

Dear colleagues,

IJDH Haiti News Briefs: Wednesday May 9 – Friday May 12, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the news on Haiti for May 9 – 12, 2006.

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) issued reports this week outlining some of the challenges awaiting Rene Preval following his Presidential inauguration this Sunday. COHA emphasizes two areas of heightened concern for the U.S: the potential return of Aristide to Haiti; and Preval's close collaboration with Cuba, Venezuela and other "pink tide" countries of the Americas. According to COHA, "what the U.S. mainly wants from Preval is to get Haiti off its agenda as soon as possible and at the lowest cost." The ICG report stresses the need for rapid action in Preval's first 100 days of office to tackle Haiti's deepest structural issues: security, justice, disarmament, economic growth and poverty reduction. The ICG emphasizes the need for immediate attention while failing to mention the fact that most of these issues have either arisen or worsened as a direct result of the Interim Government of the past two years. The ICG does not address the international community's lack of support for the elected Presidents Preval and Aristide or its support for the brutal interim government. Nor does it take into account the interim government's role in creating the problems for which Preval must now address. The ICG emphasizes the need for Preval to show results in his first 100 days, but it might take Preval that long just to assemble a government. The Prime Minister must be approved by the legislature, and this Parliament is fragmented with no party having a majority.

The United Nations released some findings from Haiti's latest census, its first in 24 years. The census results are largely unsurprising given Haiti's poor human development rankings on repeated UNDP Human Development Reports but latest and up to date figures on the state of the population is relevant in terms of directing development resources with the return of democracy. Most striking is the fact that half the population is under 20 years old and this youthful population faces the most dire education and health indicators in the western hemisphere.

The Haitian Parliament was sworn in on Tuesday May 9th and this Sunday's Presidential inauguration will likely occur with similarly little fanfare. The U.S. is sending a low level delegation led by the President's brother, Jeb Bush, the Governor of Florida.

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1. Huge task awaits incoming Haiti president By STEVENSON JACOBS

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Seattle Post Intelligencer
May 12, 2006

http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/national/1102AP_Haiti_Prevals_Challenge.html

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- As jobs go, incoming Haitian President Rene Preval will have one of the toughest.

The soft-spoken 63-year-old former president takes power Sunday for the second time in a decade, inheriting the leadership of a battered nation with a deep split between rich and poor, a corrupt state bureaucracy, a broken justice system and an economy in ruins.

"The magnitude of the challenges is enormous," said Mark L. Schneider, a senior vice president of the Brussels, Belgium-based International Crisis Group. "Every possible characteristic of an undeveloped, failed state is present in Haiti."

Few expect fast changes under Preval, Haiti's first elected president since a bloody February 2004 revolt that ousted former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and plunged the nation into chaos.

But observers say Preval's skills at governing and healing long-simmering rifts in Haiti's society will largely determine if the Western Hemisphere's poorest country can finally move toward stability - or continue down a seemingly endless path of misery.

Preval, an agronomist and a champion of Haiti's poor masses, so far has been guarded about his agenda. Meeting with journalists this week, he pledged to create "cohesion" in Haiti's fractured society and restore peace.

Bridging Haiti's deep and complex social divide won't be easy.

"From everywhere there is going to be pressure to deal with the things that Haiti badly needs," said Jocelyn McCalla, executive director in New York of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights.

Unless Preval can provide quick results, such as jobs, McCalla said, "you're going to have a mass of people who are restless ... and will do whatever they can to survive, including getting involved in violent crime."

Still, there is renewed optimism among many Haitians that their troubled nation may finally improve. Kidnappings and killings have fallen dramatically since Jan. 1, and the Haitian currency this week strengthened slightly against the U.S. dollar for the first time in months.

Preval's inauguration will be held under the protection of U.N. peacekeeping troops, who began arriving in Haiti after Aristide's ouster. The U.S. delegation will be led by Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, brother of President Bush.

Jean Paul, a 45-year-old air conditioner repairman, said he hopes Preval will fulfill his pledge to bring jobs to the Caribbean nation.

"The elite who control the economy have never done anything for poor people like me, so we're hoping that Preval will. That's why we voted for him," Paul said.

