

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for May 18 – 24, 2006.

President Rene Preval nominated Jacques Edouard Alexis as his Prime Minister. Alexis served as Preval's Prime Minister and Minister of Education during Preval's first presidential term (1996-2000). Alexis, a trained agronomist, was a key Preval adviser and manager in the most recent campaign and currently heads Preval's transition team. Alexis told Haiti's Radio Metropole that he would 'work to form an open government' indicating inclusion of members from Haiti's diverse sectors.

Parliamentary confirmation is expected on Wednesday May 24th.

Both the outgoing and incoming UN Special Representatives urged the international community to give immediate budget support to Haiti in the next six months facilitating a more stable and secure environment. Newly appointed UN Representative Edmond Mulet advised international donors to remain committed to Haiti's return to democratic governance. A team of economists, led by UN envoy Jeffrey Sachs, recommended dispersal of aid in three phases: the first six months of the new Government, the first two years and the following three years of Preval's Presidency. A meeting of donor representatives from the EU, Canada, the US and Latin Americans was held in Brasilia on May 23 to confirm donor and troop commitments to Haiti.

Reuters reported on Cite Soleil's gang leaders' demands from Preval and their implications for peace and security in the country's largest slum. The leaders "say there can be no peace without justice and a speedy response to their demands", chiefly the return of Aristide to Haiti and withdrawal of UN troops.

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1) Former premier back in familiar role in Haiti

By Jacqueline Charles

Miami Herald

May 23, 2006

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/haiti/14645297.htm>

Haitian President René Préval Monday nominated Jacques Edouard Alexis, a trusted ally who served as prime minister during Préval's first term in the presidency, to help him govern the troubled country again as his new prime minister.

Préval ended weeks of speculation by sending letters to the presidents of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies nominating Alexis, 57, to run the day-to-day affairs of the government.

Alexis, who was one of the main architects of Préval's February election victory and has been coordinating his transition team -- the president was inaugurated May 14 -- said he expects his nomination will be approved by parliament.

"The president has been preparing the terrain," Alexis, who earlier served as chancellor of the private Quisqueya University in Port-au-Prince, told The Miami Herald in a telephone interview.

NO NEW FACE

Some Haitians, including supporters, had hoped Préval would bring in a fresh face as his prime minister. Alexis had been considered the front-runner all along.

"What it says is that, unfortunately, there has not been a lot of effort on the part of Préval to go wide and see who can be brought into the inner circle," said Jocelyn McCalla, head of the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Rights.

Alexis told The Miami Herald that he shares Préval's hopes for rebuilding the economy, tackling government reforms and helping the poor.

"There is a majority in this country who feel they are excluded," Alexis said. "They don't feel they are citizens . . . The first order is that we have to work to diminish the feeling of exclusion."

Alexis' confirmation, expected as early as Wednesday, would officially end Boca Raton resident Gerard Latortue's two-year stint as interim prime minister following the 2004 ouster of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Alexis first served as prime minister at the end of Préval's first term, May 26, 1999, to Feb. 7, 2001. Haiti was then in the midst of a political crisis following Préval's decision to dismiss parliament, and Alexis was installed by presidential decree.

This time, political observers are predicting that parliament will approve Alexis. Préval's Lespwa Party has the single largest blocks of seats in both chambers of parliament, though not majorities.

CANADA INCIDENT

Earlier this month, Alexis was barred from entering Canada because his name appeared on a list of those accused of "crimes against humanity." He was eventually given a visa, but not an explanation.

"That is a very serious accusation," he said. "I am still waiting for an answer from the Canadian government."

Melanie Carkner, spokeswoman for Citizenship and Immigration in Canada, said she could not discuss an individual's case without their permission.

2) Haitian President Nominates Ally for Post

By STEVENSON JACOBS

The Associated Press

Washington Post

Monday, May 22, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Moving quickly to form a new government, President Rene Preval said Monday he has nominated former Cabinet member and close ally Jacques Edouard Alexis as prime minister.

If confirmed by parliament, Alexis would succeed outgoing interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, who was appointed to lead this impoverished Caribbean nation after an uprising ousted former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

Alexis, who served as prime minister and education minister during Preval's 1996-2001 presidency, is considered an able broker with the clout needed to hold sway in Haiti's splintered parliament, which is made up of members from 16 different parties.

"Alexis is going to do the Haitian people's work," Preval, who took power eight days ago, told reporters after meeting with legislators. "He is trustworthy and knows what he is doing."

Haitian lawmakers didn't say when they would vote on the nomination.

