

Growing Evidence of a Massacre by UN Occupation Forces in Port-au-Prince Neighborhood of Cite Soleil

Summary of Findings of the US Labor and Human Rights Delegation to Haiti

By [San Francisco Labor Council](#)

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In-depth Report: [HAITI](#)

Final Delegation Report on UN Massacre

Background Information:

The San Francisco Labor Council sent a small delegation of US trade unionists and human rights workers to participate in the National Congress of the Confederation of Haitian Workers, held in Port-au-Prince July 1st and 2nd, as well as to investigate the labor and human rights conditions in Haiti. Toward the end of our mission, on July 6th, we received an eyewitness report from local Haitian human rights workers that UN military forces had carried out a massacre in one of Port-au-Prince's poorest neighborhoods, Cite Soleil. We extended our trip to investigate the report.

Extending up from the capital's port, Cite Soleil is a vast ghetto — reminiscent of the "townships" in South Africa under apartheid — of tin shacks, unpaved roads, open sewage streams, lack of stable electricity and plumbing, as well as widespread malnutrition, illiteracy, and disease. It is also a community of political resistance, consisting of thousands of people — young and old — who provide part of the militant base in Port-au-Prince of Lavalas, Haiti's majority political party. Many residents of Cite Soleil emphatically told us they will accept nothing less than the restoration of the democratically elected government of President Aristide.

Since the coup on February 29th, 2004 that toppled the Aristide government, the people of Cite Soleil and other popular neighborhoods in the capital have been the target of systematic repression — including extrajudicial executions — by the Haitian National Police. Armed networks established by young adults in Cite Soleil — labeled "gangs" by the authorities — have attempted to provide security for a community facing almost daily incursions and shootings at the hands of the National Police. The community networks also provide vital social services such as education and food for the population.

The UN Mission in Haiti - MINUSTAH — has insisted that these networks turn in their arms, but has not shown the capability or willingness to rein in the police units that have been terrorizing the population of Cite Soleil. The grass-roots networks have refused to disarm under the prevailing conditions, and have clashed with both police and UN military forces on multiple occasions.

Investigation Methodology:

Our delegation, joined by Haitian human rights workers, carried out the following steps to investigate the massacre allegation:

1) We viewed film footage taken by a Haitian who was on the scene when the UN operation was occurring on July 6th and we also took down his eye witness testimony.

2) We visited Cite Soleil on July 7th, the day after the UN military operation there, conducted interviews with many community members, videotaped these interviews, and also videotaped physical damage to people's homes and neighborhood infrastructure, as well as corpses still on the scene.

3) We carried out an interview the following day, July 8th, with the military high command of MINUSTAH, Lt. General Augusto Heleno and Colonel Morneau regarding the operation.

4) We paid a return visit to Cite Soleil on July 9th during the community funeral service for a community leader slain during the operation, gathered more information from community members, filmed more infrastructure damage, and interviewed the Cite Soleil Red Cross staff.

5) We interviewed the staff at Medecins Sans Frontieres, the primary hospital in Port-au-Prince that serves the people of Cite Soleil. [Unlike other hospitals, it does not charge a fee for service.] The staff at Medicins Sans Frontieres discussed the number of Cite Soleil residents treated on July 6th, the nature of their wounds and treatment, and the comparison of this day to other recent days.

In sharing our findings, we will not use the name of the Haitian human rights workers or anyone currently living in Cite Soleil for their protection.

Investigation Findings:

Our delegation uncovered extensive evidence that indicates there was indeed a massacre conducted by UN military forces in Cite Soleil on the morning of July 6th. We will first present the official version of events, as rendered by the military command staff of MINUSTAH and a MINUSTAH spokesperson. We will then proceed to share the evidence we gathered that contradicts their version of events.

According to Lt. General Augusto Heleno and Colonel Morneau, a little more than 300 UN troops, led by a Jordanian contingent, surrounded Cite Soleil at approximately 3 AM on July 6th. They also surrounded the community with 18-20 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), which appear to be like tanks, mounted with a cannon, but do not have tank treads. MINUSTAH military spokesperson Colonel Eloifi Boulbars stated that the number of APCs involved in the operation was 41, as reported by the Haitian media.

Heleno and Morneau denied that the APCs used cannons in the operation. They stated that one helicopter was used, flying above the community at 3000 feet, for observation purposes only. They stated that this helicopter did not fire ammunition down into the community. They did not mention if grenades or tear gas were used. The number of troops and APCs had effectively choked off ways into and out of Cite Soleil by the time the operation began to unfold.

In our interview, Heleno and Morneau reported that the purpose of the operation was to capture Dread Wilme, a leader of one of Cite Soleil's armed community networks and

viewed as a “gang” leader by the UN occupation forces. They acknowledged the UN forces surrounded the community and attempted to launch a surprise assault by a smaller contingent of 10-15 UN soldiers, but that “gang” members fired on them first, provoking a firefight. They claimed that the UN soldiers “never fire first” in their operations. They claimed that the UN forces launched the operation into the community at approximately 5:30 AM.

