

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for the period of September 15-25, 2006.

Last week's five news reports (Sept. 15-22) were most notable because they all reported on positive developments for Haiti. All five newswire reports were ignored by the print media, other than mentions in the Houston Chronicle and South Florida Sun Sentinel.

Both Reuters and AP reported on the IMF Executive Board's recent announcement that Haiti qualifies for its Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) program that also applies to World Bank debt. This is a step in the right direction, but Haiti faces at least two more years of delay before it reaches completion point and is eligible for 100% cancellation. The HIPC process assures \$14 million in debt relief in the first year and "could unlock potential additional contributions worth \$22 million" but the overwhelming bulk of relief comes at completion point following "further macroeconomic, structural and social reforms." Past IMF "reforms" imposed on Haiti have worsened Haiti's chronic poverty. In the meantime, the Haitian government will be forced to make \$60 million a year in debt payments, money that would be better spent tackling Haiti's dire health and education problems.

Over half of Haiti's public external debt (\$1.3 billion) is owed to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which participates in HIPC but has not yet followed the lead of the G-8, the IMF, and the World Bank to provide 100% debt stock cancellation. A group of US-based organizations issued a press release voicing concern that HIPC's 'medicine' (harsh economic conditionalities) will likely be worse than the 'disease' (debt). Haiti's odious and onerous debt deserves 100% immediate and unconditional cancellation as demanded in HR 888 resolution introduced in the US House of Representatives.

A South Florida Sun Sentinel (AP) article offered the only mainstream print coverage of a \$492 million US aid package offered to Haiti over a three year period, emphasizing support to job creation, healthcare and education. Another positive signal of increasing investment in Haiti is Venezuela's plan to open a branch of its 75% government-owned development bank, BANDES (Bank of Economic and Social Development) in Haiti.

Reuters reported on the Haitian Prime Minister's demand for the US to lift its 15 year-old arms embargo against Haiti. The actual policy and conditions for its removal are unclear. "The US government wants Haitian authorities to first comply with conditions set by the U.S. Congress when the decision was made to allow the shipments to the violence-torn and impoverished country." The report claims that Haiti received two arms shipments during the Interim Government and both were confiscated and currently held by the US. In fact, the Interim Government did receive and distribute at least a portion of these weapons.

The Washington Post's Sunday edition reported on U.S. officials airing of a radio advertisement in Port-au-Prince promoting disarmament. Coupled with the aforementioned demand for an end to the US-imposed arms embargo, the US-issued disarmament ad further fueled a public and governmental perception that the US is assuming an unofficial protectorate role over Haiti.

The Miami Herald, which ignored last week's positive news, and persistently ignores large-scale killings in poor neighborhoods, on Sunday reported on a single killing of a former Haitian army colonel in upscale Petionville, saying it "shows violence spreading across Haiti."

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1. Haiti eligible for major debt relief, IMF/WB say

19 Sep 2006

Source: Reuters

By Gilbert Le Gras

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-09-19T015348Z_01_SP163544_RTRIDST_0_IMF-HAITI.XML

SINGAPORE, Sept 19 (Reuters) - Haiti qualifies for a debt write-off under a major multilateral relief effort, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday, marking a new stage in donors' attempts to bolster the poorest country in the Americas.

The IMF said in July that relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative could be worth \$14 million in the first year for the impoverished, turbulent Caribbean country and could unlock potential additional contributions worth \$22 million.

"We hope that the discussion of decision point at both the IMF board and Bank board takes place in early November. At that point they could become eligible for interim debt relief," said World Bank Latin America and Caribbean director Caroline Anstey.

"They receive the bulk of the debt relief at the completion point, which follows some two or two-and-a-half years later," Anstey added. "We believe it is very important that the savings from debt relief are spent on key social areas: health, access to clean water, education."

A meeting of 26 donor countries and agencies in July topped up and extended a two-year-old aid fund with \$750 million for 13 more months after the original \$1.1 billion package expired.

Donors meet again in Spain in November to review Haiti's progress in implementing its budget and social programmes.

In a statement, IMF deputy managing director Takatoshi Kato said Haiti had a satisfactory track record but faces daunting challenges in security, social conditions and income growth.

As a result, the country would need "continued financial support from and engagement with the international community".

