

HAITIOssagnol SERVIL

A judge has been forced out of office by the local mayor, who has threatened to kill him. He is now in hiding, in fear for his life.

Ossagnol Servil was the *juge de paix* (justice of the peace) in the town of Maissade, in Haiti's Central Plateau. In October 2000 he issued an arrest warrant for two men accused of theft. The men were supporters of the town's mayor, Wilo Joseph, who reportedly began threatening to kill M. Servil. In late October the mayor and his supporters led a demonstration outside the courthouse, burning car tyres, ransacking the judge's offices and reportedly demanding that he be sacked and replaced with someone more sympathetic to the mayor's political party. Two months later M. Servil was dismissed by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

On 27 February M. Servil's cousin was reportedly attacked by three relatives of another local official. Police reportedly arrested the three but released them after Mayor Joseph and a group of his supporters came to the police station and demanded that they be freed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Haiti held elections for local and national government in May and November 2000. *Fanmi Lavalas*, or 'Lavalas Family' party candidates won control of almost the entire country. President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who took office on 7 February 2001, is the leader of *Fanmi Lavalas*. (*Lavalas* is the Haitian Creole word for "flood", the term used to describe the vast popular movement that first brought him to power in 1990.)

Many of the newly-elected mayors, such as Wilo Joseph, have formed armed gangs to help run the areas they control, who act in the name of *Fanmi Lavalas*. As in Maissade, these groups threaten to destroy the rule of law and the authority of the police. Although they claim to represent *Fanmi Lavalas*, they are controlled only loosely, if at all, by central government. Bringing these groups under control is one of the main challenges facing President Aristide.

The new mayors and their gangs have recently closed local courts in several towns in the Central Plateau. In November 2000 the then-Minister of Justice and the then-Director General of the Haitian National Police assured an Amnesty International delegation that steps would be taken to disband illegal groups and punish local officials and others involved. However, the national authorities have since taken no action.

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

- expressing concern that the mayor of Maissade, Wilo Joseph, has threatened to kill former justice of the peace Ossagnol SERVIL, and reminding the authorities that they have a duty to protect him and all Haitians;
- urging the authorities to investigate this and other recent politically-motivated violence and intimidation in the Central Plateau, and to support local police and justice officials in bringing those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to tell Wilo Joseph and all other elected officials that they will not be allowed to maintain their own illegal security groups.

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

Prime Minister

Monsieur Jean Marie Chérestal
Premier Ministre
Villa d'Accueil
Delmas 60, Musseau
Port-au-Prince, HAÏTI

Fax: (509) 245 1624

Salutation: Dear Minister/Monsieur le Premier Ministre

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:

Commissaire de Gouvernement du Département du Centre
Parquet du Tribunal Civil de Hinche
Département du Centre, HAÏTI

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 (NCHR)
#9, Rue Rivière
Port-au-Prince, Delmas 71, Haiti

Fax: (509) 244 4146

E-mail: nchrhaiti@maf.org

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 27 April 2001.