative Alcee Hastings’ proposed Haitian Protection Act offering relief from deportation for approximately 20,000 undocumented Haitians. The act would extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians. TPS is granted to countries suffering political strife or natural disasters; currently Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and six other countries benefit from the status.

Reuters reports on recent RFK Human Rights award winner, Sonia Pierre’s efforts to highlight and reduce the ongoing human rights violations against Haitians, Dominicans of Haitian descent and undocumented migrant laborers in the Dominican Republic. “An estimated two to three million individuals, 20-25 percent of people residing in the Dominican Republic, are not documented. Among them are up to one million individuals of Haitian origin.”

A brief Ottawa Sun article voices the protest of a victim who’s attacker, Haitian Jean-Yves “Blaze” Brutus, is avoiding deportation to Haiti even though he had been accused in a serious crime, attempted murder, because he feared for his life if returned to Haiti.

A Miami Herald article features the multifaceted political, ecclesiastical and health challenges facing Father Gerard Jean-Juste as he recuperates from treatment for leukemia in Miami. Father Gerry wants nothing more than to return to serving his parishioners at St. Claire Catholic Church in Port au Prince. However, the Archbishop of Port au Prince, Joseph Serge Miot suspended Father Gerry from his priestly duties on claims that Father Gerry was seeking the Presidency even though he was legally unable to register as a candidate from his prison cell. The Archbishop claims he is awaiting a written promise

from Father Gerry that he will not engage in politics in the future. Despite legal and church setbacks, Haiti expert Robert Fatton weighs in on what he suspects is President Preval's reluctance for Father Gerry, "a major figure of Lavalas", to return to Haiti.

Contents:

- 1. UN Soldiers move into Haiti slum, BBC News**
- 2. U.N. Peacekeepers, Haitian Gang Clash, AP and CBS News**
- 3. 'Four dead' in Haiti UN operation, BBC News**
- 4. UN forces raid gang's house in Haiti leaving six wounded, Reuters**
- 5. Congress is asked to let Haitians stay, Miami Herald**
- 6. Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the United States: Protect rights, reduce statelessness, Reuters**
- 7. Feds nixed deportation order, The Ottawa Sun**
- 8. Jean-Juste impatient to return to Haiti, Miami Herald**

1. UN soldiers move into Haiti slum

BBC News

January 25, 2007

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6297213.stm>

UN peacekeepers in Haiti say they have set up a stronghold in one of the largest and most violent slums of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The stronghold is to be a centre for operations against armed gangs, a UN spokesperson told the BBC.

The UN troops came under fire as they moved into the Cite Soleil shantytown, but the UN contradicted reports that several people had been wounded.

UN peacekeepers, in Haiti since 2004, have stepped up patrols in Cite Soleil.

They were sent to the country to maintain order after a revolt ousted the former President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

On Wednesday, Brazilian soldiers of the UN mission took over an abandoned building used by gangs.

Hundreds of people have died in Port-au-Prince in clashes between rogue police officers, ex-rebels and gangs.

The Brazilian-led UN force includes more than 8,000 soldiers and police supported by some 1,000 civilian personnel.

2. U.N. Peacekeepers, Haitian Gang Clash

U.N. peacekeepers trade gunfire with gang members and seize hideout in Haitian slum

Jan. 25, 2007

By TRENT JACOBS

(AP), CBS News

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/01/25/ap/world/mainD8MS39GG1.shtml>

(AP) U.N. troops traded gunfire with armed gangs Wednesday after seizing an abandoned primary school that had been used to stage attacks on the peacekeepers, a U.N. official said. Witnesses said one person died and five were injured.

Blue-helmeted soldiers secured the empty schoolhouse during an early morning raid in Cite Soleil, a gang-controlled slum on the edge of the capital of Port-au-Prince, said Sophie de la Combe, a spokeswoman for the U.N.

"The gangs were using this house for criminal activities and to shoot on U.N. troops, putting the population in danger," de La Combe said.

Troops later came under attack by gang members, setting off a gunbattle in the squalid, densely populated area.

Residents of Cite Soleil told The Associated Press that one man died and five others were wounded, including a young woman shot in the leg and chest.

