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Haiti: Bring to trial or release all political prisoners

Amnesty International today called on the newly elected Haitian authorities to bring to trial promptly or release all political prisoners currently held in prolonged pre-trial detention across the country.

Amnesty International believes that around 100 of the more than 2,000 prisoners being held without charge or awaiting trial in Haiti could be political prisoners.

Amongst them, Annette Auguste, Yvon Antoine, Paul Raymond and Georges Honoré -- well known supporters of former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide -- are under prolonged and irregular pre-trial detention. Amnesty International believes they are facing politically motivated charges.

The four were arrested between March 2004 and July 2005 and formally charged in April 2006 under the vague offence of criminal conspiracy (*association de malfaiteurs*) in relation to a violent attack by pro-Aristide supporters against students during a demonstration against the former President on 5 December 2003.

"The Haitian authorities are failing to uphold their responsibility to bring people detained to a fair and prompt trial under recognisable criminal charges. In the case of Annette Auguste, for example, she has been detained for more than 26 months and even the public prosecutor recommended dropping charges against her for lack of evidence," said Amnesty International.

"The prolonged detention of supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide under the transitional government of Gérard Latortue was politically motivated and in breach of Haitian law and international human rights standards," said Amnesty International.

"A fair and functioning judicial system is essential for Haiti's future."

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