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THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN HAITI

ISSUE

The restoration of Haiti's legitimate government is only the first step in the collective effort required to establish a state based on due process in this country.

BACKGROUND

The year 1994 was marked by increased violations of the fundamental freedoms of the Haitian people in an effort to crush once and for all every vestige of support for the exiled President and the return of democracy. The repressors invented new methods, such as the systematic raping of women and girls related to opponents of the de facto regime, or murder accompanied by horrible mutilation, designed to sow terror. The popular leaders, and also personalities such as Jean-Marie Vincent, killed on August 28, were victims of kidnapping, arbitrary detention, often in secret places, and summary executions.

Along with the attaches, who operated directly under military orders, the paramilitary organization FRAPH systematically conducted a campaign of terror in the capital and in the provinces, funded and armed by the upper echelons of Haiti's armed forces. The news reporting on the activities of FRAPH and its leaders contributed toward reinforcing the international community's determination to do away with the regime.

Defiance against the international community increased, despite threats of a wholesale trade embargo. After attempting to manipulate the media, the regime adopted increasingly severe measures against journalists who persisted in publishing the facts. Displeased with the presence of observers from the UN-OAS International Civilian Mission (MICIVIH), the regime carried out a campaign of harassment against them and finally ordered their expulsion on July 11.

In response to this mindless violence, President Aristide suggested that the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development study the possibility of setting up a "truth commission" in Haiti which could begin its work before Aristide's return to Haiti and continue to assist thereafter. Various proposals have been prepared and the constitutional government has published a decree designed to follow through on the idea. Its purpose is to help bring about reconciliation by enabling Haitians to testify about the suffering they have endured, and to propose ways of seeing that justice is done and the democratic institutions reinforced.

With the deployment of a US-led multinational intervention force, the daily occurrences of violence were brought to an end and a breath of hope swept over the people, especially in the capital. However, the refusal to intervene in police functions, the partial failure of the program to collect weapons held by civilians, the arrest of a number of known persecutors followed by their release, and the absence of a significant international presence in many

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