

Haiti: The Canadian-backed Coup Regime's Reign of Terror

How CIDA's NCHR-Haiti Cleverly Promoted and then Covered up Atrocities

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Fuelling the deadly flames of human rights abuses that ravaged Haiti's pro-democracy advocates after the 2004 coup, was an organization that received generous financing from the Canadian government. Within a few days of the Canadian-backed coup, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) agreed to give the National Coalition for Haitian Rights-Haiti (NCHR-Haiti) \$100,000¹ for a project to assist nonexistent victims of a bogus "genocide" for which they framed Aristide's Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune.^{2,3}

NCHR-Haiti was also funded by American and French government agencies. These were the three governments that masterminded the regime change, and supported the illegal coup-imposed junta of Prime Minister Gérard Latortue.

The financial underwriting of NCHR-Haiti by the very foreign governments that had mentored the coup and its illegal spawn, placed this organization in a blatantly obvious conflict of interest. And, although its many strident statements and reports—before, during and after the coup—were extremely biased and partisan in their opposition to Aristide's legitimate government, NCHR-Haiti was continually relied upon as the world's single most important source of supposedly-neutral, human rights reports and analysis. Among those who consistently cited NCHR-Haiti were the corporate media, foreign governments, international human rights organizations and CIDA-funded Canadian groups focusing ostensibly on development, peace and democracy.

As a result, NCHR-Haiti played a pivotal role in manipulating global public opinion. In the years leading up to the coup, it worked in conjunction with Haiti's political opposition, which—largely funded and organized by local business elites and foreign government agencies—worked to promote the atmosphere of anti-Aristide hatred that helped facilitate his ouster. NCHR-Haiti's biased, anti-Lavalas reportage was, of course, lapped up by those foreign governments as they built towards a change in regimes that would empower a more pliable client state in Haiti. Then, after the coup, when Gérard Latortue had been successfully installed, NCHR-Haiti was conspicuously silent about the relentless atrocities that the regime waged against Lavalas supporters. This wilful silence helped provide cover for the grave human rights violations committed by Latortue's "interim government." NCHR-Haiti also ignored the flagrant abuses and indignities perpetrated daily by the UN military force that—under the guise of "peacekeeping"—became a foreign occupation force working in concert with the coup regime's police to mop up remaining opposition, and to prop up Latortue's unjustly ensconced, *de facto* government.

When NCHR-Haiti flexed its formidable propaganda powers, it shamelessly added fuel to the fires of human rights abuses raging across the country: it demonized Aristide; it complimented the coup regime and rebel groups for capturing Lavalas “criminals”; it even pushed the coup-regime’s police and UN forces to make even more violent incursions into poverty stricken neighbourhoods to weed out Lavalas supporters, who it derided and dehumanized with the Haitian elite’s slang term, *chimère*.⁴

However, it is not enough to say that NCHR-Haiti was a stooge for local Haitian elite and its foreign supporters. NCHR-Haiti did more than exaggerate the flaws of Lavalas and then hide the human rights abuses that blazed across Haiti during and after the coup. Immediately after the regime change, NCHR-Haiti engaged in a close working partnership with Latortue’s dictatorship. The group became, in effect, an arm of the illegal “interim” government by aiding and abetting the commission of human rights violations in Haiti. It did this, in part, by using unsubstantiated accusations and trumped-up charges that were employed to full effect by the dictatorship to illegally imprison innocent people associated with the popular Lavalas government.

NCHR-Haiti’s totally-biased, human rights coverage is exemplified by a media conference entitled: “Boniface-Latortue: the first 45 days.”⁵ This report, which focused on criticizing the supposed abuses of Aristide’s overthrown democracy while praising Haiti’s newly-installed regime, typifies the kind of blame-the-victim approach that permeated NCHR-Haiti’s CIDA-funded work.⁶

Unfortunately, many foreign politicians, government agencies, corporate media outlets and international human rights and aid groups used NCHR-Haiti as their primary source while ignoring numerous independent human rights investigations that were conducted in post-coup Haiti. This article reviews reports published by six such U.S.-based organizations with particular attention to their analysis of:

- (a) the human rights abuses being committed,
- (b) the victims being targeted, and
- (c) the main perpetrators of the human rights violations.

The human rights situation in Haiti that was consistently exposed by these six organizations was completely at odds with the picture painted by NCHR-Haiti. And, what’s more, the authors of these U.S. delegations all questioned the legitimacy of NCHR-Haiti and were in fact unequivocal in denouncing its extremely biased and partisan perspective.

Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)

The IJDH’s document, “Human Rights Violations in Haiti,” is perhaps the most comprehensive analysis from the early, post-coup period. It covers abuses reported to its staff in Haiti from late-February until mid-May 2004. It focuses on “attacks against grassroots activists and residents of poor urban and rural areas in Haiti, the type of victims whose stories are often overlooked in reporting on Haiti.”⁷

The report notes that “a general climate of fear and terror exists in the country” but concedes that “it is difficult to assess the actual number of political and extrajudicial killings.”⁸ One of its findings however gives a telling indication of the number of political murders, at least during the first month of the coup regime and in Haiti’s capital alone. IJDH

staff interviewed morgue employees at the General Hospital in Port-au-Prince who “revealed that 800 bodies on...March 7, and another 200 bodies on Sunday, March 28 were dumped and buried in a mass grave at Titanyen.”⁹ (Titanyen is where Haiti’s military and its death squads had frequently disposed of the bodies during the previous anti-Aristide coup period, between 1991 and 1994.)

The hundreds of cases cited in the IJDH report are “only a tiny fraction of the violations committed.” This is because researchers faced many obstacles, including:

- “(a) many victims, or [their] relatives..., [are in] hiding...;
- (b) ...the continuing control of areas outside Port-au-Prince by rebels of the Front [Résistance pour la Libération Nationale] and former soldiers...;
- (c) many victims or their relatives decline to report violations for fear of further retaliation;
- (d) cadavers brought to the morgue and unclaimed are systematically disposed of.”¹⁰

Despite these difficulties, the detailed report—replete with horrifying photos of mutilated bodies and piles of corpses—exposes a gruesome litany of abuses, including:

- “(a) violence to the life, security, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder, torture, mutilation, rape, as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment...;
- (b) collective punishments against persons and their property;
- (c) pillage;
- (d) ...abduction or unacknowledged detention of individuals; and
- (e) threats or incitement to commit...the above acts;
- (f) arbitrary arrests and detentions;
- (g) violation of the right to freedom of assembly and association; and
- (h) violation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.”¹¹

In terms of identifying the political affiliation of the victims, the IJDH report states that

“with the exception of four victims and for those whom it has not been possible to obtain their identity, interviewees have reported that the victims were supporters of President Aristide or Haiti’s former constitutional government.”¹²

The report also explains that:

“Many of the cases of arbitrary arrests, illegal detention and torture, and of collective punishments against victims and their property are linked to the attempts of the victims to exercise their right to freedom of expression, most commonly while expressing their support for the upholding of democracy.”¹³

