

\_\_\_\_\_, 2005

Fax No. 202-541-3339

Bishop William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane  
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE  
Washington, DC 20017-1194

Most Reverend Bishop Skylstad:

**We, the undersigned, urge the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to condemn the illegal imprisonment in Haiti of Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest and champion of the poor.**

Fr. Jean-Juste, who was ordained in New York, was arrested without a warrant, in violation of Haiti's Constitution, on July 21, 2005. He has been imprisoned in dangerous conditions ever since. The Interim Government of Haiti (IGH) has accused Fr. Jean-Juste of murder, but has produced no evidence against him. This is Fr. Jean-Juste's second illegal, political imprisonment. Police arrested him in October 2004, while he was feeding hundreds of poor children their only meal of the day. The IGH accused Fr. Jean-Juste of murder then too, but a courageous judge released him when the prosecutor produced no evidence and Archbishop Miot of Port-au-Prince showed equal courage by testifying at his hearing. The IGH responded by forcing the judge off the bench and harassing Fr. Jean-Juste. In the week before his July arrest, Fr. Jean-Juste was detained at the airport, questioned twice at a police station and summoned to court once.

Fr. Jean-Juste has been suspended from priestly duties by the Haitian Bishops' Conference, because he is accused of violating canonical norms by running for President. The evidence for this punishment is not strong- Fr. Jean-Juste never registered as a candidate, he never announced that he was a candidate and no political party ever named him as a candidate. But the strongest evidence of a canonical norm violation would not justify four months' imprisonment or the Church's silence in the face of a priests' persecution.

A growing movement of people of faith, human rights groups and political leaders from all over the world has called for Fr. Jean-Juste's release. Over 400 religious leaders of many faiths joined Bishop Thomas Gumbleton in a letter to Haitian officials, Amnesty International declared Fr. Jean-Juste a prisoner of conscience, over 2,000 people signed Human Rights First's petition, and hundreds more have written to the Haitian government. Twenty-nine members of the U.S. Congress expressed their "profound concerns" about Fr. Jean-Juste's "unjust imprisonment."

The U.S. Catholic Bishop's Conference should join these voices of faith and principle, by condemning Fr. Jean-Juste's persecution and taking every action in its power to advance his liberation.

Sincerely,



