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Haiti: Perpetrators of serious past abuses re-emerge

The emergence of former paramilitary leaders convicted of past human rights violations as leaders of the armed opposition force is fuelling a conflict that has already taken too many lives, said Amnesty International as the crisis in Haiti continues to deepen.

"At the best of times, the spectre of past violations continues to haunt Haiti," Amnesty International said today. "At this crucial stage, when the rule of law is so fragile, the last thing that the country needs is for those who committed abuses in the past to take up leadership positions in the armed opposition."

On 14 February Louis Jodel Chamblain, a notorious former paramilitary leader, reportedly gave an interview to a Haitian radio station to say that he had joined the armed movement seeking to overthrow President Jean Bertrand Aristide. He was accompanied by a former police commissioner.

In September 1995 Chamblain was among seven senior military and paramilitary leaders convicted *in absentia* and sentenced to forced labour for life for involvement in the September 1993 extrajudicial execution of Antoine Izméry, a well-known pro-democracy activist. Chamblain had gone into exile to avoid prosecution.

Chamblain has reportedly joined forces with the leaders of the armed opposition based in Gonaïves.

Another of the leaders, Jean Pierre Baptiste, alias "Jean Tatoune", is also a former paramilitary leader who was sentenced to forced labour for life for participation in the 1994 Raboteau massacre. He was among the prisoners who escaped from Gonaïves prison during the August 2002 jailbreak of Amiot 'Cubain' Métayer, deceased leader of the formerly pro-government group which violently took over control of Gonaïves on 5 February. Gang members under Jean Tatoune's direction have been accused of numerous abuses against government officials and supporters, as well as other Gonaïves residents, over past months.

"The Haitian authorities must do everything in their power to arrest these individuals, who have both already been convicted of serious violations," Amnesty International said. "For their part, political opposition parties must condemn the emergence of these notorious figures at the head of the armed movement to oust Aristide, and must do everything in their power to demonstrate their own commitment to human rights and the rule of law."

Background Information

Louis Jodel Chamblain and Jean Tatoune both belonged to the paramilitary organisation FRAPH, formed

by military authorities who were the de facto leaders of the country following the 1991 coup against then-President Jean Bertrand Aristide. FRAPH members were responsible for numerous human rights violations before the 1994 restoration of democratic governance.

The group was at first known as the *Front révolutionnaire pour l'avancement et le progrès haïtiens*, Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advancement and Progress. The acronym FRAPH phonetically resembles the French and Creole words for 'to beat' or 'to thrash.'

Antoine Izméry was gunned down in the Church of the Sacred Heart in Port-au-Prince on 11 September 1993, while attending mass. The mass was being held to commemorate the fifth anniversary of a massacre committed during an attack on Aristide, then a parish priest, on 11 September 1988 at the St. Jean Bosco Church in La Saline, a shanty town on the outskirts of the capital.

After the 5 February attack in Gonaïves, unrest spread to nearly a dozen towns in the center and north of Haiti. Concerns are increasing about the humanitarian situation in the towns under control of anti-government forces and other areas cut off by the conflict. The first demonstration of the political opposition since the violence began took place in Port-au-Prince on 15 February; demonstrators were confronted by rock-throwing government supporters, and police used tear gas and fired their guns into the air to disperse both groups.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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