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Haiti: Amnesty International urges immediate response to threats of political violence

"Threats of political violence must cease", Amnesty International said today calling on the Haitian authorities to act quickly to curb threatened attacks against opposition figures and journalists.

On 9 January representatives of popular organizations claiming to support the dominant Fanmi Lavalas party issued threats of physical violence against members of opposition parties and journalists during a press conference in the Saint Jean Bosco church in Port-au-Prince.

In issuing the threats, the speakers referred to a list of public figures reportedly opposed to the upcoming inauguration on 7 February of president-elect Jean Bertrand Aristide of Fanmi Lavalas. The list is said to contain up to one hundred names, including some opposition politicians who have announced plans to form a "shadow government" following the inauguration. Journalists and religious leaders were also reportedly named. During the press conference, the speakers warned the individuals concerned to change their position within three days or face violence.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at these overt calls by self-described political partisans for violence against opposition members, journalists and others. Amnesty International reminds the Haitian authorities of their obligation to safeguard the freedom of expression, assembly and association laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international treaties, as well as in Haitian law. Further, the organization calls on the authorities to take steps to curb threatened violence by all

political sectors, and to afford special protection for those affected by the threats.

Some popular organization members were implicated in acts of violence and intimidation in the period leading up to the May parliamentary and November presidential elections. Amnesty International once again urges the Fanmi Lavalas party and its leaders to publicly condemn acts of intimidation and violence committed in the party's name, and calls on all parties and political figures to assist the authorities in establishing a climate in which fundamental freedoms are respected.

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