
Interview: Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat

'We will not kneel down to any imposition coming from abroad'

Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat granted the following interview by telephone from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He spoke with EIR correspondents Dana Scanlon and Carlos Wesley in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 10.

EIR: Mr. Prime Minister, we understand you were a human rights activist before you were named to head the government. Could you tell us about that?

Honorat: I have been a human rights activist for over 40 years, and a professor of law and human rights. I stepped into this prime ministership to defend the basic right of my country, the basic right of my nation to be independent, and the basic right to justice. Because, in my view, the Organization of American States resolution was an act of injustice against this country; it was in complete contradiction with even the OAS Charter. The embargo decided [upon] is, as you know, an act of war against this country. As a matter of fact, it's an act of destruction against this country, and it is an act of genocide, as you said and as you know. So, it's against all of that, that I stepped in to defend the right of my nation to exist.

EIR: When you first stepped in as prime minister, Jean-Bertrand Aristide said that you were a Duvalier partisan. However, from documents we have seen, you fought against the Duvalier dictatorship. What's the real story?

Honorat: I was in my early years—when I was 25 years old—much more than a partisan of François Duvalier. Our two families are, in fact, very close, and—you probably already know about extended families—between the two families, there were extended family ties. So, I was very close to François Duvalier and I was director of tourism from 1958 to 1961. But when Mr. Duvalier staged his first coup d'état in 1961, I immediately abandoned the post of director of tourism and became an activist.

Basically, I am an agronomist, so I turned into an activist for the rights of the peasantry, and I created an institution which was designed to provide basic education, that is, literacy programs, human rights education, to teach the Haitian

peasantry why it was in the situation it has been for over 160 years; a situation which is similar to that of the black townships, or the black bantustans in South Africa; a situation where all their basic rights, even the right of existence, the right to be a human being, is denied to the Haitian peasant.

So, that was a [main] part of my life, and that being subversive, I was for practically 25 years under constant persecution from the Duvalier regime. Finally, I was caught, arrested in 1980, and expelled to the United States at gunpoint on Dec. 2, 1980. I was exiled for six years, until the demise of the government of Jean-Claude Duvalier.

EIR: What is the current situation in Haiti? Where do things stand since the embargo was decreed on Oct. 29 by the U.S.?

Honorat: The economic situation is, of course, one of total desperation. The industries that were functioning around the city of Port-au-Prince are all practically closed. Virtually all of them are shut down, and there has been a loss of over 30,000 jobs in and around Port-au-Prince, which means at least 250-300,000 people without any source of income, or livelihood, without any source of revenue.

Inside the country, since there is very little or no transportation between the provincial towns and Port-au-Prince, there is wastage of food produce and a decrease of at least 80-90% in the revenues of the peasants. Remember, that the average per capita income of the Haitian peasant is less than \$45 a year. So, when I say that there has been a loss of 80-90%, you see what this amounts to. I tell you, it is total genocide that's being committed by the United States and by the OAS against this country. We estimate that there has been a loss of over \$200 million a week in the gross national product because of the embargo.

EIR: Many reports published here—and we have reasons to suspect this may be propaganda, but maybe you can shed light on the subject—claim that, despite the fact that there is suffering, the poor of Haiti say that they want the embargo to ensure Aristide's return.

Honorat: [chuckles] I don't know if you are able to send a

reporter there. You would hear an entirely different story. There have been demonstrations throughout Haiti for the past three weeks against the embargo, and they say, well, if the international community or the American government believes that they will force the Haitian people to its knees, to accept a solution imposed by the international community or both the American government and the international community, they are terribly mistaken.

EIR: Are you saying Haiti will not give up its struggle be-

cause of this U.S.-led embargo?

Honorat: Of course. We will not kneel down to any imposition coming from abroad.

EIR: Mr. Prime Minister, there were talks last week between Haiti's parliament and OAS envoy Augusto Ramírez Ocampo. What came out of those talks? Where do the negotiations stand?

