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## Haiti To Miss Constitutional Deadline As Elections Are Postponed Again

by LADB Staff

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The Haitian interim government has once again postponed presidential elections (see NotiCen, 2005-10-06). The new date is Jan. 8, 2006, with a runoff scheduled for Feb. 15. The new date means that the race to have a permanent government in place by Feb. 7 in order to avert a constitutional breach has been lost. The UN Security Council had been pressing Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue to meet the deadline, but chaotic conditions have prevented that. The government has said the handover date would now be Feb. 24, but, if a second round is needed, this too looks uncertain.

The Organization of American States (OAS) has expressed "cautious optimism" about the new dates. OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza said that, although the process was "slow to get off the ground, considerable progress has been made, which allows us to be cautiously optimistic about having organized, orderly, and credible elections early in the new year."

In the hope of providing a somewhat safe environment for voters, the UN has adopted a resolution raising the amount appropriated for the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) by US\$46.4 million (see NotiCen, 2004-06-03). The mission's budget before the raise was US\$494.9 million. The additional money will pay for a temporary increase in the mission's strength during the election and for the subsequent political transition. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been squeezing the international community for more and urgent aid in the short term and for bilateral donors to make good on their pledges quickly. It is not unusual that countries pledge, but never pay.

He also said that more money would be needed in the longer term. "Security operations should be accompanied by humanitarian and development assistance for which the necessary resources should be provided in a timely manner. Bilateral donor assistance will also be required to permit a meaningful response to the security threats posed by drug and weapon flows," he said. Annan wants a world already beset by donor fatigue to stick with Haiti after the election, arguing that a strategy to assist the country depends not only on security, but on social and economic aspects as well.

### *A government in a hurry had to be convinced*

The January election date was arrived at after activists convinced the government that the date set by the provisional electoral council (Conceil Electoral Provisoire, CEP) was not technically possible. Former CEP secretary-general Marie Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, now leader of Fanm Yo La, the women's collective for participation in political affairs, made a public recommendation that the government give up on the Feb. 7 deadline. "What we in Fanm Yo La propose," she said on a Nov. 24 radio broadcast, "is this. Just as there was a 4 April accord, there should now be another accord declaring that the transfer of power can no longer take place on 7 February. So the CEP

and the government can sit with the advisers who support the electoral process, the international community, for example, and postpone the election dates. They could then make sure that we can get back on our feet so that in another five years the transfer of power can be done on 7 February," as the Constitution requires.

It appears that something like that is what happened. Previously, the National Council of Political Parties, made up of 27 political parties, had called upon election authorities to postpone voting until sometime in February. The chair of the group, Dejean Belizaire, a presidential candidate, argued, "We should not rush to organize flawed elections just because we want to meet a deadline. How many constitutional deadlines has the government simply decided to ignore?"

He was seconded by Osner Fevry, director general of the group, who warned, "Our group is not ready to take part in elections that are more likely to plunge the country into deeper crisis and instability than otherwise. Preparations for the elections should take a little more time to be finalized. Why not?"

The CEP responded by asserting that it, not the government, is the final arbiter of election dates and that it would decide. "Once those dates have been officially communicated to us, the president and the government will issue an order to formally call on the population to go and vote," said Latortue.

As of Nov. 12, 35 candidates are now eligible to stand for president. MINUSTAH has endorsed the January date with a statement saying that previous dates "failed to take into account technical requirements." MINUSTAH said the new dates came after a "thorough analysis of all the elements involved in the electoral process, from distributing voter cards to providing security."

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