Both Heleno and Morneau said they did not know of any civilian casualties, nor had they received reports of such casualties from the Red Cross. According to Boulbars, again as reported in the Haitian media, “numerous bandits were killed during the operation, including five in the house of Dread Wilme.” He stated to the media that bodies were not recovered because soldiers had other things to do. No UN soldiers were killed during the operation. Morneau suggested to us in our interview that the corpses still in the community after the operation could have been people killed by “gang” members and then falsely blamed on the UN forces. He suggested that ballistics tests be conducted on these bodies.

Lt. General Augusto Heleno defended the operation, asking the human rights delegation why they only seemed to care about the rights of the “outlaws” and not those of the “legal forces” in the country.

According to the eyewitness account from a Haitian (who shall remain anonymous for this report) who was present in Cite Soleil during the operation and who did get some film footage of the operation as it unfolded, a very different picture emerges. Like the official UN account, he reported that UN forces surrounded Cite Soleil, as stated by UN military command staff, sealing off the alleys with tanks [APCs] and troops. He reported that UN forces concentrated on the Cite Soleil districts of Boisneuf and Project Drouillard. He further reported that not one, but two helicopters flew overhead.

From this point on, his account diverges considerably from the official UN account. He reported that at 4:30 AM, UN forces launched the offensive, shooting into houses, shacks, a church, and a school with machine guns, APC cannons, and tear gas. The eyewitness reported that when people fled to escape the tear gas, UN troops gunned them down from the back.

UN forces shot out electric transformers in the neighborhood. People were killed in their homes and also just outside of their homes, on the way to work. According to this account, one man named Leon Cherry, age 46, was shot and killed on his way to work for a flower company. Another man, Mones Belizaire, was shot as he got ready to go to work in a local sweatshop and subsequently died from a stomach infection. A woman who was a street vendor was shot in the head and killed instantly. One man was shot in his ribs while he was trying to brush his teeth.

Another man was shot in the jaw as he left his house to try and get some money for his wife’s medical costs; he endured a slow death. Yet another man named Mira was shot and killed while urinating in his home. A mother, Sonia Romelus, and her two young children were killed in their home, reportedly by UN fire after UN forces lobbed a 83-CC gas grenade into their home.

The video footage taken by this eyewitness during the operation shows many of these killings while they were occurring. While it does not show images of the UN troops as they

were firing into the community, one can view at least 10 unarmed people either in the process of being killed or who were already killed. Many were killed by headshots, such as 31-year-old Leonce Chery moments after a gun shot ripped off his jaw. Chery was clearly unarmed. There are audible machine gun blasts occurring in the background. The video footage also depicts the bodies of Sonia Romelus and her two young children, lying in blood on the floor of their home. Apparently, Sonia was killed by the same bullet that passed through the body of her one-year old infant son Nelson.

She was reportedly holding him as the UN opened fire. Next to their two bodies is that of her four-old son Stanley Romelus who was killed by a shot to the head. The video footage shows a weeping Fredi Romelus, recounting how UN troops lobbed a red smoke grenade into his house and then opened fire killing his wife and two children. "They surrounded our house this morning and I ran thinking my wife and the children were behind me. They couldn't get out and the blan [UN] fired into the house." The video also shows the grenade canister, apparently left in the house.

The eyewitness source claimed that the operation was primarily conducted by UN forces, with the Haitian National Police this time taking a back seat.

In summing up his testimony, the source claims to have personally viewed 20 people killed by UN forces during and after the operation, in addition to five people killed who were buried by their families and yet another five people from the community who have been missing since the operation was launched.

When our delegation, joined by other Haitian human rights workers, entered Cite Soleil the day after the operation, in the afternoon of July 7th, we gathered extensive evidence that corroborated his testimony and further indicated that the people being killed in the video footage were, in fact, killed by UN forces. The team gathered testimony from many members of the community, young and old, men, women, and youth.

Community residents said UN forces had reduced the entrances and exits into and out of the ghetto by blocking a street with a large shipping container. Our delegation filmed this blocked entrance. Immediately prior to the UN military operation on July 6th in Cite Soleil, there were scarcely more than two functioning pathways into and out of the community.

Community members spoke of how they had been surrounded by tanks [APCs] and troops that sealed off exits from the neighborhoods and then proceeded to assault the civilian population. Reportedly, the assault involved at least one, if not more, helicopters firing down into the neighborhood. The community allowed the Labor/Human Rights Delegation to film the evidence of the massacre, showing the homes — in some cases made of tin and cardboard — that had been riddled by bullets, and what appear to be APC cannon fire and helicopter ammunition, as well as showing the team some of the corpses still on the scene, including a mother and her two children and one man whose jaw had been blown off.

