

## Haiti After the 2000 Elections: Searching for Solutions to a Political Crisis

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Haiti seems to be in a perpetual state of political crisis. Since the end of the Duvalier era in 1986, the country has attempted to undertake a number of critical reforms, including the establishment of democratic norms, the consolidation of a state of law and the restructuring of the national economy, among others. Yet these efforts have brought few results, especially since the early 1990s, and the deteriorating state of affairs has led to growing frustration within the international community.

Haiti's political scene during the 1990s was dominated by Jean-Bertrand Aristide. While Aristide was constitutionally blocked from running for presidential re-election after his first term ended in 1996, he hand-picked a successor in René Préval. Unable to generate widespread support from the Haitian population, however, Préval's leadership proved to be a dismal failure, and in 1997 the country plunged into a state of political turmoil. The deepening political crisis in turn led to the suspension of international assistance, thereby depriving the country of hundreds of millions of dollars.

It was hoped that the 2000 elections would symbolize a new political beginning in Haiti. Unfortunately, the electoral victories of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Lavalas Family party have only served to perpetuate the political crisis. The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the current socio-political climate in Haiti, and to consider possible options for Haiti and the international community to address the country's serious political problems.

Among these options, the promotion of greater transparency in the management of Haiti's political affairs is of particular importance. The new Lavalas administration's lack of credibility is largely due to a failure to openly articulate its intentions. The current crisis must also be addressed in a more inclusive manner integrating a wider range of social groups, and negotiations should not be limited to political actors alone. Further, the international community must develop a multilateral strategy for engagement that should include the institutional experiences of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

### RÉSUMÉ

La République d'Haïti semble être en perpétuelle crise politique. Depuis la fin du règne des Duvalier en 1986, la nation haïtienne a tenté de relever certains défis dont l'importance est cruciale; établissement des normes démocratiques, instauration d'un État de droit, reconstruction de l'économie, etc. Les résultats de

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**FOCAL**

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ces grands changements instaurés surtout depuis le début des années 1990 tardent à se faire sentir et la communauté internationale éprouve une certaine fatigue à l'égard du cas haïtien.

Sur la scène politique haïtienne, les années 1990 ont été celles de Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Ne pouvant se représenter à la présidence au terme de son premier mandat, en 1996, Aristide a cédé la place à un allier de choix en la personne de René Préval. Ne parvenant pas à regrouper la société haïtienne sous son leadership, l'administration Préval fut un lamentable échec. Depuis 1997, Haïti est la scène d'une crise politique majeure. De cette crise est née le blocage de l'aide internationale qui prive le pays de plusieurs centaines de millions de dollars.

Les élections de l'an 2000 devaient mettre un terme à cette crise. Malheureusement, les victoires électorales de la Fanmi Lavalas et de son chef, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, n'ont rien changé à cette crise qui dure toujours. L'intention de cet article est de situer le lecteur face à la situation socio-politique d'Haïti et poser un regard sur les options s'offrant à Haïti et à la communauté internationale pour résoudre le problème central que représente la crise politique haïtienne.

De ces options, il est clair que la gestion de la crise haïtienne demande une plus grande transparence. Le manque de crédibilité de la nouvelle administration Lavalas est principalement dû à l'ignorance de ses intentions réelles. Le dénouement de cette crise réside dans une approche globale de la société haïtienne, les efforts de négociations ne doivent pas se limiter aux acteurs politiques. De plus, la communauté internationale doit favoriser une approche multilatérale en exploitant l'expérience institutionnelle de l'Organisation des États américains (OÉA) et de la Communauté des Caraïbes (CARICOM).

## **RESUMEN**

La República de Haití parece hallarse en una crisis política perpetua. Desde finales de la época del gobierno de Duvalier en 1986, el país ha intentado realizar reformas rigurosas tales como el establecimiento de normas democráticas, la consolidación de un estado de derecho y la reestructuración de la economía nacional, entre otras. Sin embargo, dichos esfuerzos han producido resultados insuficientes, especialmente desde comienzo de la década de 1990, y el deterioro de la situación ha generado una creciente decepción en la comunidad internacional.

