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Haiti: Human rights abuses on the rise

Increased political violence is causing a rise in human rights abuses in Haiti, Amnesty International said today as it launched a new report: *"Haiti: Abuse of human rights: political violence as the 200th anniversary of independence approaches."*

"Killings, violent attacks and threats -- committed by political partisans and armed, politically-motivated groups -- are of growing concern, as are violations committed by security forces in responding to political violence," Amnesty International said. "In addition, attacks on freedom of expression continue."

In one ongoing situation of concern to Amnesty International, the coastal city of Gonaïves has been racked by days of violent demonstrations following the 21 September 2003 killing of former activist Amiot Métayer. Many of his supporters, accusing the government of responsibility for his death, clashed repeatedly with police officers. According to reports, at least one resident was killed and many more were wounded, while a police station and two other public buildings were burnt down.

On 2 October, in a manoeuvre which they claimed was intended to restore order, police supported by Coast Guard units and a helicopter clashed with armed residents in an attempted sweep through the Raboteau area of the city. At least three people were reported to have been killed and others injured during this incident. Ironically, Raboteau was the scene of a notorious 1994 coup-era massacre carried out by army and paramilitary forces, following a failed attempt to apprehend Amiot Métayer.

"The lessons of the past must be heeded. The right to life and physical integrity must be guaranteed, even in states of emergency or public disorder," Amnesty International said while reminding the Haitian authorities of their responsibilities under international law.

"Protection of human rights confronts one of its greatest challenges in the face of political violence," Amnesty International stressed. "In this context, special vigilance is required to ensure that rights are fully respected; at the very least, abuses committed by one side should not be invoked as justification for violations by the other."

The organisation repeated its call for a resolute and public commitment to respect human rights at the highest political levels, as well as prompt and effective investigations and sanctions when violations or abuses are committed.

For a full Copy of the report: "Haiti: Abuse of human rights: political violence as the 200th anniversary of independence approaches," please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr360072003>.

Public Document

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