

Haiti: A crucial moment for human rights

Action taken in the initial months of Jean Bertrand Aristide's presidency will be crucial to the future of human rights in Haiti, Amnesty International said today.

In a new report released today Amnesty International details President Aristide's human rights challenges as well as a series of recommendations to deal effectively with them.

"The electoral campaign marked a critical point in the human rights situation in Haiti, with an increase in political violence, threats and intimidation," Amnesty International said.

"The emergence of illegal security groups linked to local authorities elected in May is a major cause of concern as such groups have on occasions taken the law into their own hands and have been responsible for human rights violations," the organization added.

Amnesty International is calling on the Haitian authorities to act on their promises that these groups will be disbanded and that any of their members implicated in human rights violations will be brought to justice.

At the same time, the organization is insisting on the need to ensure the independence, professionalism and accountability of the Haitian National Police, which has been responsible for some human rights violations and has on numerous occasions failed to protect citizens from outbreaks of political violence.

With regard to the justice system – which remains largely dysfunctional and poses a substantial impediment to respect for human

rights in Haiti – Amnesty International is urging the authorities to make every effort to strengthen its independence, impartiality and effectiveness.

“A fully functioning justice system is essential to put an end to impunity through the successful investigation of human rights violations and the prosecution of those responsible,” the organization said.

Among the most urgent cases to be clarified is the killing of journalist and human rights advocate Jean Dominique and of Radio Haiti guard Jean Claude Louissant in April 2000.

“The authorities must take measures to protect from violence and intimidation journalists, human rights defenders and other public figures at risk for their activities,” Amnesty International added.

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