



Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis (left) and President René Prével have demanded that all armed gangs surrender their weapons or risk being killed.

Can Prével's government deliver?

Following legislative elections in April, Haiti's new president, prime minister and Parliament took office in May, and at that time there was a welcome sense of optimism that conditions were set to improve. After the disastrous reigns of the Family Lavalas party and then the interim Latortue government, the poor majority had identified René Prével as the best candidate to represent its interests. These same voters made Prével's Lespwa platform the largest party in both houses of parliament.

The new government's first priority is obviously to rapidly try and turn around the country's abysmal economic situation. Prével used the period after his election to bolster international support through a series of official foreign visits, and the early indications are that the new government will enjoy strong support from the foreign governments and the multilateral agencies engaged in the country. A donors'

meeting in late July promised aid totalling US\$750 million for the next fiscal year, but, as past experience has shown only too well, the challenge is how to turn promised aid into development that really means something to the poor.

Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis signalled his government's intentions by announcing a rapid impact, social reconciliation programme for local level development projects intended to address the immediate needs of the poorest members of the population. The programme will also address three specific, potentially explosive issues that threaten political stability in the immediate term, by allocating significant sums to pay the salary arrears of public employees, to meet the cost of agreed settlements for back-pay and pensions for former Army members, and to provide training and jobs for public sector workers dismissed by the Latortue government.

But as Prével and Alexis made clear, the government itself can only do so much, and the success of the economic model to which they are committed is dependent on investments of foreign and domestic capital. Free trade zones may prove attractive, but other investments are hostage to the security situation, and a resumption of violent incidents and kidnappings in the capital since June has focused attention on law and order issues.

Inevitably some vocal sectors of society have again highlighted the failings of the Haitian police force and resumed their call for the

return of the disbanded army – as if soldiers can serve as effective law enforcers! The government's response has been to announce a bold plan to bolster the size and effectiveness of the existing police force, and to say that if there is to be a second force, its preference is for a *gendarmerie* to guard the border and ports, assist with disaster relief, and support the police when necessary.

In August, President Prével warned gangs based in the sprawling slums of Port-au-Prince that they faced a choice of voluntarily disarming or facing robust action that could cost them their lives. Meanwhile, the UN military mission, its mandate extended until February 2007, has unveiled a new disarmament and reinsertion initiative aimed at up to one thousand low-level gang members. The fortunes of the new government to a large extent hang on the fate of the latest security drive. ■

“Investments of foreign and domestic capital are hostage to the security situation...”

Sending out

GUY DELVA started his career as a journalist over twenty years ago covering football matches in his home town of Les Cayes. For two decades, during which time Haiti has been convulsed by a series of dramatic events, Delva has worked for numerous radio stations, for *Le Nouveliste* newspaper, and as a correspondent for the Caribbean News Agency and the BBC World Service. For the last two years, he has been the country correspondent for the Reuters newswire agency.

As well as working as a journalist, Delva is a dedicated defender and promoter of media freedom. In the year 2000, following the murder of the pioneering radio broadcaster and investigative reporter, Jean Dominique, he was the driving force in resurrecting the Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH). As general-secretary of the AJH, Delva fearlessly stood up for journalists' rights, and for his pains was regularly denounced by the Family Lavalas party government and by the interim government that took over in early 2004.

At the end of May, Delva travelled to the UK to participate in the International Press Institute (IPI) congress in Edinburgh and for a brief stop in London. He spoke to the Haiti Support Group's Charles Arthur.

Delva admits working as a journalist in Haiti can be "difficult and sometimes dangerous work". He recounts his experiences with apparent nonchalance, stating, "I myself have been repeatedly threatened – death threats. I have been arrested on several occasions, and been beaten up by police and military officers. I have almost got killed because of my reporting."

He sees himself as one of the few independent journalists in Haiti. Whatever his critics say about him, Delva says he merely reports what he sees and hears. "Back in the early 1990s, after President Aristide's government was overthrown by the military, they said I was working for Aristide, for the Lavalas movement, because I was reporting on the killing and jailing of Aristide supporters. Then when Aristide came back from exile, the same thing happened. His supporters said I was working for the opposition, for the sectors that eventually formed the interim government in March 2004."

"But then, when that government was in power, I was accused of working for the Lavalas Family party! Under Latortue's interim government (2004-6), there were people in jail who were there for nothing – no trial, no sentencing or anything – but when I wrote about that, I was denounced for being against the government."

Clear conscience

Delva sympathises with other Haitian journalists who tailor their reporting to avoid falling foul of the government of the day.



Guy Delva being interviewed on October 3, 2005, shortly after being beaten up by a foreign security guard at the Palace of Justice in Port-au-Prince.

"Journalists have to eat, they have to live with this sort of thing, and they change with the government. But for me, it is better to work through it and keep reporting what I see. Some people's interests will be hurt, but that shouldn't worry me as a journalist. All I can do is have a clear conscience, and report what I see."

