

8-1-2002

President Aristide Makes Concessions To Opposition

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "President Aristide Makes Concessions To Opposition." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8991>

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.

President Aristide Makes Concessions To Opposition

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Haiti

Published: 2002-08-01

Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of the Fanmi Lavalas party recently signaled his intent to end a political crisis that was initially started by opposition allegations of fraud in the elections of May 2000. Aristide has agreed to a demand by the Organization of American States (OAS) to hold new internationally monitored parliamentary elections next spring. Aristide has also agreed to bring to a conclusion investigations of last December's attack on the National Palace, pay reparations to people who suffered damages resulting from the attack, and comply with other "confidence-building" measures.

Aristide has said that the attack on the National Palace was a failed coup attempt, but opposition figures have accused the government of staging the attack to justify a witch hunt against them (see NotiCen, 2002-01-10). The alleged coup attempt set off a violent reaction by Aristide supporters, who attacked opposition leaders and their offices around the country. Aristide supporters have also on occasion attacked journalists.

Guyler Delva, head of the Association of Haitian Journalists who writes for the daily La Nouvelliste, says that freedom of the press in Haiti is "ambiguous." "In reality, while of course you can give the news, even though that news would not please the president, after you give the news, there are other groups linked to the power, the governing body, who will threaten you," Delva said.

Opposition remains intransigent

Aristide says that he has made "major sacrifices" to comply with international agreements to end the political impasse. Nonetheless, the opposition Convergence Democratique (CD), which represents parties that have little popular support, has rejected Aristide's overtures. A recent Miami Herald editorial said that the Haitian opposition is "unwilling to accept any terms other than the president's ouster." The New York Times reported diplomats and others involved in the negotiations have expressed frustration with the opposition, which is divided on how to deal with Aristide.

In early July, the CD continued to balk at a proposed settlement, saying that it lacked guarantees of security and prosecution of those who had attacked its members. Aristide's latest OAS-brokered pledges address these concerns, but the opposition still refuses to settle. Blockage of aid and lack of investment exacerbate poverty Haiti's political instability has scared off local and international investment. In addition, the international community has blocked hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to the country until Aristide and the opposition reach a consensus on new elections.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced in February that it would not extend new credit to Haiti because of the political crisis and its disagreement with some of the government's economic

policies. The lack of investment, credit and foreign aid has exacerbated the poverty in the country. Haiti's average per capita income is about US\$1 a day and life expectancy is 54 years.

Roger Noriega, the US ambassador to the OAS, said political instability in Haiti compelled the OAS to establish a mission there to "help in the development and strengthening of Haiti's democratic political processes and institutions." The European Union (EU) has expressed support for OAS efforts to bring "lasting political solutions" and the "strengthening of democracy" to the crisis-ridden Caribbean nation.

The EU says its partial suspension of aid to Haiti will remain until a political settlement between Aristide and the opposition is reached. Aristide strongly criticizes what he calls an "embargo" on foreign aid, saying that health care, living conditions and education have all suffered as a result. He said the refusal to provide development loans had increased disease by keeping 80% of the population without clean water.

US Representatives Carrie Meek (D-FL) and John Conyers (D-MI) have joined Aristide in calling on the US government to lift its veto on disbursements of aid to Haiti. A recent Miami Herald editorial said the administration of President George W. Bush may be quietly reviewing its strategy in the wake of Aristide's most recent overtures. As a possible sign that the Bush administration may free up aid, the editorial points to a recent visit of Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) representatives to Haiti. Oxfam International, a confederation of twelve nongovernmental organizations that operates in more than 80 countries to fight poverty, argues that the international financial institutions' policies toward Haiti have not always been constructive.

The IMF and World Bank pressured the country into adopting a rapid trade-liberalization program in the 1980s. A large cut in the import tariff on rice opened the country to a flood of cheap US imports. By 2000, Haiti's rice production had halved and subsidized imports from the US accounted for more than half the local rice sales. Oxfam says the results have been devastating for Haitian farmers.

-- End --