The IJDH was equally clear about who was committing these crimes and pointed to the coup

regime's

"armed forces and other organized armed groups.... Acts of violence have been carried out by armed gangs or other criminal groups acting with impunity and what appears to be under the cover, or with the tacit consent, of the [coup regime's] authorities."14

On July 26, 2004, an IJDH update catalogued continuing human rights abuses. This second report was a damning indictment of "official persecution" by Haiti's coup regime and gave numerous examples of its culpability for:

- * "Illegal arrests and detention
- * Illegal searches
- * Persecution of the press
- * Infringement of freedom of speech and assembly
- * Infringement on the independence of the judiciary
- * Failure to protect citizens."15

The IJDH was again clear in its identification of the victims and perpetrators:

"People perceived to support Haiti's constitutional government or Fanmi Lavalas, the political party of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, have been systematically persecuted from late February through the present. In many cases, the *de facto* government of Prime Minister Gérard Latortue is directly responsible for the persecution; in other cases it is refusing to take steps to prevent its allies from persecuting Lavalas supporters.... There have been no attempts to arrest anyone for attacks against Lavalas supporters, including perpetrators actually convicted of crimes during the previous *de facto* regime (1991-1994).

"The Latortue government has made no effort to disarm the insurgents and other allies who are carrying and using illegal weapons. Heavily-armed paramilitary groups illegally control many areas..., marking a return to the practices of military dictatorships. The armed gangs make arrests, without warrants or other legal authority.... Some even pronounce and execute death sentences, with no trial. The police and judiciary collaborate with this illegality, by holding the arrestees. The military's traditional allies, the quasi-military 'Section Chiefs,' have started to reclaim power from local elected officials....

"The government has also illegally integrated former soldiers into regular Haitian National Police units, bypassing the police force's...procedures for recruitment, training and promotion.... Integrating such people into the force...is a recipe for abuse and repression."16

This IJDH report concluded by saying the regime:

"must immediately stop all persecution of those perceived to support Lavalas or Haiti's constitutional government, and must start scrupulously respecting the Haitian constitution's civil liberties protections. It must not only end abuses by its own police and judicial officials, but also bring its paramilitary allies under the rule of law."17

IJDH Denounces NCHR-Haiti

Although these two IJDH reports did not specifically mention the role played by NCHR-Haiti, the reports' author—IJDH founder and director, Brian Concannon, Jr.—has criticised NCHR-Haiti on several occasions. For instance, during an interview in August 2004, Concannon said that NCHR-Haiti is

“considered by many of the victims of persecution to be hostile to their interests, partly because NCHR has been denouncing people who were subsequently arrested and imprisoned illegally, and partly because when you go into NCHR offices there are wanted posters for people associated with the Lavalas government and they don't have posters of people who've even been convicted of human rights violations against Lavalas supporters and are roaming free.

“If NCHR and others are going to claim that this persecution is not happening they have to [go] out and conduct an investigation. I think that a lot of the mainstream human rights organisations in Haiti, which are also—not coincidentally—supported by USAID and by other wealthy governments [like Canada], have been systematically biased in their human rights reporting, in terms of over reporting accusations against Lavalas members and underreporting or ignoring accusations of persecution of Lavalas members.”¹⁸

In an article outlining the trumped-up, legal case against Aristide's Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune, for alleged responsibility in a supposed Lavalas-government massacre at La Scierie, St. Marc, Concannon notes that—despite the lack of any evidence—“NCHR-Haiti insisted that the case be prosecuted.”

Concannon also describes NCHR-Haiti as a “ferocious critic” of Aristide's government and an “ally” of the illegal regime. He explains that NCHR-Haiti had a close working relationship with the coup-installed Interim Government of Haiti (IGH). Concannon points out, for instance, that:

“The IGH, which had an agreement with NCHR-Haiti to prosecute anyone the organization denounced, obliged by arresting Mr. Neptune along with the former Minister of the Interior [Jocelerme Privert], a former member of Parliament [Amanus Maette] and several others.

“NCHR-Haiti received a \$100,000 grant from the Canadian government (one of the IGH's three main supporters, along with the U.S. and France) to pursue the La Scierie case. The organization hired a lawyer and former opposition Senator to represent the victims, and kept up the pressure in the press.”¹⁹

Concannon gave further details of NCHR-Haiti's, Canadian-funded legal case in an article for *The Jurist*, saying that although NCHR-Haiti

“became increasingly politicized and, in the wake of the 2004 coup d'état, it cooperated with the IGH in persecuting Lavalas activists. The persecution became so flagrant that NCHR-Haiti's former parent organization, New York-based NCHR, publicly repudiated the Haitian group and asked it to change its name. [It then] changed its name [to Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains (RNDDH)], but maintained its dogged pursuit of Mr. Neptune and other Lavalas members. The organization filed a suit on behalf of a group of people claiming to be victims of a massacre [at La Scierie]...with the help of a substantial grant from the Canadian government. RNDDH's legal team tenaciously opposed, in court

and in the press, the prosecutor's recommendation to drop the case, and even the request for humanitarian release."²⁰

Quixote Center (QC)

In late March/early April 2004, the QC sent an "Emergency Haiti Observation Mission" to Haiti with 23 human rights observers, including some "Congressional aides."²¹ Their report concluded that "insecurity" in Haiti was the result of numerous factors, including the:

"resurgence of military and paramilitary forces, freed criminals and human rights violators walking the streets and controlling large areas outside the capital, the integration of resurgent paramilitary and military into the Haitian National Police, weapons proliferation and armed gangs."²²

The QC report documented the "systematic campaign of terror" unleashed by the February 2004 coup and identified its main targets as

"the poor who have supported President Aristide, the *Fanmi Lavalas* party and participatory democracy."

As for those responsible, the QC report said that the

"Haitian press presently plays a key role in the persecution. The interim government is not only allowing this campaign to proceed, it is actively participating. According to nearly all the testimony, eye witness accounts and reports by family members of victims, U.S. Marines have also taken part in the terrorist campaign."²³

As a result of the

"violations and abuses since the coup...[which] disproportionately affected the poor and supporters of Lavalas,... individuals from the slums of Port-au-Prince, secondary cities and rural areas [were] forced into hiding."²⁴

For example, members of Haiti's "largest human rights organization," the Fondasyon Trant Septamn (FTS)—named for the date upon which Aristide was overthrown in a coup after his first election in 1991—were forced into "hiding throughout the country" and "their leader Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, a psychologist with a long history of working with torture victims, went into exile on March 2 [2004]."²⁵

Although FTS representatives "came out of hiding" to meet with the QC delegation, they were forced to "remain anonymous for their safety." FTS members are "predominantly urban slum dwellers...victimized during the 1991 coup." For more than a decade, they organized weekly vigils at Haiti's National Palace and "coordinated a campaign to prevent the Haitian Army from being re-established." They even managed to gather "150,000 names on a petition calling for a constitutional amendment to outlaw the Haitian Army."²⁶

The QC report contrasts the post-2004 coup persecution of legitimate human rights groups such as FTS, with the very different experience of "opposition and non-governmental organizations" who "advocated Aristide's overthrow." Following the 2004 coup, these anti-Lavalas groups were certainly not forced into hiding, nor did they face any persecution. In fact, they experienced what they described as "a greater freedom of expression."

