

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for November 17-28, 2006.

Two opposing views of Haiti's current security situation were offered by Reuters and The Independent (UK). Andrew Buncombe of The Independent (UK) reports "Fewer kidnappings, improved security" citing UN Mission (MINUSTAH) statistics of a steady decline in kidnappings since August (only 12 reported in November, down from 78 in August). Other tangible improvements include a reduced UN military presence replaced by greater police circulation and presence in areas such as Cite Soleil. A MINUSTAH spokesman notes "fewer gang shootings against MINUSTAH." Positive economic indicators show the administration "passed a budget, is cautiously collecting taxes and has been promised around \$750m in international aid. Inflation is estimated to have fallen to around nine per cent from sixteen per cent and the IMF expects the economy to grow by 2.5 per cent." The judiciary and investigative processes are back at work. Buncombe is the only journalist to have twice cited the Lancet/Wayne State University researchers' results that estimated a death toll of 8,000 people and 30,000 rapes during the interim government of Gerard Latortue. In contrast to The Independent story, Reuters reports a sharp rise in kidnappings (30 in September, 40 in October and 100 in November).

"Haiti on the mend?" from The Economist also reports improved security and a conservative viewpoint. The Economist clearly supports a continued UN MINUSTAH presence. Even if the need for peacekeeping troops wanes, they can justify their presence by "offering developmental assistance and training, as well as giving advice and help on reforming the police and the judicial and penal systems."

The latest attempts to push the HOPE bill through Congress saw renewed media coverage. A Miami Herald Op-Ed supports HOPE, granting Haiti expanded "duty-free access to U.S. markets for clothes made in Haiti with fabrics from third countries." The crux of the Herald's argument is basically that "any economic improvement that keeps Haitians from trying to migrate illegally to U.S. shores is in the best interest of our country." A Washington Post Op-Ed also supports HOPE. The Post offered an illuminating comment of historical US intervention in Haiti (securing US interests) as opposed to actually shoring up Haitian sovereignty and development "when it comes to Haiti, the hemisphere's poorest country, the United States has a perverse history of being more generous with its troop deployments than its terms of trade. The time is ripe for a new approach." The Wall Street Journal highlights the broader and more obscure political hurdles facing Washington's support for trade deals such as Haiti's HOPE bill. Voters in the US elections earlier this month cast their votes decidedly against their elected officials' support of trade deals that directly affected local industries, such as Southern textile manufacturers.

A Reuters story asks Haiti's donors to consider greater support for building a strong Haitian civil service at the upcoming donor's conference (November 30). The Haitian government is asking for support to train and finance civil servants while donors are considering "ideas such as creating a multilateral trust fund run by the World Bank to

channel any money pledged.” The special UN envoy to Haiti urged the European Union to increase its aid to Haiti in support of government reform. Edmond Mulet reiterated the prevailing sentiment that Haiti is on the right track.

The Miami Herald’s Jacqueline Charles airs her familiar hopelessness for Haitian democracy and sovereignty saying “many questions remain about the upcoming vote, ranging from concerns about Haiti’s ability to pull off a successful ballot to possible violence and doubts on whether the country can continue to afford so many elections.” Who is asking these questions? The CEP has apparently made some improvements since the February elections namely “adding 32 new voting centers, bringing the total to 834 encompassing 9,228 polling stations, to lessen complaints by voters that they have to walk too far to vote.”

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1. Fewer kidnappings, improved security - but life remains harsh on the streets of Haiti

By Andrew Buncombe in Port-au-Prince

The Independent, UK

27 November 2006

<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article2018683.ece>

Sheltering from the sun beneath a tattered piece of plastic in the crowded streets of Salamoun market, Jacqueline Charles shrugged when asked whether life had improved under the government of the man she voted for.

"We are thinking life will be better. Maybe one day," said the 60-year-old, who was selling rice. "[So far] there has been no real change. Only God knows. I voted for change but things cannot change right away."

Anyone looking for signs of improvement in Haiti has a frustrating and arduous task and this teeming market in the centre of the capital, Port-au-Prince, where some of the city's most beleaguered residents try to scrape out a living, may not be best place to start. But

six months after René Préval was sworn in as president of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere there are small, if flickering, signs that some sort of progress is being made.