De la Combe could not provide information on casualties.

Djilale Abdezigafon, a physician with a Belgian-run Doctors Without Borders clinic in Cite Soleil said several people were treated for gunshot wounds but said the injuries were not life-threatening.

In recent weeks, the 8,800-strong U.N. force has stepped up offensives in Cite Soleil to root out armed gangs that flourished after a February 2004 revolt toppled former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Last month, U.N. troops raided the slum in a crackdown against gangs wanted in a wave of kidnappings and killings. Witnesses said 10 civilians were shot to death, but the United Nations said only gang members died.

Also Wednesday, U.N. officials said a Haitian photojournalist was shot to death at his home in a violent slum days after he photographed gang members.

Jean-Remy Badio, a freelancer, was slain Friday in the southern Port-au-Prince slum of Martissant, said Fred Blaise, a U.N. police spokesman. Blaise said gang members were suspected in the shooting but no arrests have been made.

International press freedom group Reporters Without Borders said Badio apparently was killed by gang members he had photographed days earlier. It said Badio's family had reported receiving threats before his killing.

3. 'Four dead' in Haiti UN operation

BBC News

January 26, 2007

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6300885.stm>

The UN mission in Haiti says four people were killed when its peacekeepers expanded their presence in the Cite Soleil slum of Port-au-Prince.

A spokesman said six other people were injured in what he described as exchanges of fire with criminals.

On Wednesday, when the operation took place, another UN spokesman had said there had been no reports of casualties or much of a reaction to the operation.

The peacekeepers are now holding a strategic location in Cite Soleil.

The stronghold is to be a centre for operations against armed gangs, a UN spokesperson told the BBC.

A local aid worker for the charity Medecins Sans Frontieres, Fabio Pompetti, told AFP news agency that three women had been wounded in Wednesday's clash and that one of them later died from her wounds.

UN peacekeepers, in Haiti since 2004, were sent to the country to maintain order after a revolt ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Hundreds of people have died in Port-au-Prince in clashes between rogue police officers, ex-rebels and gangs.

The Brazilian-led UN force includes more than 8,000 soldiers and police supported by some 1,000 civilian personnel

4. UN forces raid gang's house in Haiti leaving six wounded

Thursday, January 25, 2007

by Clarens Renois

Caribbean Net News

<http://www.caribbeannetnews.com/cgi-script/csArticles/articles/000053/005387.htm>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AFP): UN forces raided the Haitian capital's largest shantytown Wednesday to seize a gang's house in an operation that left six people with gunshot wounds, witnesses and UN officials said.

The United Nations peacekeepers' operation was launched in Port-au-Prince's Cite Soleil slum, an area controlled by armed groups.

"We were woken up at 3:00 am (0800 GMT) by intense shooting and we noticed UN tanks in the neighborhood," a Cite Soleil resident told AFP.

With the rising sun, peacekeeper helicopters were still buzzing over the shantytown, while automatic gunfire was heard, jolting the slum's 300,000 residents.

"Six people with gunshot wounds were admitted to hospital, but their injuries are not life-threatening," said a doctor at a local hospital who asked to remain anonymous.

A police source said Haitian police did not take part in the operation, the second in Cite Soleil in four weeks by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), whose mandate is up for renewal by the UN Security Council in February.

Over two decades, Haiti has suffered from political violence and instability, notably since the resignation of then-president Jean Bertrand Aristide in February 2004 amid a popular uprising.

More than half of the Caribbean island's 8.4 million people live below the extreme poverty line of one dollar a day, according to UN officials.

Security remains a major obstacle to a turnaround.

After Aristide's departure into exile, a force of over 7,200 soldiers and 2,000 police belonging to MINUSTAH went to the impoverished Caribbean country to maintain order while an interim regime sought to restore stability.

The UN force's objective Wednesday "was to secure a house controlled by gangs who regularly exact ransoms from motorists and truckers on a busy route nearby," MINUSTAH spokeswoman Sophie Boutaud de la Combe told AFP.

The gangs also used the house to launch attacks on UN patrols, she said.

