

Haiti: elections must not be marred by violence

In response to disturbing reports of a series of killings which include a journalist, electoral officials and political candidates, Amnesty International called today on the Haitian authorities to ensure that civilian security is upheld in the run-up to the elections.

The most recent incidents include the assassination of a party official, killed by unidentified attackers armed with machetes on 25 April, and the alleged kidnapping of an electoral candidate, released on 29 April after spending 12 days in captivity. Jean Dominique, one of Haiti's most prominent radio journalists, was killed by unknown assailants on 3 April. The funeral was disrupted by individuals who claimed to be supporters of the Fanmi Lavalas Party.

Legislative and municipal elections are currently due to take place on 21 May. However, the president of the Provisional Electoral Council recently warned that the current escalation of violence could lead to a change in the schedule.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned by the risk of violence breaking out during the election period. "President René Preval, the Minister of Justice Camille LeBlanc, and the Haitian National Police must impartially safeguard human rights and public security," the organization said.

"Leaders of political parties should ensure that they and their partisans refrain from using violence in pursuing their political objectives, so that the electoral process can proceed in an open, transparent and peaceful manner," Amnesty International added.

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Amnesty International Public document - AI Index AMR 36/005/2000 - News Service Nr. 83

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