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LADB Staff

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## **Jean-bertrand Aristide Begins Second Administration**

*by LADB Staff*

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Jean-Bertrand Aristide was sworn in Feb. 7 as president of Haiti for the second time, promising to work with the opposition alliance and to repair relations with the US. Last-minute negotiations between his governing Fanmi Lavalas party and the 15 opposition parties organized into the Convergence Democratique (CD) fell apart with no likelihood of reaching a power-sharing arrangement. In December, Aristide promised to make concessions to the opposition and to the US. But in January, the CD said the Aristide presidency was illegitimate and made plans to set up its own government (see NotiCen, 2000-01-25).

In his inaugural address, Aristide renewed his offer to work with the opposition and promised electoral reforms that would include replacing the discredited electoral council (Conseil Electoral Provisoire, CEP) and offering posts in his government to the opposition. He also promised 500,000 new jobs, an attack on corruption, improvements in the police force, and other elaborate social, economic, and political reforms for his five-year term. Included in his preinauguration promises was a commitment to resolve last year's disputed elections. But it was hard to see what Aristide might concede to the opposition to end the disputes about those elections, aside from quitting the presidency (see NotiCen, 2000-12-07).

Few high-level foreign dignitaries attended the inauguration, and the US signalled its ongoing displeasure with Aristide by sending no delegation from Washington. Only US Ambassador in Port-au-Prince Brian Dean Curran represented the US. He said the US could not have normal diplomatic relations with Haiti until the election controversies were settled. Aristide's proposal to resolve the issue was to create a special commission to review the elections. But the CD refused the offer.

In the presence of UN and other foreign observers, the CD and Lavalas held talks during the weekend before inauguration day. But the talks collapsed on Monday, Feb. 5, leaving Aristide president-elect and the CD's Gerard Gourgue president of the CD's provisional government. Gourgue was a justice minister in the regime that replaced former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986. But the provisional government does not appear to have international support.

Ambassador Curran said, "The formation of a provisional government does not advance prospects for dialogue or a solution of the political crisis." Having rejected Aristide's proposal for a commission as well as power sharing in the new administration, the CD countered with a proposal that indicated a willingness to draw back from the provisional-government strategy and to implicitly recognize a degree of legitimacy in Aristide's election. The proposal was to set up an interim government headed by a triumvirate a three-person presidency that would include Aristide and that would govern for two years while preparing for new elections. Aristide's forces rejected the idea, arguing that it had no constitutional basis.

Shortly after his inauguration, Aristide named Jean-Marie Cherestal prime minister, after the CD refused a Lavalas offer to give the post to a member of the opposition alliance. Cherestal is an economist and served as planning minister and later finance minister in Aristide's first administration (1990-1995), which was cut short by a military coup. One of his first duties will be to pick a cabinet, which he said would be done in the spirit of the opening Aristide mentioned in his inaugural address. The remark is assumed to mean he is willing to include members of the opposition in the Cabinet, but the CD has been firm in refusing to serve in the government.

While there appeared to be no progress toward domestic peace, relations with the US may have improved somewhat with Aristide's December concession to President Bill Clinton. In late December, the Lavalas-controlled parliament approved an anti-drug agreement with the US that had been pending for three years. The agreement permits US interdiction ships and planes the right of hot pursuit of drug runners into Haitian waters and air space. Parliament is also expected to pass legislation to toughen banking rules to control money laundering, increase penalties for drug traffickers, and establish a national commission to fight drugs.

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