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Haiti: Illegal and arbitrary arrests continue -- Human rights hampered amid political violence

Amnesty International is concerned that Reverend Gérard Jean-Juste may be a prisoner of conscience as he is being detained in Pétionville's Police station. He may be detained solely for his political views and his political affiliation.

Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste was arrested at Sainte Claire's church, in Petite Place Cazeau, a poor neighbourhood of Delmas, a suburb of Port-au-Prince. On Wednesday 13 October, around 2:30 PM, Haitian National Police officers, in uniform and civil clothes, some wearing masks, erupted into the presbytery where Rev. Jean-Juste provides food, twice a week, to some 250 children and dozens of adults from the neighbourhood. According to testimonies gathered by Amnesty International, Rev. Jean-Juste has been punched while being dragged out of the presbytery by Police officers, resulting in injuries to one arm and foot.

His arrest is said to be connected with the outbreak of violence that has purportedly caused more than 40 dead in the country's capital since 30 September. During the operation, according to his lawyer, Haitian police officers failed to show a written mandate of arrest issued by the appropriate authorities. According to Haitian constitution, no one may be arrested or detained other than by written order of a legally competent official except where the perpetrator of a crime is caught in the act.

Following his arrest, the authorities are reported to have stated that the arrest was a pre-emptive action based on intelligence they possessed linking Rev. Jean-Juste to armed gangs supporting Aristide but so far, no evidence has been produced. Amnesty International considers that if this arrest is politically motivated for Rev. Jean-Juste being a vocal supporter of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

Indefinite detention without charge or trial, as a rule too often applied in Haiti, contravenes to fundamental human rights and to the country's main legislation. Amnesty International urges the Haitian authorities to abide by the rule of law in conformity with the Constitution of the Republic and fully respect Rev. Jean-Juste's basic rights.

