

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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Haiti

Response to Information Request Number:	HTI02003.REF
Date:	May 14, 2002
Subject:	Haiti: Information on Political Developments during 2001 and Early 2002 in the Area of Cap-Haïtien in Northern Haiti
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Haiti / Demonstrations / Political opposition / Political violence

Query:

1. Do Lavalas supporters (chimères or members of OPs - Popular Organizations) in Cap-Haïtien attack folks who don't join demonstrations in support of Aristide?
2. What is the relationship of the OPL and Convergence in Cap-Haïtien?
3. Who are leaders of OPL in Cap-Haïtien and when was the office established there?
4. In Cap-Haïtien, when and where do Convergence meetings take place?
5. Was the Convergence or OPL headquarters in Cap-Haïtien burned after the December coup attempt?
6. Do or did people live in the headquarters of Convergence or OPL (i.e., could the headquarters also be someone's home)?
7. Is Milton Chery a member of the Convergence in Cap-Haïtien?
8. Were there events in February 2001 celebrating the inauguration of Aristide. What happened in Feb. 2002? Were there any special events (demonstrations, violence, etc.)?

Reasonable Fear
Screenings

Refugees

Humanitarian Parole

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Program)

9. Were there attacks against non-Aristide supporters in Cap-Haïtien after Aristide's visit earlier this month [April 2002]?

10. Were there events in Petit Anse at the end of 2001 or in Feb. 2002 in support of Aristide?

11. Has the Organizasyon Peyizan Grande Rivere du Nord (OPGN) been active in Cap-Haïtien during 2002. Is it a member of the OPL?

Response:

The above questions were submitted to a cross-section of organizations and individuals working on Haiti, including groups and persons operating in Cap-Haïtien. Three detailed written responses were received. One was obtained directly from Citizen Initiative (Initiative Citoyenne), a grassroots pro-democracy group based in Cap-Haïtien that is critical of the government. Another, also from sources in Citizen Initiative, was obtained in Creole by Stanley Lucas, Senior Program Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean at the International Republican Institute. The third was from Justin Bender, Program Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Washington, based on his sources from Cap-Haïtien. Other sources who were contacted for information included Pierre Espérance, Director, National Coalition for Haitian Rights; Jean-Sebastien Roy, Country Director, Americas Development Foundation; Robert Fatton, University of Virginia; Philippe Cantave, USAID-Haiti. The responses painted a generally consistent picture.

All sources agreed that Fanmi Lavalas supporters do not attack people who don't join demonstrations in support of President Aristide.

OPL (Organisation du Peuple en Lutte, Organization of the People in Struggle) is one of several opposition parties which have come together in a coalition known as CD (Convergence Démocratique, Democratic Convergence) (Bender).

The OPL leaders in Cap-Haïtien are Elusca Charles, Jackson Noel, and Fritz Tanis. Neither OPL nor CD have offices in Cap-Haïtien, and they have no fixed meeting place. Meetings are held in private homes (Bender).

According to Justin Bender of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "it is common in Haiti for politicians and political parties to conduct business out of personal residences. The houses of convergence members Milton Chery, Elisca Charles and Jacques Etienne were ransacked following the December coup attempt. They were not burned" (Bender).

According to Initiative Citoyenne, "Convergence never had a headquarters in the Department of the North. But on December 17, they burned the furniture of many Convergence members, but they did not burn their homes. The people were Roro and Toto Tanis, Milton Chery, Elisca Charles, Jacques Etienne, and Celius. They burned these people's furniture because they were part of the opposition" (Lucas from Initiative Citoyenne).

Milton Chery is a Protestant minister and spokesperson for CD in Cap-Haïtien (Associated Press).

Concerning the events commemorating the inauguration of President Aristide in February 2001, Justin Bender wrote: "As on any inauguration day there were events, celebrations etc. by party faithful. In the weeks following the inauguration, there was a Convergence demonstration in Cap-Haïtien that was attacked and broken up by Lavalas partisans (Bender)."

On February 13, 2001, Haitian radio news reported clashes between supporters of Lavalas and CD in the Commune de Saint-Raphaël near Cap-Haïtien. Order was restored by the police. On March 16, CD tried to hold an anti-Aristide demonstration in Cap-Haïtien, but demonstrators were attacked by stone-throwing members of popular organizations connected with Lavalas. Police intervened, arresting both Lavalas and CD partisans. The CD members were released on March 22 (see chronology in Appendix).

There were no demonstrations or acts of violence in Cap-Haïtien on the first anniversary of the inauguration of President Aristide in February 2002. Nor were there any events in Petit Anse in support of Aristide in December 2001 or February 2002 (Bender, Julien).

