

HAITI NEWS ROUNDUP: APRIL 15 – 24, 2006

Preval's party leading in partial Haiti vote result

Mon 24 Apr 2006

By Joseph Guylor Delva

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - The Lespwa political movement of Haitian President-elect Rene Preval has won nearly half of the parliamentary seats tallied so far but his ability to control the legislature remained in doubt, according to partial election results released on Monday.

Lespwa candidates won 11 of the 24 Senate seats counted from Friday's runoff election and 20 of the 41 seats counted in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house in the legislature, Haiti's electoral council announced.

All 30 Senate seats and 97 of the 99 seats in the Chamber were up for grabs in the election. The other two Chamber seats were decided in the first round of voting on Feb. 7, when Preval was declared the winner of the presidency.

The runoff election will determine whether Preval, who served as president from 1996 to 2001, will have enough support in parliament to govern effectively.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, is trying to shake off decades of dictatorship, political violence and turmoil. The Feb. 7 election was its first since Preval's one-time mentor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was pushed from the presidency in February 2004 by a violent revolt and by pressure from foreign governments to quit.

Haiti has been run since Aristide's ouster by an appointed interim government while U.N. troops and police have tried to restore security.

Preval won the presidency with broad support from Haiti's poor majority, while the nation's small, wealthy elite harbors deep suspicions of the former Aristide protege.

Elections officials said they expected to release more results on Tuesday.

An international observer mission with representatives from Brazil, Canada, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama and the United States issued a preliminary report on the election on Monday, calling the vote credible and well-organized.

The International Mission for Monitoring Haitian Elections said the vote "accurately reflected the will of the Haitian people" but acknowledged some problems.

It said some voters with proper identification cards were barred from voting because of incorrect voter lists and some polling stations did not have enough seals to guard against ballot-box tampering.

Preval's party wins nearly a quarter of seats so far in Haiti runoff

By STEVENSON JACOBS

AP

Calgary Sun, Canada

April 24, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - President-elect Rene Preval's party has won almost one-fourth of Haiti's parliamentary seats, according to partial results, boosting his legislative influence as he tries to unite this divided and impoverished country.

But the results highlighted that, lacking a majority in the Caribbean country's senate and lower house, Preval will need to form a coalition to govern effectively. With 98 per cent of the votes counted from Friday's senate race, Preval's Lespwa party had won at least 11 of 30 seats, the Provisional Electoral Council announced late Monday.

Lespwa was easily beating the second-place Organization for the People's Struggle party, which had taken four senate seats so far.

In the lower house of parliament, Preval's party won at least 20 of 99 seats, the council said. Slightly more than half the races had yet to be decided, with more results to be released Tuesday.

Preval's party will likely pick up more seats, but the 63-year-old agronomist will still need to form a coalition government to control parliament since neither Lespwa nor rival parties have enough candidates to win a majority.

The party or coalition with a majority of seats picks the prime minister, who as head of government appoints the cabinet and most administrative posts.

In Senate races, the Fusion party finished third with three seats, while the Fanmi Lavalas party of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide had two seats. Several smaller parties won four seats, and six races were still undecided.

Also winning a seat was the nephew of interim Haitian leader Gerard Latortue, Youri Latortue, who represents a small party in the northwestern Artibonite region.

Preval, a champion of the poor and former Aristide ally, will be sworn in May 14 and has pledged to restore security and create jobs after the bloody revolt that toppled the former president, plunging the impoverished country deeper into despair.

At least 1 million Haitians - about 30 per cent of the country's 3.5 million registered voters - participated in the runoff, United Nations officials said Monday, double the initial estimate given by some international observers.

David Wimhurst, a spokesman for the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, said the turnout represented a "a big step forward" compared with past legislative races in Haiti.

Many voters were slow to turn up at polling stations in the early hours of balloting, prompting the head EU election observer, Johan Van Hecke, to call the turnout "extremely weak" and estimate participation at no more than 15 per cent.

Speaking to reporters Monday, Van Hecke said that estimate was based on "preliminary information," but stood by his assessment that participation was "very low."

Chavez to add Haiti to Petrocaribe

UPI

April 24, 2006

CARACAS, Venezuela -- Venezuela will help Haiti meet its energy needs, President Hugo Chavez has said.

"We are going to include Haiti in Petrocaribe and send it all the fuel it needs," he said Sunday on "Hello, President" television program. "We are also building storage facilities with a special fund."

The comments were reported by Venezuelan Union Radio's Web site.

Haitian President-elect Rene Preval was in Venezuela Monday to sign Haiti up to the Venezuelan oil initiative.

Annan hails Haiti's parliamentary elections as crucial step on road to peace
UN News Centre
April 24, 2006

24 April 2006 – The calm atmosphere in which the second round of Haiti's parliamentary elections took place on Friday represents a crucial step towards placing the impoverished and strife-torn Caribbean country on the path to peaceful and stable development, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said today.

“It will be essential for the country's progress that all elements of Haiti's political spectrum and the various branches of Haiti's Government work in a spirit of close cooperation to ensure that this opportunity is fully grasped,” he added in a statement issued by his spokesman.

The statement paid tribute to the “excellent collaboration between Haiti and the international community that resulted in an exemplary logistical and technical process.”

The UN helped organize the poll, together with February's presidential vote, as part of its peacekeeping mission in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established in 2004 after an insurgency forced elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to go into exile. Former President René Préval won the February's election.

Haiti begins tallying votes
Reuters
April 24, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haiti slowly began to collect tally sheets Saturday after a parliamentary election that drew few voters but avoided most of the violence that has marred past attempts at democracy.

UN troops began bringing tally sheets back from remote towns and villages to the vote -counting center in the capital Port-au-Prince, said Max Mathurin, head of the Provisional Electoral Council in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

"Some have already arrived at the tabulation center but we probably won't start talking about figures till Monday," Mathurin said.

Friday's second-round vote to pick 97 of 99 members of the Chamber of Deputies and 30 senators will decide whether President-elect Rene Preval, who won a first-round victory on Feb. 7, will have enough sway with parliament to govern effectively.

Haiti President pays 24-hour visit to Venezuela
El Universal, Venezuela
April 24, 2006

Haitian President elect Rene Preval Monday is paying a 24-hour visit to Venezuela and is meeting with President Hugo Chávez, Preval's Office informed.

"This is a friendly visit. President Preval is to seize the opportunity to set the grounds for future discussions with President Chávez," the source told AFP.

During the visit, both Preval and Chávez are to address Petrocaribe, an oil initiative Venezuela is implementing to sell cheap oil to Central America and Caribbean countries, and which Haiti has recently joined, the source added.

Latin Inflation: Peru Best, Haiti Worst
April 24, 2006
Latin Business Chronicle, FL

Peru posts Latin America's lowest inflation, while Haiti posts the highest rate. But Argentina and Venezuela will likely be the worst offenders next year.

BY CHRONICLE STAFF

Rene Preval has his job cut out for him. When he assumes the presidency of Haiti next month he will inherit not only Latin America's poorest economy, but also the worst performing one. In addition to ranking last on GDP growth last year, Haiti also ranked first in terms of inflation the past two years. While the outlook is expected to improve somewhat this year, the estimates are far from rosy. Haiti is expected to post an inflation rate of 13.1 percent this year, which will again be the highest in Latin America, according to the International Monetary Fund.

CHALLENGES: Haiti's president-elect Rene Preval faces high inflation and low GDP growth.

On the opposite end, President Alejandro Toledo of Peru has reason to be happy. Amidst low popularity rates despite impressive economic growth the past few years, Peru last year posted inflation of 1.6 percent, Latin America's lowest rate. But this year, the country will again see prices rise, ending at an inflation rate of 2.7 percent. Next year, that will fall somewhat - to 2.2 percent, the IMF expects. That forecast assumes that macro economic policies remain relatively stable in Peru, despite the possibility that Ollanta Humala, an anti-business candidate, wins the second round of presidential elections in May or June.

All in all, Latin America is expected to post an average of 5.8 percent inflation this year. That's better than last year's rate of 6.3 percent and the lowest rate in more than 25 years. A dozen countries are expected to post reduced inflation compared with last year, while six will likely see increases and one will keep its same rate, the IMF forecasts in its latest World Economic Outlook, which was released last week.

Last year, inflation ended at 6.3 percent. That was an improvement from 2004 and came despite increased inflation in 10 countries. The average reduction was largely due to significant reductions in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Venezuela.

Next year, Latin America's average inflation is expected to reach 5.6 percent. Except for two countries - Argentina and Venezuela - all are likely to see reduced inflation compared with this year, the IMF predicts.

BRAZIL AND MEXICO

Despite some political uncertainty as a result of a major corruption scandal that hit the ruling Workers Party, Brazil managed to see only a slight increase in inflation from 6.6 percent in 2004 to 6.8 percent last year. This and next year, Brazil will see declines - to 4.9 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively, the IMF forecasts.

Last week, the private Getulio Vargas Foundation reported that its General Price Index, fell 0.5 percent in the 10 days through April 20, compared with a 0.1 percent decline in the same period in March. "The data helped to ease concerns about the inflationary impact of high global oil prices," Thomson Financial said in a commentary Friday.

The good news will likely put pressure on the Central Bank to ease make further interest rate cuts.

Meanwhile, Mexico managed to reduce its inflation last year to 4.0 percent, its lowest in more than 25 years. This year, the country is expected to continue reducing the rate - to 3.5 percent, followed by another reduction to 3.0 percent next year, the IMF predicts.

"The decline in inflation over the past year ...has allowed an unwinding of earlier monetary tightening," the IMF says.

ARGENTINA AND VENEZUELA

In contrast to Brazil and Mexico, Argentina appears to be losing its fight against inflation. Last year it ended at 9.6 percent, which was more than twice the 4.4. percent rate posyed in 2004. This year, inflation will likely end at 12.9 percent, which is the highest in Latin America after Haiti. And next year, Argentina will probably have the dubious honor of having the region's second-highest inflation: 15.0 percent, the IMF predicts.

"These policies of inflation suppression and exchange rate undervaluation are neither desirable nor sustainable in the longer term," says Michael Mussa, a senior fellow at the Washington, DC-based Institute for International Economics and the author of *Argentina and the Fund: From Triumph to Tragedy*. "For this year and probably through 2007, however, the Argentine authorities can probably continue to get away with this nonsense."

A combination of larger-than-budgeted fiscal surpluses, higher interest rates, and greater exchange rate flexibility will be needed to manage domestic demand pressures and contain accelerating inflation, the IMF warns.

"The Kirchner administration remains fixated on trying to control macroeconomic problems, such as high inflation, with the implementation of inefficient micro-level policies (such as implementing price controls)," Bear Stearns says. "We continue to believe that there is a high risk that we will start to see rationing and indexation problems in Argentina."

Venezuela is the other major economy suffering from inflation. Last year it ended up at 15.9 percent, which actually was an improvement over the 21.7 percent rate of 2004. But the compared to teh rest of Latin America, the result was dismal. Only Haiti had higher inflation last year.

This year, Venezuela will likely again reduce inflation and end up at 11.7 percent, but next year the trend will turn and Venezuela will see a rise in inflation - to 17.3 percent, the IMF forecasts. That will be the worst in Latin America.

The rise is due to a significant increase in public spending financed by an oil boom. "Macroeconomic policies need to be tightened substantially to rein in double-digit inflation," the IMF warns.

