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Haiti: The *chimères*, their activities and their geographic presence; the treatment of the *chimères* by the authorities and the presence of group members within the government and the police (2006 - May 2008)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In a 26 May 2008 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the National Human Rights Defense Network (Réseau national de défense des droits humains, RNDDH), a not-for-profit non-governmental organization, stated that the *chimères* have not existed as a group since 2006, the year that President René Préval was elected (RNDDH 26 May 2008; see also *The Miami Herald* 20 Feb. 2007 and Professor 21 May 2008). Unlike the Lavalas party, the political party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Préval government does not use the *chimères* (RNDDH 26 May 2008). The *chimères* are therefore no longer used for the purposes of [translation] "political repression," but rather operate on their own (ibid. 28 May 2008).

According to a professor in the Department of Sociology at the Université du Québec à Montréal who is an expert on Haiti,

[translation]

[u]ntil his forced departure from power, gangs of President Aristide's zealous supporters organized violent pro-Aristide demonstrations and sought to control the streets and to silence the opposition and critics. They often behaved like paramilitary forces of tyranny and repression. They were given the negative name *chimères*. These gangs could be mobilized at any time to help the Aristide regime; they were not an official organization with a structure and hierarchy. After President Aristide was ousted, the *chimère* groups left the streets and the public's imagination. Of course, that does not mean that private militias with other allegiances could not reappear with other stigmatizing names. (21 May 2008)

The Haïti-Référence website, a reference guide on Haiti, defines the *chimères* as [translation] "young hooligans who sometimes form pressure groups, come for the most part from poorer neighbourhoods and supposedly work for the Famni Lavalas (Lavalas Family, the party of [former] president Jean-Bertrand Aristide)" (n.d.).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Head of operations of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti, MINUSTAH) for the western region of Port-au-Prince stated that the *chimères* are former soldiers (UN 28 May 2008). They rob and kidnap people (ibid.). They obtain weapons easily, and their methods of operation for the kidnappings can be quite structured (ibid.).

According to the Head of operations of MINUSTAH for the western region of Port-au-Prince, the *chimères* do not occupy any particular territory, unlike other criminal groups (28 May 2008). The *chimères* may have become involved with other criminal groups and can therefore be found throughout Haiti (ibid.). They are trying to return to Cité-Soleil, despite the presence of international forces (ibid.).

Treatment of the *chimères* by the authorities and their presence within the government and the police

The Executive Director of the RNDDH stated that the members of the *chimères* are still free because of the general climate of impunity in Haiti (RNDDH 26 May 2008). The people who committed crimes have not been prosecuted (ibid.). According to the Executive Director, [translation] "the government does not have control of the country; its institutions are very weak and do not control the groups who possess weapons" (ibid.). Furthermore, according to the Head of operations of MINUSTAH for the western region of Port-au-Prince, there is no will within the Haitian National Police (Police nationale d'Haïti) to conduct investigations in order to arrest the members of the *chimères* (UN 28 May 2008), and people fear that the *chimères* will retaliate if they report crimes (ibid.).

The Executive Director of the RNDDH added that some members of the *chimères* now hold positions within the government, but enjoy no particular privileges and do not carry out their duties for the purpose of exerting [translation] "political pressure" (RNDDH 26 May 2008). In addition, the members of the police who collaborated with the *chimères* may still hold positions within the Haitian National Police (ibid. 28 May 2008). The Head of

operations of MINUSTAH also stated that [translation] "... it is likely that former members of the chimères have now joined the Haitian police forces" (UN 28 May 2008). The Haitian National Police has a policy of checking the backgrounds of recruits, but in reality, such investigations are hard to carry out and results are inconclusive (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Haïti-Référence. N.d. "Tentative d'un glossaire." <<http://www.haiti-reference.com/arts/culture/glossaires.html>> [Accessed 26 May 2008]

The Miami Herald. 20 February 2007. Jacqueline Charles. "In Haitian Slum, Fear Recedes Slowly." (Factiva)

Professor, Département de sociologie, Université du Québec à Montréal. 21 May 2008. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.

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United Nations. 28 May 2008. United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Telephone interview with the head of operations for the western region of Port-au-Prince.

Other sources consulted

Internet sites, including: Agence haïtienne de presse (AHP), Alternatives, AlterPresse, Amnesty International (AI), *Boston Haitian Reporter*, Fondasyon Mapou, Haïti Échanges, Haïti Infos, Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network, Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, Réseau national de défense des droits humains (RNDDH), Reliefweb, United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

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