He believes the state of the profession leaves Haitian journalists in a vulnerable position. "Corruption and low pay are big problems. A Haitian journalist makes about US\$100 a month. Therefore, if a politician gives a journalist just US\$200, how can you be free to write critical pieces about that politician? You can't. Also we have media owners who are also politicians, and if they don't want you to write a report on a political ally, then they'll see to it that you don't."

The investigation continues

Reviewing his years at the helm of the AJH, during which time four more journalists were killed because of their work, Delva remarked, "As the cliché goes in Haiti: 'l'enquête se poursuit' (the investigation continues), which is a way of saying that the murderers will never be tried and sentenced. They will get away with it."

He continued, "Impunity is the biggest threat to media freedom. Murderers of journalists in Haiti enjoy 100% impunity. This situation only encourages the criminals to multiply attacks on press freedom, because they know the authorities won't prosecute them."

To try and help journalists overcome some of these problems, in 2005, together with other journalists, Delva formed a new organisation

ut an S.O.S.



For interim Haitian president, Boniface Alexandre, at

called S.O.S Journalistes. He explained, “Without media freedom, there cannot be a real democracy in a country. But to attain real freedom for the media, we cannot separate the issue from the day-to-day life of the journalist.”

S.O.S Journalistes

“That is why, with this new organisation, S.O.S Journalistes, we are setting up a solidarity fund to which journalists themselves will contribute. When a journalist encounters a problem and needs money, they can borrow money from the fund and not have to borrow from a politician.”

Delva wants S.O.S Journalistes to bring journalists together to help themselves and to improve their working conditions. “We have a premises and now we want a training pro-

gramme to provide journalists with knowledge and information on economics, law, and international issues. We are also planning to set up a subsidised cafeteria for journalists. Why?...because journalists spend almost half their salary on food. When I spoke about the idea on the radio, loads of journalists called me to ask for the address!”

Many areas of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, have experienced high levels of violence over the last two and a half years. Delva is one of the few journalists to actually go into those areas and to report from the scene. As such, he is well-placed to comment on what has been happening and on efforts to bring an end to the violence?

“I have been covering demonstrations in support of the ousted Lavalas Family government, and I have seen the police shoot at people. I have seen with my own eyes the dead bodies on the street with bullet wounds. But when I reported on this, and even asked the police force leaders about it at press conferences, they denied that anyone had been shot!”

Gangsters need alternatives

Delva agrees that some people have taken up arms to defend themselves, but he also states that there are armed gunmen active in some slum areas who have no overt connection to a political struggle. “In these areas, there are young guys with guns. They make a living with those weapons, and that means they are not going to give them up unless they have an alternative.”

Offering a nuanced interpretation of the situation in the most violent areas of Port-au-Prince, Delva discounts the simplistic solutions offered by both the pro and anti-Aristide camps. In reference to Cité Soleil, a massive shanty-town in northern Port-au-Prince, Delva says, “There are gang leaders there who are known as Aristide loyalists, and the interim government wanted to kill them, calling them criminals. Yet, at the same time, former soldiers who killed people in the uprising against Aristide (in 2004) were rewarded with jobs in the police force and in the port administration.”

In response to those who say those who have taken up arms must be brought to justice, Delva believes a different approach to the gang problem is needed. “Some of these people are politically-motivated. They were fighting against the interim government. Then, for the elections, they made a ceasefire, which proves that they are coordinated...In some parts of Africa, to bring an end to conflicts, the killers have been given an amnesty. Maybe we need that in Haiti, because we cannot continue with the violence.”

● **More information about S.O.S Journalistes can be found on the Haiti Support Group web site www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org**

‘Difficult and sometimes dangerous work’

2000 – 3 April, Jean Dominique shot four times in the chest by a gunman as he arrived for work at Radio Haiti Inter. The station’s security guard was also killed in the attack.

2001 – 3 December, Brignol Lindor, journalist at the Petit-Goâve radio station, Echo 2000, stoned and hacked to death with machetes by members of Dômi Nan Bwa, a local group of FL supporters.

2002 – 15 January, Guy Delva, having played a leading role in the civil society campaign to find justice for Jean Dominique, targeted by supporters of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party. FL leader René Civil accused him of being “in the pay of foreigners” and “betraying his fellow Haitians.” Later that month, Figaro Désir, spokesperson for the FL organisation, Bale Wouze, in the town of St. Marc, announced on the radio, “If Guy Delva sets foot in St. Marc, he will be killed.”

2003 – 22 February, Radio Haiti Inter, arguably the best radio station for independent news and investigative journalism, forced to close down after receiving news of impending attacks.

