

HAITI - USAID boasts “success” with pacification program (Kevin Skerrett, ZNET)

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October 10, 2005 - [ZNET](#) - In the alternative press, the role of many US government agencies and NGOs in the destabilization and overthrow of various governments around the world is widely recognized. The CIA, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and other US government and government-funded groups have been widely exposed for their involvement in advancing a very neoliberal, anti-communist, pro-US policy agenda in countries throughout Latin America and around the world. But USAID, America's aid agency, has attracted somewhat less attention. Yet, their role in shaping the political climate of “recipient countries” has been critical, whether the objective has been to condition aid on neoliberal economic policy, destabilize left-populist governments (as in Chile, Nicaragua and more recently Venezuela and Haiti), or to provide support and legitimacy to right-wing governments and dictatorships that support US objectives (Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, the list is long).

Recently, USAID has played a central role in a ten-year “regime change” process in Haiti that is now reaching its final, consolidation phase. An August 2005 report published on their website offers a revealing glimpse of the very political function of this agency following the US/Canada/France-backed coup of February 29, 2004, an event which saw President Jean-Bertrand Aristide physically removed from the country by US marines, and dumped unceremoniously in the Central African Republic. The following notes provide several citations from this report in order to help clarify the current mandate of USAID's “Office of Transition Initiatives” (OTI) in Haiti.

The report starts:

In response to growing political turmoil in Haiti, OTI initiated the Haiti Transition Initiative in May 2004 with implementing partner International Organization for Migration. The program emphasizes stability-building measures in key crisis spots through the implementation of quick, visible small projects and activities that promote peace with the following objectives: enhance citizen confidence and participation in peaceful political transition, with specific focus on disaffected communities; promote peaceful interaction among conflicted populations; and constructively engage groups that threaten the peaceful political transition.

First of all, it's worth noting that the “implementation of quick, visible small projects” is described as the priority. It suggests that the agenda here is not to implement projects that have the greatest “developmental” impact, but rather those that will be cheap (“small”) and visible - so that the impression of progress is created. The aim to engage “groups that threaten the peaceful political transition” is code phrasing for the objective of undermining the peaceful efforts of groups and leaders who continue to oppose the US-controlled coup government that was unconstitutionally established in March 2004.

The report then provides a (literal) whitewash of the horrifying UN military attack on Cite Soleil on July 6. As reported by an independent labour/human rights delegation that investigated the aftermath of this attack, the UN conducted an “arrest” operation that day which was in fact a carefully coordinated military assault, deploying some 350 troops, 20 armored personnel carriers (APCs), tear gas, smoke bombs, grenades, mortars, and “Chilean and Argentinian” helicopters.

This heavy firepower was launched at 4am into a densely-populated poor neighbourhood in Cite Soleil, with the unsurprising result that at least 23 innocent civilians were killed, some local estimates running as high as 50. The Médecins Sans Frontières hospital nearby admitted some 27 patients that day, mostly

women and children, all with bullet wounds and stories of “UN blue helmets” having shot them. The purported target of the attack, a “gang leader” (or community defender, depending on your perspective) named Dred Wilme, was also killed. These details have been reported in the UK Independent, the Toronto Star, the Halifax Daily News, the Washington Post, and on the online program Democracy Now.* A recently-released documentary film produced by KFPA journalist Kevin Pina shows in graphic detail the dead bodies of numerous innocent civilians, including the bodies of Stanley and Nelson Romelus, age 4 and 1, lying alongside their dead mother Sonia, all shot by UN “peacekeepers”, while a UN smoke bomb was spitting red smoke in the middle of their house.

USAID shows no interest in such widely-reported details, preferring instead to emphasize that the “operation” suggests a new “assertiveness” from the UN forces:

MINUSTAH steps up operations - A 12-hour operation in Cite Soleil signaled an increased level of assertiveness by the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) following months of criticism. However, the U.N. concluded that the Cite Soleil section of Port-au-Prince remains under gang control, and security forces are still unable to enter inner areas or conduct foot patrols. One of Haiti’s most powerful gang leaders, General Toutou, said he would be willing to surrender if U.N. peacekeepers guaranteed his safety. It is believed that Toutou, whose real name is unknown, is behind many of the kidnappings and killings that have added to the instability in Haiti.

Given that a 15-city international day of action was organized by solidarity activists on July 21 to condemn this massacre (prompting a belated UN investigation), it is absolutely repugnant that that this assault on poor civilians could be reported so positively and proudly, excluding the key facts of a major massacre. And, in then laying blame for the many recent incidents of kidnapping on “Lavalas gangs” in the poor neighbourhoods, USAID is joining forces with Haiti’s elite-owned right-wing Haitian media. This view is completely contradicted by the recent arrests of a number of police officers (many not yet publicly named) and very wealthy business people, in connection with kidnapping rings operating in Port-au-Prince (see BBC report, June 23, 2005). In fact, multi-millionaire businessman Stanley Handal, a member of the right-wing Haitian elite, was arrested on August 23 in connection with a kidnapping ring that combines other business leaders, the police, and bank workers who have access to account records. (See Radio Kiskeya report: “Arrestation d’un important homme d’affaires en relation avec les cas de kidnapping enregistrés à Port-au-Prince,” August 23). While Handal’s arrest took place following the publication of this USAID report, it was still widely reported within Haiti that members of the business elite were involved. Nonetheless, USAID chooses not to mention the involvement of business leaders in the kidnappings, preferring to focus the blame exclusively on “gang leaders” of the poor neighbourhoods, and “Aristide supporters”.