La escena política haitiana durante los 1990s estuvo dominada por Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A pesar de que Aristide estuvo imposibilitado constitucionalmente para reelegirse como Presidente al término de su primer mandato en 1996, esto no evitó que pudiera escoger a René Préval como su futuro reemplazo. No obstante, el gobierno de Préval no logró alcanzar un apoyo amplio por parte de la ciudadanía, y su liderazgo demostró ser un fracaso estrepitoso que condujo al país a una gran agitación política en 1997. La agudización de la crisis política provocó a su vez la suspensión de la ayuda internacional, lo cual privó al país de cientos de millones de dólares.

Las elecciones de 2000 parecían anunciar un renacer político en Haití. Infelizmente, la victoria electoral de Jean-Bertrand Aristide y su partido Fanmi Lavalas solo ha servido para perpetuar la crisis política. El presente trabajo intenta brindar un análisis de la situación socio-política actual en Haití, y exponer algunas opciones que tendría ese país y la comunidad internacional en aras de resolver las serias dificultades políticas que abruman a la nación caribeña.

Una de las opciones de particular importancia es promover mayor transparencia en la administración de los asuntos políticos de Haití. La falta de credibilidad que ronda a la nueva administración de los Lavalas se debe en gran medida a su incapacidad de plantear abiertamente sus intenciones. La solución de la crisis actual debe dar participación a un sector más amplio de grupos sociales, y las negociaciones no deben limitarse a los actores políticos únicamente. Además, la comunidad internacional debe diseñar una estrategia de participación multilateral que cuente con la experiencia institucional de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) y de la Comunidad del Caribe (CARICOM).

## HAITI: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PORTRAIT OF A COUNTRY IN CRISIS

Haiti's socio-economic situation is grim. The country's population is the most underprivileged in the Americas, with 80% living below the poverty line. Worldwide, only Somalia and Afghanistan have higher rates of malnutrition according to a recent study conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Haiti's infant mortality rate is extremely high, with over 97 deaths for every 1,000 births — twice the rate found in the neighbouring Dominican Republic. Life expectancy is only 57 years, while the general literacy rate is roughly 40%.

The country's economic situation is no more encouraging. After the coup d'état orchestrated by Raoul Cedras in 1991, the economy suffered the consequences of a severe economic embargo and deteriorated rapidly. Under the Préval Administration, economic growth remained limited, with the exception of an expanding informal sector. The country's agricultural sector, representing one quarter of national GDP and roughly 70% of all jobs, has been particularly hard hit in recent years. The production of coffee, the country's principal export, dropped by one half from 1982 to 1994, and from 27 tonnes in 1992-93 to 13 tonnes in 1995-96. Traditionally geared toward exports (mainly coffee, cocoa, sisal, and sugar), allowing for an influx of foreign capital, Haiti's agricultural sector shifted towards subsistence farming (rice, corn, beans, millet and sorghum) in the mid 1990s.

The state of the tourism industry is equally depressing. Once known as the 'Pearl of the Caribbean', the country's current political instability, inadequate infrastructure and security concerns have made Haiti one of the least visited destinations in the region. While Haiti counts only 800 hotel rooms, the Dominican Republic now boasts over 20,000.

The parliamentary paralysis that began under the Préval administration in 1997 resulted in the suspension of several hundred million dollars of aid from the international community. In a country heavily dependent on foreign assistance, this caused a deepening of the economic crisis and deprived the economy of resources needed to

modernize and reconstruct. Among the results: over 60% of the active population is now without work, and the value of the *gourde* has fallen rapidly — from 18 to 25 units per US dollar between May and November 2000 alone.

Beyond the socio-economic situation noted above, a wider range of problems including public security and illegal drug trafficking have served to deepen the country's political crisis.

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- **Public Security:** Public security concerns are directly linked to the declining strength of the country's official forces of order. In particular, Haiti's National Police Force (PNH) is badly undermined by its lack of resources and trained personnel. The PNH is also reputed to be controlled by political forces with suspected links to criminal activity (see recent reports by Human Rights Watch, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)).

As a result, the PNH and the justice system as a whole have very little public credibility, and frustrations have grown over their inability to ensure public protection from crime or to bring suspected criminals to justice. The most recent elections illustrated a growing culture of violence and impunity, as several political demonstrations turned into riots that left crowds to fend for themselves.