Alexis, 58, said he was ready for the job, telling Haitian broadcaster Radio Metropole that he would work to form "an open government" — an apparent indication he would include members from different sectors of Haiti's fractured society.

As the official head of government, Alexis would appoint Preval's Cabinet and most administrative posts.

Alexis, who like Preval is a trained agronomist, had an icy relationship with the international community at times during his first term as prime minister.

When foreign donors threatened to cut off aid to protest flawed legislative elections in 2000, Alexis likened that move to when Haiti won independence from France in 1804 and "the international community was against us."

Haiti staged the only successful revolt against slavery to become the world's first black republic. But it was governed by a string of civilian and military dictatorships.

Aristide won the first free elections in 1990 but was ousted the following year in a coup. The United States sent 20,000 troops to restore Aristide.

Alexis could also face pressure to bring back Aristide, who took asylum in South Africa after the 2004 revolt but has said he wants to return to his homeland.

Rudy Heriveaux, a senator with Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party, has said Aristide supporters helped elect Preval and that there cannot be reconciliation without the ousted leader's safe return.

Asked in April about the prospects of Aristide's return, Alexis said he would be allowed to return but suggested he might have to face allegations by the U.S.-backed interim government that he stole millions in state funds.

Aristide "will be able to return to his country but not now. He will return to Haiti in the not too distant future to answer the facts that are brought before him," Alexis said.

The interim government last year filed a federal lawsuit in Miami accusing Aristide of stealing from the Haitian treasury and state-owned telephone company. However, no evidence has been brought formally before a criminal court in Haiti.

3) UN SHOULD STAY LONG ENOUGH TO CONSOLIDATE HAITI'S PROGRESS, MISSION CHIEF SAYS

Press Release - U.N. News Center

May 21, 2006

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=18554&Cr=Haiti&Cr1=>

The international community must give urgent financial support to the Government of newly elected President René Préval of Haiti, who will lack the money to pay State workers in the immediate future, the United Nations Secretary-General's outgoing Special Representative in that country, Juan Gabriel Valdés, said today.

"It is absolutely urgent that the international community give budget support to Mr. Préval for the first six months of his Government. If he doesn't get that support he will face a very difficult situation because he has to pay police, he has to pay teachers, he has to pay health workers and the present situation doesn't permit him to do so," Mr. Valdés stressed at a news conference at UN Headquarters.

The World Bank had approved a loan for Haiti which would only be released after October, he said, but he added that both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank had shown flexibility.

A team sent to Haiti two weeks ago and led by economist Jeffrey Sachs recommended that aid be sent in three phases: the first six months of the new Government, the first two years, and then Mr. Préval's entire presidency, the UN envoy said.

A meeting in Brasilia next Tuesday would reunite donor representatives with the Core Group on Haiti - the European Union, Canada, the United States and the Latin Americans - and would also confirm the commitment of the troop-contributing countries, he said.

At that meeting, it would be important for Haitians to clarify how they had spent some \$800 million, which donor countries said they had disbursed out of the \$1.2 billion pledged, especially with respect to the execution of such projects as strengthening the infrastructure, Mr. Valdés said.

A subsequent meeting in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, had been called by the World Bank and would reunite donor countries with key financial institutions.

The envoy expressed the hope that new aid pledges would favour a programme that included combating corruption, controlling seaports and ending all illicit traffic, particularly of weapons.

On the security situation, he said the UN, which on some half dozen past occasions has left Haiti before improvements took hold, should now reinforce its presence, maintain current troop levels and strengthen the extremely fragile security.

While there might be some changes in the nature and composition of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the time had not yet come to leave, said Mr. Valdés, who is also MINUSTAH chief until the end of the month.

He noted that Mr. Préval has requested that the MINUSTAH stay on until a professional police force had been trained and the structure of the judiciary had improved - and, indeed, for the duration of his presidency.

He expressed the hope that the new Special Representative, Edmond Mulet of Guatemala, who would take over in June would find the Mission well organized in terms of its work in the security sector and in social development, especially in the poorest areas.

4) Donors eye more aid for Haiti's new government

23 May 2006

Reuters

By Raymond Colitt

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N23360059.htm>

BRASILIA, Brazil - More aid is critical to help Haiti's new government consolidate democracy and foster growth and the international community needs to make that commitment to the poor Caribbean country, donors said on Tuesday.

Several donor countries at an international conference in Brazil's capital backed a proposal for a July donor conference in Haiti to raise new funds.

"I think donors in general are ready to help more, although it is not clear how much money they will put on the table," said Prot von Kunow, German delegate to the conference.