Perhaps most noticeable is an improvement in the security situation, a factor that has long disrupted life in the capital city and which had threatened both the poor, which make up the overwhelming majority of the population, and the middle-class.

Streets that were once occupied by UN soldiers in armoured vehicle are no less chaotic but the troops are being deployed less visibly. And, vitally, the spate of kidnappings by armed gangs - a phenomenon that late last year had soared to extraordinary levels - appears to be in decline.

Figures provided to The Independent by the UN Mission in Haiti (Minustah) suggest that kidnappings have fallen every month since August when there were 78, to 45 in September, 27 in October and 12 to date in November.

"The security situation in the impoverished areas of the city is somewhat improved. In Cite Soleil the national police have established a presence for the first time in three years," said spokesman David Wimhurst. "This does not mean the situation is resolved, but it is better than it was."

He said that Minustah troops were still routinely deployed in some areas of the city which have traditionally seen most violence from armed gangs, but he added: "There are fewer shootings from the gangs towards Minustah, but they continue nonetheless, and the gangs are still present, even if less able to undertake criminal activities as a result of our military operations."

Small but important steps have also been made from an economic perspective. Mr Préval's administration has passed a budget, is cautiously collecting taxes and has been promised around \$750m in international aid. Inflation is estimated to have fallen to around nine per cent from sixteen per cent and the IMF expects the economy to grow by 2.5 per cent.

"There is some kind of window of opportunity and the sense of stability that the country has some future," Edmond Mulet, the UN's special envoy to Haiti recently told the Associated Press. "It's still a fragile situation. I wouldn't say we've turned a corner yet, but I think in the next months we'll be able to assume that, hopefully."

Another area in which Mr Préval's government has drawn praise is its apparent readiness to reinstall the judicial and investigate process - something that had been ignored under the previous, interim government headed by Gerard Latortue. Judge Claudy Gasant, a government investigator who fled in fear to the US several years ago during his inquiry into the killing of a journalist, has been brought back as a director of prosecutions. The country's criminal courts have in recent months heard a flurry of cases.

"There is a sense that there is a stronger political will to pursue certain sensitive cases and to start to combat impunity," said Helen Spraos, country director of the British charity Christian Aid. "This is not to say that there are not still very serious problems with the legal system here, but it least it's going in the right direction."

Yet the pressing challenge for Mr Préval is to somehow seize this opportunity to bring about change in the lives of those people who voted him earlier this year - the country's huge numbers of desperately poor and vulnerable people. Supporters, in essence, like the women in the market place. Clearly the very large number of people at the bottom of the pile in Haiti do not believe their lives have so far been improved.

"Things have not changed. We have not seen a change," said another of the market traders at Salamoun, Jocelyn LaCrette. Asked what would make life better for her and her colleagues, she replied: "Food and security."

It is difficult to overestimate the impoverishment and hardship faced by Haiti's poor. More than three-quarters of the population survives below the official UN poverty line of two dollars a day while more than 50 per cent exist on just one dollar a day and are officially considered to be in "abject poverty". Not only is Haiti the poorest country in the western hemisphere but it is one of the poorest outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

In the worst of the city's slums, such as the notorious waterside shanty known as City Soleil, the squalor and misery that is mainstay of every day existence is difficult to describe. Less than half the nation's population has access to clean water and Haiti is ranked with Somalia and Afghanistan as having the worst worldwide daily calorific deficit per head of the population.

"Life is just too hard for the Haitian people," said Alex Toyo, a taxi driver who lives near the historic but crumbling Olofsson Hotel in the city centre. "There has been some improvement in the security but not in the economy. People are frustrated."

Alongside this crushing poverty there is a very small middle class and a small, often lighter-skinned elite that live in the small enclave of Petionville, a district of Port-au-Prince set high on the mountainside, overlooking the ocean and overlooking the poverty. The country's Gini coefficient - a statistical tool that measures economic inequality - stands at 0.65, worse even than Brazil which is considered one of the world's most unequal nations.

Such a situation does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, Haiti has long suffered from a series of corrupt dictators, economic isolation and political interference. The country's previous elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted in February 2004 following an uprising supported by elements in Washington.

In the two years of rule by the interim government imposed by the US, French and Canadian governments, members of Mr Aristide's Lavalas party suffered widespread political repression, violence and imprisonment. One survey carried out by researchers at

Wayne State University in Michigan estimated that 8,000 people may have been killed and as many as 30,000 raped during this period.