The inability, and perhaps unwillingness, of the PNH to act during political demonstrations has been cited as proof of the political pressures

to which they are subjected. The Popular Organizations (OP), groups with strong ties to the Lavalas Family, have often benefited from the “passive presence” of the police during their frequent altercations with opposition groups. The Organization of American States (OAS) reported over 70 acts of violence of this type from January to May 2000.

- *Illegal Drug Trafficking:* According to US Representative John L. Mica (Republican, Florida), President of the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, 14% of all cocaine brought into the United States passes through Haiti. In 1999 alone, according to the US State Department’s annual report on narcotics, over 75 tons of cocaine passed through Haiti en route to the US — an increase of 24% from 1998. Making matters worse, Haitian authorities appear less and less willing to cooperate with anti-trafficking efforts. Of the 75 tons that went through the country in 1999, the police intercepted some 950 pounds — only one third of the registered amount in 1998. The US estimates that over 85% of police supervisors are now on the payrolls of drug lords.

Together these factors have created a vicious circle, as the ongoing political crisis, the depressed state of the economy, the rise of criminal activity and public security problems feed off one another. In the short term, only a resolution to the political crisis seems feasible. In the absence of political stability criminality is sure to continue its growth, whereas an end to the political turmoil would undoubtedly facilitate the work of the PNH and the justice system.

## **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

For the international community, Haiti represents more than just a troubling case of political

instability in the middle of the Caribbean, a strategically important region. Some of the country’s most pressing problems could prove damaging to other countries in the hemisphere as well. These preoccupations, notably relating to cocaine trafficking and illegal immigration, are particularly prominent in the United States due to the geographical proximity of the two countries.

Given the country’s recent political instability and the rapid rise in drug trafficking since 1997, Haiti represents a number of important challenges for the new US administration under George W. Bush.

While statistics indicate that Haiti is already a key transit point of cocaine in the Caribbean, the current political impasse will likely lead to the continued growth of this illegal trade, and may well push the country under the control of the narcotrafficking industry.

Another factor at play is the arrival of President Vicente Fox in Mexico, which may lead to a new era of cooperation between Mexico and the United States. The US-Mexico border, currently the leading site of cocaine entry into the US with 54% of the total, will likely be a target of greater cooperation between the two governments. This may free up energies that could be focused on the Caribbean.

The Caribbean region is already the second-most important point of passage for cocaine into the North American market, with 43% of the total (one-third of which goes through Haiti). Current figures are proof of Haiti’s growing role in the drug trade; a role that is likely to expand with Mexico’s deepening ties to the US, as drug trafficking is known for its ability to adapt quickly to geopolitical realities. To fight drug trafficking effectively, many believe the US will need to adapt and deepen its engagement in the Caribbean. This can only be done with the cooperation of Caribbean nations, including Haiti.

With regards to immigration, political crises in Haiti have left their mark on the US in the past.

Without a prompt resolution to the current political turmoil, any further instability could result in a new wave of immigration towards Florida's coasts. Given its proximity, Florida (governed by the brother of US President Bush) is the US state most likely to feel the effects of Haiti's troubles.

## BACKGROUND TO THE 2000 ELECTIONS

Haiti's current political and socio-economic crisis has its origins in the late 1990s. In 1996, having succeeded Jean-Bertrand Aristide as elected President, René Préval began a troubled mandate in power. The new President saw his support base within the Lavalas Political Organization (OPL) erode quickly, and he failed to pass his principal policy objective: a market-based economic restructuring that included the privatization of a number of state agencies.

Resistance to Préval's economic initiatives came from within his own party, including Aristide himself who publicly denounced the project as a threat to the nation's people. Aristide's position resulted in the split of the OPL into two new political parties; the Lavalas Family party (FL) and the Struggling People's Organization (which retained the acronym OPL). Despite this confrontation Préval remained loyal to Aristide, who headed the FL, but he never regained the support lost over his economic plan.

The Préval government's credibility was further undermined by the 1997 legislative elections. Opposition parties boycotted the second round of the vote, alleging mass fraud on the part of the government. Unable to reach a political settlement with the opposition and facing a deeply divided National Assembly, Préval dissolved both legislative houses in January 1999 and declared that he would rule by decree. Since 1997, Haiti has thus been plagued by a state of political paralysis that would hang heavily over the country's most recent elections.