Honorat: I don't think anything came out of those negotiations, nothing at all. Apparently there were negotiations

Haitian leaders charge U.S. embargo is genocide

Haiti's provisional President, Joseph Nerette, and his prime minister, Jean-Jacques Honorat, denounced as "genocide" the U.S.-led embargo decreed by the Organization of American States (OAS) against that black nation. The economic stranglehold has been imposed ostensibly to force the return to power of dictator Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the would-be Haitian Pol Pot removed from the presidency by a military coup on Sept. 30.

"This savage measure of strangulation is arbitrary, it is illegal, unjust and unjustifiable," said Nerette in a message to the participants at the Schiller Institute Conference "Build a True Fourth Development Decade—Against Genocide," held over the weekend of Dec. 7-8 in Arlington, Virginia. The embargo "is rightly perceived as a genocide perpetrated against the poor children, youth and elderly of Haiti," stated Nerette, who was elected by Haiti's Parliament to replace Aristide.

In an exclusive interview with *EIR* on Dec. 10 (page 39), Haitian Prime Minister Honorat called the embargo "an act of war against this country. As a matter of fact, it's an act of destruction against this country, and it is an act of genocide."

Honorat is Haiti's best-known human rights activist and was a leader in the fight against the brutal Duvalier dictatorship. He headed Haiti's Center for the Defense of Civil Liberties, until he was named acting prime minister by Nerette. Before the coup, Honorat was named one of this year's recipients of the first International Human Rights Award of the American Bar Association.

Honorat charged that Aristide was setting up his own private militia with former members of the dreaded Tontons Macoutes death squads set up by the late dictator

François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Aristide's "private militia was called the SSP, that is, the Special Presidential Service, and former tontons macoutes were being recruited throughout the country, to be incorporated into this new militia. There were already more than 3,000 people registered." Honorat said Aristide was physically eliminating his potential political opponents when the coup took place.

Two of them were murdered on the very eve of the coup, including Pastor Silvio Claude, the head of Haiti's Christian Democratic Party (PDCH), who was "necklaced," mutilated, and dragged through the streets of the southwestern town of Le Cayes by Aristide supporters at dawn on Sept. 30. Victims of necklacing, or "Père Lebrun," have their arms chopped off and a tire filled with gasoline is placed around their necks and set ablaze. Photographs of the incident reportedly show Jean-Claude Jean-Baptiste, "délégué"—i.e., Aristide's official presidential representative—in the department of du Sud, leading the attack against Claude. Jean-Baptiste is alleged to have struck the first blow against the PDCH leader, according to court records. The photographs obtained by *EIR* show Pastor Claude's mutilated body surrounded by a smiling mob, posing for the photographer with the sticks and knives used to hack Pastor Claude to death. One of the individuals is holding up the pastor's mutilated penis as if it were a trophy.

'Let them suffer'

Led by George Bush's favorites, Argentine President Carlos Menem and Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez (a member of the Socialist International), 13 Latin American Presidents, at a meeting of the Rio Group in Cartagena, Colombia, called on Dec. 2 for the embargo against Haiti to be "applied inflexibly." The same leaders failed to reach a decision regarding how to deal with communist Cuba, beyond a vaguely worded call for Fidel Castro to grant more "democracy." Colombia's *La Prensa* on Dec. 3 noted that the Rio Group wants "little Haiti to swallow the medicine they do not prescribe for Fidel."

about the appointment or designation of a prime minister. I don't think any practical result was ever reached.

EIR: It has also been said that you would be willing to step down as prime minister and let Aristide return if a negotiated solution can be reached. Is that correct?

Honorat: I stepped in just to prevent my country from falling apart in a civil war and from having to endure an international intervention, a foreign intervention. That was my only reason for stepping in, to abandon momentarily my human

rights activities and occupations, which means that I am ready at any time to step down from a position which I have never aspired to, which I have never sought, and which, as a matter of fact, actually upsets my entire conception of life.