This dramatic difference between the security conditions faced by groups that pitted themselves either for or against Aristide's elected government, was manifested in several ways, including the location of their meetings with the QC delegation. The QC report notes that FTS members were forced to meet "with our observation team while in hiding." In contrast, the QC's meetings with the following anti-Aristide groups were all done in the safety of their own offices: NCHR-Haiti, the Civil Society Initiative Group, Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA) and the National Coordination for Advocacy on Womens' Rights (CONAP).²⁷ Not surprisingly, these coup-friendly groups were all generously funded by CIDA.²⁸

QC Denounces NCHR-Haiti

The QC emergency observation team visited the Port-au-Prince office of NCHR-Haiti, which it describes as

"the human rights organization most widely relied upon by U.S.-based policy makers. Although NCHR claims to be an impartial organization, the [QC] team heard repeated testimony concerning their silence in cases where Lavalas supporters have been the victims. NCHR, for its own part, talked about what they called 'systematic human rights violations' which occurred during Aristide's administration. They do not believe what is happening now [late March-early April 2004] can be considered systematic."²⁹

For example, the QC team heard many eyewitness accounts of an "alleged massacre of as many as seventy-eight people in...a heavily-populated, poor neighborhood, Bel Air, in Port-au-Prince" which "escaped any real scrutiny by the international press." According to "almost every individual and organization the [QC] observation mission interviewed, the deaths came at the hands of U.S. Marines."³⁰

However, when the QC team asked NCHR-Haiti representative, Fito Espérance, if his group planned to investigate this case, his response revealed NCHR-Haiti's propensity for blaming the victims of such attacks:

"You must understand that just before Aristide left, he and his government armed a lot of people.... Almost the entire country was armed.... [Espérance] did admit that 'there is a rumor of an attack against the occupation forces in Bel Air. They said a lot of people [Haitians] died.' But he then came back to blaming the Haitian victims, and continued, 'Bel Air totally supports Aristide and there are a lot of weapons there.'"

The QC report reveals a major shortcoming of NCHR-Haiti saying "first step to ending the terror campaign is investigating the events. However, the NCHR will not investigate in Bel Air." Why? As Espérance explained to the QC team, NCHR-Haiti is not welcome in this poverty-stricken area:

"Even though we are a human rights organization, that area is not accessible to us, so we just hear the reports... Haiti has areas that are inaccessible to certain human rights organizations.... [T]hey...believe those human rights organizations are opponents. They believe we are their adversaries. It is a long process to explain we are neutral."³¹

When Espérance was asked whether other areas were also "inaccessible to the NCHR," he "listed some of the most impoverished and highly targeted neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince."³² One member of the QC team, Tom Reeves—a retired Caribbean studies

professor who had organized nine delegations to Haiti after the 1991 coup against Aristide—commented on this meeting saying: “the NCHR said they ‘lacked access’ to the pro-Lavalas shanty-towns. Of course they lacked access: they lacked any shred of credibility as a human rights monitor.”³³

In an article “compiled partly from observations and interviews in conjunction with” the QC’s Emergency Haiti Observation Mission, Reeves described NCHR-Haiti’s history of one-sided “human rights” work:

“During the two years leading up to this latest coup, they adamantly refused to investigate now-verified allegations of murders, arson and bombings against the government and Lavalas by former military and FRAPH [the CIA-backed death squad from the anti-Aristide coup in 1991].

“Although they were the only human rights group in the country adequately funded and having trained monitors throughout Haiti, the NCHR became completely partisan: anti-Lavalas, anti-Aristide. This is simply not proper for a group calling itself a ‘Haitian Rights’ organization. During the final month before the coup, they abandoned any pretext of impartiality, joining calls for the ouster of Aristide, without reference to the means....

“NCHR continues to claim it has always investigated human rights violations evenhandedly. Yet [on] April 26 [2004], NCHR joined PAPDA, CONAP and other ‘progressive,’ anti-Aristide groups in a demonstration at the National Palace. Totally ignoring the massive wave of repression against Lavalas documented by international delegations to Haiti in late March and early April, NCHR and the other groups only demanded the immediate arrest of Aristide’s last Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune and many other Aristide officials.... [but] made no mention of crimes carried out by criminals who escaped from the penitentiary, or the well-documented atrocities carried out by members of the former Haitian army, the FRAPH and others among the former ‘rebels.’ So much for impartiality in human rights investigations.”³⁴

The official QC report concurred with Reeve’s assessment, concluding that “the NCHR may proclaim it is impartial, but the people most in need of a human rights advocate do not believe it. We found that NCHR has a clear bias.” To illustrate this “clear bias,” the QC report recounts that they met Espérance in the

“NCHR conference room, where a ‘WANTED’ poster hangs behind the conference table. The first name on the poster is Jean-Bertrand Aristide and is followed by other high-ranking members of the Fanmi Lavalas party. No supporters of Aristide or Fanmi Lavalas would feel safe or protected in the offices of the NCHR.”³⁵

National Lawyers Guild (NLG)

The NLG human rights delegation to Haiti (April 12-19, 2004), reported that Haiti’s “grave” human rights situation was “especially precarious...due to the almost total lack of knowledge about, and media attention to, the human rights abuses taking place.” It reported that the “general sense...of insecurity” felt by most Haitians resulted from:

- * “killings
- * curfews

- * the lack of police or any form of working judicial system
- * ...private, heavily-armed militias
- * the unauthorized return of...armed soldiers of [the] Haitian Army that President Aristide had decom-missioned in 1994 for its historical oppression of Haiti's poor."36

The presence, at that time, of 3,600 U.S., French and Canadian troops was said to cause "general tension in the people of the city."37 For the most part, they only patrolled in "the poorest of the crowded slum neighborhoods"38 and residents in these "targeted" areas questioned whether the "arrests and home searches" to which they were being subjected were in violation of Haiti's constitution.39

The NLG also "found overwhelming evidence" that:

"the victims of the threats and violence have been supporters of the elected government of President Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas party, elected and appointed officials in that government or party or employees of the government.... Many are in hiding..., others have been beaten and/or killed. Many of their homes have been selectively destroyed, mostly by arson."40

In a section called the "Repression of Popular Organizations," the NLG report stated that:

- * "Leaders of almost every popular organization ("OP") (formed to work with the elected [Lavalas] government to address basic community needs) have been threatened or killed.

- * Many grassroots leaders have had their homes destroyed.... The threats have been carried out by former militaries and FRAPH members, as well as other supporters of the opposition.

- * Former militaries and supporters of the political opposition to the elected government continue to visit the homes of OP leaders that have not been burned to keep them from coming home, and to intimidate neighbors.