## THE 2000 LEGISLATIVE, MUNICIPAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

With Préval's mandate coming to a close, legislative, municipal and presidential elections were scheduled for 2000. Far from resolving the political crisis plaguing Haiti since 1997, however, the 2000 elections contributed instead to a deepening of the political blockage that had developed in preceding years.

The 2000 elections opposed a number of political parties divided into two main blocks. One side was led by the Lavalas Family under Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a political force whose electoral base is largely populist by nature. The other side of the political spectrum included parties representing the interests of the Haitian elite, including business groups, intellectuals and members of the middle class. Parties of note included the Struggling People's Organization (OPL), the Confederation for Democratic Unity, the Mobilization for National Development (MDN), the Movement for the Installation of Democracy in Haiti (MIDH), the Haitian Democratic Party and the Consultation Group.

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The May 21, 2000 legislative elections (municipal elections were held the same day) were proof of the Lavalas Family's continuing popular support: Aristide's party won 72 of 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 18 of 19 seats in the Senate. Given the critical importance of the 2000 elections, the international community was strongly represented through a number of electoral observation missions, including those led by CARICOM and the OAS. The OAS mission originally approved the electoral proceedings, but later retracted its approval after considering numerous protests by opposition parties over the methodology used to calculate majorities in ten senatorial elections. According to the OAS, the ten senate seats should have been decided by a second round of voting.

Concern over the senatorial elections was echoed by Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), an institution charged with the independent supervision of the electoral process. However, after having disputed the validity of the elections, the President of the Council, Léon Manus, fled Haiti in June 2000 (with the cooperation of the US Embassy) over concerns for his personal safety. Only after three members of the CEP were replaced was Préval finally able to secure the Council's endorsement of the elections.

The controversy surrounding the election results brought on two immediate consequences. First, the Préval government's refusal to correct an irregularity (one that was unlikely to have even changed the final result) raised concerns over the political integrity of the Lavalas Family and its leaders. Despite the insistence of opposition parties and the international community, the government refused to recognize an electoral deficiency that was, in fact, relatively minor. As such, the "victory" of the ten senators cast a shadow of controversy over the entire electoral process. Second, the lack of flexibility of the Lavalas Family inspired a number of opposition groups to unite under the banner of the Democratic Convergence (CD), which now includes 15 of the principal opposition parties in Haiti. Among the key leaders of the coalition are Evans Paul, Victor Benoît and Fred Brutus of the Consultation Group, Gérard Pierre-Charles of the Struggling People's Organization (OPL) and Leslie Manigat of the Assembly of Progressive National Democrats (RDNP). Many of these leaders were once Aristide allies and even welcomed him upon his arrival from exile in 1994. Yet, unable to tolerate the populist practices of Aristide and his party, they lost confidence in their former ally and finally broke off all political ties.

With its newfound strength and structure, the political opposition began an aggressive fight against the government. It demanded no less than the annulment of the entire electoral results from May 2000 as a precondition for its participation in

the November 26, 2000 presidential elections. Their demand was immediately rejected by the Lavalas Family, and the government proceeded with the elections despite an opposition boycott.

Not surprisingly, Jean-Bertrand Aristide went on to win the presidential election. Once again, however, Aristide's legitimacy was disputed. The CEP's report of a 60% voter turnout was strongly rejected by opposition groups who put the number closer to 20%, with some claiming that only 5% of eligible voters actually participated. Many foreign journalists and diplomats estimated a participation rate of no more than 10%. The credibility of Aristide's victory was further undermined by the absence of international observation missions during the election. Only CARICOM sent representatives, and they refrained from commenting in detail on the proceedings.

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The Convergence coalition insisted that the feeble participation rate symbolized the election's severe lack of legitimacy. Convergence pressured the government to annul the vote by refusing to recognize Aristide's claim to power, by moving to form a parallel government to oppose him. The international community has criticized this latest initiative of the CD, insisting instead on the importance of dialogue between political parties aimed at breeding reconciliation within Haiti's political class.

