

Haiti

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of Hospitality and is currently a graduate student in engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, had planned to go to Haiti earlier this month, but had to cancel her plans because of the country's situation. Brownell, who has worked on a variety of projects in Borgne, including water purification, said she hopes to return to Haiti this summer.

"I don't want to give up on the projects, and I'm hoping that things will settle down, and we'll be able to move forward," she said.

ARISTIDE'S DOWNFALL

A former priest, Aristide was Haiti's first-ever democratically elected president, but his career was plagued by controversy. Brownell said she was aware of discontent with Aristide when she was in Haiti last summer, but did not sense a coming rebellion.

"The people in Borgne were pretty committed to the democratic process," she said. "Nobody said to me, 'We've got to get him out of there.' People said he was better than anyone else."

Yet Brownell noted that little was done under Aristide's rule to improve Borgne's infrastructure. In part, she said this could be attributed to the decisions of the United States and other international donors to freeze aid to Haiti in response to charges of irregularities in its May 2000 legislative elections.

Father Spilly, who met the former president in the mid-1990s, said he believes Aristide should have confined himself to the role of a prophet speaking out against Haiti's injustices. Seeking political power undermined Aristide's ability to cri-



Reuters/CNS

Gang members from Haiti's Cite Solei district prepare to turn in weapons to French soldiers in Port-au-Prince March 17. The action signaled that factions were seeking to reconcile with troops stationed in Haiti following the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

tique Haiti's system, Father Spilly said, noting that Aristide's supporters became like their opponents when they used violence to maintain power.

"Using thuggery or violence doesn't solve problems in a poor country like Haiti," Father Spilly said. He added that Haitians need widespread education if they are ever to build a viable nation. "Education is a great need. Most people can't read or write," he noted.

During Aristide's administration of 1990-91, grassroots organizations that advocated for the poor flourished, Chierici said. The former president's attempts to reform Haiti were cut short by his opponents, she

noted, and he faced great barriers from the beginning. In addition, Aristide apparently didn't know how to deal with the United States nor with international financial institutions involved in Haiti, she said.

"Aristide is a visionary, but he didn't have the training in politics and administration," she said. "I don't know if he had the right people to back him."

Chierici said her homeland has always been marked by factional strife and that Haiti needs a sense of the common good to unite its people.

"I'm afraid that it's going to be up and down and up and down for quite a while until you create a vision that

everyone participates in," she said.

HOPE FOR HARMONY

Passionist Father Rick Frechette, who serves in Haiti as a doctor of osteopathy, saw the rebellion against Aristide arrive at the doorstep of his Petionville hospital earlier this month when rebels struck poses for TV news cameras in front of a cheering crowd.

The priest's hospital and orphanage receive funds from New York Friends of the Orphans, headed by Robert McNamara, a parishioner at St. Louis Church in Pittsford. In an e-mail and a newsletter sent to McNamara, Father Frechette noted that "things have gone very bad. There has been terrible looting and destruction of property. And people have been killed."

On the other hand, the priest wrote that Aristide's supporters were limited in their attempts to take revenge after his exile, and that bloodshed following the president's departure has not been as widespread as many feared. Father Frechette expressed hope that the "multitudes of good people" in Haiti will unite to build the country.

"It is dark and quiet outside," the priest wrote in a recent e-mail. "Blackout again. I hear five of our nurses singing together ... That's what we need now, harmony. I believe the multitudes of good people here in Haiti, are capable of it."

EDITOR'S NOTE: To learn more about H.O.P.E., write to P.O. Box 18767, Rochester, NY 14618. To learn more about New York Friends of the Orphans, write to 66 Stuyvesant Road, Pittsford, NY 14534. To learn about Catholic Relief Services efforts in Haiti, visit www.catholicrelief.org.

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