



**Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti**  
*Fighting for the human rights of Haiti's poor*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Contacts:**

David Lerner, Riptide Communications, [dlerner@riptideonline.com](mailto:dlerner@riptideonline.com), 212 260-5000

Brian Concannon Jr., Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, [brian@ijdh.org](mailto:brian@ijdh.org), 541-263-0029

**Aristide's Return to Haiti: Prominent Lawyers and Law Professors Urge U.S. to Respect Human Rights**

Prominent lawyers and law professors today wrote to Cheryl Mills, U.S. Department of State Chief of Staff, criticizing United States Government interference with former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's constitutional and human right to return from forced exile to Haiti. President Aristide is expected to leave South Africa for Haiti on Thursday, March 17. On Monday, Department of State spokesperson Mark Toner urged the South African government to prevent the plane's departure before Haiti's upcoming elections.

The letter to Chief of Staff Mills explains that U.S. Government's interference in President Aristide's return violates his rights guaranteed by Haiti's Constitution and international law.

Bill Quigley, Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights and Professor at Loyola New Orleans Law School stated that "the United States trying to control when any Haitian citizen—especially a former President—can enter Haiti is outrageous. It violates a stack of binding international human rights treaties. I felt compelled to speak out to defend both President Aristide's human rights and the American tradition of rule of law that I teach in my classroom."

The letter notes that Mr. Toner's expressed justification for restricting President Aristide's right to return home—a fear that he might "impact" elections scheduled for Sunday, March 20, is an additional violation of President Aristide's rights to free expression and freedom to take part in the conduct of public affairs. The letter finds such statements "especially disturbing" coming from a State Department that has noted human rights experts on its staff.

Brian Concannon Jr., Director of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, added that "while Secretary Clinton has been promoting democracy and the rule of law in the Middle East,

the State Department has been undermining it in Haiti. It is time for the U.S. Government to practice in Haiti what it preaches elsewhere.”

Over 100 lawyers, professors, students and other individuals have signed the letter, including law professors from Harvard University, New York University, University of San Francisco and Loyola University Law Schools, and lawyers from prominent human rights and civil rights organizations throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

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*To read the letter online, visit: <http://ijdh.org/archives/17766>.*



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March 16, 2011

Cheryl Mills, Esq.  
Counselor and Chief of Staff  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Re: United States Government Opposition to the Right of Haiti's Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Return

Dear Chief of Staff Mills:

The undersigned lawyers and law professors are writing to express our deep concern that the United States Department of State (DOS) is actively interfering with the human and constitutional right of former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to return to his country. As you know, President Aristide was removed from Haiti on February 29, 2004, on board a U.S. Government plane.<sup>1</sup> He has not returned to the country since then.

According to numerous press reports, on Monday March 14, DOS spokesperson Mark Toner stated that “[w]e encourage the South African Government as a committed partner to Haiti’s stability to urge former President Aristide to delay his return until after the elections,” and that “[w]e would urge former President Aristide to delay his return until after the electoral process has concluded....” These statements, read in light of previous United States Government efforts to diminish President Aristide’s presence and influence in Haiti,<sup>2</sup> demonstrate a deliberate effort to restrict President Aristide’s ability to travel to Haiti.

Haiti’s Constitution<sup>3</sup> guarantees the right of any Haitian national to return to the country. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which is binding on both the

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<sup>1</sup> President Aristide and many others assert that the departure was involuntary.

<sup>2</sup> Including a June 2005 [DOS Cable](#) explaining that the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil and the Embassy Political Counselor “stressed continued USG insistence that all efforts must be made to keep Aristide from returning to Haiti or influencing the political process,” and the U.S. Government role in removing President Aristide from Haiti in February 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Haiti, Art. 41 and 41-1.

United States and Haiti, declares that “[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.”<sup>4</sup>

The DOS justification for restricting President Aristide’s constitutional and human rights- that his “*return this week could only be seen as a conscious choice to impact Haiti’s elections*” is itself a violation of his political rights, including his right to free expression,<sup>5</sup> freedom of association,<sup>6</sup> and freedom to take part in the conduct of public affairs.<sup>7</sup>

It is especially disturbing to see such disrespect for internationally-accepted human rights from a Department that has made human rights an important part of its foreign policy, and that includes such noted human rights experts as Legal Advisor Koh and Assistant Secretary Posner.

We would urge you to reconsider the DOS policy of discouraging President Aristide’s exercise of his right to return to Haiti in light of the applicable legal standards, and to announce unequivocally that the United States government supports President Aristide’s right to return, and discourages other countries from interfering with that right.