Mr Aristide had previously been ousted in a CIA-backed coup in 1991 but he was reinstated with the help of US Marines three years later as a result of intervention by President Bill Clinton. But Mr Aristide's return to office came with a price: the international community insisted that if he wanted to receive aid to help his country he must also adopt a series of "liberal" economic measures to ensure the competitiveness of the country's labour pool. He was told to put aside his plans to impose price controls on some foods and to increase the minimum wage.

The result of this long-term policy insisted by the international community has brought few obvious benefits to the Haitian people. Indeed, the virtual absence of tariffs on imports has led to devastation within the country's agricultural sector - traditionally its largest area of export and its biggest income earner. Today in Port-au-Prince one is as likely to be eating rice, milk, and even sugar imported from the US - where these industries are heavily subsidised - than to be eating locally produced foods.

Whether Mr Aristide will ever return from exile in South Africa remains unclear. During his election campaign Mr Préval indicated there was nothing to prevent his return. He has also overseen the release from jail of a number of high profile colleagues of Mr Aristide, including former prime minister Yvonne Neptune.

Among the other high profile prisoners released earlier this year was the folk singer and Aristide ally Anne Auguste, also known as So-Anne or "Sister Anne". She had been imprisoned without formal charge for two-and-a-half years having been initially seized by US Marines who claimed she was a threat to them. Having been released after spending 826 days in jail, So-Anne is now helping her husband, Wilfred Lavaud, in his bid to become the mayor of the city's Delmas district.

In an interview at her home she spoke of the appalling conditions inside the women's prison located in Petionville and also of the need for the international community to help Mr Préval's government succeed. It had been more than 200 years since the country's rose up and achieved independence, she said, and still it was fighting for its freedom.

"If Préval is failing, everyone is failing" she said. "Haiti is a country that has struggled since 1804. We are in a hole now, struggling. We are still fighting. 2006 and we are the same. It's very bad."

2. Kidnappings, violent crime surge in Haiti

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

28 Nov 2006

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N27175023.htm>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- Kidnappings and other violent crimes have increased in Haiti in recent weeks, and Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis on Monday blamed the surge partly on criminals deported by the United States.

As many as 100 people have been kidnapped for ransom in November, according to the Coalition of Victims and Friends of Victims of Kidnappings, a group that assists relatives.

"The situation is very serious," Reginald Delva, the group's leader, said.

According to police statistics, 40 kidnappings were reported in October and 30 in September. There seems to be no pattern to the abductions and they are not confined to any particular social class or group.

"We have noted a considerable increase in kidnappings," said Stanley Ralph Brice, police director for the West department (province), which includes the teeming capital, Port-au-Prince. "We have also noted several killings over the past few days."

Brice declined to comment on possible reasons for the surge.

Even with the presence of an 8,300-member United Nations peacekeeping force, Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has struggled to contain gang and political violence since a bloody rebellion ousted then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.

At least two recent kidnapping victims, a 20-year-old woman and a 6-year-old boy, were killed even after ransoms were paid.

The woman, Fara Natacha Dessources, was found dead last week after being kidnapped and tortured by gunmen outside the capital. She was shot several times and one of her arms was broken.

The body of the boy, Carl Rubens Francillion, was found near Cap-Haitien on Haiti's north coast, police said. He was kidnapped in Port-au-Prince.

At a news conference on Monday, Alexis said criminals sent to Haiti by the United States were partly at fault for the surge in crime and at least two deportees were sought in the woman's death.

"We are not going stand idly by. We are doing everything we can to arrest these criminals and bring them to justice," said Alexis.

Haitian officials have long complained that the United States sends dozens of Haitian criminals to the Caribbean island each month after they have finished serving their U.S. prison time. With its feeble judicial system and police force, the impoverished nation is ill-equipped to deal with them.

Human rights activist Renan Hedouville, who heads the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, blamed the surge in violence in part on the police and judiciary.

"The police should be vetted and the judicial system reformed for the struggle against criminality to be effective," Hedouville said.