In his first steps to forge unity, Preval has reached out to rival political parties in Haiti's splintered parliament while forging ties with slum-based popular organizations loyal to Aristide, Preval's former ally. He also has visited the U.S., Canada and several Latin American countries to seek support for Haiti.

Preval's representatives on Thursday contacted third-place presidential finisher Charles Henri Baker, a prominent business leader, who had predicted more chaos if Preval became president again.

But Preval apparently hasn't held talks with Aristide's Lavalas party, whose supporters flocked to the polls on Feb. 7 to elect Preval. Some have interpreted the snub as a sign that Preval has moved from Aristide's shadow.

Rudy Heriveaux, a Lavalas senator, warned that national reconciliation won't be possible without Lavalas, which is calling for Aristide's return from exile in South Africa and the release of dozens of Aristide loyalists jailed without charge under the U.S.-backed interim government.

Preval has said Haitian law allows Aristide to return but has stopped short of saying whether he'd welcome back his former political mentor. Washington has warned that any return by Aristide would destabilize Haiti.

2. René Préval: Haiti May Get One Last Chance in Spite of Washington's Best Efforts

COHA REPORT:

Weekend Release: Saturday, May 13, 2006

http://www.coha.org/NEW_PRESS_RELEASES/New_Press_Releases_2006/COHA%20Report/COHA_Report_06.09_Preal_Inauguration.html

With his official inauguration planned for May 14, Haitian President-elect René Préval faces a Brobdingnagian challenge in rebuilding his shattered country. Succeeding a U.S.-installed de facto government headed by Interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, which couldn't have performed more poorly, Préval must search for a precise balance between the interests of foreign donor governments and bitterly divided domestic forces. In recent weeks, Préval has shown a genuine interest in consulting with the competing pressure points that will soon enough affect his new government.

On the domestic front, there is a near consensus that Préval has inherited a broken country from Latortue. Because of this, once inaugurated, the new president will need to

act quickly to prove his credibility after a questionable election process, which almost illicitly consigned him to an unwarranted run-off. He must also prevent a flare up of domestic political malcontents; create an effective coalition among the several parties in his government; and constructively assess former President Aristide's possible request to return to Haiti.

Not only has the president-elect initiated his efforts on the domestic front, but he has already made various strategic foreign visits, and has attempted to build a consensus with the international forces that have had a historic presence in Haiti, such as the U.S. and Canada. However, he is also attempting to form new alliances elsewhere, with Cuba and Venezuela for example, breaking away from a traditionally Washington-controlled Haiti.

Préval's efforts on the domestic front

Préval's victory is a positive sign for many of Haiti's poor. His inauguration is expected to be the start of a hopefully more stable period for the island, after a lame period of interim rule under the leadership of former lending agency official Gérard Latortue. The controversial election period has left Préval in a somewhat tenuous position, and he will now need to juggle between the competing domestic political groups, while at the same time making improvements to Haiti's shattered security, infrastructure and judicial systems. Perhaps Préval's most daunting challenge will be managing the contentious situation surrounding Aristide's exile.

Préval's victory

Préval won the Haitian presidency after a controversial election, which saw him obtain 51% of the vote only after a consensus arrangement was reached on how to tally spoiled ballots. The second round of parliamentary elections on April 21 attracted only 30 percent of the 3.5 million registered voters, to cast ballots for the 127 available parliamentary seats. While Préval's Lespwa party won the most Senate seats (eleven), it fell five short of the number needed to appoint the country's prime minister, which will force Préval to form a coalition government in order to pass legislation. The new Prime Minister will need to carefully be chosen by the Préval government, in order to ensure Haiti's future political stability.

Many of the island's political weaknesses were exacerbated by the notorious interim government that preceded Préval. The departure of the hapless Latortue regime marks the end of a government that fundamentally disregarded human rights and the rule of law. Ironically, this government was set up and appointed by a band of self-serving international powers - primarily the U.S., Canada, France, and the UN's Kofi Annan - in early 2004, just as the anti-Aristide forces were reaching Port-au-Prince. Human rights organizations such as the Haiti Support Group, several Latin American governments, as well as CARICOM (the Caribbean Community), accused the Latortue government of further darkening the country's already shaky human rights record by arresting, torturing and imprisoning pro-Aristide government officials and supporters, including former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert and former Prime Minister Yvonne Neptune, who still remain behind bars but most likely will be released the moment that Préval assumes office.

