

Eight nuns injured during attack on Haitian convent

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CNS) — Masked men wielding machetes attacked and injured eight nuns at St. Rose of Lima convent in Port-au-Prince March 18.

"As they were beating us they accused of us of being responsible for (General Prosper) Avril's departure," one of the nuns said. Avril left the country recently after being ousted by a political coup.

At least four of the eight injured nuns were taken to a nearby hospital, and one was later released. Three of the wounded were French. The convent houses about 50 nuns, who run St. Rose of Lima School.

Reporters who went to the school early March 18 as reports of the incident spread saw one nun, heavily bandaged around the eyes, being led across a balcony.

"She came close to losing her eyes because of a machete wound," a school employee said.

Hundreds of Haitians stood in a silent vigil at the convent gates.

The school, commonly referred to as Lalue, is run by the French Sisters of St. Rose of Lima.

"If they dare touch Lalue there is nothing they will respect," a former student told the British news agency Reuters, referring to the Tontons Macoute, a

paramilitary force. The force was originally formed by the late dictator Francois Duvalier and used as an instrument of terror by subsequent regimes.

"There can be no doubt that they mean us to know that no one can be spared," said the director of Port-au-Prince's Methodist school. "Serious security measures must be taken at once."

Political and diplomatic sources had voiced fears that the dreaded Tontons Macoute would strike hard to regain the power they feel they lost when Avril resigned March 10.

The Tontons Macoute were very much in evidence during two days of violence that ended with Avril's resignation. On March 12, Avril fled to the United States.

Haiti's new president, Ertha Pascal Trouillot, has promised to make ending the country's violence an administration priority.



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