"We intend to expand our presence here to better safeguard Cite Soleil," she said, offering no details of the plan.

The UN blue helmets and Haitian police in a joint-operation had already swept the shantytown on December 22, resulting in at least 10 deaths and dozens of injuries, according to several sources.

Their objective then was to wrest control of a road from Cite Soleil outlaws.

Mid-January, MINUSTAH's new Brazilian commander, General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, announced the force's most important task was to "prevent violence" wreaked on the population by armed groups.

In an interview with Agencia Brasil, the general said Cite Soleil was a hotspot for violence.

"It is the poorest neighborhood in Port-au-Prince and a garrison for three or four heavily armed gangs who have unleashed unspeakable violence against the population," he told the Brazilian news agency.

"MINUSTAH troops patrolling City Soleil are dusted by thousands of shots each day. This proves that there is a large influx of arms and munitions," he said.

In Washington on Wednesday, a conference of experts said that insecurity and impunity in Haiti amid failed police and judicial systems hindered the impoverished country's economic development.

"People are not going to invest with this kind of insecurity," said Mark Schneider, vice president of think tank International Crisis Group.

Despite the UN force's crime-busting efforts since 2004, the experts said it was difficult to counter 20 years of political instability and insecurity in the country.

Haiti's failed judicial system, they agreed, is of special concern, with many judges and lawyers lacking not only a professional background, but often basic office equipment such as paper and pencils.

5. Congress is asked to let Haitians stay

Rep. Alcee Hastings is seeking an 18-month reprieve for Haitians living in this country illegally, so they can stay and work legally.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

Miami Herald

January 19, 2007

Citing an ongoing wave of violence and kidnappings in Haiti, U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings has filed a bill to temporarily protect thousands of undocumented Haitians from deportation.

The South Florida Democrat said his proposed Haitian Protection Act of 2007 is designed to give "temporary protected status" or TPS to an estimated 20,000 Haitians living illegally in the United States. That would give them residence and work papers for up to 18 months.

SURGE IN VIOLENCE

"The Haitian government and the Haitian people need to catch a break," Hastings said. "There is no question violence is on the rise there, and tragically, kidnappings and more specifically child kidnappings are occurring in great numbers."

Hastings' bill was welcomed by South Florida Haitian and immigration activists, who in recent months have stepped up their call for TPS despite successful elections in Haiti in the past year. The country continues to suffer from instability, they argue.

In December, The Miami Herald reported that schools in and around Port-au-Prince were forced to close days early following a spike in for-ransom kidnappings of Haitian kids. At least 48 such kidnappings were reported Nov. 10-Dec. 15.

Though kidnappings appear to have decreased following joint operations by the National Police and the 9,000-strong U.N. stabilization force, insecurity remains as President René Préval and Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis struggle to return the country to stability. A recent update of a State Department travel warning on Haiti tells U.S. citizens that "there is a chronic and growing danger of kidnappings."

SUGGESTED REQUEST

Hastings, whose bill faces an uphill battle even in a Congress controlled by Democrats, said he has written to Préval asking him to make a formal request for TPS to help bolster the effort.

While Congress can pass legislation designating TPS, it is usually the Department of Homeland Security that decides if a country qualifies, based on criteria that include political strife and natural disasters.

Chris Bentley, a spokesman for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said that to the best of his knowledge, ``it only happened once before when [TPS] was created -- extending it to El Salvador. We know of no time since then Congress has actually designated TPS to another country."

6. Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the United States: Protect rights, reduce statelessness

Caribbean Net News

Reuters

Friday, January 19, 2007

<http://www.caribbeannetnews.com/cgi-script/csArticles/articles/000052/005242.htm>

WASHINGTON, USA: Exploitative migrant labour agreements and years of unregulated migration have created a permanent underclass of people of Haitian descent in the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic.

One Dominican-Haitian named Sonia Pierre who has overcome this poverty to lead a human rights movement on behalf of stateless children, and who received the 2006 R.F. Kennedy Human Rights award, compellingly describes the situation.

There is a country in the Caribbean where children cannot go to school. These children do not have a right to healthcare. These children are in danger of being taken to Haiti [even though they and their parents were born in the Dominican Republic].