Aristide's Return

Another domestic issue Préval will have to manage amidst divisive political groups in the country is former president Aristide's possible early return to Haiti. The February 2004 coup, orchestrated by the U.S. State Department and backed by its confederates, ousted Aristide and sent him into exile in South Africa. They then installed former Boca Raton talk show host Gérard Latortue as interim Prime Minister. At the onset of Préval's presidency, Aristide's shadow lurks large amidst Haiti's many uncertainties. Many Aristide supporters, as well as pro-democracy advocates, supported Aristide and are now inquiring whether Préval will allow his mentor to return to Haiti once he assumes the presidency. His many critics do not want to see Aristide come back to Haiti, at least for now, and the country's elite adamantly argue on scant evidence that Aristide was becoming "dictatorial" and corrupt. The Latortue government accused the ex-president of stealing millions of dollars of state funds, which may be as much an auto-biographical statement as it is a serious charge against the former president. But Aristide has a tremendous influence among the country's poor, where his popularity is immeasurable. Many of Préval's supporters consider his Leswpa ("Hope" in Creole) and Aristide's Lavalas parties to have almost identical agendas, and support the former president's return. While a March Knight Ridder News report noted that "Préval has made it increasingly clear to foreign diplomats that he does not want the fiery former priest to return home any time soon," in an interview with Dominion, Préval "reiterated his intention to uphold the Haitian Constitution's ban of political exile," which leaves the door open for Aristide's possible return. Préval has simultaneously warned of possible corruption charges against the former president. While Préval and Aristide were close allies in the past, their relationship became increasingly distant during Préval's first presidency from 1996 to 2001, and many fear that Aristide's return would cause a resurgence of domestic violence between pro and anti-Aristide groups.

During the Chilean presidential inauguration in March, Préval, South African President Thabo Mbeki, Brazil and several other international players - such as Argentina, France, and Chile - discussed Aristide's possible return and its likely implications. Préval will thus have to find a middle ground between Aristide's domestic supporters and opponents, while taking into consideration the potential reactions of key international actors, among them the U.S., Canada, France, Brazil, Chile and Argentina, who fear that Aristide's return to Haiti would cause unnecessary political turmoil and unrest, and could use the return to justify sanctions.

Préval in the global arena: A call for continued international aid and responsible behavior
While not only initiating efforts domestically, Préval has started to actively engage with the international community, particularly regarding the flow of international aid which is crucial to building up Haiti's economy. His efforts in this area must be stellar, since the island nation has historically been impoverished and dependent on - and thus controlled by - foreign donors.

During his predictable visit to the United States in late March, Préval met with President Bush in Washington to discuss financial assistance, and visit institutions such as the

United Nations - where he requested the continuing presence of MINUSTAH (the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti); the World Bank; the Organization of American States; the Inter-American Development Bank; and the IMF, all venues where he requested long-term development aid.

Préval also paid a visit to Ottawa for a series of meetings with Canadian officials, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to remind the officials of the importance of their country's goods and assistance to Haiti. In his conversations, Préval emphasized the recognition of dual citizenship for the Haitian Diaspora in Canada, and the need for foreign investment and tourism in Haiti's future, which would undoubtedly lead to increased economic development and more stable conditions in the country. Prime Minister Harper promised continued support of the Caribbean nation, indicating that the relatively new Conservative Canadian administration views Canadian financial assistance to Haiti as a priority in the two countries' relationship. Ironically, during Préval's visit to Ontario and Quebec, Interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue who is to leave office on May 14, asked the Canadian government to lift the travel ban on several former Haitian officials (accused but not charged of human rights abuses), stating "Help us, forget about that... give a chance to all Haitians now to be able to reconcile once again and be able to work together," according to the Canada-based newsletter Embassy.