Last month the United Nations renewed the mandate of its 9,000-strong peacekeeping force for six months, despite U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's request for a year-long extension and a World Bank official's call for a larger security force.

The IMF's Kato said further macroeconomic, structural and social reforms, as well as close attention to improving security, would be essential in enabling Haiti to reach the point where creditors agree to reduce its debt burden.

Haiti's external debt is about \$1.3 billion, of which about \$550 million is owed to the Inter-American Development Bank, which is also considering a debt write-off.

IADB President Luis Alberto Moreno, who is attending the Singapore meetings, was not immediately available for comment.

"Immediate cancellation of Haiti's debt to the IMF, World Bank and IADB would free much-needed resources needed to fight poverty," non-governmental organisations Jubilee Network USA and Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti said in July.

To date, debt reduction packages have been approved under the HIPC initiative for 29 countries, providing \$35 billion in debt-service relief over time.

The initiative was launched in 1996 with the aim of ensuring no developing country faced a debt burden it could not manage.

2. Haiti eligible for debt-relief under IMF programme

AP

Jamaica Observer

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20060919T230000-0500_113096_OBS_HAITI_ELIGIBLE_FOR_DEBT_RELIEF_UNDER_IMF_PROGRAMME_.asp

SINGAPORE (AP) - Haiti is eligible for debt-relief under an International Monetary Fund program, a fund official has said.

The fund's executive board earlier this month in a debt sustainability analysis determined that the country was eligible for assistance, Takatoshi Kato, deputy managing director of the fund, said in a statement released Monday.

The release didn't say how much debt relief the country may receive.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, has long suffered from oppression and instability and plagued by near constant political turmoil for the past two decades.

The Caribbean country is struggling to recover from a bloody 2004 rebel uprising that toppled then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and pushed the country deeper into despair.

The board cited Haiti's "satisfactory track record" under an emergency assistance program from 2004-2006, said the statement.

"They welcomed the new government's commitment to policies aimed at sustaining macroeconomic stability and creating conditions for sustainable growth," Kato said of the IMF board.

The board members said that Haiti continues to face "daunting challenges, particularly in the areas of security, social conditions, and sustained income growth", according to Kato.

3. Haiti wants 15-year-old US arms embargo lifted

Sat Sep 16, 2006

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

http://za.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2006-09-16T083906Z_01_BAN631153_RTRIDST_0_OZATP-HAITI-20060916.XML&archived=False

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Haiti's prime minister on Friday asked Washington to lift the 15-year-old arms embargo that bars the troubled Caribbean country from buying U.S. weapons for its ill-equipped police force.

Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis said the ban was hurting Haiti's ability to ensure the safety of its 8 million people.

"How can the police be effective if they cannot get the weapons and armament they need to carry out their difficult mission?" Alexis told Reuters. "That's why we have asked the U.S. to lift the embargo."

The embargo was imposed in 1991 after the Haitian military overthrew the government of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. It was aimed at preventing the Haitian army and thugs accused of gross human rights abuses from obtaining weapons from the U.S. market.

U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Janet Sanderson said the embargo is still in place, although in 2005 the United States authorized the Haitian government to conditionally buy a limited quantity of weapons.

But U.S. officials in Haiti have prevented the Haitian government from taking possession of those two shipments of weapons, which are piled up in a warehouse at the police academy in the Petion-Ville suburb of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The U.S. government wants Haitian authorities to first comply with conditions set by the U.S. Congress when the decision was made to allow the shipments to the violence-torn and impoverished country.

The weapons were required to remain under the embassy's care," Sanderson told Reuters. "And those who would be allowed use those weapons should be vetted."

Many members of the Haitian police force, including some who served in the Haitian military, have been accused of human rights violations.

One warehoused shipment was donated by the United States to the interim government that preceded the current administration. The second was purchased by Aristide during his second term as president, but shipping was delayed to 2005 because of the unrest that forced out Aristide in 2004.

Haitian and U.S. authorities also disagreed over the U.S. policy of deporting Haitians who have served prison time in the United States, which Haiti considers a threat to its national security because it lacks the means to control them.

