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Haiti: Jean-Claude Duvalier rights violation claims must be investigated

Amnesty International has urged the Haitian authorities to investigate alleged human rights violations committed by former president Jean-Claude Duvalier, also known as 'Baby Doc', after he was detained in Port-Au-Prince.

Jean-Claude Duvalier, who has been accused of presiding over numerous human rights violations during his rule from 1971 to 1986, was detained after being questioned by police on Tuesday 18 January. It is not yet clear what charges he will face.

"This landmark arrest is a welcome first step towards bringing to justice a leader whose security apparatus carried out widespread and systematic human rights violations including torture, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances," said Javier Zuñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

"Haiti must investigate Jean-Claude Duvalier, and anyone else allegedly responsible for such crimes, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, in a trial that is thorough, independent and fair."

Jean-Claude Duvalier returned to Haiti on 16 January after nearly 25 years in exile in France. He fled Haiti in 1986 after a popular uprising which was violently repressed by the former Haitian Armed Forces and a local militia known as the "tonton macoutes".

Throughout his 15 years in power (1971-1986) systematic torture, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances were widespread across Haiti.

Hundreds of people "disappeared" or were extrajudicially executed. Members of Haiti's armed forces and the militia National Security Volunteers – also known as the "tonton macoutes" – played a primary role in repressing pro-democracy and human rights activists. The "tonton macoutes" were disbanded in 1986 after Jean-Claude Duvalier went into exile.

"A cycle of impunity has prevailed for decades in Haiti, with victims of abuses and their families denied justice for way too long - now the opportunity has come for justice, truth and reparations," said Javier Zuniga.