CHILE AND COLOMBIA

Chile has been struggling to avoid inflationary pressures the past two years. Last year, inflation ended at 3.1 percent, which was much higher than the record low of 1.1 percent in 2004. This year, inflation is again expected to grow - to 3.8 percent, before falling next year to 3.0 percent, the IMF predicts.

Colombia is experiencing improvement in its fight against inflation. Last year it ended at 5.0 percent, which was lower than the 7.1 percent posted in 2004 and its lowest in more than 25 years, IMF data shows.

And the good news is expected to continue, with inflation reaching 4.7 percent this year and 4.2 percent next year, the IMF forecasts.

The reduction is due to tight monetary policies. Colombia's Finance Minister Alberto Carrasquilla said last week that the central bank likely will raise interest rates this year to keep inflation in check, according to Bloomberg.

ECUADOR, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND PANAMA

Ecuador ended last year with an inflation of 2.4 percent, its lowest in more than 25 years and the fifth consecutive year of falling inflation. However, inflation started rising in the second half last year. "A strong expansion in public spending and bank credit contributed to rising inflationary pressures in the second half of the year," the IMF says.

As a result, Ecuador this year is set to see a rise in inflation to 3.4 percent, before a fall next year to 3.0 percent, the IMF forecasts.

In other noticeable news, the Dominican Republic saw the strongest fall in inflation from 51.5 percent in 2004 to 4.2 percent last year, its lowest in more than 25 years. This year inflation will rise, though, to 8.5 percent, before dropping to 5.0 percent next year, the IMF predicts.

But the big winner this year will be Panama. Inflation will likely end up at 2.2 percent, which is better than last year's rate of 2.9 percent and the lowest in Latin America. Next year, Panama will again see a reduction - to 1.5 percent inflation, which once again will be the region's lowest rate, the IMF forecasts. Panama has traditionally achieved one of Latin America's lowest inflation rates thanks to its dollarized economy.

Assassination of Haiti's most famous journalist still unresolved

By Vario Sérant

Caribbean Net News

FinalCall.com

Apr 24, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Six years after the double assassination of renowned Haitian journalist Jean Dominique and his guard, Jean Claude Louissaint, the investigation is still in deadlock. The judge of instruction, Jean Ostrict Hercule, has been in charge of the affair since August 4, 2005, but withdrew his participation in the investigation citing personal reasons.

According to the chief of the civil court of Port-au-Prince, Rock Cadet, this decision constitutes a violation of the criminal instruction code. Although Mr. Cadet refuses to speak about the investigation being blocked, he explained that the law guarantees the independence of the judge of instruction on the jurisdictional level, but subjects him to the authority of the chief of the civil court.

According to Mr. Cadet, the Jean Dominique affair will be turned over to the Cabinet of Instruction. He added that administrative steps are being considered against the judge Jean Ostrict Hercule if such events occur again. On the sixth anniversary of the disappearance of the director of Radio Haiti Inter, Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters without Borders) called the president-elect Rene Préval to direct legal attention towards this affair. "The scandal caused by the suppression of the Jean Dominique affair is all the more serious as the identities of the alleged assassins were known. However, the three killers are currently at large," emphasized RSF.

According to the international organization for the defense for the freedom of the press, this affair reveals the need for extensive reforms of the legal system. This responsibility will fall on the government, which takes office after the second round of the legislative elections of April 21.

The National Association of the Haitian Media (ANMH) has united media directors to denounce the shameful mishandling of the assassination of Jean Dominique and Jean Claude Louissaint. According to the president of the ANMH, Anne-Marie Issa, such treatment sent a bad signal to delinquents and assassins. The human rights section of the UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has also said, "Giving justice to Jean Dominique and to all the other victims of violence would be a good way to reassure the Haitian people, the unceasing victims of the consequences of impunity."

**Thousands march for Haitian rights
Protesters marched through North Miami to protest what they call an unjust policy toward
Haitian immigrants.**

BY PETER BAILEY

Miami Herald

April 23, 2006

In the shadow of the federal government's regional immigration offices at 79th Street and Biscayne, the crowd of mostly Haitians flooded the busy boulevard, swaying in political unison to the rhythm of black pride rooted in the world's first black republic -- now broken by poverty.

'NO LONGER INVISIBLE'

Centered at the front lines of their crusade is a long-standing demand: that all Haitians be granted temporary protected status, or TPS, which permits immigrants from a handful of countries in crisis to remain in the United States as lawful residents.

Again and again Saturday, the chant -- "We Want TPS!" -- echoed throughout North Miami's streets.

"We're gonna fight to make sure there are no second-class citizens. . . . Haitians will no longer go invisible!" bellowed Eliseo Medina, executive vice president of the Service Employees International Union, a national organization representing nearly two million workers.

Medina was one of several civic leaders who organized the rally with other groups to protest what they call the unjust policies toward Haitian immigrants that began with the Clinton administration.

"We just want justice for the Haitian people. . . . We've waited for too long," local Haitian activist Ronald A. Brisé said.

TPS REQUIREMENTS

Currently, the Department of Homeland Security, which has authority over the TPS program, grants temporary legal status to immigrants from Burundi, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Somalia and Sudan.

Immigrants from Haiti have never been granted such status under TPS, which Congress first approved in 1990.

TPS is authorized for those immigrants who are forced to flee their home countries because of armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions.

Brisé says Haitians meet every condition. "Look at Haiti, and ask why we're sent back home," he said.

Standing atop a van, Jack Lieberman, of the American Jewish Congress, gave the crowd a more forthright answer: "It's racism. . . . If they allow the Cubans to stay, why are the Haitians kicked out!"

Cubans are not eligible for TPS. Those Cubans who attempt to enter the United States illegally can receive legal residency if they make it to dry land. If they are stopped at sea, they usually are returned to Cuba.

POWERFUL DRAW

Hundreds of protesters hoisted Haitian flags as they approached 79th Street and Biscayne, and another chant of "We Want TPS!" rose from the crowd.

A sense of urgency filled the air, prompting bystanders to follow the procession. One store employee jumped from behind his cash register to join ranks. Among the protesters was Mary Simeon, 42, who knows firsthand of the Haitian struggle for citizenship.

She fled her homeland 11 years ago and now works in a seafood restaurant in Coral Springs. She said Miami will offer a better life for her U.S.-born daughters -- Gina, 7, and Gesula, 5 -- both of whom joined their mother in the march.

"Haiti was hard, but I came here and did well . . . and now I'm a citizen," said the elder Simeon. "I want the same for my people."

"I'm proud to be Haitian!" yelled her daughter, Gina.

For countless others, the protest was more personal.

The words "I need my dad here with me, not back in Haiti," was emblazoned across one pink-colored poster raised high above the crowd.

Haitians go to polls today

Haiti will vote today in the second round of national elections meant to restore democracy following the 2004 rebellion that ousted Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

By JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

April 21, 2006

Haitians will go to the polls today to elect what they hope will be the first functioning Parliament since 1997 -- a critical step towards democracy in a nation beset by political upheaval for most of its history.

The Parliament would enable the May 14 inauguration of President-elect René Préval, who was declared the victor of Feb. 7 balloting after a dangerously messy vote and count that Haitians hope will not be repeated.

While Préval had a huge lead on his nearest contender, the inexplicably large number of blank ballots cast uncertainty over whether he had the more than 50 percent of votes he needed to avoid a runoff.

His supporters took to the streets and fiery roadblocks shut down the country for two days. On Feb. 16, under pressure from foreign diplomats, the Haitian electoral council threw out the blank ballots and declared Préval the winner.

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

International election observers say the technical problems that marred the first round appear to have been corrected.

"It will be much smoother because lots of things have been improved," said Claude Parent, chief of the International Mission to Monitor Elections in Haiti.

A successful vote today in races for all but one of the 129 seats in Parliament would continue the nascent process of re-building Haiti's government following an armed revolt in 2004 that forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile in South Africa.

Today's vote includes runoffs for 111 seats in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Contests for 17 other seats are being re-held in districts where the results from Feb. 7 were thrown out because of violence, widespread missing ballots or looted voting centers. Only one candidate -- for deputy -- won outright on Feb. 7 and does not face a runoff.

No party has a clear lock on control of the Parliament. Of the seats at stake today, Préval's Lespwa has only 47 candidates in the race. Paul Denis' left-of center Organization of People in Struggle, known as OPL, has 27 and Serge Gille's coalition party Fusion has 26.

'REACHING OUT'

Préval, who was president from 1996-2001, has met with various members of the opposition in an effort to break the political deadlock that hobbled his presidency and that of Aristide, a popular but

polarizing former priest who accused Haiti's light-skinned elite of exploiting the poor for two centuries.

"So far, what I see of Préval, he is clearly reaching out to other factions," said Robert Fatton, a Haiti expert and political-science professor at the University of Virginia. "And there are plenty of people in the business community who apparently made peace with him."

Political observers say some legislators from other parties are likely to form a ruling alliance with Lespwa, while OPL and Fusion might morph into an opposition movement. Fatton says the political calm is extremely fragile, and could break down if Préval does not show some early success defibrillating the flat-lining economy.

Hard-line politics has left nothing but wreckage in Haiti.

Préval's first presidency was paralyzed when the Parliament, controlled by OPL, rejected his appointments for prime minister. And right-wing members of the elite, who led the opposition that helped oust Aristide, saw their candidates trounced by Préval at the polls this February.

The deeply polarized election in February came close to spinning the country into anarchy, as winners and losers alike exploited the many technical problems to allege fraud and intimidation.

Still, in the disgraceful pantheon of Haitian elections, this has been considered one of the most successful. There have been no substantive allegations of systematic fraud or intimidation, and turnout -- over 2 million -- surprised even the most optimistic.

The biggest fiasco of the first round came when people started finding piles of burned and bedraggled ballots at Truitier Landfill outside of Port-au-Prince.

A United Nations Police (UNPOL) investigation found that the ballots at the dump had already been tallied, according to a copy of the report viewed by The Miami Herald.

The electoral material came from a U.N. base called Camp Bravo, where ballots and tally sheets from voting centers around the country were sorted before being sent to the tabulation center in Port-au-Prince. According to the UNPOL report, the camp was disorganized and lacked proper security.

CHANGES

Boucart Pest Control Company, tasked with removing trash from the site, took several loads to the landfill before the tabulation was finished. Furthering the confusion: Ballots arriving from the voting centers often came in black trash bags. "There was no designated responsible personnel at Camp Bravo to receive, check, separate and distribute sensitive and non-sensitive materials accordingly," the report said.

This time, U.N. electoral advisors, who effectively run the transport and tabulation process, say they have made numerous changes to avoid a similar fiasco on Friday.

"We are re-training everybody," said Gerard Le Chevallier, the U.N. chief of electoral assistance.

Le Chevallier said U.N. Peacekeepers will be stationed at over 30 locations where tension is expected, many in rural areas where looting or fights broke out in the first round. He and the chief of the U.N. mission in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, plan to visit the volatile city of Gonaives in the morning, to help establish a strong official presence there.

Haitian rally in Miami seeks equal treatment
The South Florida Sun-Sentinel
April 23 2006

Several thousand Haitian immigrants rallied in downtown Miami Saturday, calling for Temporary Protected Status for fellow Haitians who arrive in the United States illegally.

The protesters pointed to immigrants from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and other countries who enjoy the benefits of TPS, which halts deportations and grants work permits based on certain conditions. Haitians do not qualify for TPS.

