

Coup effects concern diocesan Haitians

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president Lionel Honorat said he believes the new government wanted Jean-Jacques, in part, because of his credentials as a human-rights activist and because of he is well-known outside Haiti.

"He's established very many international contacts," Lionel Honorat said. "I presumed that was one of the reasons (the coup leaders) called on him now to try to evade the embargo."

Lionel Honorat shares his brother's skepticism of Father Aristide's populist politics, which stress the need for redistributing Haiti's resources to the poor. Father Aristide explained his positions in an October question/answer session with *Interview* magazine.

"I see myself as someone sitting at a table with the elite and the bourgeoisie," Father Aristide told *Interview*, "and under the table is the majority, the Haitian people. I have one hand on the table, the other under it, working to harmonize the relations so that all may come to sit around the table. To get to that point, there is a social debt that the elite and the bourgeoisie must pay."

But Lionel Honorat believed Father Aristide's policies would incite the poor to exact payment from the elite through mob violence.

"I think he's a bit of a demagogue," Lionel Honorat said of the exiled president. "He's not intent on solving the real problems of the country, which are primarily economic. Instead of solving these problems, he was engaged in inciting the mass population in threatening the upper classes of society."

If Father Aristide had remained in power, Lionel Honorat said, his populist rhetoric would have scared off badly needed capital investment by foreigners. His rhetoric may have con-

tributed to his overthrow, he said.

Indeed, even those human-rights organizations — including Americas Watch — that are sympathetic to Father Aristide have criticized him for appearing in certain speeches to endorse violence against political opponents and for his failure to rebuke supporters for bullying their opponents.

In Father Aristide's defense, however, human-rights observers pointed out that in most of his speeches the priest condemned social violence and successfully reined in the country's abusive military.

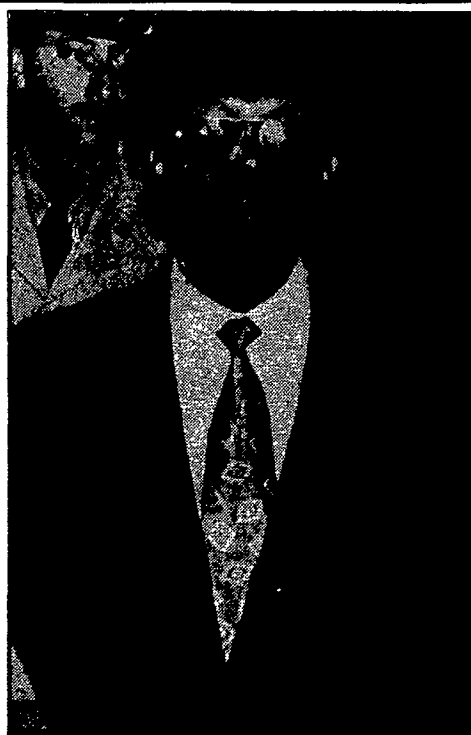
"Overall, violence in Haiti of all sorts — including criminal violence, killings by soldiers and violent rural land conflicts — dropped conspicuously during President Aristide's tenure," stated a combined report issued by Americas Watch, the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees and Caribbean Rights. The three organizations released the report in November.

Francis, on the other hand, said Father Aristide would have been justified in endorsing threats of violence against his opponents because of the greater threat that existed against the priest and his impoverished supporters.

"These people have been oppressed for more than 35 years!" Francis exclaimed. "How can they have justice when the same people ... that were brainwashed by the Duvalier system are still in the court system, still in the military system?"

Francis' views were echoed by Sosthenes Pierre-Philippe, a Haitian immigrant who during the 1980s worked with such people as Lionel Honorat on diocesan efforts to resettle Haitian refugees in Rochester.

Pierre-Philippe agreed that Father Aristide — as a leader of the poor — had few weapons other than the support of the masses to challenge Haiti's



AP/Wide World Photos
Escorted by Venezuelan Army officers, deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (right) walks through the hall of the Caracas Hilton Oct. 8.

entrenched elite.

"The people who are least capable (of exerting power) in Haiti are the ones who favored him," Pierre-Philippe said.

Most observers of the Haitian scene agreed that the nation's complex history holds it hostage to continuing misery — a misery that explained why the "least capable" support Father Aristide.

Throughout the Americas, no nation boasts a past as heroic, tragic and compelling as does Haiti. It is a story, written almost wholly in blood on parchment of human flesh, sliced by machete blades and torn by rifle fire.

Haiti — the first Caribbean nation to declare its independence from a

European colonial master — was born amid the brutal and genocidal African slave trade that marked early European settlement in the Western Hemisphere.

Led on by the voodoo priest Boukman, thousands of Africans enslaved in the French plantation colony rose up in 1791, launching a 13-year revolutionary war against their masters. The fighting ended with Haiti's independence in 1804.

Yet independence never brought real democracy and freedom to Haiti. Military coups, corrupt leaders and greedy landowners continued to impoverish the nation, which also experienced occupation by the U.S. Marines in the first third of this century.

