

HAITI - Chaos Reigns in Haiti

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Wednesday 27 December 2006 - [TruthOut](#) - The horrible crime shattered Haiti. Brilliant student Farah Dessources, 20, was tortured and murdered by her kidnappers. Her mutilated body was found in mid-November, despite her mother, of modest means, having paid a ransom. Several days later, on November 25th, the corpse of a six-year-old child, Carl Roobenz Francillon, appeared. Kidnapped at the exit of his school, he had been strangled, even though his parents also had paid what the kidnappers demanded.

Farah's funeral took on the look of a demonstration against the United Nations Mission in Haiti (Minustah), which numbers about 9,000 Blue Helmets, and against President René Préval's government. "Haitian society has been 'zombified.' Fear has moved in with almost all families in the capital, except, of course, those of the kidnappers," one reads in a widely circulated appeal "to protest against the government's inaction." Foreigners, religious functionaries, a senator, and even Fred Joseph, a former minister from President Préval's first government, have been victims of kidnappings with ransom demands.

In fact, incidents of spectacular hostage-taking increased in December. Thirteen schoolchildren were sequestered in a school bus on the Cul-de-Sac plain, north of the capital. A few days later, about sixty passengers from two buses were kidnapped. "The bandits are targeting schoolchildren more and more. Our students are terrified," says a teacher at the Sacré-Coeur de Turgeau school, from which a seven-year-old girl was kidnapped at midday December 11th.

In power for more than six months, President Préval banked at first on negotiation with the gangs that control the slums. "The government's strategy failed," observes Serge Gilles, leader of the Social-Democrat Party, which belongs to the government coalition. "There's too much carrot and not enough stick; it's urgent that we retake the upper hand."

Edmond Mulet, Blue Helmet chief, acknowledges that "the level of crime is worrying." This Guatemalan diplomat has called on the population to help the police and the Minustah to put an end to the wave of kidnappings, "which endangers the efforts of the international community and the Haitian authorities to stabilize the country."

In this country, where the "télédiol" - the local version of "the grapevine" - catalogs a number of kidnappings higher than official statistics, the population's perception does not square with communiqués from the Minustah - which were soothing for a long time. The UN machine's profuse communication contrasts with the authorities' hesitation to talk about the lack of security. This lack has become a barometer of the Minustah and the government's success.

Many Haitians know that the lower end of the capital is classified a "red zone" by the Blue Helmets. United Nations personnel may not go there except in an armored car under military escort. To go into the center of Port-au-Prince, a "yellow zone," a special authorization and radio monitoring are required.

"We get shot at every day; people set ambushes for us. Two Jordanian soldiers were killed last month. Recently, I had two Brazilians and a Senegalese wounded," adds Edmond Mulet, who finally obtained a green light from René Préval to mount operations in the areas controlled by gangs. "Martissant has become a hell. There are deaths almost every day. Eleven cases of rape were reported in less than a week," attests Rose-Anne Auguste. An official for Aprosifa, a community care center, Mrs. Auguste lives close to that pathetic suburb, south of the capital.

Violence has decreased in the immense slum of Cité Soleil, to the north, where the police have timidly

resumed patrols the last two months, with the support of Minustah's armored cars. But gang wars rage in Martissant. The December 3rd murder of policeman Jean-André Noël, implicated in several kidnappings, relaunched the clashes between the Grande Ravine neighborhood gang and the Lame Ti Manchèt - "the army of little machetes" - a gang from a neighboring district. A dozen people were killed in three days.

"During the night of July 7 to July 8, about forty people, including women and children, were massacred and several houses burned down in a reprisal operation. The authorities, although alerted to the rise in tension, did nothing against those bandits, who took over 50,000 residents hostage," deplores Mrs. Auguste.

In a report entitled "Terror Moves into Port-au-Prince," the Réseau national de défense des droits humains [National Human Rights Defense Network] (RNDDH) counted 721 people murdered, including twenty-eight police and four Blue helmets, between January and November 2006. "The government's policy - consisting of negotiating with the bandits - represents a form of encouragement for the rapists, kidnappers, and murderers, who enjoy impunity and are treated as veritable political partners," the RNDDH accuses.

Often composed of partisans of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who supplies them with money and weapons, the gangs respond less and less to political motivations. "These are common-law criminals - bandits who no longer encumber themselves with ideological justifications. Among the kidnappers, one also finds corrupt policemen and criminals deported from the United States after completing their sentences there," asserts the Minustah chief. "There are powerful interests linked to international drug and arms-trafficking mafias, who don't want the situation in Haiti to normalize," adds political official Micha Gaillard.

According to the Haitian police, it was Haitian emigrants recently deported from the United States who murdered the young Farah and kidnapped former finance minister Fred Joseph. "The Americans say they want calm; they give money; but, under the table, they send a hundred criminals a month, who arrive at the airport and lose themselves in the landscape without any file being handed over to the Haitian government," protests Edmond Mulet.

Called before a parliamentary commission in the beginning of December, Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis blamed ex-convicts who arrived from the United States for the renewal of kidnappings. "Many of those deported had left Haiti when they were children. They learned to be criminals in the United States." An apple of discord between Washington and the little countries of the Caribbean and Central America, the deportation of criminals at the end of their sentences aggravates violence in the region, particularly in the weakest states, such as Haiti. Undertaken by the Minustah since mid-November, the purging of the police force also risks reinforcing the gangs. "From a total of 6,000 policemen, about a thousand will have to leave. Many of these criminals now in the police will find themselves on the street," Mr. Mulet warns.

Considered a capable and honest man, Police Chief Mario Andrésol has already dismissed 186 agents. Fifty-three others are behind bars. Several hostages have been freed and kidnappers arrested. "There are improvements. Now the police wear a badge and their cars have a registration number. There are more checkpoints," observes a young man serving in Haiti who has lived here several years.

Launched three months ago, the DDR (disarmament, dismantlement of gangs, and rehabilitation) program is a failure. The weapons that were handed in were useless. "The United Nations police didn't want to test them because they were too dangerous," confides Daniel Ladouceur, a Canadian in charge of supervising the program.

The result is no better for the hundred or so gang members who followed a training program organized by the Minustah. "They behave well with us; then they return to Cité Soleil, where they resume contact with the gang chieftains. Out of the first group of forty-seven gang members, five were murdered and two are implicated in kidnappings," Edmond Mulet still deplores. "These young men in their early twenties, who haven't ever done anything but kill and rape, belong in psychiatric centers more than in prison," he deems. "Even more than within the police, the major problem is at the level of the legal system, the

corruption of which favors impunity," asserts human-rights militant Pierre Espérance.

Since the increase in kidnappings started in March 2004, only twenty kidnappers have been tried. "With money and political influence, they easily get themselves off," explains Mr. Espérance. "To break the cycle of impunity, the government would have to stop negotiating with the bandits and name four or five honest judges to condemn the kidnappers to exemplary sentences."

Fed-up, the population is tempted to revert to expeditive justice. Several attempted lynchings of supposed kidnappers have been reported. On December 20th, at least one person was killed and a Minustah vehicle burned, when an angry crowd tried to lynch three people, including a policeman accused of kidnapping.

- Original French article published in [Le Monde](#).

- Translation: t r u t h o u t French language correspondent Leslie Thatcher.

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