

Ousted priest-president vows return to Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CNS) — As soldiers patrolled the capital's streets, Haiti's ousted priest-president vowed to return to the impoverished Caribbean nation and restore democracy.

"There is a general who is trying to rob the people of democratic power, and I am sure that with the support of the international community ... we can overthrow him," Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide said during a press conference in Caracas, Venezuela.

"The democratic process which we have been experiencing in Haiti cannot be stopped by this coup d'etat," he stated during the news conference at the Presidential Palace in Caracas. He shared the conference with Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez.

As a new military junta struggled to maintain control Oct. 1, its leader, Army commander Brig. Gen. Raoul Cedras, made no statements on radio stations controlled by the military.

Western diplomats attributed the silence to sharp divisions within Haiti's 7,000-person army.

Witnesses and radio reports indicated that hundreds of people loyal to Father Aristide had been wounded and dozens had died since the coup began Sept. 30.

Reports said several cabinet ministers who had been appointed by Father Aristide were seeking diplomatic refuge at embassies throughout Port-au-Prince. Diplomatic sources said groups of soldiers were going door to door in search of presidential aides, ministers and human-rights activists wanted for arrest.

Father Aristide was allowed to leave Haiti early Oct. 1, after all-night negotiations by Western diplomats won him safe passage to Venezuela and the promise of eventual exile in France.

The Associated Press reported that Father Aristide sent a message to the Haitian people, warning of a possible blood-bath in their land.

"They have a very long list of people they plan to kill, still. They will kill them like flies. Do everything possible to stop people from dying," AP reported the statement as saying.

AP said the statement was received at the Haitian Embassy in Washington, but that the news agency did not know whether the statement had been published in Haiti.

France, the United States and Canada suspended all aid programs to the Haiti — the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation — and refused to recognize the military leaders.

Cedras was considered a moderate and part of a new, progressive faction within the military. He said his three-man junta — which included Col. Alix Silva and Col. Henri Robert Marc Charlges — planned to hold elections at an unspecified date.

The military junta assumed power Sept. 30 after troops fired on Father Aristide's home, forcing the president to flee to the



AP/Wide World Photos
A woman prays in a Pentecostal church Oct. 6 in Cite Soleil, a slum in Port-Au-Prince. Haiti's streets are quiet nearly a week after a military coup Sept. 30 overthrew the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

presidential palace, where he was arrested.

Diplomatic sources said French Ambassador Jean-Raphael Dufour persuaded the junta to release Father Aristide and allow him to leave.

The two cars escorting the priest and ambassador were fired upon as they left headquarters. The French envoy crawled out of his vehicle and pulled the president from his car, bringing him to safety.

Father Aristide had promoted Cedras to the No. 2 position in Haiti's military shortly after the priest was sworn into office Feb. 7. The promotion put Cedras in charge of army headquarters.

In July, Father Aristide again promoted Cedras, this time to replace Gen. Herard Abraham as interim commander of the army.

Cedras became unhappy about the temporary nature of the appointment, sources said, and had recently pressed Father Aristide to confirm him as the permanent head of the army.

Cedras had won Father Aristide's trust after playing a major role in guaranteeing Haiti's first free and democratic elections last December. During previous election attempts, most notably in November 1987, Haitian voters were stabbed and shot to death by soldiers and members of the private security force employed by the Duvalier family.

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