On April 7-8, 2002, President Aristide paid a visit to Cap-Haïtien. Following several days of security preparations, Aristide arrived and stayed in the Hotel Mon Joli. He paid a call on Archbishop François Gayot at his residence, made a speech at Place Breda (Toussaint L'Ouverture), and at Place Cathédrale au Cap, then went on to Ouanaminthe. When the motorcade reached Saint Philomène, people threw rocks at the president's car. "The police force from Port-au-Prince arrested two little bad people called Ti Jo (Little Joe) and Ti Blanc (Little White)" (Lucas, from Initiative Citoyenne).

According to Justin Bender's local sources, there were no attacks on opposition members around the time of President Aristide's April 2002 visit to Cap-Haïtien. However, according to Initiative Citoyenne, "Mr. Aristide's visit last month was linked to a lot of terror among the population. One week before this visit, Initiative Citoyenne members, along with [other] political opponents, were forced to leave the city because of anonymous threatening phone calls. In the meantime, special police forces invaded the city, causing frustration among the citizens. Two days before the visit, a helicopter with a spotlight flew over the city in order to prevent any demonstration of anger from the population. Two young boys

have been arrested by the special forces, accused of having thrown rocks against Aristide's car. They went with them to Port-au-Prince and until now, no one has heard about them. Their nicknames are Tijo and Tiblanc" (Julien).

OPGN (Organizasyon Peyizan Grande Rivière du Nord, Peasant Organization of Grande Rivière du Nord) has been active in Grande Rivière du Nord (about 10 miles south of Cap-Haïtien) and Joli Trou. It is in no way affiliated with OPL, and is in fact allied with a Lavalas senator from Cap-Haïtien (Bender).

APPENDIX: Chronology – Cap-Haïtien

--February 13, 2001 – Radio Galaxie news, in French, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Feb. 13) - Nexis: Clashes have occurred in the commune of Saint-Raphael near Cap-Haïtien between supporters of the Lavalas Family (FL) and the Convergence. Order was restored following a visit of the police commissioner of the North Department.

--March 16, 2001 – Radio Vision 2000, in Creole, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (March 17) - Nexis: Announcer Marie Chantale Alcide. The first news item takes us to Cap-Haïtien, where our correspondent Yves Mompremier has told us that today, for the second time, the city of Cap-Haïtien has had a tense day. The demonstration which the opposition partisans planned to stage in this city has been boycotted. A group of Lavalas people's organizations OP attacked the Convergence members with stones, which caused real panic and tension in the city and made people run everywhere. The police had to intervene to restore order. Mompremier will report on this information from Cap-Haïtien. Good afternoon, Yves Mompremier. Good afternoon, Chantale. We are indeed in front of Cap-Haïtien cathedral, where the opposition members are supposed to have taken refuge. The police have helped many of them to go home. It must be said that the demonstration has basically been stopped by the police. Many people, mostly OP members close to the Lavalas government, have gathered in front of Cap-Haïtien cathedral. The situation was very tense this morning in Cap-Haïtien, where a gathering was first observed in front of the Feux Verts Nightclub and then in front of Cap-Haïtien cathedral. There were many problems and the police intervened. They arrested several people including pro-Lavalas OP members, as well as members of the opposition. We can say that some people were beaten and some people were injured. For the time being, we are unable to say whether anyone has died. So, for the time being, no-one has died. However, some people have been severely beaten. Mostly opposition members have been manhandled by some OP members. The situation is apparently calm, although many people have gathered in front of the cathedral. It should be said that the police, the forces of order, including the Departmental Unity for the Maintenance of Order, did a good job and prevented more misdemeanours at this demonstration.

--March 22, 2001 – Radio Nationale news, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (March 23) - Nexis: Report by correspondent Alynx Albert Obas in Cap-Haïtien: Pastor Jean-Claude

Noel, representative of the Convergence in the north, congratulated the judicial authorities for releasing three Convergence members who were arrested in Cap-Haïtien. He said this decision is a victory for democracy. However, several people's organizations are unhappy about the release of these individuals.

--September 28, 2001 – Radio Metropole news, in French, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Sept. 29) - Nexis: Parliamentarians disagree about the value of Operation Hurricane. Cap-Haïtien deputy James Desrosins calls the operation "ill-timed," while Senate President Yvon Neptune said that the operation is necessary in order to fight drug trafficking and that it merits everyone's applause. There were overnight disturbances in Cap-Haïtien last night caused by people's organizations (OP) who tried to obtain the release of the businessmen who were arrested under Operation Hurricane. OP members held a violent demonstration yesterday in the streets of Cap-Haïtien at the entrance to town. Correspondent Gerard Martineau reports on the situation: "About 1900 last night there was unrest that started on the main road not far from Limbe to the main entrance of Cap-Haïtien. It was the same situation on the road that leads to the national airport. People threw bottles and asked for the release of the people that the police detained as part of Operation Hurricane. They barricaded roads and broke car windows, which created panic among the people. Policemen fired shots in the air to try to control the situation... We do not have a report on the number of people injured, but the police made several arrests. We are not sure if the detainees will appear before a judge today for Operation Hurricane. But meanwhile, the people are mobilized and all businesses might shut their doors to protest the arrests."