## **REACTIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

The OAS has undoubtedly been the most involved of any international organization in efforts to address Haiti's recent crisis. At the invitation of leading parties in the country, the OAS established a mission mandated to "*identify, together with the Government of Haiti and other sectors of the political community and civil society, options and recommendations for resolving, as expeditiously as possible, difficulties such as those that have arisen from differing interpretations of the Electoral Law, and for further strengthening democracy in that country*" (CP/RES.772). However, after six trips to

Haiti under the leadership of OAS Assistant Secretary General Luigi R. Einaudi, few results have been achieved due to the diametrically opposed positions of the government and the political opposition.

For its part, the United Nations has been reluctant to involve itself in the most recent political crisis, preferring instead to let the OAS take a leadership role. The lack of cooperation from the Haitian government has also resulted in the UN's decision not to renew the mandate of the International Civilian Support Mission (MICAH), a mandate that expired on February 6, 2001. In a recent report on the state of democracy and human rights in Haiti, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated that the organization's next step should be to "elaborate a program of assistance to the population that better responds to political realities in the Republic of Haiti", with the collaboration of the United National Development Program (UNDP) and other UN agencies.

In the United States, the Clinton administration quickly voiced its concerns following the November 2000 elections. After a visit from Anthony Lake, Special Presidential Envoy to Haiti, Aristide pledged to undertake a number of important political reforms. Generally satisfied with Aristide's promises, Clinton decided not to intervene further and was content to wait for results from the agreed initiatives.

The arrival of new US President George W. Bush, inaugurated on January 20, 2001, has symbolized an important change in US policy. From the beginning, the Bush administration has refused to support Haiti as long as the political crisis persists, and it has insisted that questions surrounding the May 21, 2000 elections be resolved.

The change in US administrations bodes poorly for Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his party. Ever since the US' military intervention in 1994 under President Clinton, US Republicans have consistently opposed the Democratic Party's policy towards Haiti. Bush

himself maintains that the military intervention went against the interests of the American people.

The US Congress is equally hostile towards Aristide, and a number of key Republicans are keeping a close watch over the state of democracy in Haiti. Among them are Benjamin A. Gilman, President of the House Committee on International Relations, along with Jesse Helms, President of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and Porter Goss, President of the House Intelligence Committee. Together, these leaders carry a great deal of influence. Another worry for Aristide is that the Convergence opposition coalition enjoys the support of the International Republican Institute, an organization working to promote democracy abroad whose ties to the Republican Party are well-known.

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## **LEAD UP TO THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

From December 2000 until the Summit of the Americas in April 2001, Jean-Bertrand Aristide actively sought to address the central problem of his presidency, namely restoring the credibility undermined by the 2000 elections.

As mentioned, Aristide moved quickly to engage with the Clinton administration in December 2000, vowing an allegiance to democratic values and pledging to undertake important political reforms. The Clinton administration reacted in a positive manner, declaring its satisfaction with Aristide's promises. Still, Clinton stressed that Aristide would need to offer proof of his good intentions to the international community before receiving the US' full political support.

Aristide's pledged initiatives included: resolving the disputes surrounding the May 21, 2000 elections; integrating opposition leaders within the government; reforming the Provisional Electoral Council in cooperation with the opposition; working towards an agreement with the US on the repatriation of illegal immigrants; ensuring the respect of fundamental liberties; and developing

greater cooperation with the US to fight illegal drug trafficking.

The positive momentum from these engagements led the Lavalas government to proceed with Jean-Bertrand Aristide's inauguration on February 7, 2001. Casting a long shadow over the process, however, was the Convergence coalition's refusal to recognize Aristide as President, and its decision to name Gérard Gourgue as President of a provisional parallel government. A veteran of Haitian politics, Gourgue is best known for his political activism in defense of human rights during the Duvalier dictatorship. This relatively unorganized informal government is perceived as a major threat by supporters of the Lavalas Family, and it has become one of the principal sources of political tension in Haiti.

In an attempt to regain the confidence of the international community, the Aristide government has campaigned to join the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). A potential obstacle to Haiti's membership, however, is a resolution adopted in February 2001 by Caribbean leaders insisting on the protection of democracy in the region. To assist Haiti in this regard, Caribbean leaders have established an official mission to facilitate dialogue between the various political parties in the country. Working in Haiti's favour is CARICOM's desire to create as wide a common front as possible to protect the interests of the Caribbean region and to enhance its position at the international level. At the same time, however, the Haitian crisis has created tensions between Caribbean nations themselves and has hurt CARICOM's overall political cohesiveness.