If at any point in time, the negotiators believe that the return of Aristide would be a solution, well, that would be fine with me. But, as I have been saying since the beginning of this crisis, the return of Mr. Aristide—at least now, I don't know in one, two, or four years, but now—a return of Mr. Aristide now would mean civil war in this country, and the

The Presidents also called for the European countries to cooperate fully with the embargo. At a meeting in Brussels the same day, the European Community foreign ministers said they favored an all-out trade embargo against Haiti, as also requested by Aristide.

Argentina's Menem wants a total chokehold. "There is only one way to carry out the blockade," said Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella. "Place ships to prevent the arrival of other ships."

The fact that "the embargo harms the Haitian people" is not important, said Pérez, who blames the Haitian military for the embargo, not the United States and its OAS allies. The Venezuelan leader, who is demanding an end to the blockade against communist Cuba, said of Haiti: "It is better that the people suffer now with an embargo which should be turned into a blockade to force the murderous soldiers to give way to the democratic process." Pérez reportedly told his colleagues at Cartagena that there must be action soon to force Aristide's return to power because, otherwise, the militaries in other nations of the hemisphere may be emboldened into attempting coups. He also called for prompt action against the military-controlled government of Surinam.

Out of a token 100 Haitian refugees who went to Venezuela, 73 chose to return to Haiti in early December, after they were dumped on a mosquito-infested island at the mouth of the Orinoco River, while ousted President Aristide, "champion of the poor," is being housed by Pérez in the luxurious presidential suite at the Hilton.

Similarly, prevented by judicial order from deporting Haitian refugees, the Bush administration is daily making conditions intolerable at the concentration camps in Guantánamo—where the Haitians are penned behind barbed wire to keep them from entering U.S. territory. This is intended to force the Haitians to beg for repatriation.

In a statement issued Nov. 21, Haiti's Catholic Bishops Conference noted: "Because of an internal crisis, some international organizations took decisions which usurp Haiti's sovereignty. In order to impose those de-

isions they have decreed an inhuman embargo against this defenseless country, and when some unfortunate souls seek to escape from this intolerable situation, the countries that could give them shelter have returned them, without any compassion, to their country of origin." Across the island of Hispaniola, the Bishops Conference of the Dominican Republic endorsed the Haitian bishops' statement on Nov. 26, and noted that the U.S. and other OAS nations "have hardened their hearts now that they have been called upon to take in our suffering Haitian brothers." The bishops asked that Haitians be allowed "to find their own solutions themselves. We call upon the whole world to respond to their piercing cry: Mercy for Haiti!"

Meanwhile, Washington, D.C. shadow senator Jesse Jackson, an early supporter of the genocidal war against Iraq, continued calling on the Bush administration to invade black Haiti "to restore democracy." And João Baena Soares, secretary general of the OAS, covered up for the mass killings caused by the U.S.-OAS embargo, by denying that Haitians are suffering any extra hardship. "The situation is not dramatic. There are nutrition problems, but at the usual level," Baena told the OAS. He blamed the Haitians for the blockade.

U.S. responsible for famine

In contrast, former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick wrote Dec. 8 that "the U.S. must accept responsibility for having pushed Haiti to the brink of famine and thus creating the refugees." Kirkpatrick (not likely to be taken for a bleeding-heart liberal) called on the U.S. to "urgently provide the basic necessities—food, fuel, and medicine—permitted under the embargo" and to make "decent provision" for the refugees. Merely restoring Aristide is no solution. "An elected President does not in itself guarantee the constitutionality of a government. Adolf Hitler came to power in a constitutional fashion," Kirkpatrick wrote—and Papa Doc was also "an elected President of Haiti."

—Carlos Wesley

loss of probably, 10, 20, or 30,000 people. I mean the death of 20-30,000 people. Because Aristide partisans are getting ready again to burn people on any street corner, just as they have been doing for the past five years. Now, the other segments of society are not going to accept that anymore, and they are getting ready also to retaliate. Do you see what I mean? So, there is a bipolarization of violence now. Aristide's presence would again threaten a civil war.