3. Haiti on the mend?

Nov 20th 2006

From the Economist Intelligence Unit

http://www.economist.com/agenda/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8195170

The country is hardly stable, but the president is popular

Despite an overall improvement in security, violent incidents in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, continue to highlight the still-fragile nature of the stability that has largely prevailed since the February 2006 elections. However, the new president, René Prével, who won 51% of the vote in the elections, and his Lespwa (Hope) party enjoy strong support from the foreign governments and multilateral agencies engaged in the country. They also benefit from the goodwill, at least for the time being, of the majority of Haitians.

The small but powerful and wealthy elite remains suspicious of the threat that it believes Mr Prével's government poses to its interests, but the desire for progress on reconciliation and national dialogue, which was one of the most conspicuous failures of the March 2004-May 2006 interim government, is likely to see the majority of the political players willing to co-operate to some degree.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Mr Prével's presidency will present itself not in the form of opposition from the country's elite or the risk of political deadlock, but from the risk that slow movement on improving the living conditions of ordinary Haitians might translate into a sense of disillusionment and a sharp drop in public support for his administration. Efforts would be complicated if this led to increasing demands by supporters of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL, the party of the former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted in early 2004), many of whom voted for Mr Prével, for the return of the former president from exile. Steps that Mr Prével has already taken to foster support and promote a sense of inclusive government are positive signs.

Hoping to avoid deadlock

Given Lespwa's lack of a majority in the legislature (it has one-fifth of the seats in the House of Deputies and one-third in the Senate), the government will have to forge parliamentary alliances to advance its policy agenda and avoid the political stalemate that beset Mr Prével during much of his previous term as prime minister in 1996-2001. Mr Prével's consciousness of the need to foster a sense of co-operation among other parties is illustrated by the inclusion in his cabinet of representatives of six different parties. The passage, on time, of the budget for fiscal year 2006/07 (October-September), and the government's willingness to incorporate amendments to it by both the House of

Assembly and the Senate provide further positive signs of the willingness of the parliament and the executive to work together.

To consolidate improvements in the security situation made since the since the start of 2006, rapid movement will also be needed in increasing economic opportunity for marginalised groups, disarmament, and the reform and strengthening of the Police Nationale d'Haïti (PNH, the national police force). Strengthening the rule of law will also be a prerequisite for the government's strategy of attracting private investment to foster economic growth, as will reform of the judicial and penal systems to combat corruption and public mistrust of these institutions.

International goodwill is key

Mr Préval has used the period since his election to bolster international support through a series of official foreign visits. He will need to call on the goodwill of the international community to provide backing for the implementation of rapid impact projects that will improve social infrastructure, as well as providing employment.

The support of the governments of the US, France and Canada, Haiti's main trade partners and aid donors, as well as that of multilateral agencies such as the IMF, the UN and the World Bank, will be needed to ensure the continuation of both multilateral and bilateral aid flows in 2007-08. Both Mr Préval and the international players most engaged in Haiti, especially the US, will be keen to avoid the destabilising effect that the possible return of Mr Aristide from exile in South Africa would pose, at least in the short term. The mandate of the Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti (Minustah, the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti) will face little opposition within the UN Security Council to the extension of its mandate for a further six months before it expires on February 15th 2007.

Assuming the improvements made since the start of 2006 in stabilising the security situation can be consolidated, Minustah's role is likely to be broadened from one principally of peacekeeping to one of offering developmental assistance and training, as well as giving advice and help on reforming the police and the judicial and penal systems. However, the extent to which Minustah is able to change its role will depend on the level of financing made available to enable the mission to implement infrastructure projects in Haiti. A UN presence in the country to help provide security is likely to be necessary for several years.

4. Making clothes could be an economic boost

Miami Herald

November 28, 2006

OUR OPINION: APPROVE EXPANDED U.S. TRADE PREFERENCES FOR HAITI

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/opinion/16111527.htm>

When Congress reconvenes on Dec. 5 for the end of its lame-duck session, there will be little time to do more than the essential. Yet there is a chance to approve crucial trade preferences for Haiti -- and lawmakers should take it.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., has been preparing a trade bill with the hope of passing it before the end of the year. Both he and incoming chairman, Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., are supporters of the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity Partnership Encouragement Act. This HOPE bill would grant duty-free access to U.S. markets for clothes made in Haiti with fabrics from third countries.

