

Haiti: Battle Over Who Will Umpire the Next Elections

As U.S. Delegations Visit and Masses March: Senate President Declares “El Rancho Accord” Dead

By [Kim Ives](#)

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Haiti’s Senate President, Sen. Simon Dieuseul Desras, has clearly rejected the so-called “Inter-Haitian Agreement of El Rancho,” which was brokered earlier this year by the Catholic Church’s new Haitian Cardinal Chibly Langlois.

Named after the iconic Pétionville hotel where it was negotiated starting in late January and signed on Mar. 19, the “El Rancho Accord” supposedly struck a deal between President Michel Martelly and Haiti’s political parties and civil society for a political framework to hold parliamentary and municipal elections in October.

But critics say the negotiations only included Martelly’s political allies. All the opposition parties and citizen action groups, including the former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s Lavalas Family party (which briefly took part in the talks as an “observer”), shunned the “dialogue” and have rejected the El Rancho agreement as a sham.

Desras told Martelly that the Parliament never agreed to the document and therefore “the El Rancho Accord has no binding force and cannot override either the Constitution or the Electoral Law.”

The battle is really over who will umpire the upcoming elections. The “El Rancho Accord” recognizes and enshrines the Transitional College of the Permanent Electoral Council (CTCEP), a mostly Martelly-appointed body formed last year, as the Electoral Council that would oversee elections.



Sen. Simon Dieuseul Desras said that "the El Rancho Accord has no binding force and cannot override either the Constitution or the Electoral Law."

But Sen. Desras, after two meetings with a majority of senators, was mandated to call on Martelly to establish a new Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) under the guidelines established by Article 289 of the Haitian Constitution. This clause calls for nine representatives from diverse sectors of Haitian society including churches, the university, journalists, and human rights groups.

If he fails to hold elections this year under these conditions, Desras said, the Senate "will have no alternative but to demand Mr. Martelly's resignation."

Already, thousands marched in Haiti again this past week on Apr. 26 in Cap Haïtien and on Apr. 28 in Port-au-Prince to call for President Martelly to immediately step down and for the 10-year-long 9,000-soldier U.N. Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH) to leave the country.

Apr. 26 marked the 51st anniversary of a massacre carried out by dictator Francois "Papa

Doc" Duvalier in 1963 and another carried out 23 years later by Haitian soldiers under the neo-Duvalierist regime of Gens. Henry Namphy and Williams Regala in 1986 against demonstrators commemorating the former massacre.

"Martelly and his cronies are too corrupt to hold free and fair elections, and the MINUSTAH rigged the last ones to have Martelly elected," said Oxygène David of the new party Dessalines Coordination (KOD), which took part in the protests. "We need to start with a clean slate, as a sovereign country, without a mafia in power and without neo-colonists meddling in our internal affairs."

But, on Apr. 23, Haitian-born Joël Danies, the U.S. State Department's lead agent on Haiti, visited the country to pressure six influential senators who form the core of the parliamentary resistance against the U.S./Martelly agenda of rushing through unconstitutional elections before the end of this year.

Two senators refused to meet with Danies - Sens. Moïse Jean-Charles (North) and Francky Exius (South). No agreement came out of Danies' meeting with the other four: Jean-Baptiste Bien-Aimé (North East), Westner Polycarpe (North), John Joël Joseph (West) and Jean William Jeanty (Nippes).



Thousands marched through the streets of Port-au-Prince on Apr. 28, 2014 to call for President Michel Martelly's resignation and the withdrawal of UN troops from Haiti.

On Mar. 28-29, a U.S. Congressional delegation including Florida congresspeople Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), and Frederica Wilson (D-FL) also had visited Haiti. In an apparent response to the six senators' snubbing of Danies, Ros-Lehtinen wrote an Apr. 24 letter that said: "I'm deeply concerned that already long overdue elections in Haiti continue to be delayed.... Congress is watching closely this process in Haiti as we examine our foreign aid package. The consensus El Rancho Agreement signed on Mar. 19 committed all parties to a clear path forward for holding elections this year for the Chamber of Deputies, two-thirds of the Senate, and local and regional offices. The Executive Branch and Chamber of Deputies have so far adhered to their commitment and advanced the necessary elections legislation. Now it is time for the Haitian Senate to act and pass the electoral law in the spirit of the El Rancho Agreement so that an election date can be set."

In contrast to Ros-Lehtinen's stick, MINUSTAH's chief, Sandra Honoré, held out a carrot in the form of a pool-side dinner at her residence to honor Sen. Desras on Apr. 21. "This dialogue should continue to engage all actors," she said, referring to the discredited El Rancho negotiations. "It is one of the first important steps towards a national consensus on the holding of elections in 2014 before arriving at a durable solution for the future of the country."

Sen. Desras rejected the charges that the Senate was responsible for holding up elections and said that a "trusted electoral council of consensus would not take one week to set up."

Also attending the dinner were Martelly allies, Sens. Jocelerme Privert and Maxime Roumer; former Sen. Youri Latortue, an advisor to President Martelly; Carl Jean-Louis, an aide to Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe,; Mirlande Hyppolite Manigat, a representative of the opposition alliance MOPOD; Dimitri Vorbe, a representative of the private business sector; Mary Gilles Yolène, a representative of the National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH); journalists Daly Valet of Radio Trans-air/Vision 2000 and Robenson Alphonse of the daily newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*, and a representative of the Catholic Church.

In the growing war of words, Sen. Desras, declared last week that "the National Palace has turned into a den of thieves." He pointed in particular to the appointment of Dorzena Wilma,

alias Wisky Wisky, to the city government of the town of Saut d'Eau, although the man is an alleged member of the recently busted kidnapping ring known as the "Galil Gang" headed by the fugitive Woodley "Sonson La Familia" Ethéard (see *Haiti Liberté*, [4/23/2014](#).)

On Radio Kiskeya's show *Public Interest*, hosted by journalist Lilliane Pierre-Paul, on Apr. 27, Sen. Desras seemed unfazed by Washington's pressure on him and claimed that he too had some "powerful international allies."

Desras concluded that Martelly had become "completely arrogant" in demanding that the Haitian Senate and people swallow the El Rancho accord.

Taking a half-step towards the demand of Haiti's streets for Martelly's immediate departure, Desras concluded: "I will call for the resignation of President Martelly if he cannot hold elections by the end of this year."

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