



United States Embassy Belize *Press Release*

Situation in Haiti

by

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A chapter in the history of Haiti has just come to a close and the Haitian people are preparing to write a new one. The resignation of President Aristide marked the end of a process that once held bright hopes for freeing Haiti from the violence and despotism that has plagued it since its independence two hundred years ago. Sadly, that hope remains unrealized. The challenge before the international community now is to help the people of Haiti finally break the cycle of political misrule that has caused so much misery.

The U.S. approach to strengthening democracy in Haiti encourages respect for constitutional processes, good governance, and cooperation with our hemispheric partners through the OAS and other friends of Haiti. Regrettably, our efforts in Haiti during Mr. Aristide's tenure proved fruitless. He was simply unwilling or incapable of building a political consensus, maintaining a professional non-politicized police force, reining in the rampant corruption and drug trafficking among his cronies, or promoting an atmosphere of security in which his political opponents did not fear for their lives.

It is no wonder, therefore, that when one of the largest pro-Aristide gangs turned against him and rose in open rebellion last month, the government had no effective, let alone legitimate, means with which to respond. The rapid collapse of authority throughout Haiti bore stark testimony not to the strength of the thugs who sought to bring him down, but to Aristide's own failures.

This set the stage for his eleventh-hour appeal for foreign military intervention. But in the end, no country, the United States included, was inclined to send forces to sustain the failed status quo in Haiti. By then, most in the international community realized that he had hopelessly undermined democracy and economic development in Haiti. His decision to resign thus initiated a constitutional process that transferred power to the President of the Supreme Court. A new government will now be formed under an independent Prime Minister

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Now, some leaders in the region have expressed concern that what happened to Aristide could happen to any one of them. Knowing what I know about the responsible elected leaders of the Hemisphere, I find it difficult to even conceive of such an eventuality. I know of no other leader who would, for more than a decade, systematically violate his peoples' rights, defy the international community, countenance drug traffickers, or tolerate such pervasive corruption. And that is what Mr. Aristide did and that is why he found himself where he did—without legitimacy, without support.

For the United States' part, we will continue to be a firm supporter of democracy in Haiti; will almost certainly remain Haiti's leading provider of economic aid (between 1995 and 2003, the United States provided over \$850 million in assistance to Haiti); and we will continue to support international loans to Haiti based on their technical merits. On March 1, the UN Security Council called for support of Haiti's constitutional succession and political process and the promotion of a peaceful and lasting solution to the current crisis. Now, the U.S. is leading the Multinational Interim Force (MIF) authorized by that resolution. The goals of the MIF include stabilizing the security situation and providing emergency humanitarian assistance to Haitians. The principles of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) plan of action continue to guide efforts to form an independent government that enjoys broad popular support, and work with that government to restore the rule of law and other key democratic institutions, while encouraging steps to improve the difficult economic condition of the Haitian people.

The time has come to put Haiti first. President Bush has called for a "break from the past" in Haiti. Indeed, there MUST be a break from the past if Haiti is to move forward. This will only come by unleashing the incredible potential of the Haitian people in productive endeavors. Nowhere is it written that the Haitian people must be poor or ruled by tyrants. They deserve leaders worthy of their trust and respect, who favor the common good over personal gain. Support from the United States and the international community can help—and help there will be—in the long-term effort of the Haitian people to rebuild their country.