

UA 76/02

Fear for

HAITIPatrick Merisier (m)

Berthony Philippe (m)

Other staff of NGO *Coalition Nationale des Droits des Haïtiens* (National Coalition for Haitian Rights)

Two Haitian human rights workers have received death threats, and one of them has been shot, after their organisation criticised the behaviour of some members of the ruling *Fanmi Lavalas* (FL) party. Amnesty International believes that both men and their colleagues are in grave danger.

Patrick Merisier was shot on 22 February, in the capital Port-au-Prince. He was waiting to be served in a restaurant at around 2pm when two men entered and fired at him, before fleeing on a motorcycle. He was wounded in the chest and left arm, and has since gone into hiding. Patrick Merisier works as a field monitor for the Haitian human rights organization *Coalition Nationale des Droits des Haïtiens*, National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), covering the Department of the South. He also broadcasts a programme on a community radio station, in which he covers a number of human rights issues. In late December 2001, a gang threw rocks at the radio station, damaging the building. This is a common form of intimidation in Haiti. In January, Patrick Merisier found anonymous leaflets (*tracts*) in front of his house, warning that he would be killed if he did not stop his human rights monitoring and broadcasts.

Another NCHR field monitor, Berthony Philippe, has gone into hiding after receiving similar death threats. He works in the area around the town of Ennery, in the Department of the Artibonite, north of Port-au-Prince.

On 7 February the NCHR had issued a report alleging that *Fanmi Lavalas* supporters had been involved in gang violence in the La Saline slum of Port-au-Prince and had escaped prosecution because of their links to the ruling party. On 5 March the organization held a press conference in its offices on the investigation into the killing of prominent radio journalist Jean Dominique, an outspoken critic of anti-democratic tendencies within *Fanmi Lavalas* and other parties, who was gunned down in April 2000. No one has yet been charged with his murder, and the NCHR were highly critical of the authorities' failure to ensure prompt, impartial and transparent justice in the case.

In response, on 7 March the state-funded newspaper *L'union* printed a press release from a prominent supporter of *Fanmi Lavalas*, accusing the NCHR's staff of defamation and threatening to have them arrested.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Other members of the NCHR have suffered death threats and violent attacks before now. In November 2001, NCHR staff were among the human rights defenders who reported receiving death threats after they published an open letter to the directors of the police denouncing police brutality and illegal killings. On 8 March 1999 in Port-au-Prince, gunmen in a car forced NCHR director Pierre Espérance's vehicle to stop and opened fire, hitting him in the leg (see UA 45/99, AMR 36/01/99, 10 March 1999).

The NCHR is a member of the umbrella organisation *Plateforme des Organisations Haïtiennes des Droits de l'Homme* (Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations), who are the subject of an Action File (AMR 36/006/00).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Patrick Merisier and Berthony Philippe, and their colleagues at the *Coalition Nationale des Droits des Haïtiens*, National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), and reminding the authorities that they have a duty to protect them and all Haitians;
- urging the authorities to investigate the recent death threats suffered by both men, and the shooting of Patrick Merisier on 22 February, and to support local police and justice officials in bringing those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to publicly declare their recognition of the important role of human rights defenders and to remind all Haitians, including supporters of *Fanmi Lavalas*, that efforts to curb or hinder their work will not be tolerated.

APPEALS TO: (Please note that Haiti's phone system is unreliable, and you may have trouble sending faxes. If so, please send copies by post.)

President

S.E. Monsieur Jean Bertrand Aristide
Président de la République d'Haïti
Présidence de la République d'Haïti
Palais National, Champ de Mars
Port-au-Prince, HAÏTI

Fax: (509) 223 0241

e-mail: embassy@haiti.org (Haitian embassy in Washington, DC)

Salutation: Your Excellency/Monsieur le Président de la République

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Garry Lissade
Ministre de la Justice et de la Sécurité Publique
Ministère de la Justice
19 Avenue Charles Sumner
Port-au-Prince, HAÏTI

Fax: (509) 245 0474

Salutation: Dear Minister/Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Plateforme Haïtienne des Droits Humains
Impasse Senghor
Martin Luther King, dernière maison
Nazon, Port-au-Prince, HAÏTI

Fax: (509) 245 6398

National Coalition for Haitian Rights
#9, Rue Rivière
Port-au-Prince, Delmas 71, Haiti

Fax: (509)244 4146

E-mail: nchr@haiti.maf.net

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 24 April 2002.