4. U.S. announces aid package to help stabilize Haiti

Associated Press

South Florida Sun Sentinel

September 15 2006

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/caribbean/sfl-915haitifunds,0,5097268.story?coll=sfla-news-caribbean>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- The United States on Friday announced a \$492 million U.S. aid package aimed at putting Haiti on a path to stability and lifting its stagnant economy.

The funds, to be disbursed over three years, would address the poor Caribbean nation's "enormous economic challenges" by creating jobs, increasing access to health care and education and fighting HIV/AIDS, said U.S. Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, is struggling to recover from a bloody 2004 rebel uprising that toppled former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and pushed the country deeper into despair.

President Rene Preval took power in May and has pledged to restore order, but a surge in kidnappings and other violence blamed on street gangs has raised fears that the shaky stability could crumble again.

In a report released this week, the World Bank included Haiti in a list of 26 "fragile states" at risk of collapsing because of conflict, poverty and bad governance. The report said international donors failed to help provide basic security in Haiti and had poorly timed aid disbursements.

5. Venezuela Bank Expands in Latin America

Houston Chronicle

The Associated Press

September 20, 2006

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4201872.html>

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuela's state development bank plans to open branches in Bolivia, Honduras, Guatemala and Haiti, the bank president said Wednesday.

"We foresee opening offices in Haiti, Guatemala and Honduras," said Edgard Hernandez Behrens who heads the Bank of Economic and Social Development, or Bandes, which is 75 percent owned by the Venezuelan government.

Bandes also plans to provide US\$15 million (euro12 million) in December to its Uruguayan branch, known as Cofac, and is further considering providing funds for its Union branch in Bolivia, Hernandez Behrens said.

President Hugo Chavez, whose country is the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, has lent millions for cooperative projects with friendly Latin America governments.

In March, Bandes officials purchased Cofac, an Uruguayan credit cooperative, for US\$10 million (euro8 million) and injected an additional US\$10 million (euro8 million) to capitalize it.

Chavez's government has also signed agreements with the administration of Bolivian President Evo Morales, a close ally, which have included a donation of US\$30 million (euro24 million) for social programs for the poor in the Andean country.

Chavez says he is promoting regional integration through such efforts, but his critics accuse him of squandering Venezuela's oil wealth overseas and failing to do enough to combat poverty at home.

6. U.S. radio ad fuels debate on Haitian sovereignty

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

Washington Post

Sunday, September 24, 2006

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/24/AR2006092400251.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - A radio ad urging Haitians to reveal illegal weapons caches to the U.S. Embassy has angered politicians and fueled debate on whether the troubled Caribbean nation has become a tacit U.S. protectorate.

The embassy denied any attempt on its part to undermine Haiti's sovereignty but critics say U.S. authorities have appropriated the proper role of the Haitian police.

In a paid commercial broadcast in Creole on Haitian radio, U.S. officials promise compensation to those who provide information about people who have weapons or on the location of those weapons.

Haiti has been plagued by political and gang violence since Jean-Bertrand Aristide was pushed from the presidency by a bloody rebellion in 2004. The poorest country in the Americas, it has relied since on Aristide's ouster on U.N. peacekeepers for security and on foreign aid for funds.

Efforts by police and U.N. peacekeeping forces to disarm slum gangs and former members of Haiti's disbanded army have had little success, despite assurances by some gangs that they would hand over their guns after President Rene Preval, a one-time Aristide ally, was elected this year.

It was not immediately clear whether the new advertisements would have any impact on the gun violence.

"You who are listening, if you have information about people who would hide heavy weapons, please, contact the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince," said the U.S. embassy advertisement, which provides a telephone number to call.

"The calls will be treated confidentially and you will be amply rewarded," it said.

'SECURITY CLIMATE'

A U.S. embassy spokeswoman said the initiative was not meant to threaten Haiti's sovereignty.

"We work very closely with the Haitian police and U.N. troops to improve the security climate in Haiti," she said, declining to clarify whether the information collected by the embassy would be given to Haitian police or U.N. troops.

The spokeswoman said among the tasks of the embassy was to counter threats to the security of U.S. citizens, but the embassy was also very concerned about improving the security of all Haitians.

A Haitian cabinet minister said he was offended.

"I am not a spokesman for the government, but as a cabinet member I feel offended that a foreign embassy can be allowed to air such ads in my country," he said. The minister asked not to be identified because he was not an official spokesman.