"It's a question of equal treatment," said Steven Forester, senior policy advocate for Haitian Women of Miami, one of the organizers of the march.

The peaceful rally ended in front of the Department of Homeland Security offices on Northeast 79th Street and Biscayne Boulevard, where marchers heard from local elected officials and community activists.

Haiti slowly begins tally after low-turnout vote

22 Apr 2006

Reuters

By Joseph Guyler Delva

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- Haiti slowly began to collect tally sheets on Saturday after a parliamentary election that drew few voters but avoided most of the violence that has marred past attempts at democracy.

U.N. troops began bringing tally sheets back from remote towns and villages to the vote counting center in the capital Port-au-Prince, said Max Mathurin, head of the Provisional Electoral Council in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

"Some have already arrived at the tabulation center but we probably won't start talking about figures till Monday," Mathurin told Reuters.

Friday's second-round vote to pick 97 of 99 members of the Chamber of Deputies and 30 senators will decide whether President-elect Rene Preval, who won a first-round victory on Feb. 7, will have enough sway with parliament and the next prime minister to govern effectively.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has been afflicted by dictatorships, political violence and poverty for most of its 202 years.

Preval's predecessor as president, former Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was ousted in February 2004 while facing an armed revolt amid accusations of corruption and despotism.

Haiti has been run since then by an unelected interim authority while U.N. troops and police have tried to maintain peace between Aristide's supporters in the sprawling slums and the wealthy elite, who opposed him and now also harbor deep suspicions about Preval.

One person was shot dead on Friday by a relative who supported a rival candidate, police said. Turnout was extremely low at an estimated 15 percent of registered voters, European Union electoral observers said.

The sporadic reports of scuffles and demonstrations reported by election officials suggested a relatively problem-free election compared to past ballots, when gunmen massacred voters as they stood in line.

Many people complained they had been turned away from voting stations because they had been registered in other districts. It was unclear how widespread the problem was.

Voters and politicians also complained that polling stations closed on time at 4 p.m. During the first-round election in February, huge crowds persuaded authorities to keep some voting centers open into the evening and many Haitians said they had expected the same to happen this time.

"This is a flagrant violation of the citizen's civil and political rights," said Renan Hedouville, head of the Lawyers Committee for Individual Rights, also known as CARLI.

"This was a well-planned strategy by authorities together with the electoral council to prevent a group of people from participating in the runoff," he said.

Hedouville suggested that a low turnout would hurt the chances Preval supporters because much of their support came from the poor.

Haitian Polls Close After Light Turnout

By Amelia Shaw , Port-au-Prince

22 April 2006

VOA

Haitians went to the polls on Friday in a second round of parliamentary elections that are crucial for President-elect Rene Preval to govern the country if he gets enough support in the law making body.

Only two candidates won seats in February's first round of voting. Haitians are hoping the election will produce their first functioning legislature since 1997.

Despite the declaration of a national holiday, few people turned out to vote in elections that will decide 127 parliamentary seats. This second round of voting will re-install a democratically elected government to the troubled Caribbean nation.

Haiti has been ruled by an interim government led by Prime Minister Gerard Latortue ever since former president Jean Bertrand Aristide was overthrown in a violent uprising two years ago. In 2002, more than 9,000 U.N. peacekeepers were deployed, to stabilize the country against armed gangs and former militants.

But those who did turn out to vote, like Samia Rameau, came with hope for a better future. "It's my duty to vote. It's very important, I hope there is a change, Haiti needs a lot of change. Too much problem, too much stealing. Something has to change. I hope, I hope, believe me I hope."

Max Mathurin, President of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, said that though voter turnout was lower than in February's first round of elections, many Haitians did participate. But he said, the day did not pass without incident.

Mathurin says that in rural towns in the Artibonite and Central Plateau, one person was killed and two were wounded by gunshots. In one instance, a candidate shot and wounded a national election observer. In a few voter booths, voters were threatened by armed gunmen. But he says it is unlikely that these incidents will affect the outcome of the vote.

The U.N says the legislative elections are crucial for the country's transition to democracy. The newly-elected parliament will choose a prime minister, who will serve under president-elect Rene Preval, who won the post by a majority vote in February's presidential election.

Mr. Preval's greatest challenges will be restoring political stability and revamping the nation's bankrupt economy. If no party has enough seats to win a majority in Parliament, a coalition government is expected. Final results should be released next week.

Low Turnout Marks Haiti's Runoff Vote

ABC News

AP

By STEVENSON JACOBS

April 22, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti— Low voter turnout marked Haiti's runoff vote for a new parliament, indicating President-elect Rene Preval may have to work hard to reach out to rivals in forming a new government and keep the country on the path to democracy.

Friday's race for 127 parliamentary seats 97 deputies and 30 senators was billed as the final step restoring democracy to poorest nation in the Americas two years after an armed revolt ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

But low turnout contrasted sharply with the frenzied Feb. 7 presidential race and first-round legislative election, in which throngs of eager voters braved long lines to elect Preval, who has vowed to work to bring peace and jobs to the traumatized nation. He takes power next month.

"I don't have a job and can't feed my kids or send them to school, so hopefully this government will give us a chance for a better life," said Espira St. Fleur, 56.

He was among several hundred people voting in a polling center in the Port-au-Prince slum of Cite Soleil, where some election workers sat idle in front of half-empty ballot boxes as they waited for voters.

One person was shot and killed in polling violence in the northern town of Grand Saline, said Max Mathurin, president of Haiti's electoral council. He did not give further details.

In the same town, people broke into two polling stations and burned an unknown number of ballots, said David Wimhurst, a spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission sent to restore order after Aristide's ouster.

Meanwhile in the capital, voting went smoothly except for isolated incidents of voter fraud and intimidation, officials said. Some voters in the Port-au-Prince slum of Cite Soleil grew angry after being told they could not cast ballots because they were not on the voting list.

"Historically there's not a lot of turnout for legislative elections" in Haiti, said Wimhurst.

Preval's Lespwa party will likely take the most seats, but the 63-year-old agronomist needs to form a coalition government since no party has enough candidates to win a majority.

The party or coalition with the most parliamentary seats gets to choose the prime minister, who acts as head of government and appoints Cabinet members and most administrative posts.

Daniel Erikson, a Haiti expert with the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue, said the likely prospect of a divided parliament means Preval will have to reach out to rival parties for support.

"Preval's honeymoon will almost certainly be very short," Erikson said.

Friday's race included a broad array of candidates, including members of Aristide's center-left Lavalas party and former rebels who helped oust him.

The head of a European Union observation team called the vote largely fair and free of the problems that plagued the Feb. 7 first round. Only two candidates won seats in that round.

"Overall, it's a big improvement over the first round," European Parliament member Johan Van Hecke said.

Haiti has not had a functioning parliament since 2003.

**Canadian Politicians Travel to Haiti on Eve of Elections
Meeting Plans 'Confidential'
by Anthony Fenton
The Dominion, Canada
April 22, 2006**

A delegation of Canadian parliamentarians arrived in Haiti on Thursday as Haitian voters prepared to participate in run-off elections slated for April 21st. Members of the Liberal Party, who engineered Canada's involvement in leadup and aftermath of the coup d'etat that threw the island nation into chaos in February 2004, are not among the high-level delegation. The trip was authorized by the new Foreign Affairs Minister of the Conservative government, Peter MacKay.

Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs will reportedly be meeting with President-elect Rene Preval, de facto Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, and may be visiting the national penitentiary where many political prisoners languish. A spokesperson for New Democratic Party MP Alexa McDonough, the NDP's former leader and current foreign affairs critic, would not provide details of the trip, writing in an e-mail to the Dominion that the itinerary for the trip was said to be "confidential."

McDonough's spokesperson confirmed that she has scheduled a screening of the documentary film "Aristide and the Endless Revolution" upon her return to Ottawa. The controversial but critically acclaimed film contests the version of the events offered by Canada, the US, and France, the leaders of the February 2004 invasion of Haiti. Canadian troops secured key locations in the Haitian capitol of Port-au-Prince, and US whisked elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide into his second forced exile in as many times he had held the office.

A source close to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) told the Dominion that visiting dignitaries are limited to the areas where "things are working a little bit."

"They're brought wherever people want to show them things are working reasonably [well]," the source said.

In the Haitian elections, thirty Senate seats and ninety-seven Chamber of Deputy seats are up for grabs as Haitian President-elect Rene Preval awaits the news that will determine how his popular Lespwa coalition of parties fared against a largely foreign-backed opposition representing Haiti's minority classes.

Without a majority in Parliament, Preval will be under severe pressure to stray from his mandate to eradicate poverty, end repression, free the hundreds of political prisoners, and give Haiti's impoverished majority a say in the country's affairs. Foreign donors and Haiti's elites are pressuring for structural reforms and eventual privatization under the tutelage of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and Inter-American Bank.

With voter turn-out for run-off elections traditionally low, and with a high level of foreign and Haitian elite support for opposition parties, it is plausible that Preval's Lespwa coalition will lack a majority in

the upcoming parliament. On April 19th, Reuters *reporter Joseph Guyler Delva quoted Preval as saying, "Without support from parliament, there is not much a president can do."

The head of Elections Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, heads an international elections monitoring mission in Haiti (IMMHE), a position that he has held in overseeing recent elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. The IMMHE works closely with the controversial US organization, IFES, who receive funding from the US State Department and USAID. Kingsley sits on the IFES Board of Directors. The Chairman of IFES is William Hybl, a former Bush appointee to the UN and former advisor to President Ronald Reagan, who also sits on the board of directors of the International Republican Institute (IRI). Both the IRI and IFES are widely believed to have helped destabilize Haiti's democratically elected government by supporting the largely elite-based opposition that agitated for Aristide's ouster prior to his overthrow in 2004.

On Friday, the Ottawa Haiti Solidarity Committee held a demonstration demanding Kingsley's resignation. A press release cited "Kingsley's appalling silence in the face of grave human rights violations and political repression throughout Haiti's election process demonstrate a profound partisan bias that is simply unacceptable."

"His performance is a disgrace, and he should resign immediately."

Referring to the April 21st run-off and February 7th elections as "profoundly flawed" the committee decried the failure of Kingsley to address well-founded accusations of fraud and ballot manipulation. They write that a recent IMMHE report on the February elections "completely ignores these accusations and minimizes the importance of the burning ballots. It hails the election as a "laudable democratic exercise." The protesters are also calling for the release of Haiti's political prisoners.

The Canadian government has played a leading role in Haiti's "transition" under UN-led military occupation, pouring millions of dollars of funding into programs that support Haiti's right-wing and former opposition to Lavalas. Canadian-based transnationals such as Gildan Activewear, own and contract out sweatshops in Haiti. According to a CIDA spokesperson, at least one other Canadian-based textile company is currently considering moving to Haiti where conditions are favorable due to Haiti's low wages, tax holidays, and favorable trade and labor conditions.

Critics of Canada's role in Haiti have long encouraged politicians to acknowledge the reported abuses that have been carried out by the interim government and UN forces, which include at least 100 RCMP and an undisclosed number of Canadian Forces and possible Special Forces. A Canadian has commanded the 1,700 strong UN police contingent since its inception under the MINUSTAH umbrella in mid-2004. At least five of the RCMP are devoted to intelligence gathering and surveillance.

Haitians Go to Polls to Elect Their First Parliament in Three Years
The New York Times
April 22, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, April 21 (AP) — Haitians traveled by pickup truck and mule and on foot Friday to vote in a legislative election billed as the final step in the often-delayed process to restore democracy to the poorest nation in the Americas.

