

World & Nation

# Haitian church leaders call for government's removal

Port-au-Prince, Haiti (NC) — The Catholic head of an ecumenical human rights group has denounced the Haitian government's call for a new electoral council, and a Haitian bishop said the government must be removed before the country could return to normal.

Jean-Claude Bajoux, a former priest who heads the Ecumenical Center for Human Rights in Port-au-Prince, said that "the people would never vote in an election held by the government" because they don't trust it.

Bajoux spoke December 3, four days after Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council canceled the country's first free national election in 30 years because of violence.

The National Council of Government, led by General Henri Namphy, disbanded the independent Provisional Electoral Council. Human rights groups have said Namphy does not have the power to disband the council, which was mandated by the constitution.

Bajoux said he did not see a reason for disbanding the electoral council, which included nine members selected by various segments of society.

"Since our member on the council is not dead and has not resigned, there's no reason to replace him," he added.

Some members of the electoral council went into hiding after election-day violence in which more than 30 people were killed. Churches and a Catholic-run radio station were among targets of the violence, which was attributed to members of the Tontons Macoute, supporters of former President Jean-Claude Duvalier.

Haitians and foreign observers have accused government troops of abetting or ignoring the violent mobs.

Observers said at least three churches, including the main cathedral, were attacked November 29 in Port-au-Prince, and at least two worshippers were killed inside the

churches.

"There has been a planned assault on the churches," said the Rev. Leslie Griffiths, a member of the Caribbean Conference of Churches delegation in Haiti to observe the elections.

More than 40 armed men forced open the locked doors of Sacred Heart Church in Port-au-Prince where several dozen people were attending early morning Mass. The attackers beat two women with machete butts, climbed on the altar and destroyed several fixtures, said Father Nicholas Christian, the parish priest.

The incident occurred about 15 minutes before the polls were scheduled to open. The church courtyard, a designated polling place, eventually opened for a short time.

Late November 28, Radio Soleil, the Catholic radio station, went off the air after its transmitter was hit with grenades and firebombs by uniformed soldiers, said the station's director, Missionhurst Father Hugo Triest. The station, which had criticized Duvalier before his February 1986 overthrow, was still off the air December 3.

Father Triest also said the soldiers burned the homes of two of the station's night watchmen, one of whom suffered critical gunshot wounds and severe burns.

On November 28, a Canadian film maker was wounded in the neck by Tontons Macoute who besieged a Catholic church in the town of Dessalines.

In Washington, Fritz Longchamp, director of Washington Office on Haiti, said Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie, Haiti, had issued a statement in which he said three things would have to occur before the country could return to normal: the current government would have to be removed from power; the Provisional Electoral Council would have to be reinstated; Duvalier supporters would have to be kicked out of the military, and the



Haitians pray at the Port-au-Prince cathedral following election-day violence that left more than 30 people dead and polling stations in a shambles. Terrorists also attacked at least three churches and the Catholic-run radio station.

NC photo from UPI-Reuter

Tontons Macoute would have to be dissolved.

Longchamp, who said he learned of the statement in phone conversations with people in Haiti, also said the Haitian bishops were meeting to discuss the situation December 2 and 3.

Earlier in the week, the U.S. State Department announced that all non-humanitarian aid to Haiti was being cut off immediately.

Congressional Rep. Walter E. Fauntroy, D-D.C., and chairman of the Congressional Task Force on Haiti, said that during fiscal year 1987, the U.S. provided Haiti with \$1.6 million in non-lethal military assistance and \$100 million in development, economic support and humanitarian aid.

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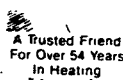
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