

1-10-2002

## Opposition Says Government Faked Attack on National Palace

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

---

### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Opposition Says Government Faked Attack on National Palace." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8921>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## Opposition Says Government Faked Attack on National Palace

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Haiti

Published: 2002-01-10

Police thwarted an attempt by a band of heavily armed men to take over the Haitian National Palace Dec. 17. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide says the attack was a failed coup attempt, but opposition leaders called the government's version absurd. Guy Philippe, a former police official whom the government has implicated in the alleged plot, is being detained in the Dominican Republic.

In October 2000, the government accused Philippe and several other former police officers of an attempt to overthrow the government of then President Rene Preval (1996-2001). Gerard Pierre Charles, secretary-general of the opposition party Organisation de Peuple en Lutte (OPL), said the coup report was invented by the governing Fanmi Lavalas party. Dominican authorities refused to return several of the alleged conspirators who had taken refuge in that neighboring country (see NotiCen, 2000-10-26).

In the Dec. 17 incident, police said 33 armed men attacked the National Palace and took over a wing of the building containing the communications center. A government spokesperson said the attackers were dressed in the same kind of military fatigues worn by the army that Aristide disbanded in 1995. Two police officers and two bystanders were killed in the exchange of gunfire. Police captured one of the attackers attempting to cross the border into the Dominican Republic, but the rest escaped. Aristide was not in the palace at the time of the attack.

Besides those killed in the assault on the palace, at least five other people died some set on fire in the violent reaction that followed, as Aristide supporters attacked opposition leaders and their offices around the country. The Dominican daily Listin Diario reported Dec. 19 that opposition party offices and the houses of some of the leaders were still smoldering after the attacks by government supporters. By then the government had announced that the death toll stood at 10, with 15 others injured.

The Associated Press reported evidence that the government had orchestrated the retaliatory acts, instructing supporters hours before the palace attack to expect something to happen. The report also said the Paris-based press organization Reporters Without Borders claimed that journalists were targeted during the demonstrations, indicating "that the protesters were acting on instructions to attack the press." Aristide quickly described the attack as an attempt to overthrow his 10-month-old government.

In an address to the nation hours after the attack, he referred to the coup that ousted him during his first administration in 1991 (see NotiSur, 1991-01-08) and said, "The period of the coup d'etat is over." He denounced the violent reaction that followed the palace attack and called for respect for the rights of all political parties, journalists, and all Haitians. Benjamin Dupuis, of the pro-

government Parti Populaire National (PPN), accused the opposition-party alliance Convergence Democratique (CD) and the Organization of American States (OAS) of conspiring to destabilize the government and using former Haitian military living in the Dominican Republic to carry out the coup attempt.

On Dec. 19, police arrested Guy Francois, a former army colonel, and charged him with taking a leading part in the conspiracy. However, Judge Rosemberg Jean Jocelyn ordered his release in early January, ruling that the arrest was illegal. On Dec. 20, former army sergeant Pierre Richardson, who was wounded and captured after the palace attack, confirmed that the assault was part of a coup attempt and said the number of attackers was 23 or 24. He said he had attended meetings in Santo Domingo to plan the attack.

Leading the meetings, he said, were Philippe, who is a former police chief in the northern city of Cap-Haitien, and Jean-Jacques Nau, a former police chief in Delmas near Port-au-Prince.

### *Accused coup leader detained in Dominican Republic*

The government said Philippe had led the attack and based the assertion on a radio transmission the attackers sent after briefly taking over part of the National Palace. Philippe was detained in the Dominican Republic Jan. 7. The Dominican government said Philippe flew to Panama the day after the palace attack and then to Quito, Ecuador, where his wife and children live. Ecuadoran authorities deported him to the Dominican Republic where President Hipolito Mejia ordered him held by military authorities.

On Dec. 29, Mejia said his government was studying a Haitian request for Philippe's extradition. He said the Dominican Republic would not become a refuge for conspirators against any government. But on Jan. 4, Dominican Foreign Minister Hugo Tolentino Dipp said Philippe would not be extradited to Haiti because the ministry had not received an extradition request and because the Haitian government had not given assurances of Philippe's safety should he be returned. Mejia said the Foreign Ministry was negotiating with third countries to find one that would accept Philippe. Failing that, Mejia suggested that Philippe might be allowed to remain in the Dominican Republic.

### *Opposition says government invented coup story*

In a telephone interview with the Associated Press, Philippe said from the Dominican Republic that he had nothing to do with the attack, which he said was "staged" by the government to cover a planned assault on the opposition parties. Evans Paul, leader of the opposition Espace de Concertation, dismissed the government reports as "a masquerade." He said it was "absurd" to imagine 33 men attempting to take over the heavily guarded palace, especially since it was well known that Aristide seldom spent the night there.

The Associated Press quoted James Morrell of the Washington-based Center for International Policy (CIP) as saying it was hard to decide which side had started the December violence. "You never know how much is a pretext for a crackdown, or if it's real," Morrell said. Micha Gaillard, a spokesperson for the Convergence Democratique, said the government claim of a coup attempt

was "a piece of theater," played out to justify "a witch hunt" against the opposition. Gaillard said Aristide supporters were transported in government vehicles to attack opposition offices and homes.

US reaction to the events was measured. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher expressed concern about the retaliation against opposition parties and asked Aristide "to take appropriate measures to restore and maintain calm." At the same time, he reiterated US support for Aristide as the leader of a legitimate government. "Obviously, we stand with people who are elected against those who seek to overthrow them by force," said Boucher. OAS could intervene in Haiti Neither the US nor the OAS appear willing to let the Aristide government and its opponents continue what has so far been a fruitless effort to resolve their differences.

The Miami Herald reported in early January that the OAS was considering imposing forced mediation to end the standoff between Aristide and the Convergence Democratique. An unnamed State Department source said, "The events of Dec. 17 demonstrated a failure of the Haitian government to protect its people from mob violence." The State Department source said representatives from the US, Canada, and various European and Latin American countries met Jan. 8 in Washington to discuss implementing the Inter-American Democratic Charter, adopted by the OAS in September 2001.

The charter calls for member states to take collective action to defend democracy in the hemisphere. The OAS could attempt to force mediation in Haiti by using a charter provision that could authorize sanctions against Haiti or even suspend its OAS membership. Haiti's Ambassador to the OAS Raymond Valcin attended the meeting.

-- End --