Haiti: Notes On Accomplishments Of New President

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Since Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide assumed office on Feb. 7, the Haitian government has undertaken an anti-corruption campaign, and attempted to sanction persons accused of major human rights abuse. Six of the army's main commanders were replaced, and enlisted men who refuse to follow new leaders have been punished. The former interim president was arrested for questioning about her role in a January coup attempt, and the coup leader Roger Lafontant was imprisoned. Lafontant was a leader of the Tonton Macoutes under the Duvalier regimes. Aristide has also commenced reforms of the armed forces structure, placing rural police under direct control of the Justice Ministry. French assistance was obtained to permanently separate the army and police force. On March 13, the army issued an arrest warrant for Gen. Williams Regala, one of principal architects of repression during the regime of Gen. Henri Namphy and a member of his ruling junta. The unprecedented move to prosecute a general was supported by armed forces chief Herard Abraham. Regala was widely believed to have been responsible for a Nov. 29, 1987, election day slaughter of 24 voters at a Port-au-Prince school. The elections were called off by Gen. Namphy. Rural military chiefs responsible for other human rights violations in the past five years have also been targeted by the Aristide government. One of the men who allegedly ordered a July 1987 massacre at Jean-Rabel that left some 255 agricultural workers dead was arrested March 16. The new president's major challenges continue to be economic. Unemployment is currently estimated at about 60%. Prices have increased 25% in the past six months, according to banking industry figures. Aristide was forced to approve large-scale imports of free rice from the US to feed the people until his four-year project for rice self-sufficiency can take over the task. Since early February, the government has been promised $82 million in aid from the US for 1991, $8 million from Canada, and at least $24 million from donor agencies, and has received millions of dollars earmarked for electricity infrastructure construction programs. (Basic data from AFP, 05/17/91)