Such trade benefits could revive a Haitian apparel-assembly industry that is in danger of disappearing. Although it once employed more than 100,000 people, the industry now supports only 20,700 jobs. Yet making clothes remains key in an economy where more than two-thirds of the work force lacks a formal job.

President René Préval and other Haitian leaders say that the HOPE Act could help jump start Haiti's moribund economy by creating employment for tens of thousands of workers. Just keeping factories open would be a boon for a country with a devastated infrastructure and beset by violence, high financing costs and global competition.

Ultimately, any economic improvement that keeps Haitians from trying to migrate illegally to U.S. shores is in the best interest of our country. Unfortunately, for four years the U.S. textile industry has beaten back trade benefits that might have prevented the loss of Haiti's apparel-factory jobs.

The U.S. House should pass the HOPE bill, which would be reconciled with the HERO bill (S. 2261) that already has been approved by the Senate. Promoted by Rep. Kendrick B. Meek, D-Miami, the HERO bill's better trade benefits should be favored by Congress to boost Haiti's fledging democracy.

5. Help for Haiti

A time for trade, not troops

Washington Post Op-Ed

Monday, November 27, 2006

WHEN IT COMES to Haiti, the hemisphere's poorest country, the United States has a perverse history of being more generous with its troop deployments than its terms of trade. The time is ripe for a new approach.

For the past two years, Congress has turned a deaf ear to pleas that Washington extend trade preferences to Haitian-manufactured T-shirts, hospital scrubs and other apparel. The effect has been devastating for the nation's garment industry, once one of the few bright spots in an otherwise supine economy. Clothing assembly plants, already hit hard by the political violence of recent years, are closing nearly every month as customers move their business to Asia. A sector that once provided 100,000 jobs now employs only 12,000 to 20,000 and stands in peril of disappearing entirely.

6. Haiti's Trade Push Hits New Political Head Wind

By GREG HITT

Wall Street Journal

November 27, 2006

http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB116459085414433165-RCPTD7X0tLKAjlv0hO34JHH72zQ_20061226.html?mod=tff_main_tff_top

WASHINGTON -- Haiti's struggle to persuade Congress to help its apparel makers underscores a new reality: In the political climate on Capitol Hill, even small trade gestures face big hurdles.

Haiti is trying to secure passage of an initiative that would allow the Caribbean country to use non-American-made material in garments destined for the U.S., while still qualifying for duty-free access. Currently, Haitian garments must be made from material produced in the U.S., or in some cases from the Caribbean region, to get duty-free treatment. Using foreign-made fabric, such as from China, could significantly lower production costs for Haitian garments makers and make their goods more competitive in global markets.

Haiti exported \$447 million in goods to the U.S. in 2005, a fraction of total U.S. imports. Haitian officials say the deal could create as many as 40,000 sorely needed jobs there.

Lawmakers from textile-heavy states, worried the initiative would result in the widespread use of inexpensive Chinese fabric by Haitian garment makers, temporarily got the deal shelved earlier this fall. Haiti and a diverse group of supporters -- including the Catholic Church, American companies and musician Wyclef Jean -- have since renewed the campaign to push through the deal. But with voter concern over globalization having tipped important races in midterm elections and helped Democrats retake Congress, Haiti now faces an even-tougher environment, trade experts said.

"There's going to be a pronounced change of tone, from a period of accommodation and negotiation to litigation and enforcement," said Dan Ikenson, associate director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank.

Mr. Ikenson said small countries like Haiti aren't going to find much political support in Washington as lawmakers from both parties pull back from free-trade initiatives. Peru and Colombia, which have sealed deals with the U.S. that await congressional approval, could also be affected.

Underscoring the sensitivity of the trade issue, the House earlier this month failed to pass legislation that would end Cold War-era trade restrictions on Vietnam and give it the same benefits as other U.S. trading partners in the World Trade Organization. The bill's defeat shocked the Bush administration, which had hoped Congress would approve the measure in time for the president's visit to Vietnam last week for a regional summit.

As needy as Haiti may be, lawmakers from textile-producing states and industry lobbyists say a similar fate could befall the proposed Haiti bill. They contend the measure would

open a new loophole in U.S. trade laws, exposing already stressed domestic producers to new levels of foreign competition.

"We can stop it," pledged Cass Johnson, president of the National Council of Textile Organizations, the largest U.S. textile-industry group. "If Vietnam shows anything, it will fail."