- * Many OP leaders reported that government funding and other support to the OPs has been summarily cut off. This includes the closing of literacy programs, food and shelter programs and orphanages."41

NLG Denounces NCHR-Haiti

In dramatic contrast to the dangerous situation faced by OPs, the NLG research team described their meeting with NCHR-Haiti officials in Port-au-Prince. Like the QC team before it, NLG investigators noted the NCHR's "WANTED" poster:

"NCHR took the [NLG] delegation into a large meeting room where the wall was adorned with a large 'wanted' poster featuring Aristide and his cabinet.... It named Aristide a 'dictator' guilty of human rights abuses [and included] a long list of other charges [and] calls for the arrest and imprisonment of Aristide and his associates."

In response to this blatant example of the NCHR's bias, the NLG delegation:

“suggested that NCHR’s neutrality and inclusiveness might be better expressed with additional posters condemning, for example, FRAPH, Jodel Chamblain, Jean ‘Tatoune’ Baptiste,... [i.e., death-squad leaders from the 1991 coup who made a comeback during the 2004 coup] The [NCHR] Director and the staff...laughed at the suggestion of adding other wanted posters to the office.”

The NLG’s report gave several other examples of the NCHR’s anti-Lavalas bias:

* “[M]any of the newsletters, ‘open letters’ and advisories available in the NCHR waiting room refer to Aristide as a ‘dictator’ [but] none of them concern abuses against supporters of the elect-ed government or Lavalas.

* NCHR is a well-funded and equip-ped ‘human rights’ agency that purports to take all cases, regardless of political affiliation, but [its representatives] could not name a single case in which a Lavalas supporter was a victim.

* NCHR was asked if they would investigate the 1000 bodies dumped and buried by the morgue during the last few weeks.... The director and his staff denied knowing about these events, laughed, and said none of it was true.

* NCHR was asked if it would investigate the [40 to 60] dumped bodies at Piste D’Aviation [on March 22, 2004]. The director and his staff laughed and denied it was true. The [NLG] delegation showed NCHR the photos we had taken of the ashes and fresh human skeletons. In response, the NCHR director told us that the General Hospital routinely dumps bodies at the Piste D’Aviation.”⁴²

Later in April 2004, the NLG sent another delegation to Haiti. One of the report’s eight “Unanimous Statements and Recommendations,” was an unequivocal condemnation of the NCHR-Haiti. It stated: “We condemn the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) in Haiti for not maintaining its impartiality as a human rights organization.”⁴³

Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA)

EPICA’s delegation to Haiti (April 18-24, 2004), composed of “a diverse group of scholars, clergy, activists, congress people, economists and researchers,”⁴⁴ met with “a wide range of individuals and organizations” including “trade unionists, international lawyers, Lavalas Party officials, the U.S. embassy, opposition parties, paramilitary leaders like Guy Philippe, and many civilians in hiding.”⁴⁵

Upon their return, the delegation issued an “Urgent Action Alert” asking supporters to:

“denounce the vast number of human rights violations being systematically carried out against Aristide supporters and unionists. Under an illegal occupation and the existence of an illegitimate government, a grave situation of human rights abuses continues. These include massacres, disappearances, summary executions, beatings, mass illegal arrests and political repression.”⁴⁶

EPICA said that “of particular concern” were:

“many accounts of Aristide supporters and unionists who have been disappeared, as well as the great number of people forced into hiding. Since February 29, 2004, these people have

had to flee their homes.... Many had already been victims of political rape and violence perpetrated under the previous coup period of the early 1990s....

“The economic elite, in collusion with the Haitian media, are orchestrating a climate of vigilante justice. The U.S.-led multinational force itself has been implicated in at least two massacres in civilian neighborhoods, and we have heard almost unanimously that Haitians feel betrayed yet again by the international community.”⁴⁷

EPICA Denounces NCHR-Haiti

An EPICA media release in April 2004 had this to say about CIDA’s favourite human rights group in Haiti:

“[T]he National Coalition for Haitian Rights, the leading human rights agency used in Washington policy circles, has refused to answer questions about terror campaigns being waged against civilians and Lavalas supporters.”⁴⁸

A report on the EPICA delegation by team member Reverend Angela Boatright—who represented the U.S. Fellowship of Reconciliation—describes their meeting with NCHR-Haiti executive director Pierre Espérance. She quoted him as saying: “Lavalas people are being arrested for the crimes they committed. Our position is that they deserve to be arrested because they have committed crimes.”⁴⁹

She recounted that Espérance told them “If Lavalas people are in hiding” it was only because “many” had

“participated in crimes or even kidnapping. Many of those in hiding have problems with the judicial system. There is not a systematic repression on the part of authorities[nor] a deliberate attempt to chase away Lavalas.”⁵⁰

Such denials by NCHR-Haiti leadership prompted EPICA to ask their supporters to take this “urgent action”:

“Call Amnesty International...and Human Rights Watch...to demand that their counterparts in Haiti, especially the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) investigate and denounce human rights abuses perpetuated against Lavalas supporters.”⁵¹

An article criticising “Amnesty International” for its heavy reliance on NCHR-Haiti’s biased reports, refers to EPICA’s “urgent action” appeal, saying:

“It was a good suggestion because Pierre Espérance, NCHR’s director, had boasted in 2002 that:

‘I am a primary source of information for international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Most recently, I was invited to address the U.S. State Department in a roundtable forum to discuss the human rights situation in Haiti.’

His statement does not seem to have been much of an exaggeration. During the first four months after the coup, Amnesty failed to call attention to the evidence that a massive assault on Lavalas was well underway.”⁵²

Haiti Accompaniment Project (HAP)

HAP's first human rights delegation to Haiti after the coup (June 29-July 9, 2004):

"coincided with a new wave of repression by the *de facto* Haitian authorities against supporters of the elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas Party.... The level of tension in Port-au-Prince was heightened by two large fires... The fires, apparently arsons, were of unknown origin, but Haitian authorities quickly claimed they were set by the Lavalas sector."53

HAP said that based on their "discussions with human rights workers," there was "widespread agreement" that

"repercussions from this coup [2004] are even worse than what took place after the brutal 1991-1994 coup.... In both instances military force, backed by Haitian elites, overthrew the democratically elected government. In both cases, there were large-scale, politically-motivated murders.... In both cases, paramilitary groups allied with the *de facto* authorities...exercised police, judicial and administrative powers, and brutally repressed dissent. In both periods, people associated with the overthrown government lost jobs, had their homes burned and were forced to leave.... In both periods, the *de facto* government routinely arrested democracy activists...without respect for their legal rights."54

HAP's analysis of the two coups also compared the role of human rights groups, the media and foreign bodies:

"In 1991-1994, independent human rights groups continued to operate within Haiti and had some access to human rights groups around the world. Independent media, at times, was able to project the voice of victims of military rule. International organizations like the UN and OAS invoked their charter mechanisms in support of democracy, insisted on the legitimacy of Haiti's elected government and isolated the *de facto* authorities.