They are victims of discrimination because of the condition of being of Haitian descent. Many times these children then have a hate for their origins. One's identity, roots, and values are what make you a human being. This is not the internal problem of one state. We live in a global world. So we are talking about world citizens.

In the Dominican Republic there exists thousands and thousands of stateless people - most of them being children. An estimated two to three million individuals, 20-25 percent of people residing in the Dominican Republic, are not documented. Among them are up to one million individuals of Haitian origin.

Within that group, and of most concern, is the large number of Dominican-Haitian children born in the country who cannot access their human right to a nationality addressed in the country's constitution. In addition, asylum seekers who have fled politically motivated persecution in Haiti live in a state of limbo because their claims are not adjudicated in the Dominican Republic.

Their Dominican-born children also live without effective nationality. As a signatory to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, there is much the Dominican government can do.

"People see the Dominican Republic as a happy go lucky place with a few flaws. In reality, it is a country with deep rooted difficulty with human rights and an attitude that no one can tell us what to do," says Bridget Wooding, a development consultant.

The complex history and economic disparity of the two countries that share one island have resulted in decades of migration, which has at various times, including the present, been largely unregulated.

7. Feds nixed deportation order

By VINCENT LAROUCHE

The Ottawa Sun

January 22, 2007

Daudi Niyonsaba was outraged after reading in the Journal de Montreal that Immigration Canada helped his accused attacker avoided a deportation order in 2003.

The newspaper reported that Jean-Yves "Blaze" Brutus, who is accused of attempted murder in the shooting of Niyonsaba, was ordered deported in 2002 for "serious crime."

Immigration Canada intervened a few months later to halt the deportation order because Brutus feared for his safety if he was sent back to his native Haiti.

Niyonsaba said he can't understand why his accused shooter was allowed to stay in Canada even though he was deemed dangerous by the authorities.

"He was known for a long time," said Niyonsaba, himself an immigrant from the central African nation of Burundi. "He was regarded as a danger to the public, but nothing was done to protect the public. That worries me."

He is calling for tough new measures to ensure repeat offenders are kept off the streets.

"If not, there will be more innocent victims like me," he warned.

8. Jean-Juste impatient to return to Haiti

The Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste -- powerful Haitian activist and former political prisoner -- longs to minister again in Haiti, but he is thwarted by political backlash and his own fragile health.

BY TANIA VALDEMORO

Miami Herald

January 28, 2007

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/16563509.htm>

Watching the Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste relax on a folding chair at the storefront office of Veye Yo, a political group he founded in Little Haiti, it is hard to tell the priest was wracked by leukemia.

Two months after finishing chemotherapy, his sallow complexion has cleared. He has gained weight. And he no longer uses a cane to walk.

"I'm very patient. I think my health will get better with time," said Jean-Juste, who led a decades-long fight in South Florida to legalize Haitians in the United States.

Leukemia was Jean-Juste's ticket out of Haiti's National Penitentiary last January. His illness and imprisonment for various alleged criminal offenses turned Jean-Juste, a potential presidential candidate and a staunch supporter of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, into a cause celebre for human rights activists. Amid intense international pressure, former Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue offered Jean-Juste a humanitarian release so he could receive medical care in Miami. Once his health improved, the government said, he would have to return to face charges.

But even as he remains in medical exile here, the priest, known for courting controversy, is fighting several battles. His targets: the Haitian government and the Catholic Church.

His biggest fight is over his suspension from his priestly duties at his parish of St. Claire Catholic Church in Port-au-Prince.

Joseph Serge Miot, the archbishop of Port-au-Prince, suspended Jean-Juste in September 2005 when it appeared he might run for president -- a political activity that the Vatican prohibits for priests. Jean-Juste immediately appealed the suspension to the Vatican.

The priest insists that his suspension is baseless. "When I was in jail, I could not register to run for president, so I didn't run," he said.

In December, Vatican officials responded personally to Jean-Juste. The letter, Miot said, supports his decision to suspend Jean-Juste.