The increased protectionist environment is a cause of concern for Haiti's finance minister, Daniel Dorsainvil, who was in town earlier this month trying to drum up support among U.S. lawmakers for the Haiti bill. At the start, he was hopeful of gathering support, but after making the rounds for two days, he conceded, "It's not 100% guaranteed."

The Haiti trade proposal has been in the works for years, but really emerged as a divisive issue this fall. Perhaps the most controversial proposal on the table would allow Haiti garment makers to produce as much as 60 million square yards of woven apparel, such as chinos and denim jeans, with foreign-made material, while still qualifying for duty-free access to the U.S. Haiti's backers say that accounts for less than 1% of the U.S.'s overall apparel imports each year.

Supporters say the deal would give Haiti greater flexibility to meet the requests of retailers, and is needed to restore some competitive edge Haiti lost after Congress conferred special trade benefits last year on the Dominican Republic and five Central American nations.

Haiti is by far the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, with four-fifths of its 8.3 million people living in poverty, and newly elected president René Préval is grappling with the spread of AIDS, unreliable electrical service and criminal gangs, as he seeks to revive the economy. "We need these jobs," said Mr. Dorsainvil.

At the end of September, House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas, a California Republican, folded the Haiti measure into a larger trade package aimed at helping poor countries, including in Africa. But only days after the package was introduced, Mr. Johnson and other textile lobbyists, working with House allies, persuaded Republican leaders to shelve the bill, after raising alarms about the Haiti measure. The maneuvering underscored the political leverage wielded by the textile industry.

After the setback, a loose coalition of business and religious interests with ties to Haiti began working quietly to revive the proposal. On Sept. 26, the day after the bill was pulled, the Catholic archbishop of Cincinnati wrote to House Majority Leader John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, to urge reconsideration.

An executive at Cintas Corp., an Ohio-based uniform firm with an apparel plant in Haiti, called Mr. Boehner's office. "For Haiti, it's a big deal," said Glenn Larsen, Cintas's vice president of manufacturing. Mr. Larsen said the proposed trade benefits for Haiti would allow his company to nearly double the work force at its plant there from 1,100.

At the time, Mr. Boehner said he would be open to reviving the bill after the midterm election.

As lawmakers left to campaign in late September, Haiti's allies built support among voters. Father Andrew Small, a trade strategist at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, distributed an alert to 1,000 Catholic leaders around the country, urging them to press lawmakers to back the bill. He distributed a letter signed by leaders of the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church to every congressional office.

The week after the midterm elections, Mr. Dorsainvil, Haiti's finance minister, arrived in Washington to make a push for the legislation. His timing was ill-fated: That day, the Vietnam bill went down on the House floor.

Undaunted, Mr. Dorsainvil toured Capitol Hill with Haiti's ambassador to the U.S. and Mr. Jean, the musician, who also is the ambassador's nephew. They visited several lawmakers, including Rep. Charles Rangel, the New York Democrat who is set to take over the House Ways and Means Committee, the starting point for all trade bills in Congress. They also met with Mr. Boehner's chief of staff.

Mr. Jean later performed at a Capitol Hill reception, urging staffers, lawmakers and lobbyists to step up efforts for Haiti. A spokesman for Mr. Boehner said no formal decision has been made about how to proceed. But House Republican leaders have discussed bringing the Africa and Haiti package to a vote in early December, when Congress is expected to make another run at approving the Vietnam measure.

Mr. Rangel is supportive, suggesting that he isn't a knee-jerk opponent of free trade but sees moral and foreign-policy reasons for helping Haiti. Being able to see trade in those terms could help Mr. Rangel reach across party lines, since the Bush administration at times defends its own trade priorities in similar ways.

The Vietnam and Haiti-Africa packages could face resistance. Rep. Robin Hayes, a Republican who represents a textile-heavy district in North Carolina, led the opposition against Haiti earlier this fall, and he is less inclined to compromise now. Mr. Hayes had expected to cruise to re-election, but encountered a challenge from a Democrat who made much of the congressman's support for the Central America Free Trade Agreement in 2005. Nov. 7's election results were so close that a full recount is likely.

