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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 92/94

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**3 MAY 1994**

**URGENT MEASURES NEEDED TO STOP HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN HAITI**

**Amnesty International today called on the Haitian authorities and the international community to take urgent steps to resolve the country's continuing human rights crisis.**

**"Since the Governor's Island Accord, intended to return President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, collapsed last October, the eyes of the world have turned to other world trouble spots", Amnesty International said.**

**While accepting the urgency of these other crises, the human rights organization is urging the international community to focus once more on the human rights tragedy afflicting Haiti.**

**"It is imperative that new initiatives be developed both at national and international level to put an end to such outrages as the killing by the Haitian military of at least 20 and, according to some sources, possibly as many as 50 people, on 22-23 April in the shanty-town of Raboteau," Amnesty International said. "The number of casualties already known to have occurred in Raboteau makes this the largest single mass killing by the military since the coup that overthrew President Aristide in September 1991".**

**Amnesty International's call for new human rights initiatives on Haiti to end such as atrocities as the Raboteau killings came as new moves have been announced at international level to resolve the Caribbean nation's political crisis. But the human rights organization insisted that any new initiatives must also focus on resolution of the country's human rights crisis.**

**"Failure to do so will cast doubt on the commitment of the international community to the very ideals upon which the United Nations was founded", Amnesty International said.**

**Since the coup, the people of Raboteau, Gonaives, Artibonite department, have been the particular target of repeated military attacks. Children as young as two years old have been subjected to maltreatment, including beatings with gun-butts.**

**The latest incident at Raboteau began on 18 April, when Haitian soldiers initially tried to locate a local activist, Amio Mètayer. When they failed to find him at home, they reportedly burned his house to the ground, ransacked other homes in the shanty-town, beat some villagers and arrested others, including Mètayer's father and sister.**

**The villagers were released the following day, but the army returned to Raboteau on 22 April, accompanied by members of the Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haitien (FRAPH), a paramilitary group linked to the army. The combined force surrounded the town and then opened fire with machine-guns as frightened residents fled towards the beach to try and escape in small boats.**

**Another group of soldiers and armed men allegedly fired on the fleeing villagers from the water, and also targeted Raboteau residents who had been sleeping in small canoes and fisherman in their boats. According to the military, the dead were killed in a gun-battle between the military and "terrorists" loyal to President Aristide.**

**It is reported that the military may have burned or dumped the bodies of some of the dead into the sea and that many of the shanty-town's residents have now fled into the surrounding mountains, making it difficult to establish a final death toll.**

**In view of the grave human rights situation in Haiti, Amnesty International is also reiterating its call upon the US to review its policy of intercepting Haitian asylum seekers at sea and forcibly returning them to Haiti without a hearing of their asylum claims. This policy has been carried out under a 1981 bilateral Haitian-US treaty on interception of Haitians, which has recently been abrogated by President Aristide.**

**A number of recent cases have been reported to Amnesty International in which Haitian asylum-seekers have been arrested or ill-treated by the Haitian military after being forcibly returned to Haiti by the US Coast Guard.**

**"The US administration is violating international standards by continuing with its policy of forcibly returning all Haitian asylum-seekers intercepted at sea outside US territorial waters", Amnesty International said. "By continuing to intercept and return Haitian asylum-seekers, the US Government is placing them at risk of serious human rights violations in Haiti".**

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