"In the current period [2004], even though the overwhelming majority of Haiti's electorate voted for President Aristide and Lavalas representatives, their voice has been silenced. The Haitian media, mostly controlled by the Haitian elite, has been a consistent voice of the opponents of Aristide. Most...radio stations...are members of the Association of National Media of Haiti, which is...a member of the Group of 184, which helped orchestrate the coup d'état. [T]hese stations are not merely biased in their news coverage...they publicly committed themselves to the overthrow of Haiti's democratic government.

"The U.S. and France have dissuaded the UN and the OAS from even investigating the coup, despite requests from half of the OAS membership and a third of the UN. The international media has largely ignored the massive human rights violations since the coup.

"The U.S., [Canada] and France have been able to construct a multilateral occupation of Haiti under the aegis of the UN.... While this does nothing to change the illegality of the occupation, it gives it an aura of legitimacy.... [T]he UN Military Command works in close coordination with the Haitian National Police, which has already integrated many former military into their ranks. While sending thousands of troops to Haiti, the UN has so far sent only one human rights officer to Haiti."55

The HAP team also received

“numerous reports that the UN military command... coordinates its activities with Guy Philippe, the rebel leader ...responsible for major human rights violations—including assassinations—in the period preceding the coup.”⁵⁶

The kidnapping and forced exile of President Aristide, and the imprisonment of his government’s top elected officials, dramatically show that the foreign-backed coup was a blow to democracy. However, this was only the beginning. The HAP report states that “thousands of democratically elected officials have been effectively removed from office.” To this massive assault on democracy must also be added the fact that “approximately 10,000 state employees”—hired by the Lavalas government—were “fired from their jobs.”⁵⁷

The coup regime’s whole-scale demolition of the Lavalas government, its elected officials and bureaucracy, created immediate economic hardships for tens of thousands of individuals illegally removed from their jobs. However, this strike against democracy also devastated the lives of those dependent upon the Lavalas government’s many social programs. Most severely affected were Haiti’s already-destitute majority. The HAP team’s report cited “clear evidence of an economic campaign against the poor” being waged by Latortue’s coup-appointed dictatorship:

- * “Large land owners accompanied by armed paramilitaries have seized land...given to peasant families...[by Lavalas] Land Reform projects....

- * Residents of...a [Lavalas-government] public housing project, have been evicted.... The UN seized [a new four-story apartment complex] to house its personnel, and the residents were put out on the street....

- * A crackdown on labor unions and peasant associations....

- * The Latortue government...[gave] a tax holiday...to large businesses who suffered losses between December 2003 and March 2004. No state support was offered to the thousands of poor people who have lost their homes or livelihoods due to the coup d’etat....

- * The government...cancelled subsidies for school children and schoolbooks and...ended funding for literacy programs... [C]hildren have been forced out of school because of family affiliation with Lavalas.”⁵⁸

HAP Denounces NCHR-Haiti

HAP’s report also examined the significant role played

by human rights groups that were tied to the dictatorships imposed by the anti-Aristide coups of 1991 and 2004:

“[F]ollowing both coups, many independent human rights workers were threatened and forced underground, while some human rights groups placed their reputations at the service of the dictatorship. In 1991, Jean-Jacques Honorat of the human rights group CHANDEL, became the Cedras military regime’s *de facto* Prime Minister. In 2004, groups like the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR)...and CARLI helped develop support for the coup with exaggerated reports of human rights violations by supporters of the elected government. At the same time, they downplayed or denied the much more massive violations of the *de facto* regime and its paramilitary allies. Both groups continue to ‘denounce’ supporters of the elected government that they claim were involved in human

rights violations. Although these denunciations are not accompanied by proof, they are often accompanied by illegal arrest, incarceration and sometimes the disappearance of the accused. Both NCHR and CARLI are supported by USAID [and CIDA].... They are not independent human rights groups.”

The HAP delegation also met with legitimate human rights groups that had *not* “placed their reputations at the service of the dictatorship.” For instance, the HAP team met with members of Fondasyon Trant Septamn (FTS), the victims advocacy group previously discussed in the Quixote Center’s report. According to HAP, FTS representatives:

“were deeply dismayed that the outside world still looked upon NCHR as a credible independent voice. They told us that NCHR was now working hand-in-hand with the post-coup Minister of Justice [Bernard Gousse] in carrying out illegal arrests and detentions. In several cases, including that of Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, NCHR staff have made accusations without evidence that have led to arrests of Lavalas officials.”⁵⁹

Like the other, independent human rights reports cited above, HAP clearly described the wave of anti-Lavalas repression sparked by Haiti’s 2004 coup, and the failure of NCHR-Haiti to report this violence:

“Fanmi Lavalas has experienced the brunt of repression since the coup. Many leaders have left the country or are in internal exile. Many Lavalas members and supporters have had their homes burned, have lost jobs and have been separated from their families. Activists from around the country face continual threats from police, the former military and political opponents. The Justice Ministry has ordered personal and organizational bank accounts to be frozen, rumors continually circulate about impending trials for corruption and many former officials have been barred from leaving the country, in violation of the constitution. The National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), which has positioned itself among international media as the voice of human rights in Haiti, has refused to condemn this widespread repression against Lavalas.”⁶⁰

The HAP report then details two cases in which high-profile Lavalas figures were imprisoned based on totally-concocted charges. In both cases (Annette Auguste and Yvon Neptune), NCHR-Haiti not only “refused to condemn” the abuse of these political prisoners, it played a “pivotal role” in their arrest and prolonged unlawful imprisonment.

Annette Auguste (So Anne):

On May 10, twenty heavily armed U.S. Marines used explosives to blast their way into the home of this 60-year-old grandmother, a “well-known singer and Lavalas activist”:

“The Marines did not have a warrant, as the Constitution requires, and the operation was implemented in the middle of the night, which is also illegal. During the arrest, eleven other Haitians, including children, were hooded and threatened. After questioning Auguste and all her family members, the Marines turned her over to the Haitian police.

“Ms. Auguste has faced a bewildering series of shifting charges, none of them legally documented. First, she was accused of planning attacks against U.S. Marines. Shortly after her arrest, NCHR made public statements indicating that they had evidence that Auguste was involved in the events of December 5, 2003.... On May 13 [2004], Auguste was taken before a judge who stated that there was no evidence for those charges. Still the

prosecutor...refused to sign her release.”⁶¹

So Anne was not released until in mid-August 2006, when—after 826 days in illegal custody—a judge stated that there was no evidence against her. In a statement made during her imprisonment, So Anne explained that the

“Government prosecutor, Daniel Audain, started criminal prosecution against me because the organization NCHR (National Coalition for Haitian Rights) stated that I was among the people who on December 5, 2003, beat up the rector of the State University.”⁶²

Prime Minister Yvon Neptune:

Aristide’s Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune, was imprisoned by the coup government after being falsely accused by NCHR-Haiti of “masterminding” a “massacre.”⁶³ HAP reported that when they visited him on July 8, 2004, he “had not yet seen a judge... despite the Constitutional requirement” that this be done “within 48 hours.” HAP concluded that there was “no legal justification for his detention” and referred to the “pivotal” role played by NCHR-Haiti in the phony case against him:

“As in the case of [So Anne] Annette Auguste, NCHR appears to have played a pivotal role in the arrest of the Prime Minister. NCHR was the first to claim that 50 people were killed in a ‘massacre’ in St. Marc in February. At that time journalists and human rights workers went to St. Marc and found that, in fact, five or six people had died...most likely due to a clash between two rival groups, Bale Wouze and Ramicos. They did not find the remains of 50 people. Pierre Espérance, the NCHR director in Haiti, publicly stated that the bodies, including the bones, had been eaten by dogs. He has since backtracked on this statement, now claiming that the bodies are hidden.