As these various initiatives progress, Jean-Bertrand Aristide's administration has taken shape.

Although the Convergence coalition is steadfast in its refusal to cooperate, the Aristide government now includes a number of opposition party members and civil society leaders within its ranks. In an attempt to rebuild his credibility within the

OAS, Aristide also sent his Minister of Foreign Affairs to Washington, D.C. to request the creation of a special commission to support democracy in Haiti. The OAS declined the request, however, despite the political endorsement of Caribbean nations, preferring to apply pressure on the Aristide government by promoting a strategy of consultation between the government and Convergence.

Meanwhile, the capital city of Port-au-Prince has become the stage for widespread political demonstrations that have often turned violent. In the absence of adequate institutions to ensure the

security of its citizens, Haiti has witnessed the emergence of a variety of popular movements. In the streets of the capital, the Lavalas popular organizations are pushing for an end to the political crisis, while opposition supporters have denounced what they claim to be a campaign of intimidation orchestrated by Lavalas Family leaders. The human rights situation

continues to decline as a result, and the state of democracy has become increasingly fragile.

In short, despite the various efforts of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's political isolation has continued. Still unable to secure legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, Aristide would turn to the 2001 Summit of the Americas as an important opportunity to generate the international support so badly needed by his regime.

### **THE III SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS IN QUEBEC CITY**

Jean-Bertrand Aristide saw his participation in the third meeting of the hemisphere's 34 elected heads of state and government as a political success in itself, and his government clearly interpreted it as a recognition of its democratic legitimacy within the hemispheric community. In reality, however, the outcome of the Summit challenged such conclusions, and served instead to apply additional pressure on Haiti's leaders.

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Among the Summit's various documents and declarations, two hold particular importance for Haiti. First, the 34 leaders adopted a 'democracy clause' as part of the Declaration of Quebec. The declaration reinforces the importance of democratic norms within the hemisphere, notably by making democracy an essential condition for the participation of states in the Summit of the Americas process. Further, it states that any alteration or unconstitutional interruption of the democratic process will disqualify a state from participating in future summits. The Organization of American States (OAS) was given a mandate to draft an Inter-American Democratic Charter based on these principles at its upcoming General Assembly in June 2001 in San José, Costa Rica. In the years to come, Haiti will likely be a test of the hemispheric community's determination to uphold its stated commitment to democratic principles.

Second, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made the hemispheric community's continuing concern over recent political developments in Haiti very clear during his closing speech. Speaking on behalf of all Summit participants, and making reference to the Declaration of Quebec, Prime Minister Chrétien noted that: *"The case of Haiti drew our particular attention. We acknowledge the problems that continue to limit the democratic, political, economic and social development of this country."* He urged all parties to intensify efforts to find a solution to the crisis, and noted that OAS Secretary General César Gaviria had been granted a mandate to hold consultations before the OAS General Assembly in San José.

As a result, far from conferring a new democratic legitimacy on Aristide and the Lavalas Family, the Quebec City Summit served as a public warning to Haiti's government that it must reach a political agreement with opposition leaders and make decisive steps towards establishing democratic norms in the country. This message was reinforced by the OAS General Assembly in San José on

June 3-5, 2001, further pushing Haiti's entire political class to seek solutions to the current impasse.

## THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN SAN JOSÉ

Subsequent to the Quebec Summit but prior to the General Assembly, the OAS and CARICOM conducted a joint exploratory mission to consult with the major political parties and civil society representatives. Ambassadors Einaudi and Ramdin visited Haiti from May 10 to May 13, only to note at the end of their consultations that the conditions for a comprehensive solution to the political crisis did not exist. However, when OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria and CARICOM representative Dame Eugenia Charles traveled to Haiti two weeks later, they were able to extract major concessions from Aristide which could prove a breakthrough in the quest to end the political turmoil on the island.

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In a letter addressed to the President of the OAS General Assembly, Aristide unveiled five concrete steps his administration is prepared to take. Among these, he offered the resignation of seven senators whose seats are still contested and to put these to a new vote by the end of the year, as well as to cut other senate terms short and hold new legislative elections in 2002. These new elections would be overseen by a new, independent and credible electoral council, which would be composed of members from all the political forces in Haiti.