Very truly yours,

**Law Professors, Lawyers & Law Students\***

Brian Concannon, Esq.  
Executive Director  
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)  
Boston, MA

William Quigley  
Legal Director  
Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)  
New York, NY

Nicole Lee, Esq.  
President  
TransAfrica Forum, Inc.

James L. Cavallaro  
Clinical Professor of Law, Harvard Law School  
Executive Director, Human Rights Program, Harvard Law School  
Cambridge, MA

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<sup>4</sup> ICCPR Art. 12(4)

<sup>5</sup> ICCPR Art. 19.

<sup>6</sup> ICCPR Art. 22.

<sup>7</sup> ICCPR Art. 25

Jeffrey S. Brand  
Dean, University of San Francisco School of Law  
San Francisco, CA

Pamela Merchant  
The Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA)  
San Francisco, CA

Jean-Senat Fleury, Av.  
Former Judge and Academic Director of Haitian National Judicial Academy  
Boston, MA

Mirta Desir, Esq.  
Chair & Founder  
Link Haiti, Inc.

Kathleen Ruff  
Former Director, British Columbia Human Rights Commission  
Senior human rights adviser, Rideau Institute,  
Ottawa, Canada

Adjoa A. Aiyetoro  
National Conference of Black Lawyers  
Little Rock, AR

Paul Copeland C.M.  
Bencher (director), Law Society of Upper Canada  
Member, Law Union of Ontario

Makau Mutua  
Dean  
SUNY Distinguished Professor  
Floyd H. & Hilda L. Hurst Faculty Scholar  
University of Buffalo Law School,  
State University of New York  
Buffalo, NY

Jeanne Mirer  
President of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers  
Brooklyn, NY

Philip Althouse, Esq.  
Attorney  
Cleveland, Ohio

Audrey Bomse  
National Lawyers Guild

Kathleen Bergin  
Director, You.Me.We.  
South Texas College of Law  
Houston, Texas

Marjorie Cohn  
Professor of Law  
Thomas Jefferson School of Law  
San Diego, CA

Edward T. Dangel, III, Esq.  
Boston, MA

Soffiyah Elijah, Esq.  
Deputy Director, Criminal Justice Institute  
Harvard Law School  
Cambridge, MA

Aaron Frishberg, Esq.  
New York, NY

Annie Gell, Esq.  
Lawyers Earthquake Response Network Legal Fellow  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti / New York, NY

Thomas Griffin, Esq.  
Legal Director  
LAMP for Haiti  
Philadelphia, PA

Lawrence A. Hildes  
Attorney  
Bellingham, WA

Nancy Kelly, Esq.  
Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic/Greater Boston Legal Services  
Boston, MA

Beatrice Lindstrom, Esq.  
Lawyers Earthquake Response Network Legal Fellow  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Jeena Shah, Esq.  
Lawyers Earthquake Response Network Legal Fellow  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Daniel L. Meyers, Esq.  
Past President, National Lawyers Guild New York Chapter  
New York, NY

Tom Miller, General Counsel  
Global Exchange  
Berkeley, California

Teddy Ky-Nam Miller, Esq.  
Foreign Service Officer (Admitted 10/24/2010)  
Alumni - Hastings to Haiti Partnership  
Washington, DC

Lori A. Nessel  
Professor of Law  
Director, Center for Social Justice  
Seton Hall University School of Law  
Newark, NJ

Shelby Quast, Esq.  
Columbus School of Law  
Catholic University of America  
Washington, DC

Michael Ratner  
President  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
New York, NY

Keren G. Raz  
NYU Law Social Enterprise Fellow  
New York, NY

Christopher Reilly, Esq.  
Northvale, NJ

Pamela D. Bridgewater  
Professor of Law  
American University  
Washington College of Law  
Washington, DC

Judith Reilly, Esq.  
Northvale, NJ

Professor Dale F. Rubin  
Appalachian School of Law  
Grundy, VA

Grahame Russell  
Co-director, Rights Action  
USA & Canada

Margaret Satterthwaite  
Associate Professor of Clinical Law  
NYU School of Law  
New York, NY

Susan Scott, Esq.  
Inverness, CA

Irwin Stotzky  
Professor of Law  
University of Miami  
Miami, FL

Bret Thiele, Esq.  
Senior Expert - Litigation & Legal Advocacy  
Centre on Housing Rights & Evictions  
Duluth, MN

Deborah M. Weissman  
Reef C. Ivey II Distinguished Professor of Law  
University of North Carolina School of Law  
Chapel Hill, NC

Burt Wides, Esq.  
Former Counsel to Constitutional Government of Haiti  
Special Counsel to President Carter for oversight of all U.S. Intelligence Agencies  
Washington DC