Beating the Brush for Aid

Préval has also moved his diplomacy into new international arenas, somewhat to the dismay of Washington, which already warily associates him with Aristide—who the State Department abominated. In April, Préval visited Cuba and Venezuela, where he discussed aid in health care, education, and electricity. The Préval-Castro meetings were particularly significant since the country is in dire need of the doctors Cuba could provide, as well as medical training for Haitian students in Cuba's universities. Following the Havana visit, Préval had a 24-hour stay in Venezuela on April 24, where he discussed with Chávez possible Venezuelan aid in health and education, as well as Haiti's entry into Venezuela's Petrocaribe program, which provides poor Central American and Caribbean nations with discounted or bartered oil. Assistance from Cuba and Venezuela could play a key role in Préval's attempt to rebuild Haiti.

Importantly, Préval made his first visit to the Dominican Republic in March, where he dialogued with President Fernandez on the vitally important immigration issues that dominate the relationship between the neighboring countries. Préval then continued to Brazil, where he met with Brazilian president Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva, to discuss infrastructure projects, as well as thank Brazil for its troop support in Haiti under the Brazilian led UN mission MINUSTAH, later traveling to Argentina and Chile.

Washington's Worries

Washington will, as always, be scrutinizing what is happening on the island. Policymakers are undoubtedly troubled by Préval's ties to Aristide and his decision to build relationships with such "pink tide" countries as Venezuela. What the U.S. mainly wants from Preval is to get Haiti off its agenda as soon as possible and at the lowest cost. It also will insist that Preval clamp down on any revival of the "boat people" trying to illegally enter this country.

This is, of course, Washington's primary concern, as a renewed instability would lead to a higher number of illegal Haitian immigrant boats floating towards Florida's shores, a problem Washington is eager to avoid. This may give Préval some much needed autonomy to formulate policies and build alliances that, while untraditional, may ultimately benefit Haiti. Thus, Préval's attempts towards domestic, as well as international cooperation, including Cuban and Venezuelan aid to Haiti may not produce an immediate backlash. For decades, until the present, the State Department has been content to allow lower policy standards, based on the working philosophy that since it is only Haiti, the best need not be required.

As Florida Governor Jeb Bush prepares to lead a U.S. delegation to Haiti for Préval's official inauguration on Sunday, unfortunately very few will be watching the situation closely and carefully.

This analysis was prepared by COHA Research Associate Mara van den Bold

3. Haiti after the Elections: Préval's 100-Day Challenges

International Crisis Group

May 11, 2006

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4104&l=1&m=1>

Port au-Prince/Brussels, 11 May 2006: Haiti may finally overcome its troubled past, but only if the incoming president tackles longstanding security, social and economic challenges during his first 100 days.

Haiti after the Elections: Challenges for Préval's First 100 Days,* lays out an agenda for President René Préval, who is to be inaugurated on 14 May, which would allow Haiti to put years of instability, violence and economic decline behind it. The 7 February and 21 April elections yielded relatively high turnout and little violence and give Préval the chance to move the country beyond its traditional polarisation. To do so, he must reach out to the sectors that opposed him as well as his supporters and take advantage of a rare moment of optimism in the much suffering country.

“Deep structural challenges still threaten what may be Haiti's last chance to extricate itself from chaos and despair, and action in the first 100 days is vital”, says Mark L. Schneider, Crisis Group Sr. Vice President, “but then the UN and donors must make at least a ten-year commitment to help Haiti deal with security, justice, and economic growth, prioritising rural development and poverty reduction”.

For decades, large sections of society have been left out of the decision-making process. If the new government is to address its challenges effectively, civil society, peasant organisations and groups representing the rural and urban poor must be given a stake in the country's future.

Preval's first order of business should be to capitalise on the improved security situation by addressing the underlying causes of violence and crime, including mending political divisions. This has to include disarming and demobilising gangs in the city and ex-military in the countryside. The Haitian National Police (HNP) must be professionalised, strengthened and purged of corrupt officers. The judicial system must be overhauled, beginning with establishing a joint international and national judicial panel to review the cases of political prisoners detained without trial.

The most cost-effective investment now for the UN, OAS and its member states is to help ensure stabilisation and security in the country.

Alain Deletroz, Crisis Group's Latin America Program Director, says, "Haitians have high expectations that the new government will quickly improve their standard of living, and they must see from Préval that a new chapter has indeed opened in their history. Otherwise, Haiti could become the hemisphere's first permanent failed state".

