

**Summary of Presentation by Attorney Thomas M. Griffin, for Petitioners,
to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,
on Matters Relating to Rampant
Violent Human Rights Abuses by the Government of Haiti,
Friday, March 4, 2005, 122nd Period of Sessions.**

After ten months under an interim government backed by the United States, Canada, and France and buttressed by a United Nations force, Haiti's people churn inside a hurricane of violence. Gunfire crackles, once bustling streets are abandoned to cadavers, and whole neighborhoods are cut off from the outside world. Nightmarish fear now accompanies Haiti's poorest in their struggle to survive in destitution. Gangs, police, irregular soldiers, and even UN peacekeepers bring fear. There has been no investment in dialogue to end the violence.

Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence. Summary executions are a police tactic, and even well-meaning officers treat poor neighborhoods seeking a democratic voice as enemy territory where they must kill or be killed. Haiti's brutal and disbanded army has returned to join the fray. Suspected dissidents fill the prisons, their Constitutional rights ignored. As voices for non-violent change are silenced by arrest, assassination, or fear, violent defense becomes a credible option. Mounting evidence suggests that members of Haiti's elite, including political powerbroker Andy Apaid, pay gangs to kill Lavalas supporters and finance the illegal army.

UN police and soldiers, unable to speak the language of most Haitians, are overwhelmed by the firestorm. Unable to communicate with the police, they resort to heavy-handed incursions into the poorest neighborhoods that force intermittent peace at the expense of innocent residents.

The injured prefer to die at home untreated rather than risk arrest at the hospital. Those who do reach the hospital soak in puddles of their own blood, ignored by doctors. Not even death ends the tragedy: bodies pile in the morgue, quickly devoured out of recognition by maggots.

There is little hope for an election to end the crisis, as the Electoral Council's mandate is crippled by corruption and in-fighting.

U.S. officials blame the crisis on armed gangs in the poor neighborhoods, not the official abuses and atrocities, nor the unconstitutional ouster of the elected president. Their support for the interim government is not surprising, as top officials, including the Minister of Justice, worked for U.S. government projects that undermined their elected predecessors. Coupled with the U.S. government's development assistance embargo from 2000-2004, the projects suggest a disturbing pattern.

A human rights team conducted an investigation in Haiti from November 11 to 21, 2004. The group met with businessmen, grassroots leaders, gang members, victims of human rights violations, lawyers, human rights groups, and police and officials from the UN and the Haitian and U.S. governments, and conducted observations in poor neighborhoods, police stations, prisons, hospitals and the state morgue. Because of the importance of the findings, the Center for the Study of Human Rights has chosen to publicize them. The report concludes that many Haitians, especially those living in poor neighborhoods, now struggle against inhuman horror. The Center presents this report with the hope that officials, policymakers and citizens will not only understand this horror better, but will take immediate action to stop it.