

NATIONAL COALITION FOR HAITIAN REFUGEES
ADVISORY ON CURRENT CONDITIONS IN HAITI
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Random Violence: A Strategy for Intimidating Opposition

Since the beginnings of the coup on Sunday night, September 29th, troops loyal to the military junta have been patrolling the streets of poorer neighborhoods of the capital and at least two smaller cities, spraying crowds with machine gun and rifle fire. Both men in army and police uniforms and others dressed in civilian clothes have been observed shooting -- on foot, from armored military vehicles, private cars, pick-up trucks and jeeps stolen from other state agencies, such as the national telephone company. Widespread shooting, often without warning, has been reported in Cite Soleil, Martissant, Carrefours, Carrefours-Feuilles, Delmas, Petionville, Gonaives and Cap-Haitien. Victims have included persons participating in or preparing to join demonstrations and public assemblies, as well as many random victims of indiscriminate gunfire.

The extreme and random nature of the violence apparently has succeeded in intimidating the general populace and turning Port-au-Prince into what has been described as "a ghost town." Indeed, no public transportation has been available, and even medical facilities in the capital have proven too unsafe to be counted as refuge. On Monday (September 30), an ambulance was fired upon while picking up the wounded, and drivers and patients were attacked. Soldiers were also reported to have beaten patients and staff in the main public hospital in Port-au-Prince.

While it has been impossible thus far to establish an accurate count of the dead and wounded, due to the threat of violence facing journalists and human rights monitors as well as the larger population, at least one photographer has reported finding 140 victims in the morgue of a single hospital in the capital. NCHR anticipates that the numbers reported for the dead and missing will mount as the days go by, and estimates that already more than 200 persons have been killed, with hundreds more wounded.

Attacks on the Freedom of the Press

Public communications have been systematically disrupted, with freedom of expression and the the sharing of vital information all but wiped out at times during the first three days since Aristide's ouster. One by one, radio stations have been shut down at gunpoint, with heavy shooting reported at Radio Haiti and Radio Antilles. The national television station was reduced to broadcasting a test pattern during the insurrection, and all the capital's newspapers remain shut down because of the strife.

Journalists have been made special targets for repression. Six armed men in army uniforms arrested Michel Favard, director of

Radio National at his station at nearly midnight on September 29th, minutes after he had broadcast a report that a coup was believed underway. Four other journalists disappeared the following day: Jean Pierre Louis and Herald Gabiliste of Radio Antilles and Father Roday and Philiaire of Radio Cacique.

Attacks on Political Parties and the Aristide Government

There has been widespread intimidation of as well as numerous threats of violence against government representatives and members of political parties, many of whom have gone underground or sought refuge in foreign embassies. Evans Paul, the Mayor of Port-au-Prince who had been tortured during the dictatorship of General Prosper Avril, has gone into hiding along with others in his family. Also in hiding are Prime Minister Rene Preval and information minister Marie-Laurence Lassegue, both of whom had been erroneously reported detained by the military.

Silvio Claude, President of the Haitian Christian Democratic Party, was attacked by a crowd in Les Cayes and burned to death with a flaming tire ("Pe Lebrun") hung around his neck.

The military junta has announced the release of all "political prisoners," a statement threatening the Haitian people with the freedom of a number of persons, including Alfonse Lahens and Major Isidor Pongnon, who had been arrested under Aristide, having been implicated for various human rights abuses. The former director of the notorious Tontons Macoutes, Roger Lafontant, convicted in July of numerous crimes against the state, was reported by General Cedras to have been killed at the penitentiary before he too could be freed.

President Aristide's Warning of the Violence to Come

In his message to the Haitian people, made immediately upon his arrival in Venezuela on the morning of September 30, President Aristide warned of the coming bloodbath. The army, he advised, has "a long list of people whom they plan to kill." Those targeted, he continued, "will be killed like flies," unless the people "Do everything in [their] power to stop people from dying." Aristide's message was disseminated in Haiti, as radio stations resumed broadcasting, at least intermittently.