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## Haiti's Largest Party Nominates Jailed Aristide Ally For President

by LADB Staff

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The party of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has named a candidate for this fall's presidential elections. He is Gerard Jean-Juste, a Catholic priest, as was Aristide. The selection appears to have resolved a growing split within Fanmi Lavalas between moderates who wanted the party represented and strong Aristide loyalists who still consider Aristide the leader of the nation. Jean-Juste's nomination also creates a nightmare scenario for the US, which, when it spirited Aristide away to exile in February, did not contemplate the election of another president cut from the same mold (see NotiCen, 2005-04-28).

The participation of Lavalas also resolves the question of the legitimacy of the elections for the interim government, since Lavalas is the country's largest party by far. The interim government must now look to its own legitimacy, however. It has been holding candidate Jean-Juste in jail since July on suspicion of involvement in the kidnapping and murder of a prominent Haitian journalist. Jean-Juste has denied involvement, was in Miami at the time of the murder, and has not been formally charged.

### *Historic political ploy repeats*

The accusation against Jean-Juste for the murder of journalist Jacque Roche bears a strong resemblance to the accusation against Aristide for the April 3, 2000, murder of famed radio journalist Jean Leopold Dominique (see NotiCen, 2000-04-27). The crime remains unsolved to this day. Aristide opponents at that time pointed to the fact that the president and the journalist had been close, but had had a political falling-out, as a basis for accusing Aristide. Dominique had been a much-loved popular hero, having opposed the Duvalier regimes as well as that of Rene Preval (1996-2001) and had advocated for the poor. He risked life and limb in his reporting and critique, and was twice driven into exile, but each time returned.

Similar circumstances apply to Jean-Juste, who had been close to the Roche family. Given the lack of formal charges against him and the ardent opposition of the interim government and its international backers to Lavalas, the jailing of Jean-Juste has the earmarks of a political ploy to turn the popular sectors, who well remember Dominique, against Lavalas.

From exile in South Africa, Aristide has condemned his longtime ally's incarceration. "His unlawful detention, alongside the unlawful detention of thousands of political prisoners in Haiti, demonstrates a clear determination to exclude Lavalas, or the huge majority of Haitian people, from participating in free, fair, and democratic elections," said the president in a statement sent to the press. The interim government, meanwhile, has for the second time postponed the election in an effort to get more people registered (see NotiCen, 2005-07-28). Late reports show that about 2 million people have registered, half those eligible.

The new election date is Nov. 20, with a second round, if necessary, set for Jan. 3, 2006. The deadline for registration is Sept. 15, but that, too, could change. In addition to a president, voters will elect 30 senators and 83 representatives to the respective legislative houses. Candidates represent 60 parties. At last count, there are 30 presidential candidates.

While insisting that Jean-Juste be freed, Aristide stopped just short of saying that he should run. Jean-Juste has said repeatedly that he would only run with Aristide's approval. Aristide named only Jean-Juste in his call for release of all Lavalas prisoners. He did not mention Yvon Neptune, his former prime minister, who has been held for 15 months without any public disclosure of what evidence the government has against him.

The exiled president has said that before any election there must be a "national dialogue" and an end to repression. He told the media, "Fr. Jean-Juste too has echoed this call for dialogue and peace. Dialogue leading to peace through the restoration of constitutional order this is the will of the Haitian people. After 200 years of independence it is clear that a new Haiti will emerge from this dialogue." As the drama progresses, Jean-Juste is reportedly not doing well in prison.

On Aug 25, Detroit Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Johanna Berrigan, a nurse practitioner, visited him in jail and reported he appears very tired, in pain, and has tenderness in the abdomen with swelling in the lymph nodes of his neck and under his arms. Jean-Juste told his visitors he had been examined by the prison doctor, but no tests were done or blood drawn. The doctor was reported to have said that his patient's condition warrants further evaluation and treatment and that he would recommend transfer to another facility, perhaps the one where Neptune is kept. Neptune was said to have been near death following a hunger strike.

Jean-Juste told his visitors he was wary of a transfer, regardless of the availability of treatment. Nomination notwithstanding, Jean-Juste told his visitors that he wanted to clarify that he is absolutely not a candidate for president. He said he would be, however, if his conditions, identical to those expressed by Aristide, were met.

The uncertainty lessened later in the week when a diplomatic source in Haiti told NotiCen that Aristide partisans played a taped message with Aristide's voice "asking everybody to have their voter-registration card and to vote Jean-Juste. This declaration was seen as an official blessing from Aristide and that's what the media have been commenting on." The source, who did not give permission to be named, said that, while he had not heard the tape, he had heard that Aristide also said in Creole, "Jean-Juste devan, mwen deye" (Jean-Juste will come first, then me).

For hard-line supporters, that is more than an endorsement; for the US State Department, more than a headache; for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which has refused to recognize the legitimacy of the interim government, justice served. CARICOM has objected strenuously to Aristide's abduction.

## *Dominican Republic deports and destabilizes*

While the situation regarding the Lavalas candidacy remains fluid, pressures on the caretaker government and its international backers to create relatively stable and peaceful conditions in which to hold an election increased as the Dominican Republic arrested and deported about 700 Haitians. The undocumented refugees were rounded up in Janico, San Jose de las Matas, La Canela, and El Rubio. The deportations appeared to be a dismissive response by the Dominican Republic to Haitian complaints of deportations at this sensitive time. Haitian authorities, already fearful that as many as a million refugees could be deported, are pressed as well by social and human rights groups within the country to stop the flow and the violations of rights allegedly being visited upon their countrymen and women by the Dominicans.

The organizations, among them the Grupo de Apoyo a Repatriados y Refugiados (GARR), accused their government of "prolonged silence" regarding the matter. Henri Bazin, Haitian economy minister, who was standing in for Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, out of the country at the time, denied the government had done nothing and said he deplored the "cruel and savage racism" that motivated Dominican treatment of the Haitians. Four young Haitians were recently bound and set afire in the Dominican Republic.

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