John Willshire-Carrera, Esq.  
Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic/Greater Boston Legal Services  
Boston, MA

Martin R. Stolar  
Attorney at Law  
New York, NY



Mark Windsor  
Attorney at Law  
Pasadena, CA

Kathy Roberts  
Staff Attorney  
The Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA)  
San Francisco, CA

Pam Spees  
Staff Attorney  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
New York, NY

Anjana Samant  
Staff Attorney  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
New York, NY

Cathy Albisa  
Executive Director  
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)  
New York, NY

Troy E. Elder  
Director, Carlos A. Costa Immigration and Human Rights Clinic  
Clinical Associate Professor of Law  
Interim Director, Law Clinics  
FIU College of Law  
Miami, FL

Tim Dore, Esq.  
Casey Family Programs  
Seattle, WA

Martha L. Schmidt, Esq.  
Attorney & Counselor  
Seattle, WA

Judy Somberg  
Chair  
National Lawyers Guild Task Force on the Americas

Mary Ratcliff, Esq.  
San Francisco Bay View Newspaper  
San Francisco, CA

Emily J. Yozell  
Attorney

Meetalı Jain  
Project Director  
South African Constitutional Literacy and Service Initiative (CLASI)  
University of Cape Town, Faculty of Law  
Cape Town, South Africa

Sarah Dougherty, JD, MPH  
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)  
Boston, MA

Karen Musalo  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Director, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
University of California  
Hastings College of the Law  
San Francisco, CA

Daniel Hornal  
Law Student  
Georgetown University Law Center  
Washington, DC

Corinne Clave  
Attorney  
UNMIS Khartoum

Stephen Bingham  
Staff Attorney  
Bay Area Legal Aid  
San Francisco, CA

Purvi P. Patel, Esq.  
Chicago, IL

Hillary Exter, Esq.  
New York, NY

Kerry McLean, Esq.  
New York

J.P. "Sandy" Ogilvy  
Ordinary Professor of Law  
Director, Innocence Project Clinic  
Direction, Law & Social Justice Initiatives  
Director, National Archive of Clinical Legal Education  
Columbus School of Law  
The Catholic University of America  
Washington, DC

Nicole Phillips, Esq.  
Staff Attorney  
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)  
San Francisco, CA / Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Mark Windsor  
Attorney at Law  
Pasadena, CA

Gerald D. Wall  
Greater Boston Legal Services  
Boston, MA

Allison Guttu, J.D.  
New York, NY

Jared L. Watkins, Esq.  
New York, NY

D'Ann Johnson  
Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

Kathleen Johnson  
Attorney  
Birmingham, Alabama

Simrat Mand  
Law Student  
Georgetown University Law Center  
Washington, DC

Tracie L. Washington, Esq.  
Director  
Louisiana Justice Institute  
New Orleans, LA

Natalie Bridgeman Fields  
Law Offices of Natalie Bridgeman Fields, Esq.  
San Francisco, CA

Robin Alexander  
Director of International Affairs  
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)  
Pittsburgh, PA

John T. Mitchell, Esq.  
Interaction Law  
Washington, DC

John Higgins, Esq.  
Vice Chair, Board of Directors  
TransAfrica Forum

Keiko Cervantes-Ospina, Esq.  
New York, NY

M. Chris Fabricant  
Visiting Professor of Law  
Director, Criminal Justice Clinic  
John Jay Legal Services, Inc.  
Pace University School of Law  
White Plains, NY

Professor Adele Bernhard  
Pace University School of Law  
White Plains, NY

Hannah Cochrane  
Law Student  
Pace University School of Law  
White Plains, NY

Professor Vanessa Merton  
Faculty Supervisor, Immigration Justice Clinic  
John Jay Legal Services, Inc.  
Pace University School of Law  
White Plains, NY

Jessica A. Wolff  
Law Student  
Pace University School of Law  
White Plains, NY

Professor David Abraham  
University of Miami School of Law  
Coral Gables, FL

Barbara Rhine  
Attorney at Law  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Kehilla Community Synagogue  
Piedmont, CA

Walter Riley  
Attorney  
Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute  
Berkeley, CA

Ann Fagan Ginger  
Attorney, Professor & Author  
Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute  
Berkeley, CA

Dauida Finger, Assistant Clinical Professor  
Loyola University N.O. College of Law  
New Orleans, LA

Eugene P. Squeo  
Attorney  
New Jersey Forum for Human Rights  
Newark, NJ

Lory D. Rosenberg  
Immigration Attorney & Consultant  
Owner and Founder, IDEAS Consulting and Coaching  
Darnestown, MD

