

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of Torture/Legal Concern

4 June 1992

HAITI:

Denis VERDIER, Roman Catholic Priest, aged 58
Sony DECOSTE, Roman Catholic Priest
Jean-Baptiste CASSEUS, Roman Catholic Brother
Marcel BUSSELS, Roman Catholic Priest, Belgian
and Father Denis Verdier's driver (name not known)

Amnesty International is concerned at the recent reported arrest of three Roman Catholic priests, one Roman Catholic brother and a driver of one of the priests, carried out by members of the armed forces in Les Cayes, South Department, and Cap-Haïtien, North Department on 1 and 2 June 1992. The reasons for their arrest have not been clarified. Amnesty International is concerned about their legal situation and fears that they may be ill-treated in custody.

At approximately 9.00 am on 1 June, Father Denis Verdier, the Director of the regional office of Caritas in Les Cayes, was reportedly arrested along with his driver (name not known) in the city of Les Cayes by members of the armed forces as the priest was on his way to his office. According to information received by Amnesty International, Father Verdier and his driver were badly beaten during the arrest. Witnesses reported that the clothes of both men were torn and that they were taken away to the military barracks (caserne) in Les Cayes. Father Verdier is a member of the Fraternité des Pères du Sud (Fraternity of Priests from the South), and has publicly stated his opposition to the coup of 30 September 1991.

Father Sony Decoste, another Roman Catholic priest from the Les Cayes district, was reportedly arrested on 2 June in the village of Torbeck, approximately 30 km east of Les Cayes city. It is not known where he is currently being held.

Brother Jean-Baptiste Casséus, from the Sacred Heart (Sacré Coeur) order was also reportedly arrested on 2 June in Les Cayes. It is believed he is being held at the Les Cayes military barracks.

The four above arrests are believed to be in retaliation for the attack and burning of the military outpost in Camp Perrin, near Les Cayes on 30 May 1992. Numerous arrests were reported immediately following the attack. (see UA 180/92, AMR 36/23/92, 1 June 1992).

On 2 June, Father Marcel Bussels, a Belgian national and priest, was taken into custody without a warrant after the rectory in Ballan near Cap-Haïtien in northern Haiti was reportedly searched by soldiers as was his own house, the nuns' home and the church.

Members of the armed forces accompanied by a Justice of the Peace, went to search the rectory and were asked for a warrant by Father Bussels, a priest at the rectory. Reportedly, the soldiers said they didn't need one and searched the rectory, Father Bussel's house, the nuns' home and the church, during which they destroyed equipment, including typewriters and radios. After searching Father Bussel's house, the armed forces reported that they found a machete, a pic à glace (an ice-pick), and a small "révolver d'alarme" (a small hand-gun). They also claimed to have found pamphlets supporting the ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Father Bussels is being held at the military barracks in Cap-Haïtien, and is due to appear before a judge on 4 June 1992.

Father Bussels is active with the Mouvement Honneur et Respect Ballan (Ballan Movement of Honour and Respect), a grassroots political and development group. This group has reportedly been consistently targeted by the armed forces following the coup, and in November 1991, Father Bussels went into hiding following attacks against him by the armed forces. He has also reported receiving constant threats directly from the armed forces or from

those working with them. (See EXTRA 13/92, AMR 36/07/92, 6 February 1992).

On 1 June the home of the Bishop Verrié, the Bishop of Les Cayes was also searched by soldiers, who were reportedly searching for "des pères qui se cachent avec des armes" ("armed priests hiding there")

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In past weeks, anti-government protests have been followed by increased repression by the security forces, with students and residents of poor districts of Port-au-Prince being particularly targeted. Following the protests, Amnesty International has learned **page 2 of U** of increased numbers of arrests and at least nine people have reportedly been victims of extrajudicial execution. These abuses have been carried out by uniformed security force agents or, on some occasions, by men in civilian clothes ostensibly linked to them.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the arrests, reportedly without warrant, of four members of the Roman Catholic clergy along with the driver of one of the priests;
- expressing concern at the reported beating of Father Denis Verdier and his driver and asking for an immediate investigation;
- asking that those found to be responsible be brought immediately to justice;
- asking for clarification of the legal situation of all five detainees and that they be charged with a recognizably criminal offence or immediately released;
- asking for assurances that the physical integrity of the five detainees be guaranteed in custody.

APPEALS TO:

1. Prime Minister:

Maître Jean-Jacques HONORAT
Premier Ministre
Palais National
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

**Telegrams: Premier Ministre Honorat,
Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

Faxes: + 509 34 1980

**[Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Minister
/ Dear Prime Minister]**

3. Cap-Haitien's Public Prosecutor - for the case of Father Marcel Bussels

Monsieur le Maître Sainvil
Commissaire du gouvernement
Parquet du Tribunal Civil
203, rue 9-10K, Cap-Haïtien, Haïti

**Telegrams: Monsieur le Commissaire du
gouvernement, Parquet du Tribunal Civil,
Cap-Haïtien, Haiti**

2. Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces:

Monsieur le Général Raoul CEDRAS
Commandant-en-Chef des Forces Armées
d'Haïti
Grand Quartier Général des Forces Armées
d'Haïti
Rue Geffrard, Port-au-Prince, Haïti

**Telegrams: Comandant-en-Chef des Armees
d'Haiti Cedras, Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

Telexes: 20391 gqfadh

Faxes: + 509 23 9007; + 509 23 9407

**[Salutation: Monsieur le Général/Dear
General]**

4. Les Cayes' Public Prosecutor - the other cases

Monsieur le Commissaire du
gouvernement
Parquet du Tribunal Civil
Rue Mgr. Guilloux
Les Cayes, Haïti

**Telegrams: Monsieur le Commissaire du
gouvernement, Parquet du Tribunal Civil,
Les Cayes, Haïti**

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Commander of the North Military Department

Monsieur le Colonel
Département Militaire du Nord
Rue 26 B
Cap-Haïtien, Haiti

Telephone: + 509 62-0008

**[Salutation: Monsieur le Commandant/Dear
Commander]**

Commander of the South Military Department

Monsieur le Commandant
Département Militaire du Sud
Rue Mgr. Maurice
Les Cayes
Département du Sud, Haiti

**[Salutation: Monsieur le Commandant/Dear
Commander]**

Human Rights Organization:

Plateforme Haïtienne des Droits Humains
3 Bis, 3ème Ruelle Rivière
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

and to diplomatic representatives of Haiti in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 July 1992.