Rene Preval took office on May 14 as Haiti's first elected ruler since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in an armed revolt in February 2004.

The international community needed to make long-term commitments to Haiti's fragile infrastructure and public security, said Jose Miguel Insulza, secretary-general of the Organization of American States.

"If President Rene Preval faces energy shortages and overdue salaries, he will have political difficulties," said Juan Gabriel Valdes, U.N. representative to Haiti.

The World Bank last week also called on donors, which include the United States, Japan, and France, to swiftly provide more financial aid to Haiti.

Ninety percent of the \$1.1 billion that was pledged by international donors in a July 2004 conference in Washington had already been spent, according to Brazil's foreign ministry.

A United Nations peacekeeping force, led by Brazil, has helped check rampant violence in Haiti following Aristide's fall and allowed presidential elections in February this year.

Brazil has pledged to keep its troops there until Haiti established its own, working police force, which could take several years, Brazilian diplomats say.

5) Preval faces big challenge in Haiti's largest slum

21 May 2006

By Tom Brown

Reuters AlertNet

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N21288819.htm>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - The volatile situation in Haiti's largest and most violent slum could prove a major obstacle for President Rene Preval as he seeks to stabilize his country and put it on a democratic path.

Preval appealed for peace in the troubled Caribbean nation last Sunday as he was inaugurated as Haiti's first democratically elected leader since Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled an armed revolt more than two years ago.

But leaders of gangs in Cite Soleil, a shantytown home to at least 300,000 people and a potent symbol of misery in the poorest country in the Americas, say there can be no peace without justice and a speedy response to their demands.

No ultimatums have been set, according to several gang leaders who voiced cautious support for Preval when interviewed by Reuters last week.

But chief among their demands is one for the return of Aristide, who went into exile in February 2004 in the face of a bloody rebellion and pressure from Washington and Paris to step down.

Preval, a one-time Aristide ally and previously president of Haiti from 1996 to 2001, has said there is nothing to prevent Aristide's return. He stopped short of saying he would welcome back a figure still seen as a champion of the poor but reviled by Haiti's tiny, wealthy elite.

"Aristide must come back," said Augudson Nicolas, a slight man known as General Toutou who controls one of the gangs in the teeming warren of shacks, narrow alleys and open sewers.

The United States has warned Preval not to allow Aristide back -- accusing him of despotism and reliance on armed thugs to silence opponents. But that could reignite violence in Cite Soleil, which has seen an orgy of bloodshed over the past two years.

A U.N. peacekeeping mission, now numbering about 9,000 troops and civilian police, has been in Haiti since June 2004 to support a U.S.-backed interim government.

U.N. PULLOUT

Preval has asked the mission, widely despised in the slums, to stay on for now but that too could backfire on him.

Cite Soleil's gang leaders are demanding the withdrawal of the U.N. troops, saying they have killed women, children and other defenseless people since rolling into the shantytown in menacing armored personnel carriers.

Resentment runs high among many residents, whose cinder-block homes are pockmarked by bullets fired during pitched battles between U.N. troops and Cite Soleil's gangs.

Georges Masillon, 54, standing outside a sand-bagged former supermarket where blue-helmeted U.N. troops are bivouacked, bemoaned the fate of his 29-year-old son on crutches nearby.

The young man was shot by Jordanian peacekeepers while trying to run for safety on Feb. 1 when gunfire erupted for no apparent reason, Masillon said. One bullet severed his Achilles tendon while the exit wound from another damaged his genitals.

"MINUSTAH has done nothing to help us, they have only hurt us," said Masillon, using the French-language acronym of the U.N. mission

"Cite Soleil gave Preval power," said Sonson Pierre, a self-proclaimed soldier in what he described as the army of Commander Evans, one of Cite Soleil's main gang leader.

"If Preval doesn't respond to us it's going get hot," he said, referring to the demands for a U.N. withdrawal.

Several of Haiti's gangs had offered to lay down their weapons once Preval took office but none has disarmed so far.

Evans' followers, many barefoot and brandishing automatic assault rifles, danced through mud-choked alleys and fired off gunshots into the air last Thursday in celebration after briefly taking a Brazilian army colonel hostage. Evans, who figures prominently on Haiti's most wanted list, said there had been a botched U.N. attempt at his arrest.

"All we want for this country is peace," he said. "I don't think the whites (U.N. peacekeepers) want peace. They should leave."

6) U.N. Envoy Urges Continuing Aid for Haiti

The New York Times

Reuters

May 20, 2006

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/20/world/americas/20haiti.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

UNITED NATIONS, May 19 — The top United Nations envoy in Haiti urged international donors on Friday to keep aid flowing during President René Préval's first six months in office, or risk renewed instability.