RoseAnne Concannon, Esq.  
Marshfield, MA

Stephen Coats  
Executive Director  
U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project (USLEAP)  
Chicago, IL

Cheryl Harris  
Professor of Law  
UCLA Law School  
Los Angeles, CA

Carlos Villarreal  
Executive Director  
National Lawyers Guild SF Bay Area Chapter  
San Francisco, CA

Clyde Leland  
Univ. of San Francisco School of Law  
San Francisco, CA

Tanya H. Russell, Esq.  
Oakland, CA

Audrey M. Robert Ramirez, JD  
Boston, MA  
Sulay Grant  
Law Student  
Pace Law School  
White Plains, NY

Sabrineh Ardalan  
Lecturer on Law  
Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program  
Cambridge, MA

Karen J. Koonan  
Attorney  
National Jury Project  
Minneapolis, MN

Anne Butterfield Weills  
Attorney at Law  
National Lawyers Guild  
Oakland, CA

Denise Abrams  
Attorney

Dawn Aberg  
Charlottesville, VA

Marc-Tizoc González, Esq.  
Treasurer, LatCrit, Inc. (Latina & Latino Critical Legal Theory, Inc.)  
Immediate Past President, East Bay La Raza Lawyers Association  
Adjunct Faculty, Golden Gate University School of Law  
Berkeley, CA

Thomas R. Lebach  
Attorney  
North Falmouth, MA

Kamau K. Franklin, Esq.  
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement

Natsu Taylor Saito  
Professor of Law  
Georgia State University College of Law  
Atlanta, GA

Ashley Ahlholm  
Law Student  
Suffolk University Law School  
Boston, MA

Andrew B. Reid  
Attorney  
Boulder, Colorado

Dean Royer  
Attorney at Law  
Siegel & Yee  
Oakland, CA

Barbara Bernier  
Professor of Law  
Florida A&M University College of Law  
Tallahassee, FL

**Non-lawyer supporters\***

Vincent Warren, Executive Director  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
New York, NY

Patrick Elie, Ph.D.  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Albert Maysles  
Documentary Filmmaker  
New York, NY

Nick Preneta  
Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL)  
Haiti

Judith Wittner  
Professor  
Department of Sociology  
Loyola University  
Chicago, IL

Sr. Mary Finnish, GNSH  
Matthew 25 Guest House  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Sasha Kramer  
Executive Director  
Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL)  
Haiti

Peter Mott  
Co-Editor  
INTERCONNECT  
Pittsford, NY

Gail Mott  
Co-Editor  
INTERCONNECT  
Pittsford, NY

Emira Woods  
Foreign Policy in Focus  
Washington, DC

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Executive Director  
Global Youth Connect  
Kilgali, Rwanda  
New York, NY

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Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora  
Mexico City, Mexico / USA



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Bayonne, NJ

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Juan Carlos Vallejo  
Chair Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
Liberal University  
Burlington, VT

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Priority Africa Network  
Oakland, CA

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Americas Program/Programa de las Americas  
Mexico City, Mexico

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Port-au-Prince, Haiti / New York, NY

Arden Murphy

Julie Webb-Pullman  
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Dr. Catherine Nolin  
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University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC)  
Prince George, BC, Canada  
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Oaxaca, Mexico

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Washington, DC

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Community Development & Education Program Coordinator  
Berkeley, CA

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Vancouver, BC, Canada

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Research Fellow in Human Geography  
School of Geography  
University of Plymouth  
Drake Circus, Plymouth  
Devon, United Kingdom

Ruth Wilton  
Canada

Andrés Thomas Contreris  
Nonviolence International  
Program on the Americas

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Carleton University  
Victoria BC, Canada

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Adriana Podesta

Susan Hagen Morrison, MD

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Rebecca Emory

Emelina Ramos

Jeffrey Frank

Jennifer Turchetta

Andrew O'Kane  
Trail BC, Canada

Professor Barbara Ransby, PhD  
Author and Activist  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

Sr. Conrado Acevedo

Tariq Jeeroburkhan  
Montreal, Canada

Professor (ret.) Maivan Clech Lam  
City University of New York Graduate Center  
New York, NY

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Director  
Pax Christi Metro New York  
New York, NY

Julie Rufo  
Alameda, CA

Barbara Newman, M.D.

Paul J. Patnode

George H. Johnson  
Seattle Washington

Stella Marie Goodpasture, OP  
Justice Promoter  
Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose, CA  
Oakland, CA

Kevin Skerrett  
Canada Haiti Action Network  
Ottawa, Canada