

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 26 August 1992

**HAIITE: @HUMAN RIGHTS HELD TO RANSOM BY**  
**TORTURE, ARBITRARY ARREST AND EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION**

Almost a year after the coup that ousted democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, human rights abuses reminiscent of the Duvalier era are once again part of most Haitians' daily life, according to an Amnesty International report released today.

"The old repressive structures are back in place," said the human rights organization. "Haitians live in permanent fear, while their oppressors are free to kill, torture and terrorize with impunity. The military is spearheading the crackdown and tens of thousands of Haitians have gone into hiding to escape persecution."

Amnesty International has been receiving reports of serious human rights violations since the coup in September 1991, and in March this year went to Haiti to investigate. The delegates came away with evidence of extrajudicial executions, torture and arbitrary arrests.

Since October last year, the organization has received hundreds of reports of torture, including reports of detainees being beaten to death. After arrests, which are often arbitrary and without any kind of warrant, severe beatings appear to be almost automatic.

Once taken to detention centres, victims often face daily beatings, including the calotte marassa, a twin slap to both ears which causes severe pain and often leads to infection. Detainees are beaten with sticks, hands and rifles - in one case a police chief apparently broke his rifle on the back of a detainee.

The only way to avoid beatings appears to be to pay the authorities. While in Haiti, the Amnesty International delegates uncovered evidence of a pattern of widespread extortion by security forces.

"Civilians have to pay to prevent human rights violations," said Amnesty International. "Prisoners have to pay to stop the beatings or to secure their release. In many cases, families have to sell their possessions to help a relative out of jail."

In one case, a prisoner told Amnesty International how he was arrested and severely beaten. He had to pay the prison authorities to avoid further beatings and was put in a cell with about 80 other people and no sanitation. He had to pay to get into a better cell, pay to be moved to prison from military barracks where he was being beaten again, pay for water and trips to the toilet and finally pay to be released.

"Lawlessness pervades Haiti and the security forces know they can get away with the human rights violations that are so rampant," said Amnesty International. "There is an atmosphere of fear in Haiti, and many thousands of people are in hiding in their own country."

Thousands more have fled the country altogether, seeking refuge in the USA. Amnesty International has been deeply disturbed at the US authorities' refusal to honour their international obligations in dealing with people fleeing Haiti.

**Thousands have been intercepted in international waters and returned directly to Haiti without even a cursory attempt to identify those who might be at risk of human rights violations - this flouts international law. This policy is currently being challenged before the US Supreme Court.**

**"International standards insist that no-one at risk of human rights violations should be returned without a full examination of their case," said Amnesty International. "In Haiti, human rights violations are a fact of life for so many people - yet the US government seems determined to ignore this."**

**Other countries such as France and Switzerland have made it difficult for Haitian asylum seekers to have access to request asylum.**

**"It is time the international community recognised the chronic situation in Haiti and stopped trying to avoid its own responsibilities."**

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