
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 196/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - HAITI - Please note there have been some changes to the Haiti briefing sent out in news service 195/94, so I have enclosed the item again. Please use this text for all media work not the original item. The internal note about the item and the index number remain the same as in news service 195/94. Apologies for any inconvenience.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Haiti - 24 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Brazil - 14 September - PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Kosovo - 19 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Indonesia - 28 September - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Bhutan/Nepal - 25 August - See news service 168/94

Yemen - 1 September - See news service 194/94

Thailand - 6 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Togo - 15 September - See news service 168/94

Turkey - 14 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 181/94

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

The following information on the human rights situation in Haiti has been gathered by Amnesty International's research project set up in the Dominican Republic, at the end of July, and includes information Amnesty International has received as recently as 21 August.

HAITI: CONCERNS ABOUT CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

BACKGROUND

Under the state of siege declared by the de facto government on 1 August, constitutional guarantees have been suspended. As one of Amnesty International's contacts in Haiti, the director of a human rights organization, said to the organization's researcher in the Dominican Republic last week, "(the country) is in a state of war. The army and police can do anything at any moment. They can burst into your home or arrest you in the street for investigation... The situation is even worse in rural areas, where section chiefs have absolute power; they are forcibly recruiting people for training in the militias."

With expulsion of the United Nations/Organization of American States (UN/OAS) Civilian Mission (MICIVH) this past July, Haiti lost its international human rights monitoring presence. In addition, it has become more difficult to obtain information from Haiti due to censorship measures imposed on the media under the state of siege, security measures such as frequent searches of people and vehicles at road blocks, random raids by security forces, difficulties generated by the embargo such as lack of transportation because of gasoline shortages. As well, a heightened climate of terror has increased the reluctance of the population to denounce human rights violations. It has also been more difficult for other human rights observers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to visit the country to investigate human rights violations because of restricted access by the de facto authorities.

At the end of July Amnesty International set up a research base in the Dominican Republic to monitor the human rights situation in Haiti and to assess the possibilities of visiting Haiti itself. In this time, Amnesty International has established and maintained contacts with human rights groups and other sources of information in Haiti as well as with organizations in the Dominican Republic working with Haitians.

CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN HAITI

Based on its research, Amnesty International believes that there has been a marked deterioration in the human rights situation in Haiti -- even though it has been impossible to get a comprehensive statistics of the repression by the de facto authorities.

As the UN/OAS Civilian Mission stated in its report of 27 July, "the human rights situation in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding area during the past four months has been characterized by an unprecedented increase in violence and a marked resurgence in human rights violations over the last year's totals."

Widespread human rights violations committed with complete impunity by the military and civilian auxiliaries, or "attachés" linked to them, have been reported throughout the country.

In Amnesty International's news release the organization reports on the discovery of two mass graves, each containing the bodies of 12 young men, near Port-au-Prince in mid-July. Since then, killings have continued at an alarming rate, with bodies appearing almost daily in Port-au-Prince. Reports have been received of victims being killed in one place, then dumped in another, which makes identification more difficult.

Over the last five days, five dead bodies have reportedly been found in Cité Soleil, a slum area of Port-au-Prince. These include the mutilated and bullet ridden bodies of three young men who were assassinated during the night of 20-21 August, and two other bodies, reportedly of a young man and a young woman found on 23 August. Independent investigations continue in order to determine their identity. Tensions remain high in Cité Soleil, where armed individuals, associated with the military, have reportedly been patrolling and undertaking house searches, virtually sealing off the area.

Those who flee the repression live in constant fear of being found by the military and civilian auxiliaries. According to information provided by several Haitian human rights organizations, Vixene Thomas, André Noresca, Emmanuel Deus, Nicolas Selligny -- all members of a peasant organization from the Central Plateau -- who were in hiding in Port-au-Prince were arrested from their homes on 22 July. According to a witness, they were taken away by armed civilians in a vehicle. One of them was reported to have been severely beaten and another one was forced to reveal the whereabouts of fellow activists. Amnesty International has received unconfirmed reports that the bullet ridden bodies of three of them were seen in an area that has become a regular dumping ground for bodies near the capital on August 4. When witnesses returned to retrieve the bodies, they had been allegedly removed.

