

Speech

Organization of American States



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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
NOTES FOR A STATEMENT TO THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
ON HAITI
December 9, 2002 - Washington**

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Mr. Chairman,

The situation in Haiti is extremely worrying. Over one month past the agreed deadline of November 4 for establishment of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), Haiti is at an impasse.

Resolution 822 of September 4 made clear that obligations had been assumed by a number of key actors, both within Haiti and without. The primary obligations assumed by the Government of Haiti were to pave the way for the holding of elections in 2003. Successful and credible elections were widely seen as the gateway to a strengthened democracy and to renewed economic and social development. In order to hold such elections, a credible electoral council or CEP is a must. The agreed procedure called for nine previously identified and agreed entities each to name one representative to the CEP.

Mr. Chairman, I regret greatly that it has to be said that since September 4 the Government of Haiti has not done enough to convince the entities concerned to name their representatives. Resolution 822 did not require that all obligations be completed by November. But meaningful progress was essential, not merely words.

Unfortunately, the payment of Reparations issue has not been completed. Significant progress on dealing with those responsible for the events of December 17 has not been made—almost one year after the events! The so-called “political cases” have not been reopened or otherwise tackled. The security climate has sadly worsened. Disarmament is only too obviously still a major problem—we need look no farther than Gonaives where a fugitive from justice whom the Commission of Inquiry had implicated in the violent incidents of December 17, 2001 is effectively in control of the streets. And Government supporters with limited democratic credentials have been allowed, some would say encouraged, to harass opposition supporters, retaliate against demonstrators, and threaten the press. If we are engaged in a process that will lead to credible elections, then this situation, whose continuance has obvious implications for an electoral campaign, is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, some sectors have taken advantage of the inaction of the Government to change course from formation of the CEP as the first step towards elections to the mobilization of the population to bring down the Government by mass protests in many parts of the country, beginning in Cap Haitien. Some of these have been well handled by the police, some not so well. In many cases there have been subsequent and undemocratic reprisals against those involved. Then on November 22 and on December 3 government supporters reacted by taking things into their own hands, in the first case tying up Port au Prince for a day with barricades and burning tires, and in the latter case leading to violence which reportedly injured over 50 persons in Port au Prince. Democratic opinion in the country, and elsewhere, is understandably outraged.

The result is an increasingly polarized country. Opposition forces are calling for

the resignation of the President; some are refusing to consider holding elections with Aristide in office. The relatively few voices calling for calm, and for a return to the path laid out by Resolution 822, are finding it increasingly difficult to be heard; and indeed are often criticized for their efforts to build up the center and avoid the confrontation which some extremist groups on both sides appear to seek. The Special Mission and the Government have developed excellent Terms of Reference for election and security work; these now risk being swept aside by events.

The anti-democratic elements on both extremes are the ones whose voices are loudest at present. This is of course a recipe for disaster and, I fear, further social and economic degradation.

I continue to believe that the course laid out by Resolution 822 is the right one for Haiti and for the international community. But I have to tell you that it is becoming increasingly difficult to see how it is going to be followed.

I would like to think that in the days ahead you and your governments will find a way to urge democratic leaders across the political spectrum, among all the political parties, especially the Fanmi Lavalas and the Convergence Démocratique, and including as well the churches and civil society:

- to reflect hard on the implications of the course Haiti is lurching onto at the moment, and its potential for worsening the lot of each of them, further shattering their political hopes and ambitions—to say nothing of the wellbeing of the longsuffering Haitian people;
- to recognize that potential donors and investors will not look kindly on further disruption and uncertainty in Haiti, and that the international community has no plans to send in troops to rescue Haitians from themselves;
- to examine coldly whether their associates are as democratic as they profess to be, and, if they are not, whether they can in fact be “controlled” in the days ahead;
- to ask themselves what they can do in the next day or so to strengthen the political center in Haiti, recognizing that it is not necessary to love either the Fanmi Lavalas or the Convergence Démocratique in order to do so;
- to act very specifically to prevent anniversaries such as December 17 from being used to envenom the situation even more; and finally
- to find a way to reach agreement promptly on formation of a credible new Constitutional institution: the CEP, while pursuing expeditiously the other elements of Resolution 822.

Clearly, this also absolutely requires that the Government steel itself immediately to take the hard decisions now on Reparations and on a shortlist of significant actions to begin meaningfully to implement its other obligations under Resolutions 806 and 822.

Now is the time. With each day of delay the costs for the Government and for the country go up.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.