4. Haiti's first census in 24 years uncovers pressing problems, UN agency says May 11, 2006

UN News Centre

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=18421&Cr=haiti&Cr1=>

10 May 2006 – Haiti's first census in 24 years shows that half of the Caribbean country's population is younger than 20, unemployment is a staggering 33 per cent and less than half of the school-age children are attending primary school, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which helped finance the effort, said today.

"The census offers a map of where the direst needs are in Haiti," UNFPA's representative in the country, Hernando Clavijo, said. "The population structure in itself, with an overwhelming majority of young people, means that more resources should be put into education and reproductive health services."

Related studies of the data collected show that Haiti's maternal mortality ratio is the highest in the Western Hemisphere, with 523 deaths per 100,000 live births, UNFPA said.

Last year Haiti placed 153rd out of the 177 countries studied for the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report 2005 on maternal mortality. Regionally this ranking compared with Barbados at number 30 and Cuba at number 52.

Haiti's HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of between 4 and 5 per cent is also the highest in the Western Hemisphere, UNFPA said.

Haiti's Ministry of Finance and the Statistics and Informatics Institute conducted the \$8 million census, the fourth in the country's history. It employed 25,000 people and was funded by the Government of Haiti, UNFPA, the Inter-American Development Bank, the

European Union (EU), the Government of Japan and the Government of the Walloon Region of Belgium.

5. Gov. Bush to attend swearing-in

Associated Press

Miami Herald

May 11, 2006

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/14550583.htm>

President Bush has tapped his brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, to lead the U.S. delegation to the inauguration Sunday of René Préval as Haiti's first elected president in two years.

"Haiti's a very important country as it relates to Florida and the United States, and I'm honored to be able to go," Jeb Bush said Wednesday before departing for an annual hurricane conference in Fort Lauderdale.

Préval's predecessor and political mentor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted during a rebellion in 2004. Aristide is living in exile in South Africa.

Préval, an agronomist who served as Haiti's president from 1996 through 2001, was elected in February but his inaugural was delayed until after a new parliament was elected in April.

"Haiti's had significant issues in developing a mature democracy and the elections are an important step in that regard," Jeb Bush said. "I hope it brings enough stability so that the economy can improve there and the level of poverty and the level of despair will begin to subside."

The U.S. delegation will include Florida Secretary of Health M. Rony Francois, a Haitian American.

6. Haiti Legislators Sworn In, Hold Session

By Stevenson Jacobs

The Associated Press

The Washington Post

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/09/AR2006050901462.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Haiti's first parliament in two years was formally installed Tuesday as President-elect Rene Preval prepared to take office and steer this impoverished nation toward stability.

Amid boisterous cheers from supporters, legislators in the Senate took the oath of office, following deputies in the lower house by a day.

Preval, who served as Haiti's president from 1996 to 2001, takes power Sunday in front of the parliament, which hasn't convened since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a February 2004 uprising.

Stephen Benoit, a deputy from Preval's Lespwa party, said the body's biggest challenge will be finishing its four-year term _ something that's never occurred in Haiti's chaotic 202-year history.

"That's the first challenge, to last the four years without a coup d'etat, without the president saying you're not going to finish your term," Benoit said after deputies held their first legislative session. "The population is counting on us. We need to deliver and we need to deliver quickly."

But getting work done won't be easy.

Preval has had to reach out to rival parties for legislative support since Lespwa, which means "hope" in Creole, lacks a majority in parliament.

Preval told reporters Tuesday that he would work to form "cohesion" among Haiti's fractured society, including the former ruling Lavalas party of Aristide.

Rudy Heriveaux, a Lavalas senator, said the party was ready to work for "national reconciliation" but will call on Preval to release dozens of Aristide allies jailed without charge under the U.S.-backed interim government. Among those jailed is Aristide's former prime minister, Yvon Neptune, who is accused of orchestrating killings of political opponents but has yet to be tried.

He added that Lavalas would also seek Aristide's return from exile in South Africa.

Preval, a former Aristide ally, has said that Haitian law allows Aristide to return, but hasn't said if he would welcome back his one-time political mentor.