“The *Agence Haitienne de Presse* reported [July 8, 2004] that a source close to the *de facto* government had privately expressed frustration with NCHR. According to this source, the *de facto* government blames NCHR for embarrassing the government by pushing for Neptune’s arrest and then being unable to substantiate the charges.”⁶⁴

However, the coup regime’s supposed embarrassment by NCHR-Haiti was never serious enough for it to release Neptune, let alone the 1000 other political prisoners experiencing the inhumanity of Haitian jails which a U.S. Court likened to a “scene reminiscent of a slave ship.”⁶⁵

A second HAP delegation to Haiti (July 30-August 16, 2004) uncovered evidence that NCHR-Haiti actively engaged in the interrogation, coercion and bribery of political prisoners. In the case of Roland Dauphin, this effort seemed aimed at securing false testimony against Neptune and others arrested for the alleged “massacre” at La Scierie. These serious “allegations of inappropriate and illegal behavior by [a] human rights organization,”⁶⁶ namely NCHR-Haiti, were published in the second HAP-delegation report.

This report, which states that “NCHR played a role in the interrogation of political prisoners,” includes testimony from several political prisoners who—after being subjected to horrific abuse amounting to torture, including beatings and death threats—were “visited by Marie Yolene Gilles of NCHR...on the pretext of protecting their human rights.”⁶⁷ All three witnesses recounted how this NCHR-Haiti official helped in their brutal interrogation.

Rospide Petion:

Petion, the Lavalas government's head of Airport Security, went into hiding after the coup, but was captured on March 14, 2004, by about 15 members of Haiti's equivalent of a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team. They:

"forced him to the ground, beat him,...put a black sack over his head and demanded \$50,000... At the police station, [*de facto* police chief Leon] Charles interrogated Petion, saying he would be given a chance if he informed authorities where Lavalas members were hiding. Petion replied that he didn't know, whereupon Charles threatened him with prison. Petion protested that he was arrested without a warrant, to which Charles scoffed, 'Aristide is gone now.'.... [H]e was told to speak with a representative of NCHR and the media.... Marie Yolene Gilles, NCHR, then took over the interrogation, saying, 'We know you crashed the radio tower.'"68

Petion was later accused of participating in attacks against anti-Aristide protesters that allegedly occurred on December 5, 2003, at Haiti's State University. However, after spending nine months in prison, Petion finally received a "provisional release" in December 2004. All charges against him were dropped in April 2006, when a judge ruled that there was no evidence of any kind linking Petion to that event.69

Roland Dauphin:

Roland Dauphin, a St. Marc customs worker, was taken to a police jail on March 1, 2004, after being kidnapped by "paramilitary troops" who accused him of "gang affiliation." At the police station, Dauphin saw 150 to 200 armed rebels, including Guy Philippe,70 the leader of the uprising that had provided the pretext for the 2004 coup.

During the next four days, Dauphin was "twice taken from his cell at night for interrogation.... Front members wearing masks...put a hood over his head, cuffed him and drove him around.... He thought they would kill him."

Dauphin faced the torture of mock execution when "he was ordered to get out and lay on the ground. Shots were fired at the ground around his body." His father wasn't so lucky. "While imprisoned, paramilitary forces burned down [Dauphin's] house. His father was inside and died."

Dauphin told HAP's team that Marie Yolene Gilles of NCHR-Haiti "sought him out at the...police station, offering a deal for information." He said she "interrogated" him, and claimed "that they knew he was a member of Balewouze, a pro-Lavalas popular organization." Dauphin said "Gilles offered him an American visa if he would testify that Neptune and Privert were responsible for the alleged massacre at La Scierie."

Dauphin described how Gilles of NCHR-Haiti:

"urged him to implicate the Prime Minister [Neptune] and Minister of the Interior [Privert] in an alleged massacre of Aristide opponents in St. Marc, promising him money and safe haven in the U.S. When he balked,...Gilles made a phone call to show she had the authority to deliver the deal.... Gilles spoke English during the telephone call and identified the other party as a U.S. Embassy official.... The NCHR spokeswoman...then indicated authorities were prepared to release him immediately and secure his safety."71

When Dauphin refused to take the NCHR-Haiti bribe, Gilles "left her business card in case he 'changed his mind.'" Later, Dauphin was accused of involvement in the St. Marc incident

that NCHR-Haiti inflated into a “genocide.” As of July 20, 2007, Dauphin was still being held in prison.⁷²

Amanus Maette:

Amanus Maette, was the Lavalas Party member of parliament for St. Marc, where NCHR-Haiti claimed a genocidal “massacre” had taken place. Maette told HAP that he was taken from his house by

“masked men wearing black uniforms. They cuffed his hands, chained his legs and put a bag over his head. They ...threatened to kill him unless he gave up the names of Lavalas members.... Four hours after his initial arrest,...he was re-cuffed, re-chained, [and] again hooded. Security forces again threatened to kill him for not talking.”⁷³

Details of NCHR’s direct involvement in Maette’s arrest are detailed in a letter to the coup regime’s Minister of Justice and Public Safety from Maette’s lawyer, Mario Joseph, and the leaders of five legitimate human rights groups, including Lovinsky Pierre Antoine and Ronald St. Jean:

“It was on the basis of a mere press release dated March 2, 2004, by the National Coalition for Human Rights..., that the former parliamentarian Amanus Maette was arrested on March 19, 2004 and then interrogated...by one of the executives of NCHR, Marie Yolène Gilles.”⁷⁴

Maette said that “Gilles offered him a...bribe [and] pledged to secure his release, provided he would ‘name names.’”⁷⁵

Although Maette would not “name names,” Gilles did not hesitate. She “went on elite-owned radio to name wanted Lavalas ‘bandits,’ contributing to a climate of anti-Lavalas terror.”⁷⁶ Gilles was highly-regarded by CIDA-funded “NGOs” in Canada that twice flew her to Ottawa and Montreal for media conferences,⁷⁷ to lobby politicians and influence “civil society” in this country.