Even when the notorious convicted paramilitary killer Louis-Jodel Chamblain was allowed to go free in August by the coup government’s “justice” system, USAID distorts the record. Referred to as merely having been “accused” of killing and torture, this report carefully omits Chamblain’s previous conviction in absentia in the year 2000, under a landmark court proceeding established specifically to prosecute human rights abusers from the previous (1991-94) coup period. At the time, this conviction was celebrated by international human rights groups as a major human rights victory, a turning point in Haiti’s struggle against impunity. All of the work that went into that trial has now been neatly undone.

Choosing to exclude any reference to this well-known background, the USAID report suggests that it was Chamblain’s “group” that had been merely “accused” of serious crimes:

Rebel leader released from prison - A Haitian rebel leader, Louis-Jodel Chamblain, who once led a paramilitary group accused of killing and torturing thousands of people, was released from prison in August. He was jailed in April 2004 on two counts of murder. He also took part in the armed uprising that ousted President Aristide in February 2004.

This is another whitewash, one that continues to suppress the fact (admitted by US officials) that the paramilitary group that Chamblain led, known under the French acronym FRAPH, was actually organized and financed by the CIA itself - as boasted by former leader Emmanuel Constant. Meanwhile, hundreds of

Lavalas supporters, activists, and leaders, including former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, potential presidential candidate and priest Gérard Jean-Juste, and popular folksinger So Ann, remain in prison, without charge, and without any evidence being presented against them. Interestingly, the importance of Neptune, and efforts to free him, are admitted by USAID:

Staff in St. Marc will build on the positive momentum generated in La Scierie, a St. Marc suburb, by the Play for Peace camps to strengthen the Haiti Transition Initiative's presence in this extremely sensitive area. The political situation in La Scierie continues to grow more tense as political pressure mounts to free former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, currently jailed (without charge) for his participation in the alleged La Scierie massacre.

With careful phrasing, USAID asserts Neptune's "participation" in the "La Scierie massacre", with perhaps a later editor adding the qualifier "alleged". As I have written in detail in another article,** no evidence has ever been presented to suggest that any such massacre even took place, let alone that any killings were ordered by the Prime Minister of the time. (Various UN human rights officials have admitted that no massacre took place, and that Neptune's rights have been violated). Yet, Yvon Neptune remains in prison, now in his 16th month, and the convicted killer Chamblain, exonerated by the coup government and its kangaroo courts, is walking the streets of Port-au-Prince, free to return to his previous activities. His friend and paramilitary coup-conspirator Guy Philippe is currently a candidate for President in the coming sham elections.

Perhaps the most disturbing and obvious example of the politically partisan strategies of USAID project aid is the report on their establishment of "peace camps" for children and youth. In this report, USAID openly boasts that their "Play for Peace" summer camps are succeeding at reducing participation in anti-government political mobilizations that are taking place, and thereby delegitimizing the expression of peaceful political opposition:

OTI initiated a Play for Peace summer camp in Petit Place Cazeau, the Port-au-Prince stronghold of Lavalas Party presidential candidate Father Gerard Jean-Juste. In addition, the staff met extensively with residents and local activists to develop a list of community priorities. Three new grants came from these discussions: the rehabilitation of the national school and two "Terrains d'Ententes," a football field and a basketball court. The fruits of these efforts were seen during a recent demonstration attended by 200 people. At the same time that the demonstration was taking place, 300 people were enjoying the summer camp activities. It is believed that this camp prevented the demonstration from being larger and giving greater legitimacy to the protesters. The coming weeks will see a deepening of OTI activities in Petit Place Cazeau, where events like the summer camp will become increasingly important now that Father Jean-Juste has been arrested. His imprisonment has inflamed pro-Lavalas fires in the area and made him a martyr to some Haitians. (Emphasis added)

In this passage, USAID's real agenda becomes obvious. The agency is organizing these play camps with the explicit intention of drawing youth out of political activities, reducing the size of anti-government demonstrations, and undermining the "legitimacy" of the protesters. In fact, they are boasting of their success in doing so.

Interestingly, they do not mention the reason for the arrest of Father Jean-Juste, nor the fact that the feeding program for children at his church has been tremendously damaged by his arrest (something we might expect an "aid agency" to be concerned with). As is widely reported in Haitian media, Jean-Juste was arrested by Haitian police in late July, following accusations against him of responsibility for the July 10 kidnapping and murder of journalist Jacques Roche (a crime that took place while Jean-Juste was in the US). He has not been charged, and once again, no evidence has been presented to any judge to suggest any involvement. Father Jean-Juste was the leading presidential candidate of President Aristide's Lavalas party, and his unconstitutional imprisonment without charge has prevented him from registering as a candidate. He was declared a "prisoner of conscience" by Amnesty International.

The USAID report reviewed here expresses no discomfort with such details, preferring to omit them. Rather, for the agency, the illegal jailing of Jean-Juste, of Neptune, So Ann, and other political prisoners,

the police and UN repression in Haiti's poor neighbourhoods, and the sham character of upcoming elections, all these factors represent the issues that are "inflaming pro-Lavalas fires" that they are there to douse through targeted programming and misinformation. In other words, the completely reasonable and justified popular anger at the coup government and its elite supporters is the political problem that USAID is there to solve - not Haiti's poverty. This report makes clearly that they recognize this to be their function. Haiti's population is to be pacified, distracted, impressed by "visible" "quick-win" projects, and above all, re-directed away from oppositional political activities, all to make life more comfortable for the US/Canada/France-backed and elite-controlled government. This is euphemized as "democracy enhancement", recognized widely in Haiti as the final erasure of their nascent poor people's democracy.

* For just two examples, see:

Andrew Buncombe, "Peacekeepers accused after killings in Haiti," The Independent, 29 July, 2005.
Available at:

<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article302259.ece>

Democracy Now, "Eyewitnesses describe UN massacre in Haitian slum," Available at:

<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/07/11/1351253>

** See "Faking Genocide," at:

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=55&ItemID=8142>

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