When lawmakers returned the week after the election, Mr. Hayes chided Republican leaders for bringing up the Vietnam legislation. He voted against the bill, and said he is opposed to helping Haiti if that trade deal comes up again.

"It's a way for China to get around quota agreements in place," a Hayes spokeswoman said.

7. UN says Haiti donors should focus on civil service
28 Nov 2006

Reuters

By Sabina Zawadzki

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L28225292.htm>

BRUSSELS, Nov 28 (Reuters) - An international donors meeting for Haiti should focus on helping it build a civil service to deal with the problems it faces after retreating from the brink of civil war, a senior United Nations official said on Tuesday.

Haiti is recovering from decades of political violence topped by a 2004 ouster of then-leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, but remains one of the world's poorest countries, plagued by brutal armed gangs, corruption and poor infrastructure. The donors conference, taking place in Madrid on Thursday, aims to pledge money for the mid- and long-term development of the Caribbean country. The U.N. says the majority of Haiti's state budget comes from international aid. Donors had already pledged \$750 million in July for Haiti's immediate economic needs, but without a functioning administration this money had been poorly absorbed, U.N. special envoy Edmond Mulet told reporters.

"They already received a lot of money, which is in the coffers of the government, but they don't have the administrative capacity, the civil servants to even spend that money," he told reporters.

"That is why ... one of the main requests of the Haitian government to the international community will be to help the government to help train and finance civil servants' jobs -- to create the administrative structures which don't exist anymore."

Countries including the United States and organisations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, which are all due to attend, will discuss Haiti's request.

They will consider ideas such as creating a multilateral trust fund run by the World Bank to channel any money pledged.

Haiti said in July it needed \$7 billion to help revive its moribund economy through investment in roads, agriculture, tourism and institutional reform.

Mulet said Thursday's conference had no targets for a final sum.

8. Special U.N. envoy to Haiti calls on EU to send more aid to impoverished country
International Herald Tribune, AP

November 28, 2006

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/11/28/europe/EU_GEN_EU_UN_Haiti.php

BRUSSELS, Belgium: The special U.N. envoy to Haiti urged the European Union on Tuesday to send more aid to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, saying it was key to make sure government reform would continue.

"The situation in Haiti right now is very difficult and very complicated," Edmond Mulet said. But "I can say confidently that we are on the right track."

Mulet was in Brussels to discuss the Caribbean country's situation with several European Parliament members before heading to Spain to take part in an international donors conference scheduled for Thursday.

Haiti, a country of 8 million, is struggling to recover from a bloody 2004 rebel uprising that toppled then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and pushed the country deeper into despair.

Recent unrest has come just weeks before municipal elections are scheduled to take place on Dec. 3. Earlier this month, around 100 university students in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, staged a protest calling for the removal of U.N. peacekeepers from the country and two Jordanian peacekeepers were killed.

Mulet said despite the recent unrest, much progress has been made toward stabilizing the country. He credited the Haitian government for its efforts to prevent corruption and establishing order, but said international aid was crucial in furthering the progress that has been made.

"Almost 60 percent of the Haitian budget comes from international donors," Mulet said. "The international community should get more involved in Haiti right now and try to support this enormous window of opportunity we have there."

Last week, European Development Commissioner Louis Michel visited Haiti to discuss the EU's pledge of €233 million (US \$293 million) in aid.

9. Shots Fired at Anti-U.N. Rally in Haiti

By STEVENSON JACOBS

The Associated Press

Washington Post

Saturday, November 18, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Gunfire rang out Saturday during a street protest by university students demanding the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeepers from Haiti, and witnesses said two demonstrators were wounded.

About 100 protesters were marching through Port-au-Prince's downtown when gunfire erupted, scattering demonstrators. Witnesses said a security guard at a nearby bank fired the shots and was later arrested by police after protesters threatened to lynch him. It was not clear what prompted the shooting.

Two students were wounded by bullets, one in the leg and the other in the back, witnesses said.

Shortly after the shooting, protesters regrouped and came upon three U.N. civilian police officers. Associated Press journalists saw protesters chase after the Filipino officers and throw rocks. U.N. police spokesman Fred Blaze said one Filipino police officer was slightly injured but could not give details.

Earlier in the day, the students from the Human Sciences Faculty of the state-run University of Haiti marched on a main road, chanting "U.N. get out!" and "Haiti is not your home!"

