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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - HAITI

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 27 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

Myanmar - 20 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 99/94

India - 16 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 129/94

Kosovo - 20 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

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

France - second week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

North and South Korea - ON HOLD - SEE NS 146/94

Sri Lanka - 15 July - SEE NS 146/94

Brazil - 14 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Date: 12 July 1994
AI INDEX: AMR36/WU 04/94

News Service 148/94

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS EXPULSION OF UN/OAS OBSERVERS FROM HAITI

Amnesty International today condemned the order given by Haitian authorities on Monday to expel the joint United Nations (UN)/Organization of American States (OAS) International Civilian Mission from that country.

"The justification given by the Haitian military that these observers are a threat to national security is completely absurd", Amnesty International said. "Instead, expelling the observers could be a sign that further large-scale human rights violations may be in the offing."

The human rights organization said that though the mission was severely curtailed in recent months in numbers of observers, where they could travel, and access both to communications and to Haitian authorities, the mission's remaining observers played a crucial role in monitoring and publicizing escalating reports of political killings, torture and rape of people opposed to the current military-backed government and their relatives.

Amnesty International also rejected claims by Haitian authorities that the human rights observers' presence in the country was "illegal" because the mission's mandate had been renewed by the UN General Assembly last Friday, 8 July.

There has been widespread speculation that this latest outrage by the Haitian authorities could be used to justify armed intervention in the country, and the human rights organization made clear its position that it has never favoured or opposed invasions.

"If there is an invasion of Haiti, we would be deeply concerned that the human rights of potential victims of abuses must be protected," Amnesty International said.

"We would be wary that the situation should not repeat the experience of Somalia, where unarmed civilians were killed by forces meant to be protecting their human rights."

In the event of an armed intervention in Haiti, international observers should scrutinize such forces to make sure that international and humanitarian laws in time of armed conflict are respected throughout military action. Any alleged abuses should be subject to immediate inquiries by qualified impartial investigators and anyone found responsible for having contravened international laws should be brought to justice.

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