



PRESS RELEASE
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The recent wave of popular pressure for democratic change has been welcomed by pundits and critics alike across the political spectrum. From the Philippines to Lithuania, the power of ordinary citizens infused with electoral zeal has reshaped the world's political landscape in remarkably short order.

Most recently, another nation whose people have been subjected to decades of oppression and violence, have taken it upon themselves to exercise their "people power" and rid themselves of the latest in a succession of dictators. This is not the first time that Haitians have demonstrated popular dissatisfaction with a corrupt leader. In 1984 at Gonaives, the first example of "people power" in Haiti took place. Long the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti--in its struggle to free itself from the oppressive yoke of its Duvalierist legacy--is presently charting a course which abounds with hope yet remains fraught with peril.

The ouster of Lt. General Prosper Avril who fled early Monday morning aboard the same U.S. Air Force plane which ferried his mentor Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier to France four years ago, brings Haiti to a critical juncture in its long and tormented history.

The Haitian Assembly of Convergence (L'Assemblee de Concertation) has proposed a "unique alternative" --the creation of a provisional Council of State who, in tandem with the provisional President, Mme. Ertha Pascal-Trouillot, will prepare to hold Haiti's first free and fair elections. With its membership drawn from all sectors of Haitian society including peasant groups, the Haitian Bar Association, educational organizations, trade unions, and the churches, this Council of State most clearly reflects the spirit of true democratic representation.

In November 1987, when Haitians were last afforded an opportunity to vote, those arriving at the polls were massacred in an attempt by the Namphy regime to abort the electoral process. Presently, a new window of opportunity exists that will open the way for the first democratically elected President in Haiti's history. However, elements remain in Haitian society who will stop at nothing to stem the tide of democracy and plunge the country once more into spiralling repression.

Attacks on civilians and the country's fragile infrastructure peaked sharply last weekend. Wanton violence by some units within the army and their cronies within the dreaded Tontons Macoute have

left dozens dead on the streets and a cooking oil refinery's storage depots sabotaged.

These attacks do not occur in a political vacuum. There remain in Haiti countless Duvalierist ideologues attempting to derail the nascent democracy movement in order to retain the corrupt, dictatorial system begun in 1957 by Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Any attempts to thwart the widely popular calls for democracy by a mere changing of the guard must be resisted at all costs.

The Washington Office on Haiti calls upon the international community, notably the United States, to support the alternatives proposed by the Assembly of Convergence and to safeguard their framework for a workable democracy against any attacks by Duvalierist forces.

While each sovereign nation retains the inherent right not to support any other nation's goals and policies, it is incumbent upon the international community not to undermine the political process of any of its members. A clear opportunity exists for those who profess to support democratic principles to demonstrate such beliefs toward Haiti in its present transition to democracy.

Haiti's new situation is faced with hardship. It is believed that the economy lies in shambles. The United States, with its influence among international lending agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, can forge with these groups and other allies of the Haitian people, an emergency package to assist the Haitian economy which has completely exhausted itself.

The new provisional government has committed itself to fair and honest elections when the proper conditions exist. It is widely accepted that Duvalierist holdovers continue to occupy positions within the military and civilian administrations and that these ideologues who oppose democracy must resign their posts. With the United Nations and the Organization of American States, a workable formula for monitoring these elections can be developed, similar to the recent example in Nicaragua.

No meaningful change in Haiti's socioeconomic structure can be expected until such time that a legitimate government elected through honest and democratic elections takes charge in Haiti. Today's priority should be to create the appropriate conditions for such an election to take place.