Voter turnout in the runoff to pick a Parliament, two years after an armed revolt ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, fell well below the numbers who cast ballots in the presidential race in February.

The contests for 127 seats in Parliament — 97 deputies and 30 senators — will determine the level of legislative support for President-elect René Préval, who has vowed to work to bring peace and jobs to the traumatized nation. Mr. Préval takes power next month.

"I don't have a job and can't feed my kids or send them to school," said one voter, Espira St. Fleur, 56. "So, hopefully this government will give us a chance for a better life."

Mr. St. Fleur was among several hundred people in a polling center in Cité Soleil, a Port-au-Prince slum where some election workers sat idle in front of ballot boxes as they waited for voters.

One person was shot and killed in polling violence in Grand Saline, in the north, said Max Mathurin, president of Haiti's electoral council. He did not give further details.

In the same town, people broke into two polling stations and burned an unknown number of ballots, said David Wimhurst, a spokesman for the United Nations peacekeeping mission that was sent to restore order after Mr. Aristide's ouster.

In the capital, voting went smoothly except for isolated reports of fraud and intimidation, election officials said.

Some voters in Cité Soleil grew angry after being told they could not cast ballots because their names were not on the voting list.

The relatively calm vote on Friday contrasted sharply with the frenzied balloting in the presidential and first-round legislative election on Feb. 7.

During that voting, throngs of eager voters waited in enormously long lines at chaotic polling stations to elect Mr. Préval, 63, a former president and onetime Aristide ally.

Only two candidates won seats outright in the first round, forcing the second-round runoffs.

"Historically there's not a lot of turnout for legislative elections" in Haiti, said Mr. Wimhurst.

Mr. Préval's Lespwa party will probably take the most seats, but he will face the task of putting together a coalition government because no party has enough candidates to win a majority outright.

The party or coalition with the most parliamentary seats gets to choose the prime minister, who acts as head of government and appoints cabinet members as well as filling most administrative posts.

Daniel Erikson, a Haiti expert with the Inter-American Dialogue, based in Washington, said the likely prospect of a divided Parliament meant that Mr. Préval would have to reach out to rival parties for support.

"Préval's honeymoon will almost certainly be very short," Mr. Erikson said.

The election on Friday included a broad array of candidates, including members of Mr. Aristide's center-left Lavalas party and former rebels who helped oust him.

The head of a European Union observation team called the vote largely fair and free of the problems that had plagued the first round.

"Over all, it's a big improvement over the first round," said Johan Van Hecke, a member of the European Parliament.

Haiti has not had a functioning Parliament since 2003.

Confusion mars Haitian legislative election

Fri Apr 21, 2006

By Joseph Guyler Delva

Reuters

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - Confusion reigned at many polling stations on Friday as Haitians voted in a parliamentary election that will decide if President-elect Rene Preval has enough support to govern the troubled Caribbean nation.

There were no reports of bloodshed but scattered violence forced police to shut down a handful of voting sites, and many would-be voters were turned away and told they had gone to the wrong polling station.

Preval on February 7 won Haiti's first presidential election since former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in an armed revolt two years ago, but he will need supporters in parliament, and an ally in the prime minister that parliament will pick, in order to chart a course for the country.

Only two parliamentary races were decided in the first round of voting, leaving 97 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 30 in the Senate to be decided in Friday's runoff.

Polling stations were nearly devoid of voters in the early hours of Friday in Port-au-Prince, the capital. At several polling sites, lines had grown to several hundred people by midday, and as turnout picked up, more and more people carrying voter registration cards were told they were in the wrong place and could not vote.

"I came to vote here during the first round. Now they told me my name is not on the list," said Monique Pean, 30. "I can't understand that."

"I'm eligible, I want to vote!" shouted an angry 50-year-old man who would not give his name. "I'll go wherever they want me to, but Lord, somebody needs to tell me where to go."

U.N. troops in armored vehicles and Haitian police were out in force.

Police arrested an election worker on an electoral fraud charge in Carrefour near Port-au-Prince. Three people were arrested in the southern town of Port-Salut for threatening poll workers with guns, police spokesman Frantz Leurebours said.

Several polling sites in the northern Artibonite region were shut down because of demonstrations and partisan scuffles. In western Haiti, U.N. peacekeepers stopped protesters who were cutting up a roadway to block traffic, Leurebours said.

Under Haiti's constitution, the party holding at least half the seats in parliament will pick the prime minister. Final results are not expected until April 28, but no party has enough candidates in the runoff to win the required majority.

Preval, a champion of Haiti's poor masses who is to be sworn in on May 14, has urged candidates from rival parties to form a coalition around his political platform "Lespwa," Creole for hope.

Opponents, many representing the country's wealthy elite and business class, have lobbied just as hard for candidates to join forces against Preval, a former Aristide protege who served a previous term as president from 1996 to 2001.

"If we elected the president, we have to help him have a parliament that can pass good laws." said Jean Bernardin, 25, in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti's last parliamentary elections in 2000 were tangled in a vote-tallying dispute that was never resolved, paralyzing the legislative body. Discord over subsequent presidential elections helped to undermine Aristide, once viewed as a champion of Haiti's fragile democracy but accused in later years of corruption and despotism.

The new government faces a daunting job of restoring stability to the deeply poor nation, which has been plagued by political violence and corruption for most of its 202-year history.

UN Haiti envoy hails parliamentary elections while denouncing violent incidents
UN News Centre
April 22, 2006

The senior United Nations envoy to Haiti has hailed parliamentary elections in the country as a major step towards consolidating democracy while decrying clashes that resulted in the closure of three voting centres.

“I am very satisfied with the way these elections have been held,” said Juan Gabriel Valdés, head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which worked with the National Police to provide electoral security.

Voters cast ballots at 804 voting centres to elect 27 senators and 83 deputies on Friday. As expected, participation was lower than the first round of elections, when René Préval was elected president, the mission reported.

Mr. Valdés hailed Haitians for completing the process, saying they have “restored democracy to Haiti.”

But he also noted that disturbances in Grande Saline and Grand'Anse had resulted in three voting centres being closed. “It is very regrettable that local confrontations between political groups have prevented voting in some places,” he said. “Recourse to violence dishonours the genuine national aspiration for real democracy.”

Haitians vote for new parliament
BBC News
April 22, 2006

Officials saw a trickle of voters in the early part of Friday

Voting has ended in the second round of parliamentary elections in Haiti with turnout low despite calls from the United Nations for a strong showing.

The UN had hoped for a healthy turnout in the violence-wracked state to boost the future government.

Observers estimate that less than 20% of the 3.5 million voters took part, with results due within a week.

President-elect Rene Preval's supporters should do well but will not necessarily win an outright majority.

Haiti has been run by an interim government and UN peacekeepers since the violent overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

Yet the presence of peacekeepers in Haiti - the poorest country in the Americas - has failed to stem the tide of violence that has gripped the country.

Voting was reportedly disrupted in Grande-Saline, in the north of the country, after one person was shot dead.

Poll delay

Mr Preval, elected president in February, had made an appeal to his supporters before election day.

"Without support from parliament, there is not much a president can do," he said.

The second round of elections had been set for March but was delayed because of the volume of complaints from the first round in February.

Only two candidates for deputy won first-round victories, which meant 97 seats in the lower chamber and all 30 senate seats were up for election on Friday.

Under the constitution, the party that holds at least half the seats of parliament will pick the prime minister.

Haitians apathetic - MP
By BROOKES MERRITT
EDMONTON SUN
April 22, 2006

Peter Goldring says the recent parliamentary election in Haiti went off surprisingly well, but voter apathy and gang violence are keeping the embattled country from realizing its full potential.

The Edmonton East Tory MP visited the Caribbean country earlier this week to monitor the election as a member of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee.

A United Nations-mandated interim government organized the recent election after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in an armed rebellion in February 2004.

Goldring said the elections are a step towards democratizing an impoverished, overpopulated country that has suffered decades of violent strife and corruption.

"We go everywhere in armoured vehicles with armed officers, and we stay out of the 'red zone,'" he said, describing an area in Port-au-Prince overrun with armed gangs.

"But the election itself went ahead fairly trouble-free. I didn't run into any trouble, and I've got a good picture of what's been going on here in terms of our aid funding."

Goldring said security is Haiti's number one failing. Gangs have been known to kidnap as many as 30 people a day for ransoms, which are often paid.

He said most Haitians seem to support current president Rene Preval, who won a recent election with 51% of the vote.

"But there's apathy here, voter turnout is very low. Haitians seem to be happy with Preval, and uninterested in voting to elect a prime minister and parliament."

Goldring will return to Canada this weekend and file a report to Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay

Haitians elect parliament - 13,500 security officers deployed
April 21, 2006
ReliefWeb

The first round of voting on February 7 saw 1,200 candidates vying for 129 seats in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Only one candidate won enough votes then. The results of the second round of voting are expected in the next days.

More than 13,500 officers from police ranks and those of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) have been deployed throughout the country to safeguard election proceedings.

Several international experts have travelled to Haiti additionally to monitor the elections.

Former head of state, Rene Preval, won 51.2 per cent of the vote in presidential elections on February 7. The president-elect is to be sworn in on May 21 by the new parliament.

The National Assembly with the upper and lower house was dissolved in early 2004 after the ouster of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide amid a rebellion and popular uprising.

Haiti has since been led by a UN-mandated interim government.

A donor conference is expected to be held in Brazil in late May to help Preval's new government emerge from the economic crisis.

Haitians elect parliament

BY JOE MOZINGO

Miami Herald

April 20, 2006

Haitians will go to the polls today to elect what they hope will be the first functioning parliament since 1997 -- a critical step towards democracy in a nation beset by political upheaval for most of its history.

The Parliament would enable the May 14 inauguration of President-elect René Préval, who was declared the victor of Feb. 7 balloting after a dangerously messy vote and count that Haitians hope will not be repeated.

While Préval had a huge lead on his nearest contender, the inexplicably large number of blank ballots cast uncertainty over whether he had the more than 50 percent of votes he needed to avoid a run-off.

His supporters took to the streets and fiery roadblocks shut down the country for two days. On Feb. 16, under pressure from foreign diplomats, the Haitian electoral council threw out the blank ballots and declared Préval the winner.

International election observers say the technical problems that marred the first round appear to have been corrected.

"It will be much smoother because lots of things have been improved," said Claude Parent, chief of the International Mission to Monitor Elections in Haiti.

A successful vote today in races for all but one of the 129 seats in parliament would continue the nascent process of re-building Haiti's government following an armed revolt in 2004 that forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile in South Africa.

Friday's vote includes run-offs for 111 seats in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Contests for 17 other seats are being re-held in districts where the results from Feb. 7 were thrown out because of violence, widespread missing ballots or looted voting centers. Only one candidate -- for deputy -- won outright on Feb. 7 and does not face a run-off.

No party has a clear lock on control of the Parliament. Of the seats at stake Friday, Préval's Lespwa has only 47 candidates in the race. Paul Denis's left-of center Organization of People in Struggle, known as OPL, has 27 and Serge Gille's coalition party Fusion has 26.

Préval, who was President 1996-2001, has met with various members of the opposition in an effort to break the political deadlock that hobbled his presidency and that of Aristide, a popular but polarizing former priest who accused Haiti's light-skinned elite of exploiting the poor for two centuries.