Several government officials and politicians accused the United States and other foreign powers of turning Haiti, the world's first independent black republic, into a protectorate.

"I think it's some sort of protectorate even though they did not officially call it that name," said former Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul, who ran unsuccessfully for president this year.

"I don't think Preval can make any decision without taking into account the will of those foreign powers and institutions. I don't think the Haitian embassy in the United States could have released such a commercial," he said.

7. Man's killing shows spread of violence across Haiti

BY DANI McCLAIN

Miami Herald

Sunday September 24, 2006

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/15596487.htm>

Hundreds of people packed a Kendall funeral home Saturday to bid farewell to a former commander of Haiti's army whose tragic killing 10 days ago in an upscale Port-au-Prince suburb serves as a stark reminder of Haiti's worsening violence.

Guy André François, 53, wasn't just a former colonel. He was an emblematic link between Haiti's history of bloodshed and South Florida's Haitian-American struggles. Twice, he was accused of plotting to overthrow Haiti's government.

Last year, his younger brother, Dr. M. Rony François, became Florida's secretary of health -- among the highest-ranking Haitian-Americans appointed to a state agency.

On Saturday, family, friends and strangers alike tried to make sense of François' assassination Sept. 14 in Petionville.

STILL NO ANSWERS

"Guy was killed not by foreigners, but by his countrymen," said Father Verdieu Joassaint, who officiated the services. "Why?"

The funeral service was standing-room-only. Those who came to pay their respects were packed shoulder to shoulder and spilled into the chapel's foyer. Men who had served in the military alongside François saluted their higher-ranked officers.

François' widow, Marie-Alice, sat near the open casket next to her four children -- Guy Jr., Valerie, Fabienne and Sabine.

Though he lived in Petionville, François' family buried him in the Miami area to accommodate the many family members and friends who live here, said Dr. Laurinus Pierre, director of the Center for Haitian Studies in Little Haiti and a longtime friend of François' son.

The younger François lives in the Miami area and is well known in the Haitian-American community as a music promoter, Pierre said.

The former colonel had planned to move to South Florida at the end of this month, said Eddy Altine, a Miami-Dade Department of Human Services employee and childhood friend. Altine and François both graduated from St. Louis de Gonzague, a prestigious boys' school in Port-au-Prince.

"The man worked hard all his life," Altine said. "He was in jail under Aristide, and he was trying to start his life over."

ACCUSED IN PLOT

Former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide accused François of helping to plot a December 2001 attack that Aristide said was a coup against the government. François was imprisoned soon after, many believe unjustly.

Years earlier, when he served as commander of the feared Dessalines Battalion in Port-au-Prince in 1989, he was accused of conspiring with other officers to overthrow then dictator Lt. Gen. Prosper Avril. After the failed attempt, François fled to Venezuela and later returned to Haiti.

He also served in the Department of Interior under General Raoul Cédras, who was Haiti's dictator from 1991 to 1993 after a coup against Aristide during his first presidential term.

The details surrounding François' murder remain murky. On Sept. 14, he was found dead behind the wheel of his car in Petionville, according to The Associated Press. Minutes earlier and on the same street, journalist Liliane Pierre-Paul and her brother, Stephan Pierre-Paul, were robbed.

The Pierre-Pauls were not injured, but their money, cellphones and other belongings were taken. Moments after the robbers ran away, shots rang out, Liliane Pierre-Paul told The Miami Herald. She said she believes the men who robbed her also killed François.

If François was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, his murder is further evidence that random violence is moving out of Haiti's slums and into its wealthier neighborhoods. Several months ago, the widow of former Haitian President Dumarsais Estime also was murdered on a street in Petionville.

SPREAD OF CRIME

"This is a last-resort place where people could have a good time," Pierre, the director of the Center for Haitian Studies, said of the Petionville suburb. Violent criminals "try to disrupt the kind of apparent peace they have there."

At Saturday's funeral, family members sobbed as they crowded around the open casket. The packed chapel sang How Great Thou Art and incense hung heavy in the air.

Dr. M. Rony Francois stood near the casket, receiving those who had come to pay respects. Both the secretary of health and a spokesman from his office refused to comment on Guy Francois' murder.