



S T A T E M E N T

BY

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ON

BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
(CARICOM)

IN THE PLENARY DEBATE OF THE
48th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 31:

'THE SITUATION OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN HAITI'

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The Situation of Democracy and Human Rights in Haiti

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on Agenda item 31, The Situation of Democracy and Human Rights in Haiti on behalf of the twelve states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which are members of the United Nations, namely: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and my own country Guyana. I also speak on behalf of Suriname

We are particularly concerned with the suffering of the Haitian people at the hands of the Haitian military. The dictatorship of the armed forces of Haiti which is responsible for the systematic violation of human rights in that country must cease. Democracy must not die in a country which blazed the path to freedom as the first free republic in the Caribbean.

The world rejoiced in 1991 when Haitians exercised their franchise after many years of political, economic and social travail. Their aspirations were however short lived when President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forcibly removed from office on September 30, 1991 by the armed forces of his country. It was a shameful blow against freedom and democracy in the Caribbean.

Mr. President,

Since the coup d'etat took place in Haiti, Caricom countries have been very outspoken in addressing the issue of the rape of democracy in our sister Caribbean country. We have engaged in diplomatic and political initiatives within the OAS and in the United Nations in the hope of amicably resolving that tragic occurrence. It was our fervent hope that those efforts would have by now resulted in the return of the democratically elected government of President Aristide. We are disturbed that this has not yet happened.

Because of our geographical proximity and long historical association, the Caribbean countries and Haiti have traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations. Haiti has observer status within Caricom and is

involved in many areas of regional cooperation.

Developments in Haiti are therefore of much concern to us and we are understandably anxious that they should not import instability into our midst. Since the Caribbean is composed of small and vulnerable states, it is highly susceptible to all forms of external threats.

Mr. President,

Numerous reports, including the Secretary General's Report on Haiti (A/48/532) and the Report on Human Rights Situation in Haiti (A/48/561) spoke of "wide scale arbitrary or illegal arrests, reportedly always accompanied by torture or other ill treatment which have continued to be carried out in Haiti. Victims are said to include anyone suspected of supporting President Aristide, those who defend persons critical of the present authorities, students, journalists, human rights advocates, priests, nuns, the rural and urban community leaders and all those involved in opposition activities.

Repression in the rural areas and in Port-au-Prince slums remain particularly intense, and even possessing or circulating photographs of President Aristide can be a cause for arrest. According to information received by the U.N. Special Rapporteur, the number of those killed since the September 1991 coup by the Haitian Armed Forces, including the army, police and their civilian supporters, is believed to be as high as 3000.

As one source stated, 'it is difficult to assess the actual number of political and extra judicial killings because the judicial authorities rarely conduct criminal investigations into any unexpected deaths, including violent ones such as murder, whether political or not'.

Security forces continue to extort money from the poorest people, who pay in order to avoid arbitrary arrests, beatings and ill treatment or to obtain their release from prison. Such extortions have forced some victims to sell all their possessions or surrender the deeds to their lands in order to pay their ransom, leaving them even further impoverished".

Caricom countries are increasingly disturbed by the continued loss of lives of patriots who seek to improve the lives of their fellow countrymen. The cold blooded murder of the Justice Minister Guy Mallary demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that the Haitian military is not entertaining the restoration of democracy at the present time.

Still more violations of the right to life and physical well being continued in Haiti this year. As the Special Rapporteur mentioned in document A/48/561, such illegal actions by the Haitian Armed Forces were "intended primarily to restrict or prohibit the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression, assembly and peaceful association. Cases of summary execution, physical violence, persecution and harassment have been brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur. Persons suspected of supporting President Aristide continue to be particularly targeted, as do members of trade unions, popular organizations and neighborhood associations, as well simple citizens who had the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Children, women and the elderly have not been immune from the violence".

Mr. President,

These actions of the Haitian armed forces run counter to the spirit of democracy which is sweeping the region. Of utmost importance in the democratic process is to ensure freedom's spirit is kept alive in Haiti.

The Haitian people's search for freedom and the necessity to flee from military subjugation finds brave but dangerous challenges when they escape across the Caribbean sea. The sight of the anguished, many yearning to breathe free, clinging precariously to flimsy vessels in the hope of finding safe haven cannot fail to sting the conscience of humanity. Yet the Haitian people await the awakening of the conscience of the world to restore their dignity and freedom. Must the international community continue to be hamstrung while all the norms of decent international behaviour are flouted by the illegal activities of men in Haitian military uniforms?

When the Governor's island agreement was signed on July 3, 1993 by Raoul Cedras to permit the return of the lawfully and democratically elected government of President Aristide, it also allowed for economic sanctions

against Haiti to be lifted by the United Nations Security Council.