"So far, what I see of Préval, he is clearly reaching out to other factions," said Robert Fatton, a Haiti expert and political science professor at the University of Virginia. ``And there are plenty of people in the business community who apparently made peace with him."

Political observers say some legislators from other parties are likely to form a ruling alliance with Lespwa, while OPL and Fusion might morph into an opposition movement. Fatton says the political calm is extremely fragile, and could break down if Préval does not show some early success defibrillating the flat-lining economy.

Hardline politics has left nothing but wreckage in Haiti.

Préval's first presidency was paralyzed when the Parliament, controlled by OPL, rejected his appointments for prime minister. And right-wing members of the elite, who led the opposition that helped oust Aristide, saw their candidates trounced by Préval at the polls this February.

The deeply polarized election in February came close to spinning the country into anarchy, as winners and losers alike exploited the many technical problems to allege fraud and intimidation.

Still, in the disgraceful pantheon of Haitian elections, this has been considered one of the most successful. There have been no substantive allegations of systematic fraud or intimidation, and turnout -- over 2 million -- surprised even the most optimistic.

The biggest fiasco of the first round came when people started finding piles of burned and bedraggled ballots at Truitier Landfill outside of Port-au-Prince.

A United Nations Police (UNPOL) investigation found that the ballots at the dump had already been tallied, according to a copy of the report viewed by The Miami Herald.

The electoral material came from a U.N. base called Camp Bravo, where ballots and tally sheets from voting centers around the country were sorted before being sent to the tabulation center in Port-au-Prince. According to the UNPOL report, the camp was disorganized and lacked proper security.

Boucart Pest Control Company, tasked with removing trash from the site, took several loads to the landfill before the tabulation was finished. Furthering the confusion: ballots arriving from the voting centers often came in black trash bags.

"There was no designated responsible personnel at Camp Bravo to receive, check, separate and distribute sensitive and non-sensitive materials accordingly," the report said.

This time, U.N. electoral advisors, who effectively run the transport and tabulation process, say they have made numerous changes to avoid a similar fiasco on Friday.

"We are re-training everybody," said Gerard Le Chevallier, the U.N. chief of electoral assistance.

Le Chevallier said U.N. Peacekeepers will be stationed at over 30 locations where tension is expected, many in rural areas where looting or fights broke out in the first round. He and the chief of the U.N. Mission in Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, plan to visit the volatile city of Gonaives in the morning, to help establish a strong official presence there.

Three political prisoners freed in Haiti
by Lyn Duff
San Francisco Bay View
April 20, 2006

Children of political prisoners demonstrate in Port-au-Prince for their parents to be released. Human rights activists and Haiti's pro-democracy populace are cheering about the fact that three political prisoners have been released in Port-au-Prince. On Easter weekend, Judge Mimose Janvier, the investigating magistrate in the cases of Mario Exilhomme, Harold Sévère and Anthony Nazaire, ordered the three to be freed, saying that no evidence had been produced to indicate they committed a crime. Exilhomme had been illegally imprisoned for 10 months while Nazaire and Sévère had been held without charge since March 2004.

Exilhomme is a grassroots pro-democracy activist. At the request of the Haitian Ministry of Justice, he was arrested in the Dominican Republic, where he was staying legally, and extradited to Haiti on July 22, 2005. He was never charged with a crime, and prosecutors never produced any evidence of wrongdoing

Harold Sévère, the former mayor of Port-au-Prince, was one of those freed. Sévère was arrested March 14, 2004, but was never charged with a crime. Anthony Nazaire, a former officer in the National Palace Security Unit, was arrested the same day.

On Dec. 23, 2004, a judge, recognizing that the government had produced no evidence against them, ordered Harold Sévère and Anthony Nazaire to be freed on their own recognizance. The prosecutor even agreed to execute the order but was overridden by an illegal order from the minister of justice, says attorney Mario Joseph of the human rights organization Bureau des Avocats Internationaux in Port-au-Prince.

Family members of political prisoners wait outside the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince to see their loved ones.

On Dec. 30, 2004, former Justice Minister Bernard Gousse sent a letter to the chief judge of the Port-au-Prince trial court, ordering him to remove all the case files in the possession of Investigating Magistrates Jean Sénat Fleury and Brédy Fabien. This came days after Judge Fleury ordering the liberation of Fr. Gérard Jean-Juste, a pro-democracy activist, and Judge Fabien ordered the provisional release of Sévère and Nazaire, says Joseph.

No one knows how many political prisoners there are in Haiti, says American attorney Brian Concannon of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. "Prison authorities routinely limit human rights groups' access to prison records. But we know that 90 percent of the total prison population has not been convicted of a crime and that some were engaged in political activity before their arrest." More than 2,000 people are currently imprisoned in Port-au-Prince.

As political prisoners languish in prisons and police stations across Haiti, three police officers implicated in a bloody massacre at a USAID-sponsored soccer tournament last August have been released from prison. On April 17, by order of Judge Jean Péreste Paul, Inspector Renan Etienne, who served as the director of the Central Police Administration and reportedly had close ties to the rebels

who staged the 2004 coup, was released along with three other officers. Speaking on Radio Caribes Monday afternoon, a spokesperson for released police officers said that they did nothing wrong and expected to be fully cleared of any criminal acts in the August 2005 incident.

DeWine talks to students about work in Haiti; Spying, gas prices also discussed

By BETH L. JOKINEN

LimaOhio.com

04/21/2006

ADA — Aside from the selfish reasons that should cause Americans to care about Haiti, U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine said Thursday that after seeing the poverty there, people should be compelled to care.

“You can’t go to Haiti and not be changed. You can not describe it,” he said at Ohio Northern University.

DeWine, a graduate of ONU’s law school who has a daughter currently enrolled, was invited to speak about his work in Haiti and the Sudan by the Black Law Student Association, Student Bar Association and the Christian Legal Society.

DeWine became interested in Haiti after a quick trip there in 1995 just after being elected to the Senate. He said he was struck by the amount of poverty.

Along with the humanitarian reasons, DeWine said there are also many selfish reasons to get involved, including that drugs come into the U.S. from Haiti, the U.S. has sent troops there, and when things are bad, Haitians often try to come here.

In addition to securing \$196 million in recent appropriations bills for Haiti, DeWine is working to pass the Haiti Economic Recovery and Opportunity Act, which encourages Haiti to make further economic, political and social reforms.

Despite the poverty and need for investments to create stability, DeWine said there is hope because so many people of all backgrounds are helping.

“There are people who are down there every single day making a difference and saving lives,” he said. “It is not only a country of great despair, but also a country of great hope.”

While taking questions, DeWine told his audience that most everything that gets done in Washington, D.C. happens because of bipartisanship. He also said that while there are no immediate solutions to the expected high gas prices of the summer, there are long-term solutions.

“This country has to get away from oil. ... We are going to have to move to nuclear power, going to have to move to wind, going to have to move back to coal,” he said. “It is now a question, in my opinion, of national security.”

There were also questions about intelligence. DeWine has spent 10 years on the Senate’s intelligence committee.

“The only way to protect us is to find out what bad people are going to do and stop them. And intelligence today is spying,” he said. “It is absolutely necessary. There is a reason why the country has not been hit since Sept. 11, and it is because of our intelligence.”

Haiti Faces Future with Mixture of Hope and Fear

By Judith Scherr

Berkeley Daily Planet

Edition Date: Friday, April 21, 2006

It's a remarkable moment in Haiti's 200-year history, one where both optimism and fear coexist. There's the hope that Rene Préval, the popular president-elect, can take the country's reins and provide the fundamental freedoms and necessities of life, for which the people elected him.

"After two years of an unelected U.S.-imposed regime, an elected president is scheduled to be inaugurated on May 14," attorney Brian Concannon, director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, said Wednesday in a telephone interview from his home in northeastern Oregon.

Concannon was referring to the ouster of elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004 and his replacement by an interim U.S.-backed government.

The elected government will "provide opportunities and dangers for Haiti," he said.

Concannon and Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, Haitian human rights activist and coordinator of the September 30th Foundation, will be in Berkeley at the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant tonight (Friday) speaking about "Haiti at the Crossroads."

The danger Concannon cites is the possibility that the United States and European allies will undermine Haitian democracy as they have before, through an economic embargo or political destabilization.

When Préval served his first term as president, 1996-2001, the United States enforced an embargo when he refused to institute many of the monetary policies demanded of him, such as privatization of all state-owned companies and lowering of tariffs, Concannon said.

The political destabilization was more subtle.

"What was happening was that the United States was propping up political parties that had absolutely no electoral legitimacy—they never got more than 10 percent of the vote," Concannon said.

Préval's Feb. 7 victory was the continuation of a break with the past that began with Aristide's first election in 1990, when Haiti's poor majority understood that they could choose candidates who would speak for them, rather than the wealthy elite, Concannon said.

The population appreciates "even very obvious things like candidates speaking Creole, which most Haitians speak, instead of French, which most Haitians don't speak," Concannon said. "The main thing the voters were looking for are progressive social and economic policies."

Much of the work of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti is aimed at educating people in the United States about Haiti. If people understand the role of the United States in Haiti, they will put pressure on the U.S. government, Concannon said.

He said that the average person lacks awareness of events in Haiti due largely to the media, which generally ignores or distorts what is happening there.

“The media keeps repeating things until it’s believed,” Concannon said, pointing specifically to the notion, advanced in the press, that Préval was Aristide’s puppet when he governed.

Préval brought in a whole new leadership team when he took over the presidency, Concannon said. And the emphasis of the two presidents was different, although both concentrated on improving the lives of Haiti’s poor. While Aristide focused more on the urban poor, Préval, an agronomist, looked more toward the peasantry and land reform and developing agricultural production, he said.

Préval’s rule will surely be complicated by the situation in Parliament, he said. Runoff elections are scheduled for today (Friday) and will probably result in a legislature fragmented by multiple parties, he said.

The most influential political movement since 1990 has been Aristide’s party, Lavalas. Because the unelected government was ruling the country and the U.N. military was occupying it, Lavalas leadership decided to boycott the elections.

The man who would have been the Lavalas candidate for president—put forward by grassroots Lavalas leaders—Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste, was thrown in jail.

Préval created a new political party—the party of Hope. It will not have a majority in the legislature.

“No party will have a near majority,” Concannon predicted. Préval will have to patch together a coalition. “It’s going to be a difficult collaboration,” he said.

But the bigger danger is that foreign powers won’t allow Haiti to develop in the direction it chooses.

“Préval has a chance to build the economy, but only if the United States lets it,” Concannon said, putting the burden on progressives in the United States. “Unless activists in the United States force our government to allow Haiti develop, it’s not going to develop. To me, that’s the key. It matters some what Préval does on the ground, but in the end, as long as the international community does not let Haiti develop along the lines it wants to develop, then it won’t do so.”

Brian Concannon, director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, and Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, Haitian human rights activist and coordinator of the September 30th Foundation, will be in Berkeley at the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant at 362 Bancroft Way tonight (Friday) at 7 p.m. speaking about “Haiti at the Crossroads.” For more information, see the IJDH website is www.ijdh.org.

Haiti signs up to PetroCaribe oil-supply pact

AP

Jamaica Observer

Thursday, April 20, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Haiti will soon join a Venezuelan oil pact that supplies Caribbean countries with fuel under preferential terms, President-elect Rene Preval said.

