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**NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD CALLS ON HAITI'S ELECTED GOVERNMENT TO
RELEASE POLITICAL PRISONERS REMAINING FROM THE LATORTUE
DICTATORSHIP**

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) urges Haiti's Constitutional Government, especially President René Préval and Minister of Justice René Magloire, to immediately release all of the political prisoners remaining from the unconstitutional regime of Prime Minister Gérard Latortue (2004-2006). Almost all of the political prisoners were arrested illegally, all have been in jail without trial longer than Haitian law allows. None has been convicted of any crime.

The Latortue regime's systematic incarceration of political opponents has been well documented in reports by the NLG, Amnesty International and the United Nations. Many of these prisoners have been released since President Préval's May 15, 2006 inauguration, but there has been no apparent progress on political prisoner cases for the last two months.

The NLG is particularly concerned about defendants held in the *La Scierie* case, including Amanus Maette, a former legislator, Hora Jean-Baptiste and Wantalès Lormejuste. Mr Maette has spent 950 days in prison without trial, 163 of them under a democratic government. He appealed the charges on October 7, 2005. Under Haitian law, an imprisoned defendant has the right to have an appeal decided within 30 days, absent unforeseen obstacles. Over a year later, the Appeals Court has yet to decide the case, and, without explanation, has failed to rule on the three defendants' request for pre-trial release.

According to NLG President Professor Marjorie Cohn, "Haiti's new elected government showed democracy's potential by releasing several political prisoners in July and August. But after five months in office, it should be translating that potential to reality for all the political prisoners."

Founded in 1937 as the first racially integrated national bar association, the National Lawyers Guild is the oldest and largest public interest/human rights bar organization in the United States, with more than 200 chapters. The Guild has a long history of representing individuals whose rights have been violated by governments in the U.S. and abroad. The Guild prepared the first two major human rights reports following the February 2004 coup d'état against Haiti's elected government. Professor Cohn has written extensively on the international law implications of the 2004 coup d'état. Guild members have represented Haitians seeking political asylum in the U.S., and brought suits in U.S. courts on behalf of victims of past Haitian dictatorships.