

UA 45/99

Fear for**HAITI Pierre Espérance, human rights defender**

Human rights defender Pierre Espérance was attacked by gunmen on 8 March 1999, and Amnesty International believes his life is in danger.

As Pierre Espérance, director of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) in Port-au-Prince, was travelling by car with a colleague, a white Toyota sedan pulled in front of him and stopped. A man stepped out and began firing at them with a machine gun. When Pierre Espérance tried to escape, the Toyota gave chase and the occupants began shooting again, wounding Pierre Espérance, who is now in hospital recovering. His companion was not harmed.

No one has yet taken responsibility for the attack, but the NCHR's Director in New York is quoted as saying that "Indications are that this was a cold-blooded, premeditated attempt to murder a well-known human rights advocate".

Amnesty International fears that Pierre Espérance and other Haitian human rights defenders may be at risk of further attacks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pierre Espérance joined the NCHR in 1991, a few weeks after the military coup which overthrew democratically-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Since then he has been helping victims of human rights violations, often risking his own life to document abuses. In 1995, he became the director of NCHR's Haiti office and was recently elected treasurer of the *Plate-forme des Organisations Haïtiennes des Droits de l'Homme*, Platform of Haitian Human Rights Groups.

Haiti has been in political crisis, with tensions between the various political groups running high, since June 1997, when the prime minister resigned. Since then there have been several killings, some possibly politically motivated. Several police officers have been killed. The police have been frequently accused of serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and torture.

On 11 January 1999 President René Préval said he would uphold a 1995 electoral law under which most legislative and municipal officials' terms of office ended that day. Legislators objected to the decision, which effectively dissolved parliament and allowed Préval to rule by decree. On 1 March Senator Jean Yvon Toussaint, a member of the main opposition group, the *Organisation du peuple en lutte*, Organization of People in Struggle, was shot dead at close range outside his home. In the past week leaflets threatening human rights groups, notably the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Groups, have been circulating in Port-au-Prince.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Pierre Espérance, Director of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), was attacked by gunmen;
- requesting that steps be taken to protect him and other human rights defenders;
- requesting that an independent and impartial investigation be carried out into the attack and that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

S.E. Monsieur René PRÉVAL
Président de la République de Haïti
Présidence de la République de Haïti
Palais National
Champ de Mars
Port-au-Prince

Telegrams: President Préval, Port-au-Prince, Haïti

Fax: + 509 23-2530

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République

Chief of Police

Monsieur Pierre Denizé
Directeur général de la Police nationale d'Haïti
Grand quartier général
12 rue Oscar
Port-au-Prince
Haïti

Telegrams: Directeur général PNH, Port-au-Prince, Haïti

Fax: + 509 45-73 74

Salutation: Monsieur le Directeur général

Inspector General of Police (in charge of investigating police abuses)

Monsieur Luc Eucher Joseph
Inspecteur général de la Police nationale d'Haïti
rue Oscar Prolongée
Pacot
Port-au-Prince
Haïti

Telegrams: Inspecteur général PNH, Port-au-Prince, Haïti

Tel/Fax:+ 509 45-9256

Salutation: Monsieur l'Inspecteur général

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental organization

National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR)
275 Seventh Avenue, 25th Floor
New York, NY 10001
USA

Fax: + 1 212 337 0028

Human Rights Organization

Plate-forme des Organisations Haïtiennes des Droits de l'Homme
Casier Postal 19181
Port-au-Prince
Haïti

and to diplomatic representatives of Haïti accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 April 1999.