As with so many other Lavalas-linked political prisoners, Maette’s case also flaunted Haiti’s constitution because he had to wait many months to have his first appearance before a judge. (The Haitian constitution requires this to occur within 48 hours.) Maette was not released until April 24, 2007, more than 37 months after his illegal arrest.⁷⁸

Center for the Study of Human Rights (CSHR)

The CSHR conducted a human rights investigation in Haiti between November 11 and 21, 2004. It met with

“businessmen, grassroots leaders, gang members, victims of human rights violations, lawyers, human rights groups, police, officials from the UN, Haitian and U.S. governments, and conducted observations in poor neighbor-hoods, police stations, prisons, hospitals and...morgue.”⁷⁹

The CSHR report, written by immigration attorney Thomas Griffin, gave a chillingly eloquent account of the human rights catastrophe then underway in Haiti:

“After ten months under an interim government backed by the U.S., Canada and France, and buttressed by a UN force, Haiti’s people churn inside a hurricane of violence....

Nightmarish fear accompanies Haiti's poorest in their struggle to survive in destitution. Gangs, police, irregular soldiers and even UN peacekeepers bring fear. There has been no investment in dialogue to end the violence.

"Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence. Summary executions are a police tactic, and even well-meaning officers treat poor neighborhoods seeking a democratic voice, as enemy territory where they must kill or be killed. Haiti's brutal and disbanded army has returned to join the fray. Suspected dissidents fill the prisons, their constitutional rights ignored. As voices for non-violent change are silenced by arrest, assassination or fear, violent defense becomes a credible option. Mounting evidence suggests that members of Haiti's elite, including political powerbroker Andy Apaid, pay gangs to kill Lavalas supporters and finance the illegal army.

"UN police and soldiers, unable to speak the language of most Haitians [i.e., Creole, not French], are overwhelmed by the firestorm. Unable to communicate with the police, they resort to heavy-handed incursions into the poorest neighborhoods that force intermittent peace at the expense of innocent residents....

"U.S. [and Canadian] officials blame the crisis on armed gangs in poor neighborhoods, not official abuses and atrocities, nor the unconstitutional ouster of the elected president. Their support for the interim government is not surprising, as top officials, including the Minister of Justice, worked for U.S. government projects that undermined their elected predecessors. Coupled with U.S. [and Canadian] government's development-assistance embargo from 2000 to 2004, the projects suggest a disturbing pattern....

"Haitians, especially those living in poor neighborhoods, now struggle against inhuman horror."⁸⁰

CSHR Denounces NCHR-Haiti

The CSHR report also exposed disturbing revelations about NCHR-Haiti's extremely partisan approach to human rights as well as its cosy ties to the U.S. government and to Haiti's ruthlessly violent coup regime.

The CSHR delegation interviewed U.S. Embassy officials who composed their State Department's influential human rights reports on Haiti. These officials "admitted that they do not investigate human rights conditions first hand, and do not visit victims or detainees. They stated that they depend on sources such as NCHR, CARLI [and] the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission [JJLAP]."⁸¹ (The latter two CIDA-funded groups belonged to the elitist Group of 184.⁸²

These U.S. embassy officials also "conceded that the human rights situation" in Haiti was "extremely grave," but—like the NCHR, and other CIDA-funded groups—they laid the blame for this on "armed gangs" of Lavalas supporters in impoverished neighbourhoods and on the fact that "police are not at full strength" to root out and destroy those pro-Aristide gangs. Although they also "acknowledged" that former soldiers of Haiti's dismantled military were "acting as an armed force and are 'particularly troublesome' outside of Port-au-Prince," they did not see their attacks against Aristide supporters as a significant human rights problem. Instead, they "repeatedly emphasized that the major problem was the 'armed gangs' in [the urban "slum" of] Cité Soleil, [and] blamed Aristide for arming them."⁸³

NCHR's entanglement in the day-to-day operations of the coup regime's "Ministry of Justice" was discussed in a CSHR interview with CIDA-employee Philip Vixamar. As Haiti's Deputy Minister of Justice, Vixamar was "confident" in the regime's "exclusive reliance" upon NCHR-Haiti for two crucial, human rights functions.⁸⁴

The first had to do with "arrests, detention and due process." When the CSHR team asked Vixamar about "the current rash of warrantless arrests, and reports that hundreds of prisoners have not appeared before a judge," the CIDA-paid, Haitian official replied that "all prisoners in Haiti are seeing magistrates."⁸⁵ And, although even the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission estimated that there were then "over 700 political prisoners in the capital alone,"⁸⁶ Vixamar "denied that there are any political prisoners in Haiti."⁸⁷

Two others who publicly bucked Haiti's brutal reality with similarly vehement denials were Pierre Espérance, the head of NCHR-Haiti, and Canada's Prime Minister, Paul Martin. Espérance told journalist Anthony Fenton: "I can tell you right now that there are no political prisoners in Haiti."⁸⁸ Martin echoed this lie when he assured the unquestioning media during his mid-November 2004 jaunt to Haiti, that: "There are no political prisoners in Haiti."⁸⁹

CIDA's Vixamar also told the CSHR team that Haiti's "Ministry of Justice is fully confident in its exclusive reliance on human rights group NCHR...to alert it when the Police or the Courts commit human rights abuses."⁹⁰ Although such "exclusive reliance" would not be reassuring to anyone with the faintest knowledge of NCHR-Haiti's track record, it provided sufficient cover for CIDA's purposes.

The dictatorship's, CIDA-funded "Ministry of Justice" also relied solely on NCHR-Haiti for vetting the "integration of former soldiers into the [Haitian National Police] HNP." Assessing the hidden histories of former soldiers was a serious task. Many members of Haiti's dissolved military had flagrantly abused human rights during and after the two anti-Aristide coups (1991 and 2004).

Vixamar, however, was unconcerned with the grave potential for continued violence that was bound to result from the recruitment of former soldiers into the police. He "confirmed that 200 soldiers from the disbanded army had been officially integrated into the Haitian National Police since Aristide's ouster, taking posts throughout the country.... (former soldiers have taken the highest HNP command positions throughout Haiti). 'Many more,' he said, 'are currently training [under RCMP direction] at the Haitian Police Academy.'"

Vixamar then went on to state that he was

"confident that the former soldiers integrated into the HNP are not among those known to have committed human rights and criminal violations while in the Haitian Army, explaining that 'all former militaries are fully vetted by a human rights group' before being allowed into the HNP. When asked which organization conducts the 'vetting,' Vixamar replied 'NCHR.'"⁹¹

Conclusion

The reports of six independent, U.S. human rights organizations that sent investigative teams to Haiti soon after the February 2004 coup, were unanimous in all key aspects of their findings. Each delegation documented overwhelming evidence showing that the members

and supporters of Aristide's elected government and his popular Lavalas party were the primary targets of abuse during and after the coup.

These six organizations were also in agreement that the newly installed, coup regime was directly or indirectly responsible for the broad range of severe abuses and systematic acts of repression being experienced by Lavalas. The police, courts and prisons of the coup regime's so-called "Justice" ministry were blamed for most of these human rights violations. Each report also presented evidence indicating that foreign troops—in Haiti under a UN mandate to protect the coup regime—were also directly or indirectly responsible for serious human rights abuses and were seen by most Haitians as a threat to public security.

