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November 8, 1989

The Honorable William Lehman  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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Dear Mr. Lehman:

Knowing your interest for the people of Haiti struggling to create a democratic society, the Washington Office on Haiti wishes to call your attention to a disturbing set of events that has taken place there in the last few days.

The military regime in Haiti, under the command of President-General Propere Avril, has unleashed a new wave of repression against its critics.

On Wednesday, November 1st, around 7:00 p.m., military personnel broke into a meeting of the Rassemblement National (National Rally), illegally arresting three people:

\* Jean Auguste Mesyeux, a member of the executive committee of the trade union CATH (Autonomous Haitian Workers' Central);

\* Evans Paul, a leader of the Confederation for Democratic Unity (KID), journalist for Radio Cacique, and playwright;

\* Moreno Etienne, a leader of the group OP 17. The OP 17 is the organization of the non-commissioned officers who led the September 17, 1988, coup against General Henri Namphy that brought General Avril to power. Avril later dismissed these officers from the military and held them under illegal arrest for more than 3 months.

These three men are all members of the Rassemblement National, a coalition of 33 political, civic, trade union and grassroots organizations that called for the successful general strike of September 27, 1989, against the Avril government. On Monday, October 30, the Rassemblement National held a press conference to announce a program of daily protest in opposition to the military government in the form of non-violent civil disobedience. The program was to culminate in a march on November 29 in memory of the 1987 election massacre on the same date.

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On Thursday, November 2, in a very distasteful attempt at instilling fear into the population reminiscent of the methods of General Namphy, the military paraded the arrested men in front of the government television cameras. It was obvious that they were mistreated while in detention. They had their faces swollen, their heads covered with bandages and they experienced difficulty in standing up.

In a further demonstration of the military contempt for the Constitution of March 1987, General Avril has once again reintroduced the "prefecture" system that was abolished by the Constitution because of its use by the Duvalier regime to entrench the tonton macoutes' paramilitary body into the state apparatus.

These latest initiatives of the Avril government have provoked the indignation of every sector of Haitian society. Through radio, television and newspapers, civic, trade unions and political organizations have voiced their opposition to General Avril's disregard for national and international public opinion.

Among those who reacted to these incidents was the Haitian League for Human Rights, by its president, human rights lawyer Joseph Maxi, who, in a statement read over the radio, has offered to assist in the legal defense of the arrested persons. Immediately following this announcement Mr. Maxi's house was ransacked by troops from the National Palace. His house continues to remain under military surveillance.

This incident is the latest in a series of acts of repression carried out by the military and their civilian collaborators since October, 1988, when the progressive wing of the military was sacked by the Avril forces.

It is feared that as the economic and political situation continues to deteriorate and opposition to the Avril government grows, the military will resort to increasingly harsh repression in an effort to silence its critics and those who oppose its regime.

Sincerely yours,

Fritz Longchamp  
Executive Director  
Washington Office on Haiti