

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 36/008/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 042
23 February 2004

Haiti: Rebels, like government forces, must respect human rights

Rebel leaders have the responsibility to respect human rights and ensure that humanitarian assistance has access, said Amnesty International as rebel forces took control of Haiti's second largest city Cap Haïtien, setting the northern half of the country outside the sphere of state control.

"A number of rebel leaders have abysmal human rights records, raising serious concern about levels of violence, as well as the humanitarian situation, in the areas under their control," Amnesty International said today. "As a matter of urgency, rebel forces must respect the rights of all Haitians as they expand their region of influence."

Rebel leader Guy Philippe is reported as saying that up to eleven people were killed in the taking of Cap Haïtien on Sunday; it was not possible to confirm those figures.

Amnesty International also repeated its calls for police and armed government supporters to respect human rights. In one worrying incident in Port-au-Prince on Friday 20 February, a Haitian correspondent and a foreign cameraman were reportedly among nearly a dozen people injured when pro-government gang members attacked an opposition demonstration.

On the political front, international bodies have joined forces to propose a settlement of Haiti's political crisis.

Representatives of CARICOM, the Organisation of American States, the European Union, the United States, Canada and France proposed a settlement, agreed to by Haiti's president Jean Bertrand Aristide, whereby a multisectoral 'council of wise men' would name a new Prime Minister and a new Cabinet to help him govern.

The political opposition initially rejected the plan, but has reportedly been given until 22:00 GMT today to give a formal response.

The rebel forces are not included in the plan.

"Any political settlement must be grounded in the rule of law, and ultimately in the Haitian Constitution, if all parties involved in the conflict are truly committed to finding a peaceful and lasting solution," Amnesty International concluded.

Background Information

Rebel leaders include notorious figures such as Louis Jodel Chamblain and Jean Tatoune, convicted of

gross human rights violations committed a decade ago. Their forces are reported to include a number of former soldiers implicated in human rights abuses in the Central Plateau region of Haiti over the last year.

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