Preval made the announcement Tuesday after returning from a five-day trip to Cuba, where he met with Fidel Castro to discuss Cuban aid to his impoverished nation and underwent back surgery.

Preval, who takes power next month, said he also met with Venezuela's ambassador to Cuba and discussed Haiti's desire to join the PetroCaribe pact, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's initiative to sell oil directly to Caribbean countries with generous financing.

"During our stay, we discussed the subject (of PetroCaribe) with the Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba, who happens to be the brother of President Hugo Chavez," Preval told reporters at the airport in Port-au-Prince, the capital. "The country will soon become a part of PetroCaribe."

Haiti would join 13 Caribbean countries that signed the oil-supply agreement last year. The deal requires Caribbean countries to pay a portion of the cost up front but allows them to finance the remainder through low-interest loans over 25 years.

High oil prices have been especially punishing for Haiti, where many communities have little or no electricity because of a lack of fuel needed to run the country's ageing power grid.

Preval said Cuba agreed to send technicians to help resolve the power blackouts, which he described as "an evil".

He said Cuba also agreed to send more doctors to boost health care in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Preval is seeking to secure aid and development assistance from Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Cuba offers Haiti help on electricity
UPI
April 19, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti-- Cuba has said it is willing to help Haiti address its energy crisis.

The offer of help, reported by Haitian Metropole radio, was made by President Fidel Castro to Haiti's new leader, Rene Preval, following the latter's visit to Havana.

Haiti's power crisis was the main topic of discussion between the two sides, Cuba's AIN news agency reported.

Separately, U.S. experts are helping the country's main utility, state-run Ed'H utility, to improve the electricity output.

The Peligre power plant and Ed'H's thermal power plants produce less than 50 mW of electricity a day. Port-au-Prince alone needs 200 mW, the radio report said.

The utility says it is plagued by technical problems and the theft of electricity from the grid. Instability in Haiti is also a factor, it says.

UN to honor RP peacekeeper killed in Haiti
The Asian Journal
April 18, 2006

(UPDATE) THE UNITED Nations will honor a Filipino peacekeeper killed while serving in Haiti, while five other Filipino peacekeepers have received special service medals for their work in Timor Leste, the Department of Foreign Affairs said Tuesday.

Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque will be honored with the Dag Hammarskjold Medal along with several soldiers, police and civilians from other countries who died in 2005 in UN peace operations worldwide, Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations Lauro Baja Jr. said.

In an e-mail from his office in New York, Baja said the UN would formally honor Batomalaque when the world body commemorates the International Day of UN Peacekeepers on May 29.

Baja said the Philippine mission in the UN will receive the Dag Hammarskjold Medal, named after the former UN secretary general, on behalf of the family of Batomalaque, the first Filipino peacekeeper to die in combat.

"Sergeant Batomalaque died gallantly in the line of duty and in so doing brought pride and honor to the Philippines and to the Filipino people," he said.

Batomalaque was fatally shot by Haitian gunmen during a firefight in the violent slum neighborhood of Cite Soleil in Port-au-Prince April 14 last year. He was killed while providing cover for a ranking official shortly after gunmen attacked a group of UN peacekeepers they were with.

A member of the Philippine Army's First Scout Ranger Regiment, Batomalaque was deployed to the troubled Caribbean country in January 2005 as part of the 135-member Philippine contingent serving as the Force Headquarters Support Unit for the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

In East Timor, five Filipino police officers -- Edgar Layon, Pedrito delos Reyes, Jose Molava Duenas, Joseph Pangilinan and Celso Destajo -- received on April 7 the UN Special Service Medal in rites in the capital Dili, Philippine Ambassador Farita Aguilicho-Ong said Tuesday.

The police officers work for the UN Office in Timor-Leste or UNOTIL.

The Philippines is presently the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations from Southeast Asia with more than 500 troops, military observers, and civilian police officers deployed in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, Sudan, and Timor Leste. (INQ7)

Caricom embraces Haiti once again
Thursday April 20 2006
by Nikisha Smith
The Antigua Sun

Caricom heads have declared Haiti's first round of elections to be free and fair and at the conclusion of the second round, have stated that as promised, they will begin discussions on the terms and conditions under which Haiti will be welcomed back into the regional fold.

At the 18th meeting of the heads of government of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) Tuesday, time was spent to look at developments in Haiti, giving recognition to interim winner President-elect Rene Preval.

A number of issues and matters were discussed at the Jolly Beach Resort meeting.

Chairman of Caricom, Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago Patrick Manning, Secretary-General Edwin Carrington, and the host, Prime Minister of Antigua & Barbuda Baldwin Spencer spoke about the day's proceedings.

Manning noted that when the second round of elections is complete then the issue of Haiti's re-admittance into Caricom becomes current.

The 15-member Caricom suspended Haiti's membership shortly after former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled in 2004 after a bloody revolt. The group refused to recognise a US-backed interim government that it called unconstitutional.

He said if Haiti became involved in Caricom, the territory would benefit from the organs of integration that have been put in place. According to him, certain limitations on the movement of Haitian people into the rest of the Caribbean, would have to be adopted.

According to the heads, they had always intended to welcome Haiti back into Caricom even before learning the results of the election.

"Even before the elections were held, Caricom had put out a statement saying that as long as the elections were judged to be free and fair then Caricom was standing by ready willing and able to admit Haiti back into the organs of Caricom," Manning stated.

The chairman rejected the idea that Caricom had stood by while Haiti faltered on its own after the removal of Aristide. "To put it that way would be misrepresentation of the facts," Manning stated.

He said Caricom was proud of the fact they had initiated talks with Haiti and that the region was part of the effort to monitor their elections.

The meeting also included Caricom's response to the US rejection of the WTO ruling; readiness of member territories for CSME, which they claimed was on track; preparations for meetings with the prime minister of Spain and the European Union in May.

The meeting was reported to be very successful.

Caricom seeks new engagement with Haiti
RICKEY SINGH
The Jamaica Observer
Friday, April 21, 2006

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados - The Caribbean Community (Caricom) is seeking an early meeting with Haiti's president-elect Rene Preval, in its latest effort to re-engage that Caribbean state in the business of the Community, of which it is a member.

Caricom-Haiti relations was one of the issues discussed at the special meeting of the Caricom Bureau (the Community's management committee) at its meeting in Antigua on Tuesday this week.

Haiti has not participated in Caricom meetings since the 2004 ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide during a bloody uprising.

Matters arising from the recent meeting in The Bahamas between US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the Community's foreign ministers, to be further pursued by heads of government, were also considered.

Haiti's renewed involvement with Caricom, along with the Community's relations with the United States of America also comes up for review at this weekend's scheduled meeting of Caricom foreign ministers in Grenada.

The meeting of the Caricom Bureau, hosted by Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and chaired by current chairman of the Community, Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago, was the first in a series of meetings involving the Georgetown-based Community Secretariat.

The meeting of the Bureau, that also discussed the status of CSME-readiness arrangements by the six countries of the OECS sub-region, was also attended by Prime Minister Owen Arthur of Barbados and St Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Denzil Douglas, who will host the annual Caricom Summit in July.

President-elect Preval and Prime Minister Manning are likely to have an informal meeting ahead of the Caricom Summit, at which the Haitian leader is expected to be among the speakers at the ceremonial opening.

Meanwhile, there will be a two-day ministerial meeting of the United Kingdom/Caribbean Forum in Barbados on April 26.

Expected for that meeting is Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who will discuss with his Caricom counterparts matters relating to regional security, the fight against terrorism and narco-trafficking, immigration, trade and other issues, including a special focus on the UK's cooperation in security arrangements for Cricket World Cup 2007.

**On Préval's Visit to Cuba and Cuban-Haitian Cooperation:
An Interview with Radio Havana's Anna Kovac
Haiti Progres Weekly
April 19, 2006**

Haiti's President-elect René Préval traveled to Cuba on April 12. The visit, originally expected to be three days, lasted almost one week.

"Essentially I would say it was a trip of friendship and of making and extending contacts," Préval said on his return to Haiti on April 18. "There will be very concrete results."

On April 13, Préval met with Cuban president Fidel Castro at Havana's Palace of the Revolution. Cuba's ministers of Public Health, of Basic Industries, of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, of Foreign Affairs and of Agriculture were also present.

Préval said that Cuban doctors, of whom there are now some 500 in Haiti, would soon be stationed in every Haitian county. Fifty-five Haitian counties – called communes – presently don't have Cuban medical personnel, Préval said. Since their deployment in Haiti in 1998, during Préval's first administration, the Cuban doctors have made an estimated 8 million consultations and 100,000 operations.

Préval traveled to Cuba with about 60 young Haitians who will study in Cuba to become doctors. Before flying to Havana, Préval stopped first in Santiago de Cuba where he and the 60 new students were warmly greeted by the 600 Haitian medical students already studying in Cuba. Last August, 128 Haitians graduated from the Cuban medical school, and 80 of them are now practicing in Haiti.

Préval also was accompanied by 40 patients who stayed in Cuba to undergo eye surgery under the joint Cuban-Venezuelan "Operation Miracle" program, which provides free ophthalmological treatment to low-income people from Third World nations. The program has already treated 635 Haitian patients, Préval said.

Préval returned to Port-au-Prince with a delegation of Cuban electrical engineers, who will study Haiti's feeble and black-out prone electrical grid. A Cuban-Haitian commission will be formed at the end of June or beginning of July to study and make proposals about the different areas of cooperation, Préval said.

On April 15, the radio program "Haiti: The Struggle Continues," produced by the Komite Chalo Jaklen and Haiti Progrès on WBAI 99.5 FM in New York, interviewed Anna Kovac, Haiti Progrès' correspondent in Cuba and the head of Radio Havana Cuba's Creole language service. Ms. Kovac conducted two interviews with René Préval during his visit to Cuba. Here is some of what Kovac had to say. She spoke by telephone from Havana.

Kim Ives, *Haiti Progrès*: Anna Kovac, can you tell us why René Préval is visiting Cuba and with whom he is meeting?

Anna Kovac: He said why when he arrived in Santiago de Cuba with about 60 young Haitians who are starting their studies in medicine at the Caribbean faculty in that city and around 40 Haitians with limited economic means who are going to be operated on free of charge for various eye problems like cataracts and glaucoma. Préval said that during his first mandate, he launched cooperation relations with Cuba and after he left the Presidency, these contacts diminished somewhat, not completely, and he wants to reinforce them.

He has come to Cuba to speak to his friend Fidel, to ask for help and cooperation to not only continue but to increase in health, education, sports and lots of other areas too, like fishing and the sugar industry.

Préval's first big meeting was with the Cuban President Fidel Castro for official consultations. We don't have a lot of details on what has come out of these talks.... This morning [April 15], Préval visited the Cuban province of Pinar del Rio in Cuba's far west. There he saw an experiment in not only saving electricity but in assuring that everybody in that province has electrical service. That province has been hit very badly over the years – last year, especially, and the year before, and this year it probably will be – by hurricanes. The national electric system uses thermo-electric plants which are very old and very expensive to use. They burn a lot of oil, which is now extremely costly. So Cuba has set up small plants assuring electricity for hospitals, schools, bakeries, food production plants, water pumps, and so on. Now when there's a break-down in the national system, this province is not affected. And the electricity costs much, much less than using these old electrical plants. I don't know if Préval is going to get some ideas from what is happening in Pina del Rio, but it is a very interesting province. It is one of the poorest provinces in Cuba, but it is now self-sustaining in electricity production.