--October 3, 2001 – Signal FM Radio, Port-au-Prince, in Creole, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Oct. 4) - Nexis: Calm has returned to Cap-Haïtien after three days of unrest. Ronald Dupond, a Radio Maxima employee who was shot in the head yesterday, underwent surgery and is out of danger, according to another Radio Maxima journalist. Dupond was injured during a confrontation between police and people's organization members, who hurled stones at a police car and broke its windows. Meanwhile, Operation Hurricane ended in Cap-Haïtien because, according to statements by Deputy Nawoom Marcellus, all those who were arrested for involvement in drug trafficking were released by order of the president of the republic without appearing in court.

--November 14, 2001 – Signal FM Radio, Port-au-Prince, in Creole, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Nov. 15) - Nexis: Report by Cap-Haïtien correspondent: The Cap-Haïtien Civic Initiative is a new organization that has begun fighting against the Lavalas regime. Jean Denis Julien, spokesman for this organization, explained that his organization has not been created with the sole purpose of fighting Lavalas. He added that in less than one month the organization will have a national network that will work on forming a solid civic network.

--November 15, 2001 – Text of report by Haitian Radio Vision 2000, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Nov. 17) - Nexis: We are going immediately to Cap-Haïtien to listen to William

Bernard, who says the general strike called for by the northern branch of the Democratic Convergence has proved to be a success. All activities are paralysed, schools have not opened and businessmen have closed their shops. However, some public administration offices are open as usual in Cap-Haïtien. Contrary to what they previously said, the pro-Lavalas people's organizations did not turn up in an attempt to boycott the opposition's strike. The police are patrolling the streets to prevent misdemeanours. Reporter William Bernard - recording: A high percentage of activities are paralysed in Cap-Haïtien on the first day of the strike called for by the opposition parties. This strike has affected several sectors of the city. The schools are not working. Big business is paralysed. Most shops remain closed. Small businesses are also affected. Many small merchants' stalls remain empty in the centre of Cap-Haïtien. In the open market of Rue 3, most small merchants' stalls have remained empty since 1100 local time throughout. One sign that shows that small business has worked partially is that all banks are open. Today, 15 November, some public administration offices have not opened their doors at all. Among them are the National Drinking Water Service and the Post Office. The employees of several other public institutions have chosen to stay at home. This is the case of the General Directorate of Taxes, the local branches of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Economy and Finance. The public transport sector is partially paralysed. Buses linking Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince have not run at all. In the morning, vehicles linking Cap-Haïtien to other areas did not operate. Inside the city, a few public transport vehicles were observed as from 0700. Until 1130 only a few public transport vehicles, including Service Plus buses, were observed in the centre of the city and the suburbs.

--November 16, 2001 – Signal FM Radio, Port-au-Prince, in Creole, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Nov. 17) - Nexis: Today is the second day of the strike called by the opposition in Cap-Haïtien against the current government. We recall that yesterday's strike was respected by 70 per cent, according to many people and by 80 per cent, according to others. The percentages vary.

--The supporters of the Lavalas Family [FL] in Cap-Haïtien responded to the organizers of the strike by staging a demonstration to show their solidarity with Aristide. They wanted to show through this demonstration that, contrary to what the opposition is saying, Lavalas is still popular. However, a group of young men, counter-demonstrators from poor neighbourhoods, threw stones and bottles at the demonstrators. Some people were injured. The police had not arrested anybody at the time we received this information.

--November 18, 2001 – John B. O'Donnell, "An abandoned U. S. adventure; Haiti: The dream that the Western Hemisphere's poorest country would be rebuilt with international help has almost died, as conditions continue to worsen," Baltimore Sun, 18 November 2001, p. 1F - Nexis: There is talk of a coup as Aristide's support weakens. A general strike by the political opposition, accompanied by some violence, virtually shut down the nation's second-largest city, Cap-Haïtien, last week while small demonstrations have occurred elsewhere.

--November 20, 2001 – Signal FM Radio, Port-au-Prince, in Creole, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Nov. 19) - Nexis: The Rene Theodore branch of the National Reconstruction Movement, MRN, denounces murder threats against Julien Denis, a member of the newly created Civic Initiative in Cap-Haïtien. The threats were made after he took a stand on the political crisis. According to Theodore, Denis said on the radio in Cap-Haïtien that Lavalas dignitaries in the north are hatching a plot against him and other members of the Civic Initiative.

--December 20, 2001 – Text of report by Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) news agency, from BBC Worldwide Monitoring (Dec. 21) - Nexis: Crowds also burned the private residences of opposition figures in Port-au-Prince, in Cap-Haïtien and elsewhere in the country. Opposition members and their families reportedly went into hiding. According to various sources, police either were not present or did not intervene during these activities.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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