"At this point in time it is absolutely urgent to mobilize funds to support Haiti for the first six months," said the envoy, Juan Gabriel Valdés, a former Chilean foreign minister.

Mr. Préval took office last Sunday and quickly appealed for peace in his impoverished country, which has suffered violent outbreaks recently that have taken hundreds of lives. He is Haiti's first democratically elected leader since Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled into exile more than two years ago.

If outside aid starts drying up, Mr. Préval will face a very difficult environment that could undermine recent political progress and fuel new violence, Mr. Valdés said.

A United Nations peacekeeping mission now numbering about 7,000 troops and 1,700 police officers has been in Haiti since June 2004, supporting an interim government installed to run the country until elections could be held.

7) Haiti gang holds, then releases Brazilian officer

19 May 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva and Tom Brown

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N18377606.htm>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A gang that controls Haiti's largest and most violent slum took a Brazilian army colonel hostage on Thursday and threatened to kill him to thwart what the gang's leader said was an attempt by U.N. peacekeepers to arrest him.

Tensions were flaring in Cite Soleil when two Reuters reporters seeking to interview the gang leader, known as Commander Evans, came across the hostage in the teeming shantytown.

Brazilian Col. Odair, who declined to give his first name, was being held by dozens of Evans' young followers.

Several, speaking Creole, said loudly he would be killed if Evans, whom they believed had been detained by Brazilian peacekeepers, was not freed immediately.

Odair was set free after being held for at least two hours in barren storefront painted with images of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was toppled by an armed revolt in February 2004.

"I'm being held hostage," Odair said softly into his cell phone shortly before being ordered to sit on a bench and remove his helmet and open his flak jacket.

One gang member crouching over the colonel put his fingers around his skull menacingly after Odair removed his helmet.

The colonel was not allowed to speak to the Reuters reporters, though he did say briefly that there had been a misunderstanding between peacekeepers and Evans' self-described soldiers.

Several of Haiti's disparate armed gangs have offered to lay down their weapons after February's election of President Rene Preval, who took office on Sunday. But none has disarmed so far, and they remain defiant in the face of the U.N. mission in Haiti, which is comprises about 9,000 soldiers and civilian police.

Thursday's incident came a day after Jordanian peacekeepers in Cite Soleil -- home to at least 300,000 people -- turned over command of the area to a Brazilian force.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst denied that Evans, who features high on the Haitian National Police's most-wanted list, had been targeted for arrest.

Wimhurst said the Brazilians had prearranged a meeting which went off as planned, but led to rumors that Evans had been arrested.

Evans, however, told Reuters he had been bundled into an armored personnel carrier and held against his will.

"They wanted to arrest me," he said. "They put me into the APC and they wanted to take me to their base but the population intervened and prevented that from happening.

"All we want for this country is peace. I don't think the whites want peace. They should leave," said Evans, calling the U.N. peacekeepers "traitors."

Evans' loyalists, many barefoot and brandishing automatic assault rifles, danced and fired volleys into the air when he returned to his warren of shanties.

"If they want peace we want peace too," said one of Evans' followers, referring to the peacekeepers as he stood guard over Odair. "If they want war, we are ready for war."

8) Aristide accuser arrested

By Jacqueline Charles

Miami Herald

May 24, 2006

http://origin.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/haiti/14652773.htm?source=rss&channel=miamiherald_haiti

The head of Haiti's financial crimes investigative unit, who has been probing money laundering and corruption in ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government has been arrested.

Investigative Judge Jean Peres Paul issued an arrest warrant and Jean-Yves Nol was picked up at 4:45 p.m. Monday in his office in Port-au-Prince. He is being held at the city's penitentiary.

Peres told The Miami Herald that he issued the warrant for Nol's arrest because he failed to show up for a May 3 hearing. Peres launched an investigation of Nol in November after a court processor accused Nol of ordering his bodyguards -- Haitian National Police officers -- to hold him captive in his car for about an hour outside of the Banque Populaire Haitienne in Port-au-Prince.

Nol was attempting to prevent the processor from serving a court summons that would have released more than \$6 million belonging to the Aristide Foundation, according to sources familiar with the case. The funds had been frozen at Nol's request, as part of his probe. Peres said his decision to arrest Nol has nothing to do with the corruption investigation.

Nol's attorney, Carol Chalmers said the arrest was politically motivated. Nol's unit has issued two blistering reports accusing Aristide and his supporters in Haiti of corruption.