Kim Ives: There are about 500 Cuban doctors in Haiti now. Préval said during his visit to New York last month that Cuba and Haiti were looking for a third country to help finance the mission of the 500 doctors in Haiti. What discussions might there be about that?

Anna Kovac: Well, there are two things about the 500 doctors. It's not financing the doctors. It's financing the doctors' medical supplies which is necessary. The doctors are fine, but they need needles, medicine, cotton and so forth to do their work, and the Cuban doctors have been working really with very little supplies.

From the very beginning, back in 1998, Cuba asked France, Canada and lots of other countries to supply these much-needed medicines and medical supplies. Countries like Japan gave something, but very token donations...

Even with the doctors, you need medical supplies and equipment to operate. Cuba is a poor country. What Cuba has is its people, who are highly qualified and capable, but you can't operate if you don't have the necessary surgical instruments. That's really what Cuba is looking for.

Cuba in the United Nations has said this on many, many occasions. There are thousands of Cuban doctors working in Africa too. But in Africa, even more so, they need supplies. They need medicines. You can't have a vaccination campaign if you don't have the wherewithal to do it with. This is really what Cuba and Haiti are looking for. It's the rich countries that have the money to do this, because the Cuban doctors are working for free. The only thing they need is to eat and a place to sleep...

The other thing is that last August, 128 young Haitians got their diplomas as doctors and 80 of them have gone back to Haiti to work with the Cuban medical brigade. Afterwards, they are going to come back to Cuba to learn a specialty, that is to specialize in some branch of medicine. Every year from now on, all the Haitian students who graduate will go back to Haiti. Each young student has promised to go back to help their community, to serve their community, when he or she returns back home.

So the medical plan is pretty vast, but I think that it is well thought out. Because Cubans aren't there forever. They have to be replaced by Haitians.

Kim Ives: Anna, it is no secret that the U.S. government is seeking, as it has sought for many years, to overthrow the Cuban government, and at this point Haiti is militarily occupied by U.N. troops with U.S. troops poised just across the border in Barahona, Dominican Republic. There are said to be some 1000 U.S. troops, maybe many more, whom have been the object of many demonstrations by Dominicans against their presence on Dominican soil. What concerns might the Cubans raise with René Préval about the continuing occupation of Haiti?

Anna Kovac: Well, I think that it's remarkable that the Cubans have stayed in Haiti in spite of the February 29th coup, in spite of the fact that first you had a U.S. occupation, followed by a U.N. occupation, in spite of the fact that you had all these gangsters and ex-soldiers and criminals who practically took over Haiti, in spite of all the waves of kidnappings and so forth which were pretty terrible. The Cuban doctors stayed. I think that, first of all, that is remarkable. That just shows that Cuba is interested in helping the people. The Haitian people are number one, and governments are number two...

I think that what's going to happen now is that there is going to be another type of cooperation. Cuban cooperation is not like U.S. cooperation or European cooperation. All the money that was supposedly sent to Haiti – about \$1.3 billion was promised and about half of that has been sent to Haiti. Well, it went to Haiti, but then it turned around and went back to where it came from. Eighty percent, Préval said, of the \$750 million in aid went back to the countries that had sent it to Haiti. How did it go back? Well there were studies on studies, and reviews of the cooperation. The whole plan was that you give 10 and you take back 9, because, if it's French cooperation, you demand that everyone who is employed is French, that you buy French equipment, and use French services. So in fact, the money just turns around and goes back to where it came from.

But Cuban cooperation is different. Cuban cooperation is not for Cuban doctors to stay in Haiti, but to the contrary, to hold out until the young Haitians who become doctors can go back home and take their place.

Roger Leduc, Komite Chalo Jaklen: Anna, I was going to piggy back on the notion of the different approach that countries like the United States give aid to Haiti and the way Cuba gives help. The Haitian masses have expressed in different ways their gratitude for the gesture of the Cuban revolution and the Cuban people toward Haiti. I have seen the Cuban doctors in Haiti and they are like fish in water. There is a very good rapport with the masses, which is not the rapport of someone giving charity but it is the rapport of fraternal solidarity which prevails. And at this point, Cuba has been able to maintain the aid, even going through the coup, going through very difficult times, ordeals and trials. How do you see that the Haitian people can – even if we don't have the material means – how can we, through our relationship with Cuba, pay a little bit of this back to you?

Anna Kovac: Well, I don't think it's a question of giving back. I think it's a question of solidarity and working together. Just to give an idea....

Cuban medicine is very different from U.S. medicine or French medicine, because it is based on different principles. Of course in Cuba, all medical care is absolutely free. But it's not only that it's absolutely free, but it's done with the idea of prevention first of all. In other words, all children, ALL children, get 13 vaccines to protect them against 13 different diseases. All pregnant women are cared for and followed by doctors that have ultrasound and all kinds of tests to assure that their new born baby is born healthy. There is another attitude, another way of doing things... And this in itself terrific. This is a step forward for all humanity.

You know Fidel once said in one of the summit meetings that the planet is like a boat. Even if the rich and the elite are up on the top decks and the poor are in the hold of the ship, if the ship goes down, we all go down. If the planet goes to pot, we all go. We're all in this together. So Cuba has another way of thinking, another way of seeing the world. And the Haitian people's solidarity for Cuba is really tremendous...

Now if we are going to talk about cooperation, for instance in sports, Haitian football [soccer] is a thousand times more sophisticated than Cuban football. Cuban football players are healthy and strong and can run and kick the ball, but they just don't have the same level of strategy and tactics. They don't play football in as excellent a manner as Haitians do.

So I think that's one area where there can be exchange. And in fact, during Préval's first term in office, there were exchanges between football teams of young children and teenagers.

I also think the possibility of cultural exchange between Haiti and Cuba are absolutely fantastic. Even in the 40s, one of the greatest Cuban jazz piano players, Chicho Valdés, his father [Bebo Valdès] played in [famous Haitian band leader] Issa Sayeh's orchestra. Omara Portuondo, who is the great lady of Cuban song, sang at the Choucouné Night Club in Port-au-Prince. So Haitian music and Cuban music really influenced each other a lot, especially in the 1950s, because I think there is a natural attraction between two countries which are neighbors and which were artificially separated for 40 years during the Duvalier dictatorship. So there are so many levels where there can be real sharing and real learning on both sides, because Haiti has lots and lots to offer.

Haiti has been a beacon for over 200 years because Haiti was the first country which became free and independent, that ended slavery, in the Western hemisphere. I know there was the American revolution, but they just betrayed their principles and they didn't free the slaves, etc.

So Haiti has been and still is a beacon for the world, just as Cuba has become another beacon because of its socialist revolution. The Western countries have spread lies and said the most absurd things about Haiti to make people afraid of Haiti. During the 19th century, they restricted Haitian commerce because they wanted people to believe that being free was not a good idea, that it was better to be a slave. Well maybe you can convince slave-owners that it's better to be a slave, but you certainly can't convince an ex-slave that it's better to be a slave. But the United States and France have been trying to do this for over 200 years.

They are trying to do the same thing to Cuba! Oh, free health care is no good! Since when? Certainly not to the Cuban people. Free education is no good! Well, the Cuban people certainly don't think so.

Roger Leduc: Anna, the Haitians are really impressed by the attitude of the Cuban doctors, who really taught a lesson to the whole society in this way: Haitian doctors tended to be very elitist and arrogant in their dealings with the poor masses in Haiti, and the Cuban doctors have shown that you can provide medical services while maintaining the dignity of the people you are servicing. And this, I hope, is a lesson that the Haitian medical students in Cuba can bring with them in Haiti and set a new tradition, a new kind of rapport between medical doctors and the population at large.

Anna Kovac: I'd like to say something about that because most Haitian doctors are great doctors. But that's not the problem. The problem is the system. A Haitian doctor has to eat and feed his family. So if a Haitian doctor were to treat everybody for free, he'd die of hunger. I want to say this because it's not that Cubans are better than Haitians. It's not true. It's just that in Cuba we have a socialist system that provides all doctors with a salary. So they treat everybody for free. Here in Cuba, no doctor gets money from a patient. And in medical school, all medical students are taught that you have to serve, you have to heal, you have to alleviate suffering of everybody. And for free, of course!

I can tell you terrible, terrible stories. Just yesterday, I was speaking to a Haitian patient who is in a Cuban hospital having an operation on his knee. He told me a terrible story of a young man in Jérémie, who was pretty poor and was using his bicycle to transport goods. That's what he did for a living. He was hit by a car. His foot and his leg were smashed. His jaw was out of place. He was brought to the Jérémie general hospital, and the Haitian doctors wanted to cut off his leg. The Cuban doctor who was there said "Why do you want to cut off his leg? We can fix his leg." The Haitian doctor said "Well he doesn't have a dime and he can't pay us." The Haitian doctors wouldn't even cooperate with the Cuban doctors to operate on this young man. So the Cuban called the other medical personnel to come and help him, and they operated and saved his leg. I was told that he still limps but he still can use his bicycle, and they put his jaw back in place. He can still use his bicycle to transport goods, in other words he can still eke out a living. He said "Why, these Haitian doctors! How terrible! They didn't want to help." But this is what the capitalist system does to people. It makes them inhuman. But it doesn't mean that the person is inhuman. It's that the person is living in a system that instead of encouraging solidarity, instead of encouraging even Christian or Muslim principles, it is encouraging dog-eat-dog principles.

Kim Ives: Anna, can we look at some of the other domains of Haitian-Cuban cooperation? We know that the Cubans helped revitalize the sugar plant in Darbonne, near Léogane in Haiti, during the 1996-2001 administration of President Préval and also have been helping in the domain of fishing, trying to provide more protein to the Haitian diet. What can you tell us about these two areas?

Anna Kovac: In fishing, one plan went down the drain and I don't have all the details as to why. But after Préval's term in office, Cuba had sent a couple of fishing boats – what they call mother boats. The mother boat goes out with a group of fishermen in their small boats. They go out on the high seas where there are fish banks. They have refrigerators in their hold. The small fishermen bring in their catch every single day and after two or three weeks go back to port, and can sell their fish. Well, the Cuban boats were in Haiti for about six months but they never went out to sea. I don't know why they never went out to sea. There was a whole big fight over this, but I don't know why. Anyhow, finally the Cuban boats went back home because they were doing nothing. So we hope that maybe a similar plan to help poor Haitian fishermen can be launched.

There is also aqua-culture, which means raising fish in ponds, artificial lakes and reservoirs. That is another plan which they do in Cuba. That's another possibility.

There is also sports. I think that would be great if there were a new sports accord.

There are lots of other things, for example, in computers and computer technology. Préval went to the Infomatics Science University in Cuba. In Cuba, all schools in the countryside and the city have computers. In other words, everybody can learn how to use a computer – and we're talking about a poor and underdeveloped country.

Kim Ives: We know that Haiti used to produce a lot more sugar but that has been severely curtailed in recent years. Is the revitalization of Darbonne going to be one of the projects?

Anna Kovac: Well, I don't know. I think it would be great. As I said, Préval has not yet spoken to the press about these projects... But he certainly is exploring many different areas, and not only the traditional areas. I think in commerce too, there are possibilities between the two countries. In all, they are looking at about ten areas of cooperation ...

Kim Ives: Finally, can you tell us how people can find the Creole language service of Radio Havana Cuba and when you broadcast each week?

Governor General plans trip to Haiti
Apr. 17, 2006
The Toronto Press

OTTAWA — Michaëlle Jean was a terrified 11-year-old when she and her family fled a barbarous regime in Haiti.