Now, remember, the speech by Aristide on Sept. 27 was a declaration of civil war.

EIR: Are you referring to the speech where he called the "Père Lebrun" a beautiful instrument?

Honorat: Yes, [in which he called] "necklacing" a work of art.

EIR: Among the charges made by the current government against Aristide and his supporters, is that he is responsible for the murder of the head of Haiti's Christian Democratic Party, Silvio Claude. What can you tell us about that killing?

Honorat: Mr. Aristide's representative—there are pictures, there were pictures taken of that killing. They thought it was the funniest thing to do. In the pictures it is clear that Aristide's personal representative in the city of Les Cayes was there; he is accused of being the first one to have hit Mr. Silvio Claude, it is evident. That crime was committed at the same time as the execution of Roger LaFontant, who was a prisoner in a national penitentiary. So, it was a scheme designed to eliminate all political opponents, all eventual opposition to Mr. Aristide. And there were also other names on the list.

EIR: And these two events took place before the military removed Aristide from the presidency?

Honorat: Certainly.

EIR: The charge has also been made that Aristide was setting up a private army, something similar to the Tontons Macoutes, trained by the Swiss. Can you tell us about that?

Honorat: Yes. His private militia was called the SSP, that is, the Special Presidential Service, and former Tontons Macoutes were being recruited throughout the country, to be incorporated into that new militia. There were already more than 3,000 people registered.

EIR: What do you think of the fact that the United States, which launched this embargo; that Venezuela, which has been very adamant in favor of this embargo; that Argentina, which has been very much in favor of this embargo, and Chile also; that none of them wants to take in the Haitians who are fleeing Haiti because of the economic embargo?

Honorat: The Latin Americans you are talking about, they want to—they are afraid of their own military. They are afraid that the events that took place in Haiti will serve as an

example, as an incitement to induce their own military to act in this manner.

But, by being so adamant against what took place in Haiti, what they are creating, what they are setting, is another example, an example that may trigger what could be presidential assassinations throughout Latin America, instead of coups. As regards the United States, they have again proven—and it is that that has been constant to us throughout the history of relations between the two nations—they have proven once again that they cannot understand what's happening in Haiti. They have never made it their business to investigate and know more profoundly what is taking place in Haiti. The Latin Americans have evidenced also their incapacity to understand the Haitian situation.

EIR: But, specifically, about not taking the refugees, of putting them in concentration camps in Guantánamo or whatever?

Honorat: It's a policy of the United States not to accept the Haitian refugees. It dates back to the early days of 1981, when the flow of boat people, so they called them, started to reach U.S. shores. They have never accepted the refugees in the United States and it is an evident case of racism. It is a well-proven case. It has been proven even in the U.S. courts, that the attitude of the United States against the Haitian refugees is a case of a double standard when compared to what the United States is promoting in Southeast Asia, for instance, or the attitude of the U.S. government in relation to European refugees, for instance. It is a case of racism, it is well proven.

EIR: I don't know if you are familiar with the fact that the Chilean government the other day invited refugees from the former Soviet Union, from eastern Europe, to emigrate to Chile? Similarly, President Carlos Menem of Argentina. But none of them is inviting the Haitians to come.

Honorat: None of them will ever, not unless they need forced labor. It is the same thing as the slave trade again. Now it's being done from Haiti and the center of the Caribbean. Of course, everybody will welcome, will call for, caucasian refugees, but not for black refugees. The case is patent.

EIR: What's the solution for Haiti? How do we get out of this?

Honorat: Let's lift the embargo first. If the United States wants to claim, as they pretend, that they want to help this country, the first thing they have to do is lift the embargo, first of all. Then a political solution can be found. It must be found within the framework of the Haitian Constitution. There is no other solution. The OAS, the 34 countries of the OAS, went too far and too fast. They must recognize that, and then come and sit and discuss with us, within the framework of our national Constitution, what can be done. They cannot come and impose anything on us, and the embargo is not going to do it.