

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 36/51/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 334/92 Legal Concern/Fear of Torture

28 October 1992

**HAITI: Innocent MÉRAT, aged 30
 and one other, name unknown to Amnesty International**

Amnesty International has learned of the reported arrest without warrant of Innocent Mérat, carried out on 21 October 1992 by uniformed members of the police in Gros Morne, Artibonite department. Amnesty International is concerned that Innocent Mérat may have been arrested in connection with carrying out lawful community work and is calling for his immediate release as a prisoner of conscience. Amnesty International is also concerned that Innocent Mérat may be ill-treated in custody.

According to the information received by Amnesty International, Innocent Mérat, a small farmer was arrested on 21 October on the orders of the armed forces in Gros Morne, along with another man, whose name is not known. Both men were taken to Gros Morne prison and from there transferred to Gonaïves prison, also in Artibonite department on 22 October. They have reportedly not been brought before a judge to be charged. The reasons behind their arrest are reportedly linked to their participation in a community education project for underprivileged families. Innocent Mérat whose brother is a local priest, had reportedly been called upon by the local mayor and the congressional representative of Gros Morne to interview families in his area to assess their eligibility to benefit from the project. Both the mayor and the congressional representative of Gros Morne are members of the Front National pour le Changement et la Démocratie (FNCD), National Front for Change and Democracy, the coalition supporting the former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, ousted in a military coup in September 1991. Members of the armed forces reportedly ordered the arrest of Innocent Mérat and the other unnamed person because they maintained they had not previously sought their permission to carry out the interviews. They accused those associated with the project of being linked to the Lavalas, a political grouping supporting former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of all those associated with the project.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Troops violently overthrew the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who took office in Haiti on 7 February 1991, in a coup on the night of 29 to 30 September. Since then Amnesty International has learned of widespread human rights violations committed by the security forces, including a large number of extrajudicial executions, torture and ill-treatment and mass arrests without warrant. Several of those detained by the authorities remain "disappeared", carried out against supporters and those perceived to be supporters of the ousted president. These abuses have been carried out by uniformed security force agents or, on some occasions, by men in civilian clothes ostensibly linked to them. (see Haiti: Human Rights Held to Ransom, AI Index: AMR 36/41/92, August 1992)

On 19 June 1992 a new prime minister, Marc Bazin was sworn in. Several days before he took office, he pledged before the Haitian senate to "stop repression and restore freedom

of the press". However, Amnesty International is continuing to receive reports of widespread human rights violations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in French or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest reportedly without warrant of Innocent Mérat and the other unnamed man;

- expressing concern that they may have been detained solely because of their participation in an education project for underprivileged families and demanding their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience;

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- expressing concern that the physical safety of both men be guaranteed in custody;

- asking for guarantees for the safety of those associated with the education project.

APPEALS TO

1. Prime Minister:

Marc BAZIN

Premier Ministre

Palais National

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telegrams: Premier Ministre BAZIN, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Faxes: + 509 34 1980, 23 2121

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Minister/Dear Prime Minister

2. Minister of Justice

Maître Moïse SENATUS

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

Cité de l'Exposition

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice SENATUS, Port-au-Prince

Telephone: +509 45 0474, 45 1626

Telexes: 20166 Justice

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

3. 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, Haiti

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

Telephone: +509 22 3935

Telexes: 20391 qqfadh

Faxes: +509 23 9007, 23 9407

Salutation: Monsieur le Général/Dear General

4. Director of Gonaïves Prison

Monsieur le Directeur

Prison de Gonaïves

Gonaïves, Artibonite,

Haïti

Telegrams: Monsieur le Directeur, Prison de Gonaïves, Gonaïves, Artibonite, Haïti

Salutation: Monsieur le Directeur/Dear Director

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Public Prosecutor for Gonaïves
Monsieur le Commissaire du Gouvernement
Tribunal de Première Instance
Gonaïves, Artibonite
Haïti

Haïti en Marche (News weekly)
173 N.W. 94 St
Miami
FL 33150, USA

Conférence Episcopale d'Haïti
Angle rues Pignant et Lamarre
Port-au-Prince
Haïti

and to diplomatic representatives of Haiti accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 December 1992.