A different kind of slavery — imposed for years by a minority elite of wealthy Haitians — held the country's poor in shackles when Pope John Paul II visited the Caribbean island nation in March, 1983. The pope's plane landed in a country ruled by a repressive government seemingly indifferent to the poverty, hunger and despair in which most of its citizens lived.

To the thousands who had come to see him at Duvalier Airport in the capital of Port-au-Prince, and to the millions listening on their radios and televisions, the pope stated the situation plainly. "It is really necessary for things to change," he proclaimed.

Such simple words were nearly a call for revolution in Haiti at that time, coming as they did from a pontiff who — by calling for goods and services to be distributed to the poor — embarrassed his Haitian host, President Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier.

As Haitian journalist Elizabeth Abbot described it in her 1988 book, *Haiti — The Duvaliers and Their Legacy*, the Holy Father's speech dealt a fatal blow to Duvalier and his wife, Michele Bennett Duvalier. Together they had vainly hoped that the papal visit "would sanitize Haiti's image as nothing else could," Abbot wrote.

Instead, she noted, the pope's visit became a catalyst for the Duvaliers' opponents, and the nation's Catholic leadership played a prominent role in protesting the regime.

"Since March 1983 the Church had been speaking out against the regime's abuses, defying the government, challenging Jean-Claude, rousing Haiti's millions of Catholics ...," Abbot explained. "Haitian and foreign priests also spoke out, some inspired by liberation theology, others by disgust at the corruption of the country, and Sunday sermons were as much about politics as God."

Three years after the pope's plane departed from Haiti, another plane carried the Duvaliers from the capital into exile following a military coup.

A succession of military regimes and a civilian puppet government failed to rectify many of the systemic problems afflicting Haiti following the deposal of the Duvaliers. But many Haitians thought Father Aristide's election marked the beginning of the end of "Duvalierism," the corrupt form of governance created by "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc."

However, local Haitians who believe in Father Aristide — or at least in the democratic process that elected him — expressed concern that he might never return to a democratic Haiti.

"It seems like every day that passes, his chances of being returned are going by the wayside," Pierre-Philippe said.

Bishop calls leaders 'ferocious, bloody'

JEREMIE, Haiti (CNS) — The head of the Haitian bishops' Justice and Peace Commission has urged a delegation from the Organization of American States to find the truth about the situation in Haiti.

The justice and peace chairman, Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie, also said Haitians would rather live with an OAS embargo than live under the "dictators" who took power Sept. 30.

Naming only Jean-Jacques Honorat, prime minister of Haiti's de facto government, Bishop Romelus referred to Haiti's current leaders as "ferocious, bloody and deceitful dictators."

An OAS delegation began a visit to the Caribbean nation Nov. 10. Its intention was to negotiate for the return of Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's president, who has been in exile since a Sept. 30 military coup.

In a statement dated Nov. 5, prior to the OAS delegation's visit, Bishop Romelus said that in order for the OAS to tell what is really happening, "everyone must be allowed to protest."

"They must be made to realize that the coup leaders are experts at lying," the bishop said, noting rumors that the government was organizing demonstrations in its favor. The bishop also pointed out

that anti-government protests have been forbidden since the coup.

When the OAS delegation arrived in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince Nov. 10, about 3,000 people mobbed its caravan of cars as it approached the Haitian parliament. Demonstrators danced to drums and chanted deafening, anti-Aristide slogans.

"We won't negotiate when we are hungry," the crowd chanted, alluding to an OAS trade embargo called to press for Father Aristide's return. The embargo has left Haiti with virtually no gasoline and is slowly strangling the economy.

Bishop Romelus's statement said, however, that "the OAS mission must also give attention to the embargo. The people say they want to sacrifice in order to achieve true democracy rather than live under the ferocious dictatorship which is in power now."

Bishop Romelus said the military was "hunting people down all over the city, arresting people everywhere, beating people who do not agree with the government in power."

He said the city of Port-au-Prince "has emptied into the countryside" as people go into hiding.

"They (military) have killed great numbers, some say 1,000, others say 2,000," the bishop said.

People have been arrested and shot in their homes, he added, and some have been "savagely beaten."

"If they (military) cannot find the person for whom they search, all of those in the house are beaten, children as well as adults, women as well as men, pregnant women as well as nursing women — no one escapes these villains," he said.

"We do not doubt that they are capable diplomats, they know what to do," Bishop Romelus said of the OAS delegation. "They will not make the mistake of swallowing what the coup leaders tell them."

In a Nov. 10 speech formally opening the new round of talks, Haitian Senate Speaker Dejean Belizaire defended parliament's appointment of a provisional president and accused the OAS of "systematic contempt for the Haitian constitution" and violation of its charter.

The OAS mission leader, former Colombian foreign minister Augusto Ramirez Ocampo, responded that the OAS defense of Haiti's elected president was endorsed by the United Nations.

During its four-day stay, the delegation was expected to meet with party leaders, businessmen, church groups, and leaders of the army and parliament.