

Aristide's pending return heralded by violence

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Dozens of religious activists have launched a human rights vigil in Haiti, hoping to smooth the path for the Oct. 30 return of the country's deposed president.

Waves of violence have marked the months since an agreement was reached for Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resume his position as the country's first democratically elected president. He was ousted in a 1991 coup and has been living abroad while terms for his return were negotiated.

Another Haitian priest and friend of Father Aristide sees the next few weeks as critical to their country and said he wishes people of the United States and in the church would "do their homework" and pay attention to events in Haiti.

More than 100 people have been killed since July 3, when a United Nations accord was signed outlining steps for Father Aristide to go home.

"The situation there is probably as

violent as I've seen anywhere," said Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, who returned from Haiti Oct. 1. Attacks by military personnel and "attaches" affiliated with Port-au-Prince police chief Michel Francois have been blatant. "Even ordinary people on the street are killed, for no apparent reason," he said.

As the Oct. 15 deadline approached for army chief Lt. Gen. Raoul Cedras to step down, pro-military gunmen and Francois' attacks have tried to enforce a general strike with gunfire; blocked for three weeks attempts by the elected government to regain control of state news media; attacked a judge and the home of the capital's mayor; and assassinated an outspoken supporter of Father Aristide while he attended Mass.

Fearful that attempts to disrupt the process will prevent Father Aristide's return, a coalition of human rights groups organized Cry for Justice, placing international observers in trouble spots around the country for periods of two weeks or longer. Among organizations on the steering committee are Pax Christi USA, Sojourners, the Wa-

shington Office on Haiti and the Christian Peacemaker Teams. Co-sponsors include the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, the Quixote Center, Benedictines for Peace and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

Sponsors hope the presence of non-Haitians will deter further violence by Father Aristide's opponents and that publicity about attacks will encourage the international community to take a firmer hand in dealing with the de facto rulers.

Bishop Gumbleton joined the first of those teams, visiting Haiti for the Sept. 30 anniversary of the coup.

He found, despite the wave of violence, the people of Haiti are optimistic that Cedras will step down as scheduled and that the return of their president will put the country back on a path of justice.

Particularly since the murder of Antoine Izmerly at Sacre Couer Church on Sept. 11, priests and other church workers are "traumatized yet determined." Everyone is simply living on hope," Bishop Gumbleton said.

Izmerly was pulled from a Mass

marking the anniversary of a 1988 massacre and killed just outside the building by men known to be in the military.

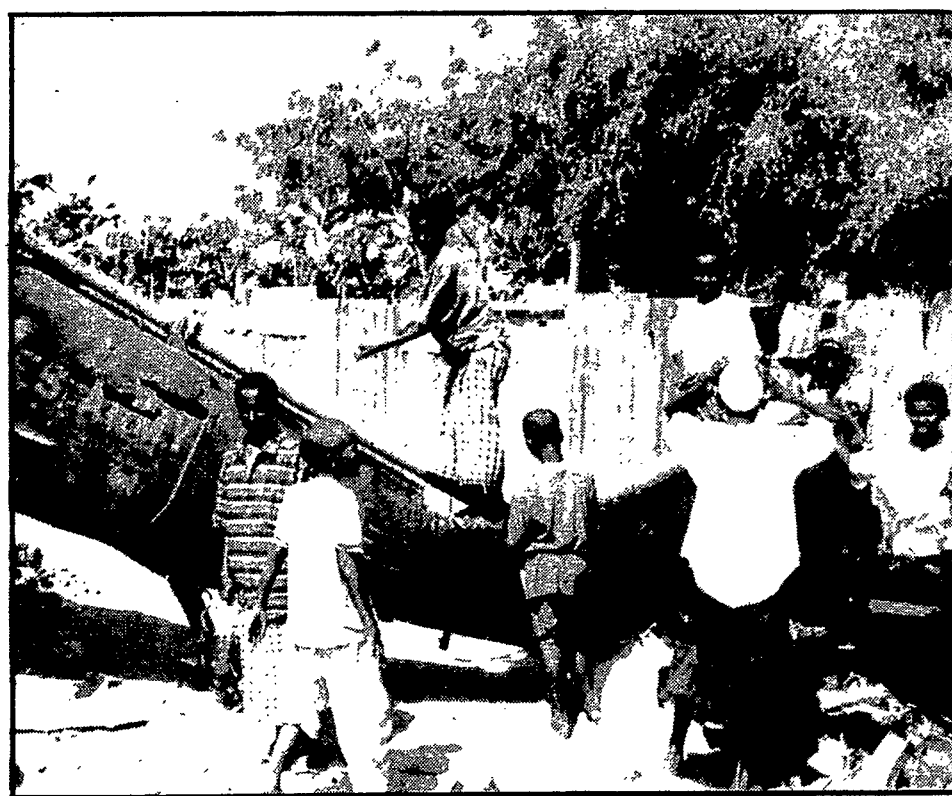
Holy Ghost Father Antoine Adrien, a friend of Father Aristide and former head of his religious order in Haiti, was at the Mass where Izmerly was killed. Like others in the church that day, he was stunned by the boldness of the attack, he said.

Bishop Gumbleton was among participants at a memorial liturgy held where Izmerly was killed. Besides the Americans, only a few of Izmerly's relatives attended because the event was watched closely by the military, he said.

"It was the most horrible experience," said Bishop Gumbleton. "We walked out on the street and blessed the ground where he was slain — the bloodstains were still there."

International intervention such as the Cry for Justice campaign is essential to making it possible for the president to return, said Father Adrien. As a small nation with few economic assets, Haiti gets little respect from larger countries.

Battle's bloodshed



AP/Wide World Photos

U.S. to withdraw forces by March

Small children play around the wreckage of a U.S. Blackhawk helicopter in Mogadishu. The helicopter was one of two shot down in war-torn Mogadishu. Twelve U.S. soldiers were killed in Mogadishu Oct. 3 during a series of battles with the militia commanded by Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. U.N. forces are welcoming a cease-fire by Aidid, while the United States has decided to withdraw almost all its forces — the backbone of the U.N. presence — by March 31.

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Archbishop: Gay-rights measures miss point

By Tricia Hempel
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Neither a 1992 city ordinance nor a counter measure on November election ballots adequately address the questions of civil rights for homosexuals, Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk said.

A proposed amendment to the city charter would make illegal any legislation that protects homosexuals from mistreatment, regardless of whether they engage in homosexual behavior. It is meant to counter an ordinance adopted last year giving homosexual behavior the same protection and acceptance as heterosexual behavior.

"The proposed amendment is as detrimental to the public good as the Cincinnati city ordinance which it intends to invalidate," said Archbishop Pilarczyk in an Oct. 8 statement. "It is not right to mistreat persons or to be legally able to mistreat persons on the basis of their homosexual orientation."

He suggested the city would be best served by rejecting the ballot measure and changing the city ordinance from its explicit legal protection of homosexual behavior.

"Both the city ordinance and the proposed charter amendment are unsatisfactory in that they overlook the distinction between orientation and behavior," he wrote.

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