Demonstrators, some with their faces covered, smashed the windshield of a passing U.N. vehicle and threw rocks at other cars, witnesses said. They later cornered a white SUV and spray painted the words "Down with the U.N." on the side. No injuries were reported.

It followed a series of other demonstrations calling for the exit of U.N. troops, who arrived in June 2004 to quell unrest after rebels forced out former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Protesters accuse the blue-helmeted troops of failing to curb violence and of firing indiscriminately during slum raids, wounding and killing civilians. The U.N. says it only fires when attacked.

The 8,800-strong U.N. mission has beefed up patrols in the capital since two Jordanian peacekeepers were shot to death on Nov. 10. The soldiers were returning to base when they were surprised by unknown gunmen.

10. 29,000 candidates on Haiti's ballot
Haiti is preparing to hold its long-overdue local elections.
BY JACQUELINE CHARLES
Miami Herald
November 25, 2006

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/haiti/16093748.htm>

PORT-AU-PRINCE - If you thought the 2000 Florida presidential election was mind-boggling, imagine this: 29,000 candidates jockeying for 1,420 provincial and municipal positions.

That's the enormous challenge facing Haiti's electoral officials as they prepare to finally hold long-delayed local elections on Dec. 3.

The elections are yet another critical step in putting Haiti's tenuous democracy back on course following the elections earlier this year of President René Préval and the country's first functioning parliament in nearly a decade.

"We've already elected a president and parliament. Now we have to replace the mayors and other local representatives who are not legitimate," said Micha Gaillard, a spokesman for the Fusion Social Democratic Party. In the wake of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's ouster from office in 2004, mayors were appointed by the U.S.-backed interim government.

But many questions remain about the upcoming vote, ranging from concerns about Haiti's ability to pull off a successful ballot to possible violence and doubts on whether the country can continue to afford so many elections.

The elections, whose \$14 million cost is being financed by foreign donors, marks the third time this year that Haitians will head to the polls -- presidential and legislative elections in February and a legislative runoff in April.

WINNER TAKE ALL

The Dec. 3 balloting -- which also includes elections for 14 still undecided national legislative seats -- is winner take all. But to avoid some of the other problems that plagued the February elections, the country's Provisional Electoral Council, known as CEP, is taking several steps. Among them:

- Relocating 30,000 of the 3.5 million registered voters in hopes of avoiding a repeat of chaotic scenes of voters wandering aimlessly in search of their voting spot.

"We feel fairly confident that most people are going to find their names in the . . . list that shows the picture, the names of each voter per voting station," said Jacques Bernard, director general of the CEP.

- Adding 32 new voting centers, bringing the total to 834 encompassing 9,228 polling stations, to lessen complaints by voters that they have to walk too far to vote.
- Keeping a close eye on the security situation. Though the 9,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping mission here has tightened security in the capital, sporadic violence continues to dog densely populated slums.

"There may be areas, a few little areas, where we may not be able to conduct elections," said Bernard, noting that if violence breaks out, the vote will be canceled and rescheduled in those communities only. "We are following the situation and will not make the decision until the day before."

Albert Ramdin, assistant secretary general of the Organization of American States, said that while the security issue remains challenging, he's optimistic it will not ``disturb the process."

HIGH HOPES

"The government of Haiti is ready, the electoral commission is ready, and I hope the same atmosphere, which we saw during the presidential elections, we will see again: massive turnout, high degree of discipline and orderly conduct," he told The Miami Herald after a recent visit here.

Edmond Mulet, overall head of the U.N.-mission here, said although the U.N. is less involved in the local balloting preparation than it was in the presidential elections, it stands "ready to provide" security and logistical support.

It's anyone's guess how many voters will actually cast ballots for mayors, vice mayors, town delegates and council seats. Haitians have always put more emphasis on presidential races and this year is no exception, as evidenced by the absence of campaign posters from city streets.

"The candidates are tired with the campaign," Gaillard said, adding they also are broke after two years of campaigning for elections initially set for Oct. 9, 2005.

Still, it doesn't mean the vote is any less important in a country where the majority live in rural communities.

"When you elect these local governments, it allows the country to decentralize power. You don't want a system where the powers are centralized in the capital," said Lesley Richards, a program officer for the Washington-based International Foundation for Election Systems.