That agreement was based on mutual recognition of the office and authority of the two principal figures in the crisis. General Cedras was to have recognized Mr. Aristides as President of the Republic who in turn was to have recognized the former as Commander-in-Chief of the Haitian Armed Forces.

According to the solemn declaration in the Governor's Island agreement: "The President of Republic and the Commander-in-Chief agree that these arrangements constitute a satisfactory solution to the Haitian crisis and the beginning of a process of national reconciliation. They pledge to cooperate fully in the peaceful transition to a stable and lasting democratic society in which all Haitians will be able to live in a climate of freedom, justice, security and respect for human rights".

Mr. President,

It is widely acknowledged that the Haitian military authorities have not met their end of the bargain, even though the United Nations had kept theirs by the lifting of sanctions after the installation of Prime Minister Robert Malval.

We have therefore a great task before us, to review what has been done, take stock of successes or failures and plan ahead despite the terrible reality of an illegal military regime transgressing the expressed will of its people, the principles and norms of democracy and the international conscience of humanity.

The Caricom group of countries, had welcomed the reimposition of sanctions against Haiti's military leadership in a fresh bid to force it into relinquishing power and reinstating the lawfully elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

We remain especially concerned, however, for the plight of the impoverished masses of Haitians whose suffering have multiplied in the present situation. To alleviate their misery, humanitarian assistance must be provided through a mechanism that will ensure better targetting and improved

transmission. Such life supporting aid must be effective in meeting the needs of those for whom it is destined.

The persistence of a despotic ruling clique in Haiti represents a stern test of our collective will at a time when the human condition in all its dimensions is prominent on the global agenda. We must rise to the challenge to ensure collective decency gains the upper hand for a democratic Haiti. We must redouble our efforts to bring to an end the illegal takeover of the elected government by military forces which show no respect to the democratically expressed will of the Haitian people.

Can we allow the political will of the Haitians who have been subjected to so much degradation to be so easily dismissed?

Mr. President,

The United Nations Security Council and the International Civilian Mission have expressed particular concern at the acts of violence carried out by criminal groups acting with impunity and apparently under the cover or with the expressed or tacit consent of the de facto authorities in Haiti. The existence of paramilitary groups or bands of delinquents which are tolerated by the Haitian army has also been cause for alarm.

When this occurs we must raise our collective voices to condemn such occurrences.

Caricom states remain committed to the goal of a democratic and free Haiti with President Aristide as Head of State.

In this context, Caricom countries at their meeting in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in October 1993 issued a call for the full implementation of all relevant U.N. resolutions. We further support the call for the imposition of new and more severe sanctions against the Haitian military to add to the existing ones. These sanctions should be accompanied by effective action to ensure that such sanctions are enforced. Such measures, in our view, are consistent with the objective to re-establish constitutional order and consolidate democracy in Haiti.

Yet we are very bothered by the reports of continued violation of the embargo on Haiti and dismayed that economic sanctions are breached both overland and by sea. Caricom states strongly urge the continued strengthening of the sanctions and the instituting of checks and balances to ensure this is discontinued. We strongly exhort the international community to redouble its efforts towards the objectives of removing the illegal military and undemocratic government in Haiti and spare no efforts in reinstating President Aristide as the lawful and democratically rightful ruler of his country.

The member states of Caricom are of the view that the presence of the Civilian Mission and the U.N. Mission are fundamental to progress in Haiti to renew completion of the Governor's Island Agreement. Therefore it is extremely important that the necessary conditions for their deployment are made possible with the greatest urgency. This we believe is an important step to be undertaken without delay.

Mr. President,

We have entered upon a new and difficult phase in the restoration of democracy in Haiti. The United Nations is again faced with a tremendous challenge in the exercise of its mandate to maintain international peace and security. The countries of CARICOM, therefore, exhort the international community, acting through the United Nations, to redouble its efforts to achieve the full implementation of the Governor's Island Agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The countries of CARICOM will continue to give their wholehearted support to this effort and will assist in whatever way possible to ensure the return to Haiti of its democratically-elected government.

The United Nations and the international community cannot afford to fail in this effort to assist an embattled and courageous people to break the stranglehold of oppression and degradation and to rise up in freedom and dignity within the democratic process. In this matter, action by the United Nations, in collaboration with the Organization of American States, is imperative; the future of a people and a nation is at stake as well as the credibility of this Organization and its collective security mechanism.

Today it is not too late but a definite necessity for the United Nations to act so that the yesterdays of Haiti will not be a continuous tomorrow.

Thank you.

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