Next month, she will return to her homeland as Canada's governor general, sitting shoulder to shoulder with other heads of state to witness the inauguration of Haiti's new president.

Rideau Hall is still working out the details, but a government source said the initial plans are for Jean to attend the inauguration of René Préval in Port-au-Prince on May 14. She is also expected to stay in Haiti for a few days afterward.

Jean was born in Port-au-Prince in 1957.

Her father Roger Jean was a teacher who was driven into exile by dictator Papa Doc Duvalier's regime. Michaëlle Jean, her mother and sister followed him to Montreal in 1968.

"The story of that little girl, who watched her parents, her family, and her friends grappling with the horrors of a ruthless dictatorship, who became the woman standing before you today, is a lesson in learning to be free," Jean said in her first speech as governor general last September.

The trip will be a logistical challenge for Jean's office. The Department of Foreign Affairs to this day advises all Canadians to avoid travel to the country, and for citizens with non-essential business there to leave.

"Criminal activity, police reprisals, and lawlessness remain persistent throughout the country," the department's travel warning says. "Personal safety cannot be guaranteed by local authorities, and police no longer have a presence in certain cities."

Still, that's not likely to faze Jean, a former Radio-Canada journalist.

She's been back to Haiti before, and she and her husband Daniel Lafond adopted their daughter Marie-Eden seven years ago from the seaside town of Jacmel where Jean's family hailed from.

The couple has a deep interest in the country's politics, and of the success of the Haitian community in Montreal, which numbers 130,000. They have collaborated on documentaries about Haiti and Haitian-Canadians.

Jean spoke in February about the elections that saw Préval win the presidency.

"First of all, I think this election had to be a success, and a success means that it had to happen in full security, with a great rate of participation. All this happened," she said.

But Jean's views on Canada's controversial involvement in Haiti over the past two years are not known.

Preval's democratically elected predecessor and associate, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown by rebels in 2004. The United States provided an airplane to help Aristide flee the country, but he did not get any help to regain power.

The U.S and Canada, along with others in the international community, continued to send money to Haiti to support the interim government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue.

Canada is spending \$180 million to help with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and a Canadian was selected again by the United Nations to serve as UN police commissioner for the mission.

Amnesty International has criticized Latortue's government of ignoring human-rights abuses and making no real effort to disarm the population. The organization has also urged the UN mission to make better inquiries into those abuses.

UN to honor Filipino peacekeeper killed in Haiti
The Philippines Sun Star
April 18, 2006

MANILA -- The United Nations (UN) will honor a Filipino peacekeeper killed while serving in Haiti, while five other Filipino peacekeepers received special service medals for their work in East Timor, the Department of Foreign Affairs said Tuesday.

Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque will be honored with the Dag Hammarskjold Medal along with several soldiers, police, and civilians from other countries who died in 2005 in UN peace operations worldwide, Philippine Ambassador to the UN Lauro Baja said.

Baja said the Philippine mission in the UN will receive the award on May 29, International Day of UN Peacekeepers, on behalf of the family of Batomalaque, the first Filipino peacekeeper to die in combat.

A member of the 135-man Philippine contingent to the troubled Caribbean country, he was killed by gunmen during a firefight in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince on April 14, 2005.

In East Timor, five Filipino police officers -- Edgar Layon, Pedrito delos Reyes, Jose Molava Duenas, Joseph Pangilinan and Celso Destajo -- received on April 7 the UN Special Service Medal in rites in the capital Dili, Philippine Ambassador Farita Aguilucho-Ong said Tuesday.

The police officers work for the UN Office in Timor-Leste or UNOTIL. (AP)

Bahamas-Haiti Immigration Accord Still Pending

By Quincy Parker

The Bahama Journal

April 19, 2006

The Government of the Bahamas appears hopeful that the inauguration of Haitian President-elect Rene Preval in May will allow the conclusion of a bilateral agreement negotiated in 2003, which may help stem the seemingly unending flow of illegal economic migrants from Haiti to The Bahamas.

The influx of undocumented Haitian migrants continues to be a major concern for the Bahamas.

It would be the fourth incarnation of a bilateral agreement between Haiti and The Bahamas covering various aspects of migration; the three previous documents, signed in 1971, 1985 and 1995, are now defunct.

The 2003 agreement was negotiated with Haiti under the presidency of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and was left unsigned when Mr. Aristide left office.

According to Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs Fred Mitchell, "that accord still stands, and we would like, once constitutional authority is returned to Haiti, to conclude that accord, (and) to sign it."

"It has certain provisions about regulating labour flows from Haiti and the Haitian government will have certain responsibilities with regard to stopping the flow," he said.

In March, Mr. Mitchell met with Mr. Preval in New York where both men were addressing the United Nations. However, Mr. Mitchell declined to say whether there was a definite agreement between the two governments concerning the accords.

"I think it's a little too early for him to be talking about the question of bilateral agreements between (Haiti and The Bahamas)," Mr. Mitchell said, pointing out that Mr. Preval will not be inaugurated until May 14.

"He's interested in making an early visit to Nassau to discuss with us a whole number of matters."

While the 2003 document remains unsigned, it will likely share common ground with the defunct agreements.

Pages one through 10 of the 11-page 1971 agreement dealt with labour recruitment of Haitian workers for work in the Bahamas, setting out extensive guidelines for how such an arrangement would work.

These guidelines included provisions for Haitian officials to inspect working and living conditions for contract workers, and for those potential contract workers to produce police certificates and undergo physical examinations, among other things.

"The government of the Bahama Islands would issue the normal work permit to such persons as have been recruited in accordance with the procedure established herein and inform the Haitian Consulate of those Haitian nationals to whom work permits were issued," the agreement stated.

The remainder of the document, a little over a page, dealt with repatriation, and then only of those contract workers who are not engaged in work for whatever reasons.

The '71 accord also contains the following passage:

"The Bahamas government would, if it thinks fit, regularize the immigration status of any Haitian national who may now be residing in the Bahamas."

The preamble to the 1985 agreement speaks of a desire to "strengthen ties between (Haiti and the Bahamas)" and notes that matters not dealt with specifically in the agreement are subject to "the rules and principles of general international law."

The '85 agreement launched immediately into the illegal immigration discussion, with both parties agreeing to "take all measures" to assure the proper "control of illegal arrivals and departures of their nationals in and from their respective territories," and to "prevent illegal emigration of their nationals by sea or air."

Article Two provided a definition for who was to be determined an "illegal immigrant" – anyone found in either territory without proper documentation – and guidelines under which such immigrants were to be repatriated. Article Five provided for the "immediate repatriation of Haitians who arrive illegally in The Bahamas" after the signing of the '85 agreement.

Article Two also provided for a sort of amnesty, mandating the Bahamian government to give legal status to any Haitian in the Bahamas who did not have a criminal record, were employed at the time of the signing of the treaty, were married to a Bahamian citizen or owned land in the Bahamas.

Article Three of the '85 treaty called for the establishment of a Bahamian consul to be resident in Haiti, who would issue the visas to qualified Haitians, such as those the Bahamas government felt would be required for the local labour pool. These migrant workers would, under Article Eight, have one year to work in The Bahamas.

The Haitian negotiators noted that at the time, there were 6,000 Haitians employed on Bahamian farms, less than half of whom had work permits. The remaining 3,600 had either to be regularized, or a similar number recruited.

Haiti looks to ethanol
AP and Sunday Finance
Jamaica Observer
Sunday, April 16, 2006

President-elect Rene Preval has announced plans to diversify Haiti's ailing sugar industry, including an initiative to refine sugar cane into clean-burning fuel with help from Brazil.

Preval, a 63-year-old agronomist, said using sugar cane to produce ethanol and bio-diesel could breathe new life into the struggling industry and help the poor Caribbean country cope with high energy prices.

"Everyone knows the price of oil is going up all over the world," Preval said after touring a refurbished sugar refinery in rural Leogane, 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of Port-au-Prince, the capital.

The former president said plans were under way to boost Haiti's sugar cane cultivation for making ethanol, a fuel that can be used to power cars and generate electricity.

Since 2005, the Jamaican government has been examining the possibility of utilising sugar cane produced locally for the production of ethanol.

The project, however, has been stalled because of a lengthy audit of the government owned factories and lands, which forms the prerequisite for the sale of the factories to private investors.

Then prime minister, PJ Patterson, had announced the sale of the factories in October of last year, and have received expressions of interest from several investors.

In the meantime, Jamaica has been producing ethanol for export to the US market since August 2005, through a joint venture between the state-owned petroleum refinery, Petrojam, and a Brazilian firm, Coimex.

That endeavour earned the company operating under the name Petrojam Ethanol Limited (PEL) \$2.26 billion in revenues and netted a profit of \$247 million for the seven months it has been in operation. For the current fiscal year, PEL is expected to generate a net profit of \$381 million from \$3.76 billion in revenue.

Brazilian officials proposed the idea to the Haitian president during Preval's recent trip to the South American country - the world's largest sugar producer and a major consumer of ethanol.

DR-Haiti commercial activity is growing
The Dominican Today
April 16, 2006

DAJABON, DR. – In spite of the badly deteriorated highways in the boarder towns, affecting vehicular transit, commercial activity between Haiti and Dominican Republic in this zone continues growing.

During Easter Friday in which Jesus' last supper was commemorated, Dominicans and Haitians made of Dajabon an especially prosperous binational market.

Even though the deterioration of the highways negatively affects the delivery of farm products from the Cibao to be sold in Dajabon during the Mondays and Fridays of commercial exchange, the region seems to be growing as result of the international effort.

“President Leonel Fernandez promised to fix the highways in Montecristi, Dajabon and Santiago Rodriguez”, said Pericles Estevez, a mini bus driver, “but nothing has happened yet, now is the time to do it, when commerce is good”, he added.

Rural leader Domingo Constantino Martinez said: “the highways need to be repaired now, if they wait, it will be more costly due to increased deterioration”.

Merchants from both sides of the boarder gather in Dajabon every Monday and Friday offering merchandise from comestibles to clothing at very accessible prices, drawing a large amount of people that take advantage of real good deals.

**Project Fielded Sixteen Observers for Second Round
Haiti Democracy Project
April 17, 2006**

Left: Haiti Democracy Project election observer Rev. Garry Theodate at the electoral commission.
Photo by Elmide Meleance

Right: Haiti Democracy Project observers in Ouanaminthe on February 8, 2006 from left top: Tedis Hernandez (Cabarete, Dominican Republic), Gerald Gourdain (Beltsville, Maryland), Jaime Blondin Martinez (Cabarete), Arely Montero (Cabarete), and Jose Gil (Cabarete). Hernandez, Montero, and Gil were among the seven Dominican observers prevented from crossing by Dominican border authorities; here, finally in Ouanaminthe on February 8, they proudly sport their badges. They all returned to observe the second round.

Reverend Theodate of Boston observed in Port-au-Prince on February 7, 2006 and returned to observe the second round in the Nord-Est department on April 21. Of the fifteen project observers in the first round, eight were Haitian-American.

The Haiti Democracy Project fielded sixteen international observers in Port-au-Prince and the Nord-Est department for the second round of elections scheduled for April 21. Ten were in Port-au-Prince and six in Ouanaminthe.

Of the sixteen, five returned from observation in the first round , three were accredited but did not observe the first round, and eight were newly accredited by the CEP for the second round.