The team also filmed a church and a school that had been riddled by ammunition. Allegedly, a preacher was among the victims killed. Some community members allowed the team to interview them, but not to film their faces for fear of their lives. People were traumatized and, in the cases of loved ones of victims, hysterical. One woman spoke of how her husband was shot and killed during the operation, leaving her stranded alone to fend for three children.

Community members also guided us to two electrical transformers in the neighborhood that had been destroyed, claiming that UN troops had shot them and caused a blackout in the course of the operation.

Multiple community residents indicated that they had counted at least 23 bodies of people killed by the UN forces. Community members claimed that UN forces had taken away some of the bodies. Some community estimates range even higher.

The team returned to Cite Soleil two days later, on July 9th, during the community funeral ceremony for Dread Wilme in order to continue the investigation. Hundreds of people from the community — woman and men, children and adults — turned out for the funeral, held in a street. Armed young adults attempted to provide “security” during the ceremony. While they seemed to elicit no fear from the general population, the UN military forces did. Twice during the ceremony, a rumor traveled through the crowd that UN military forces, represented by several APCs in the near distance, were moving on the ceremony. People fled in terror, in a virtual stampede and then regrouped when they realized that such an operation was not occurring.

During the ceremony, the team interviewed a Reuters reporter who claimed to have filmed bullet holes in roofs in Cite Soleil, which he concluded were caused by machine gun fire from a helicopter assault during the operation. Our team subsequently filmed what appear to be gun shot holes in the roof of a community school and the roof of a nearby building. The Reuters reporter also reported that, while he was not present during the UN operation, he personally filmed seven dead bodies a day or two later.

In the early afternoon of July 9, the team left the ceremony and interviewed a staff member of the Cite Soleil Red Cross. She informed the team that the local Red Cross was not present during the UN operation, but that the Red Cross had transported approximately 15 people to a local hospital two days later on Friday July 8th. She did not know of how many, if any, people were killed during the operation. Additionally, she reported that about one week prior to the “operation”, UN military forces had detained her, the President of the local Red Cross, and at least one other local Red Cross member and taken them to the local UN compound for interrogation. She described the detention as intimidating.

After the interview with the local Red Cross, the team left Cite Soleil and interviewed the staff at the Mediciens Sans Frontieres Hospital in downtown Port-au-Prince. This is one of the few, if not the only hospitals in Port-au-Prince where people can from Cite Soleil can go because it provides free health care unlike other hospitals which charge a service fee. The staff at Mediciens Sans Frontieres shared with the team their hospital registry records detailing the number of patients from Cite Soleil that the hospital admitted and treated on July 6th. Starting at approximately 11 AM, the hospital received a total of 26 wounded people from Cite Soleil who were reportedly transported to the facility by Red Cross “tap taps” (local minivans). Of these 26, 20 were women and children and 6 were men. Half of the total number were seriously wounded by abdominal gun shot wounds and were routed into major surgery. One pregnant woman lost her baby. Other victims seem to be in recovery, according to the hospital staff.

All reported that they had been wounded by UN military forces during the operation and some spoke of their homes being destroyed. This number of 26 stands in contrast to the hospital’s records of Cite Soleil residents admitted on other days when the figures are much lower, such as 2 people on July 7th and none on July 8th. One Haitian human rights worker present during the meeting with the hospital staff speculated that the number of men from

Cite Soleil who were admitted to the hospital was low because many men would fear being arrested by the authorities while in the hospital.

In addition, a Red Cross staff member stated that on Friday, July 8th, the local Red Cross transported 15 victims from the UN operation to a local hospital.

Putting all this evidence together, it is clear that there were substantial civilian casualties from the UN operation that were transported by the local Red Cross and by perhaps other means, to be treated in a local hospital.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the evidence of a massacre by UN military forces in Cite Soleil is substantial and compelling. The eyewitness account of the operation, and the film footage shot by Haitian human rights workers who were on the scene during the operation; the extensive videotaped testimony by community members themselves on July 7th, coupled with tangible, physical damage to their homes and infrastructure; the bodies still on the scene that we have on video; the intense fear of the UN military forces evidenced by hundreds of residents of Cite Soleil; the statements by the local Red Cross; and finally the registry records of the relevant hospital — all of these pieces of evidence indicate that UN military forces in Haiti today are not engaged in the work of “peacekeeping” as much as they are in the business of repression.

Clearly, further investigation is required to determine the exact number of victims from the operation, their identities, and the reasons for their deaths. One can only wonder why UN forces in Haiti have not, apparently, contacted the relevant hospital or dispatched their own human rights team into Cite Soleil in order to assess the true “collateral damage” resulting from this and other armed incursions by the UN military forces.

Contact: Seth Donnelly ph:650-814-8495 sethdonnelly2000@yahoo.com

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