The authors of the six independent reports all critiqued NCHR-Haiti for having a fiercely one-sided bias. They all condemned it for refusing to even consider investigating the widespread human rights assaults that were being waged against pro-democracy Lavalas supporters who were suffering the bulk of Haiti's post-coup violence.

NCHR-Haiti was denounced not only for covering up these rampant human rights abuses, but also for actually encouraging Haiti's climate of anti-Aristide hysteria. NCHR-Haiti did this by building a close working relationship with the coup regime and then using unfounded accusations to help the *de facto* authorities to target Lavalas officials and supporters. The coup regime used NCHR-Haiti's baseless allegations to illegally apprehend and detain many people who were later found to be completely innocent.

Perhaps most damning was that several political prisoners who had been tortured, described how an NCHR-Haiti staff person actually participated in their interrogations. This official, Marie Yolene Gilles, tried to intimidate and bribe several abused prisoners into either "naming names," disclosing the hiding places of Lavalas activists or giving testimony against high-profile, elected cabinet ministers from Aristide's government who were also being held illegally as a result of unsubstantiated allegations made by NCHR-Haiti.

It is appalling that despite NCHR-Haiti's abysmal failure as an legitimate human rights organization—or rather, more accurately, as a *direct result* of this utter failure—Haiti's brutal coup-installed regime relied solely upon this group to fulfil the role of human rights watchdog. No human rights group worthy of the name would ever have supported or assisted Haiti's dictatorship. However, NCHR-Haiti did just that. It eagerly accepted CIDA funds and took on a key role in aiding and abetting the regime's reign of terror.

Even with the publication of all the evidence thoroughly documenting NCHR-Haiti's extremely one-sided analysis and its complicity in the coup regime's assault on democracy and human rights, this organization has continued to enjoy the generous patronage of foreign governments, like Canada, the U.S. and France. This unwaivering support, however, is not surprising. These afterall were the very governments that had planned the coup. Furthermore, these governments remained loyal partners of the illegal, undemocratic regime that they had foisted upon Haiti, until it finally lost its grip on power thanks to an election in 2006.

A recurring theme running through all of the critiques of NCHR-Haiti can best be described as their "blame-the-victim" approach to human rights. NCHR-Haiti became so ludicrously fixated on their anti-Aristide philosophy that even when the Lavalas movement was being decimated in a widespread systematic witch hunt, NCHR-Haiti continued to describe Lavalas as if it was main *perpetrator* of human rights abuses. This "blame-the-victim" perspective

was also promoted by the coup regime, the corporate media and several large human rights and aid organizations—both inside and outside Haiti—that received funding from the U.S. and Canadian governments.

Because U.S. and Canadian officials also exhibit an alarming proclivity to blame Haiti's victims for the human rights abuses that they suffer, one might wonder whether this was a kind of confusion resulting from overreliance on groups like NCHR-Haiti. This, however, is a "chicken-or-the-egg" problem. Who is influencing whom? NCHR-Haiti was after all a creature whose genesis and existence resulted from U.S.-, Canadian- and French-government largesse. These governments sought out, hand picked, financially supported and, in effect, created NCHR-Haiti and a host of other supposedly "non-governmental" organizations (NGOs). These NGOs then promulgated malicious, anti-Aristide slander that proved useful to the nefarious designs of their foreign mentors. These governments then appeared to consult NCHR-Haiti, as if it were an independent source of information. This phony consultation process created the convenient illusion that these government's anti-Aristide policies were the result of input from Haiti's grassroots activists.

But it wasn't just foreign governments that teamed up with NCHR-Haiti. Numerous well-respected, CIDA-funded labour, human rights and development groups based in Canada became dependent on NCHR-Haiti for information and adopted its one-sided bias. (The next issue of *Press for Conversion!* will focus on these Canadian NGOs and expose their pivotal role in destabilizing the Aristide government, supporting the Canadian government's role in the regime change and then covering up the human rights atrocities that were committed by the Latortue dictatorship.)⁹²

Although these Canadian groups are engaged in some progressive efforts, they helped undermine Haitian democracy and development by supporting the 2004 coup and by ignoring the human rights disaster that followed. By disseminating virulently anti-Aristide/anti-Lavalas propaganda to their supporters and the Canadian public, these groups did a huge disservice to the poor and struggling people of Haiti for whom they profess to be advocates. And, by uncritically spreading disinformation from NCHR-Haiti, and others, they directly contradicted their ostensible goals of promoting democracy, human rights and development.

As such, these supposedly left-leaning groups were successfully manipulated by the Canadian government into being the ideal harbingers of right-wing policies. One of their main functions then—as far as the government is concerned—was to disseminate information to the public which might be suspect if it were conveyed by government sources. Politicians and government bodies, like parliamentary committees, turned to these servile groups for input and advice as if they were independent non-governmental actors.

Many anti-war, human rights and development activists in Canada would not be surprised to learn that Canada's corporate media and corporate-leaning government would so completely misrepresent the truth about Haiti. However, many activists would likely be surprised to learn that they—or their allies and coworkers in progressive organizations—could be so effectively used to spread dangerous falsehoods about Haiti. These well-meaning Canadian groups, wittingly or not, helped set the stage for and then rationalized a brutal *coup d'état*. They also helped to cover up the atrocities of the coup regime's horrific reign of terror.

This level of Machiavellian trickery may seem hard to believe. How could good Canadian

organizations be so duped? The answer is largely tied to the pivotal role played by NCHR-Haiti and other groups of its ilk in Haiti.

It is relatively easy for governments, like the U.S., Canada and France, to use the financial resources of their international agencies to establish and manipulate what are essentially artificial groups in the countries they have targeted for war or regime change. Such blatantly-partisan groups as NCHR-Haiti, CARLI, CONAP, ENFOFANM, the G184, PAPDA and POHDH, can be paid off to exaggerate or even fabricate events. Their faulty reports, once passed to the media or to well-meaning but naive progressives abroad, can have a powerful effect on moulding public opinion.

When the Canadian government takes part in U.S.-led wars, regime changes or other hard-to-justify military programs, it tries to create the best propaganda smokescreen that it can to get public support. (Sometimes, as was the case with its complicity in “Ballistic Missile Defence” and the Iraq war, the Liberal government was actually successful in manipulating the compliant corporate media, various naive peace groups and many members of the public, into believing that Canada is *not* involved in these unpopular U.S.-led programs, even though it was and is deeply complicit.)

The case of NCHR-Haiti demonstrates that the Canadian government is willing to engage in blatantly deceptive campaigns of propaganda using its forged groups abroad to funnel bogus information and a politically partisan analysis to the Canadian public through domestic media and organizations that are generally perceived to be objective non-governmental sources. And, it provides a clear warning that Canadian groups must be more careful not to become complicit in the government’s efforts to bring public attitudes into line with repressive foreign policies and actions.

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