The OAS General Assembly on June 5 adopted a resolution taking note of Aristide's initiative, putting particular emphasis on the importance of setting up a reliable and independent Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) by June 25, 2001. Clearly a sign of encouragement to Aristide, the resolution mentions the possibility of renewing financial assistance to Haiti *"as progress is achieved in reaching sustainable solution to the crisis (...)"*. Nonetheless, a lot of work remains to be done.

The next important step is the constitution of a new and functional CEP, which if done accordingly to the resolution, should strengthen the level of confidence between the political actors in Haiti. The political opposition so far has rejected Aristide's overtures and the reconciliation process is unlikely to get off the ground if it cannot be brought on board. In all likelihood, the international community will have to continue to put pressure on both sides for things to move ahead.

## **POLICY CHALLENGES TO END THE CRISIS**

With the Quebec City Summit and the OAS General Assembly in San José now past, what are the immediate challenges facing the main protagonists in Haiti's political drama?

For the Lavalas Family party and its leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first priority must be to seek reconciliation with the official opposition. This reconciliation must begin with the constitution of the new and independent CEP, a crucial confidence building measure to restore trust among the key political actors. A new CEP uniting the political spectrum could become a strong basis that ensures a healthier political environment for Haiti.

While the Democratic Convergence coalition represents only part of the political opposition to Aristide, it is critical that these two forces reach an agreement with a view to ending the political crisis. For this to happen, Aristide and the opposition must understand that in a democratic system, yesterday's losers are often tomorrow's victors. Aristide will not be able to run in the next presidential elections, and thus the opposition must involve itself as soon as possible in efforts to build a democratic state in Haiti. Aristide should make it clear that he will abide by the Haitian constitution and not run in the next presidential election. Above all, Aristide must prove a willingness to give the opposition a concrete role in developing reform projects.

Most importantly, Aristide must fulfill his five commitments made to the OAS in early June, without limiting himself to these reforms alone. In particular, he must increase the transparency of his government, offer proof of his good intentions and seek assistance from willing nations and international organizations. Efforts to enhance transparency must include not only the political platform of the Lavalas Family, but also the management of international assistance, blocked since 1997.

As for the opposition united under the Democratic Convergence banner, its challenge will be to

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articulate a clear position vis-à-vis the Lavalas Family. At all cost, opposition groups must avoid marginalizing themselves and seize this new opportunity to be involved in political and economic reform initiatives in order to present the coalition as a legitimate alternative to the Lavalas administration.

If they disagree with Aristide's proposals as they have so far, they should give good reasons for doing so and provide workable alternatives. At a minimum, they will have to maintain a dialogue with the Lavalas party and with Aristide himself, given that these political actors are unlikely to disappear from the political scene anytime soon.

The international community, for its part, must exercise patience by working to avoid the political isolation of Haiti. International actors cannot afford to remain inactive or to allow the country to descend further into a political and economic abyss. Instead, the international community should use the current regime's vulnerability as an opportunity to promote badly needed reforms, along the lines of the OAS General Assembly resolution. Stressing a multilateral approach to international involvement, the OAS and CARICOM should take the lead in supporting democratic and economic development in Haiti.

Their main challenge will consist in maintaining the Haitian crisis high on the hemispheric agenda while pushing for the most urgent reforms in

the short term. Reforming the CEP is key in this regard, this will affect the validity of all future elections.

Provided that Aristide and the Lavalas government are indeed willing to promote basic democratic reforms and respect their commitments, the OAS and other international actors should work towards reopening the flow of international assistance to Haiti, as well as develop mechanisms to ensure the efficient management of financial resources. Transparency in the handling of international assistance funds is essential, and the management of aid must be oriented towards improving the socio-economic situation of the Haitian population. Finally, the OAS and the rest of the hemispheric

and international communities must ensure an engagement in Haiti that goes beyond the current political crisis. An assurance of medium and long-term international support would also serve to promote a quicker resolution of the crisis between Haitian leaders and the political opposition. The OAS, in particular, possesses the necessary tools and expertise to promote the development of democratic values within Haiti's political system (but lacks the financial ability to do so), especially if it is mandated to monitor the development of democracy through the adoption of an Inter-American Democracy Charter.

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