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## **Haiti: Amnesty International urges UN not to abandon Haiti**

*A withdrawal of the United Nations (UN) mission to Haiti, without a meaningful alternative monitoring presence, would have a catastrophic impact on human rights protection in the country, Amnesty International said today.*

*In light of the increasingly grave human rights situation in Haiti, Amnesty International is deeply concerned by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recommendation to discontinue the International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (MICAH) when its mandate ends in February 2001.*

*"We have just returned from Haiti and we found a sharp deterioration in the human rights climate there," said Amnesty International researcher, Paige Wilhite. "If the UN leaves, it will effectively be abandoning the country and leaving the Haitian human rights defenders to cope on their own at a highly vulnerable moment."*

*"We are convinced that a withdrawal would be premature and highly detrimental to human rights protection in Haiti," added Amnesty International's researcher. "The Haitian human rights community is under-resourced and exposed, and would become more so in the absence of a UN monitoring presence in the field."*

*Amnesty International believes that the UN's departure would effectively negate the results of all past efforts by the UN, the Organization of American States and Haitians themselves to promote a climate of respect for human rights.*

The organization fears the UN's withdrawal from Haiti would also undermine efforts to dismantle newly-established illegal security forces and to prosecute all those within these forces found responsible for human rights violations. Furthermore, a withdrawal of UN support would undermine recent progress in bringing other Haitian military and police officers responsible for human rights violations to justice.

"The period following the inauguration of President-elect Jean Bertrand Aristide is a crucial one for Haiti's future," said Amnesty International's researcher. "A discontinuation of UN human rights field presence would weaken the level of international scrutiny, seriously damaging past and ongoing efforts in human rights protection in Haiti."

#### **Background:**

Newly-elected local and regional officials have begun establishing *de facto* and highly partisan security forces which have been responsible for a significant number of human rights violations. The Prime Minister of Haiti, as well as high-level justice, police and legislative officials, recognized the gravity of the matter and pledged to dismantle these illegal forces and to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations.

November saw the conclusion of the trial of former military and paramilitary implicated in the 1994 Raboteau massacre. In September, the first trial of police officers implicated in human rights violations was held, with several convictions. These trials are a sign of willingness on the part of Haitian authorities to hold those responsible for human rights abuses accountable for their actions.

Acts of political violence increased in Haiti during the local and legislative elections that began in May 2000, and continued to be frequent in the run-up to the 26 November presidential elections. The April 2000

*killing of radio journalist Jean Dominique is perhaps the most prominent of these. The manner in which the new administration addresses such outstanding cases will have a profound impact, for good or for ill, on the future of respect for human rights in Haiti. Of equal importance is the new president's response to any continuing violence and intimidation by partisans of his own political party.*

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Amnesty International's researcher will be available for interview. To request an interview or for more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
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