2004 – 16 April, Jeanty André Omilert, the Mirebalais correspondent for Radio Solidarite, kidnapped and held for three days by a group of former soldiers. At the Association of Haitian Journalists’ annual award ceremony in June, when Olimert was granted one of the prizes, some journalists demanded that the decision be reversed because of Radio Solidarité’s sympathetic coverage of the Fanmi Lavalas Party. When AJH secretary-general, Guy Delva, refused to bow to the pressure, he received death threats.

2005 – 14 January, radio reporter, Abdias Jean, killed by police while covering a police operation in the Village de Dieu sector of Port-au-Prince, allegedly because he had been witness to extrajudicial executions they had carried out. Later that month, Prime Minister Gérard Latortue issued a statement saying that a recent report by Guy Delva, was a “shameful machination” and that Delva “does not miss an opportunity to provide disinformation about Haiti, and basically preaches to his own political clique.”

– 4 April, two weeks after being hit by cross-fire as he covered a clash between United Nations troops and a group of former soldiers, Laraque Robenson, a reporter for Tele Contact radio in Petit-Goâve, died of his wounds.

– 14 July, Jacques Roche, a well-known journalist and political activist, kidnapped in Port-au-Prince, and four days later found dead, having been tortured and shot several times. ■

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UN vehicles removing rubbish from a Port-au-Prince street.

Picture: MINUSTAH

Haiti Advocacy Platform Ireland-UK

The Haiti Support Group is a participating member of the new Haiti Advocacy Platform Ireland-UK (HAPI-UK), a grouping of British and Irish development NGOs and solidarity organisations working in Haiti and supporting the Haitian people.

The platform came into existence in late 2005 with the aim of coordinating British and Irish advocacy initiatives on Haiti, and of uniting on agreed issues in order to speak with a louder voice. The following organisations are participating in the HAPI-UK: Cafod, Christian Aid, Haiti Support Group, OxfamGB, SCIAF, Tear Fund, and Trocaire.

Since the initiative began, the platform – through its part-time coordinator, Anne McConnell – has participated in meetings with the British Foreign Office and the Department for International Development (DfID), as well as the quarterly meetings of the Coordination Europe-Haiti (CoE-H), the network of European solidarity and non-governmental organisations.

Call to CARICOM

At the beginning of June, HAPI-UK issued a call to the Caribbean regional body, CARICOM, regional

heads of states, and Caribbean civil society to support progressive and constructive change in Haiti. On the eve of Haiti's readmission to CARICOM after a two-year suspension following the collapse of the democratic government, the call included some specific suggestions on how Haiti's neighbours could help with security, democratisation and economic development.

The idea for the recommendations to CARICOM was first mooted during a meeting in London between representatives of the Haiti Support Group, Christian Aid, and Reginald Dumas, the Trinidadian diplomat who was UN secretary-general Kofi Annan's Special Adviser on Haiti between February – August 2004.

On the MINUSTAH mandate

In advance of the renewal of the mandate of the UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the HAPI-UK published a number of recommendations on how to improve the mandate. The recommendations were sent to representatives of governments on the UN Security Council. In mid-August, Resolution 1702, extending the mandate for six months, was passed. ■

HAPI-UK recommendation

1. Action on economic recovery and livelihoods.

2. A better focus on the reform and vetting of the police force, and a stronger and bigger UN police role.

3. A coherent and more dynamic Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion (DDR) programme.

4. A new and comprehensive judicial reform process with civil society involvement.

What the new UN mandate said

Recognised the need to prioritise this but did not say the mission itself would be involved. In practice, however, the MINUSTAH is already funding development projects, and is increasing the amount to be disbursed over the next 14 months.

Again prioritised police reform, and gave the go-ahead for greater MINUSTAH involvement in vetting and managing the police force. Did not change the ratio of the military/police composition of the MINUSTAH, and did not significantly boost the UN police role.

Called for a re-oriented DDR effort to include a comprehensive community violence reduction programme adapted to local conditions. But dialogue with key stakeholders involved in DDR was not clearly specified.

Again addressed the issue but really provided nothing new, merely stating MINUSTAH will support Haitian government initiatives. Did not specify the need for civil society involvement.

Web sites of interest

1) Haitian Rara <http://rara.wesleyan.edu/>
Features video clips, still photos, and audio clips featuring the vibrant annual street festival in Haiti.

2) The call for tough arms controls: Voices from Haiti www.oxfam.de/download/

[Haiti_Bericht.pdf](#) A Control Arms Campaign report.

3) On the Margins www.bond.org.uk/pubs/groups/lac_xtaid_onthemargins_mar06.pdf

Discrimination against Haitian migrants and their descendants in the Dominican

Republic. A Christian Aid report.

4) Ile-a-Vache www.ile-a-vache.com/
Promoting tourism on this island in south Haiti.

5) Haiti Travels www.haititravels.org/
Alternative tourism site.