

CARIBBEAN RIGHTS

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ATTENTION ALL NEWS EDITORS

THE FOLLOWING PRESS STATEMENT WAS TODAY RELEASED BY CARIBBEAN RIGHTS.

WE ARE ASKING YOUR CO-OPERATION IN GIVING COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE TO THIS STATEMENT.

PRESS STATEMENT BY CARIBBEAN RIGHTS AND THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR HAITIAN REFUGEES ON HAITI

The following is a joint press statement issued today by the Barbados-based human rights network Caribbean Rights, and the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Refugees on the most recent developments in the Republic of Haiti.

We regard as most ominous, the disruption by elements of the Haitian military of the mediating efforts by a mission of the Organisation of American States. This is clearly a challenge to the international community which is seeking the reinstatement of President Jean Bertrand Aristide and restoration of constitutional and democratic government in Haiti.

The latest incidents of arrests and shooting of supporters of President Aristide confirm our fears that those who exercise authority through the gun in Port-au-Prince, are not negotiating in good faith for a return to legitimate and constitutional authority.

Caribbean Rights and the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees are particularly disturbed by the emphasis being given, with the evident approval of the military junta, to allegations of gross human rights abuses by the ousted President Aristide. In contrast, there seems to be a calculated plan to significantly minimise the extent of the atrocities already committed by the security forces against an unarmed civilian population protesting the military coup.

From information received, the death toll is now well over 200 with hundreds of others injured, many of them seriously. Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul was arrested on October 7 and released twelve hours later with broken ribs and legs. From the moment of his arrest at the airport in front of several members of the OAS and political leaders, he was beaten

severely. Paul had been arrested once before in November 1989 and brutally tortured by the government of Lt. -General Prosper Avril.

The Haitian people are now faced with shortages of food and medicine and are now fleeing for their lives from Port-au-Prince. The moment for decisive action by the international community, including the governments and representative institutions of the Caribbean, is NOW.

In our view, any solution to the current political crisis in Haiti must include the reinstatement of President Aristide and his cabinet of Ministers as the only legitimate constitutional authority in Haiti.

Attempts by the Haitian military to mask its brutal imposition of military dictatorship by appearing to empower the legislature must be denounced as nothing but a smokescreen.

All independent radio stations have been forced off the air at gunpoint. Although Michel Favard, director of Radio Nationale, has been released from military custody, Jacques Daudier, known as Jacky Caraibes, director of Radio Caraibes has been reported missing since last Monday evening when three carloads of soldiers picked him up at this residence and took him away from his family.

Allegations that President Aristide was in the process of establishing a paramilitary force which would have undermined the authority of the regular security force and eventually lead to the disbanding of the army, cannot stand up to independent inquiry. A 30-man security force does not make a paramilitary force, able to rival a 7,000-man uniformed force that is complemented by a vast network of irregular forces (chefs de section). If President Aristide was indeed planning to build such a force, weapons would have already been distributed to his supporters. This argument by the military is another smokescreen to justify its interruption of the democratic process.

Further, it has not been conclusively established that President Aristide ordered the assassination of former Duvalierist Minister of Defence Roger Lafontant as is being alleged. Lt-Col. Pierre Cherubin, chief of police, has denied that he communicated such an order, or that he was personally involved. This is all part of the smear campaign being generated to justify the creation of a provisional government in Haiti and to prevent the return

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of President Aristide to power.

We strongly urge the governments of the Caribbean, the OAS and the United Nations, to refuse to extend any kind of legitimacy to the provisional government now being set up in Haiti, and to insist on the reinstatement of the popularly elected, legitimate government of President Aristide.

CARIBBEAN HUMAN
08.10.891.

RIGHTS NETWORK