Recent events in Miragoane, Grande-Anse department, are representative of the pattern of violations taking place with increasing frequency. For example, Gardy le Blanc, an engineer employed in public works under President-in-exile Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was arrested on 17 August. According to reports, on that morning the home of Gardy le Blanc in Miragoane was searched by soldiers from the local and other military barracks. When the soldiers found a piece of paper with President Aristide's name on it they arrested Gardy le Blanc, put him into a truck and took him to the local military barracks, searching several other homes along the way. He has reportedly been beaten in detention and remains in custody without being formally charged.

On that same day, five high school students, activists in the local popular organization, were reportedly arrested in the neighbouring village of Fonds-des-Negres and taken to the local military barracks, where they continue to remain in detention, accused of being communists.

Throughout the day, the military and armed civilians continued to terrorize the population in Miragoane, raiding several houses of alleged supporters of President Aristide. According to reports, an undetermined number of young people, members of popular organizations, have gone into hiding to avoid arrest.

On August 5, in Cavallon -- also in the south -- 39 people were reportedly detained after an unidentified individual took down the flag on the municipal building; this is considered an offence by the *de facto* authorities (under a 29 June order flags must remain flying on public buildings). They are reported to have been severely beaten and ill-treated during detention.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports concerning an agronomist and six peasants from Chansolme, in the north-west of the country. They were arrested on 20 August, while having a meeting on the protection of the environment. While the agronomist was released after two days, the six peasants are reported to be still in detention in the prison of Port-de-Paix. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be at risk of being tortured.

In some cases, detentions are reportedly undertaken by the military in reprisal for alleged "terrorist attacks". No independent evidence has emerged, however, to substantiate the military's reports of such attacks. This may have been the explanation for the alleged arrest of a number of people in Les Cayes, in the south, since August 11. According to other reports, some of the people arrested have died as a result of the effects of torture and ill-treatment. Amnesty International has received two such reports of deaths in custody in the past month in Les Cayes and in Savanette, in the Central Plateau.

The human rights organization has also received reports of increasing repression in the Central Plateau. Members of the Papaye Peasant Movement, one of the oldest non-governmental organizations in the country, and other organizations have reported an upsurge of repression since the appointment of new military personnel in the area which are reported to have lists of political opponents to eliminate.

The military, under the threat of armed intervention by the United States sanctioned by Security Council Resolution 940 on 31 July, has begun to arm a large number of civilians and recruit them to serve in militias, in many cases using threats of force. In a number of different areas in the Central Plateau, the military has forced civilians to participate in military training exercises to prepare for a possible armed intervention by the United States.

A Haitian refugee in the Dominican Republic told Amnesty International two days ago, "in Lascahobas (a town in the lower Central Plateau), everyone is forced to participate in military training. Those who refuse, have no choice but to go into hiding."

Amnesty International is attempting to confirm initial reports that 18 residents of the area have been forced to flee the country. Reports have also been received that several people, including a number of women, have been arrested in Lascahobas by a group of armed civilians on 16 August because they allegedly made fun of participants at a militia training session.

Under the state of siege there have been increasing restrictions on the freedom of the press. In Port-au-Prince, Radio Arc-en-Ciel (Lakansyal in Creole), has suspended its news bulletins since early August because of threats by attachés against the station's reporters. A radio journalist for Radio Tropic, Ernest Ocean, has been in hiding since the end of July. Imprisoned once before, Ocean fears for his life following his reporting on a voodoo ceremony against the return of President Aristide held at the military barracks of Saint Marc (Artibonite).

In the words of a journalist of an independent radio station, "We work under fear...We don't know any more what we can or cannot broadcast".

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