The sanction, Miot told The Miami Herald in a telephone interview Wednesday from Haiti, will stand until Jean-Juste personally writes him promising, "he will not engage in politics, and only tend to his pastoral duties."

"He has not done anything," Miot said. "He only wrote Rome saying that the suspension was unjust. He has to write me and say what he's going to do."

"He says he is waiting for me. He has to send me a letter saying he's only going to work for the church and not engage himself in political affairs. He has not done anything."

Jean-Juste also complains that Miami Archbishop John Clement Favalora has neither interceded on his behalf in the dispute nor provided him a stipend to get by during his months of treatment.

"It wouldn't be appropriate for another bishop to interfere," said Mary Ross Agosta, spokeswoman for the Archdiocese of Miami, explaining that Jean-Juste has never even served as a priest in the Miami diocese. "But, the Archbishop is concerned about the Rev. Jean-Juste's spiritual well-being."

Even if he were to win that battle with his church, Jean-Juste also must settle the criminal charges against him. He is charged with conspiring to kill Haitian police officers and harboring illegal weapons in his parish. The priest has denied all wrongdoing.

His lawyers, Mario Joseph and Brian Concannon, are trying to dismiss the criminal charges against him in Haiti.

In July 2004, Haitian officials accused Jean-Juste of murdering Jacques Roche, a prominent journalist, after he showed up at Roche's funeral. A judge dismissed the charge last year, but Haiti's new government has yet to determine what to do with the conspiracy and illegal weapons case.

Jean-Juste's return, while welcomed by members of Aristide's Lavalas Family Party, would be unsettling for President René Preval, who has built a fragile coalition government absent any high-profile members of Aristide's once all-powerful Lavalas Family Party.

"He doesn't say so publicly, but I don't think Preval wants major figures of Lavalas back in Haiti. He certainly doesn't want them engaged in political activities," said Robert Fatton, a Haiti expert at the University of Virginia.

"Jean-Juste's return would rekindle and intensify the political divisions in the country. At the time of the election, most analysts had assumed if he could have presented himself as a candidate, he would have won the presidency."

Exalted by Haiti's poor as a natural successor to Aristide, cancer has reminded Jean-Juste that he is vulnerable. He has not escaped the unpleasant side effects of chemotherapy and spends his days resting in Fort Lauderdale or commiserating with Aristide supporters at Veye Yo on Friday nights during the group's weekly meetings.

His throat scarred from a biopsy, Jean-Juste says he has trouble swallowing and may have to resume chemotherapy treatments.

His diagnosis is the stuff of spy thrillers. Paul Farmer, a longtime friend and infectious diseases specialist at Harvard University, visited the priest in jail in 2005 and took blood samples when prison guards were not looking. He later spirited them to a University of Miami hematologist for analysis.

Instead of fearing prison guards, Jean-Juste now fears infections and mosquito bites. Both are plentiful in Haiti. Despite the risks, the priest insists he is well enough to go home. His parish needs tending. His food program, which serves 1,000 people a week, needs money.

"My doctor said I can go back for three days at a time," Jean-Juste said.

While he complains of being treated like a pauper by church officials, Jean-Juste points to the generosity of his supporters at Veye Yo, who have given him new clothes, a cell phone and money.

Activists like Jack Lieberman, who worked to free the priest from jail, are incensed that criminal charges against Jean-Juste still remain. "If Haiti is to be a democracy, the prosecutions of people who were victimized by the illegitimate regime [of Latortue] need to be rescinded," he said.

Jean-Juste spoke bitterly of Latortue, whose return to the United States last year could not be more different than the priest's. After a tumultuous two years of heading a caretaker government, Latortue has quietly resumed his retirement in Boca Raton.

"Speak of the devil," the priest said, as he watched the former prime minister's image appear in old television footage of Haiti at Veye Yo. Now out of power, Latortue declined to respond to Jean-Juste's attacks of his administration.

Without a country to visit or a church to lead, Jean-Juste remains ever defiant.

"This is ridiculous! I am a priest convalescing and I am not able to serve. That's what makes me sicker!" Jean-Juste said from his lawn chair.

Miami Herald Staff Writer Jacqueline Charles contributed to this story.