

Washington Takes Control of Haiti Elections and Reconstruction, Cancels January Run-off

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This week, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced that the second round of dramatically flawed Nov. 28 presidential and parliamentary elections will not be held until at least February, and, given how things are degenerating in the country, it may be even later.

"It will be materially impossible to hold the run-off on Jan. 16, 2011," said the CEP's Director General Pierre-Louis Opont on Jan. 4. He added that "from the date of the publication of the final results of the first round, we will need at least one month to hold the run-off." The CEP was to have published the final results on Dec. 20.

But now, when those final results will be published is anyone's guess, including the CEP's, because Haiti's electoral process effectively has been taken over by the Organization of American States (OAS), which Cuba refers to a "Washington's Ministry of Colonial Affairs."

On Dec. 30, a mission of ten "OAS technical experts" arrived in Haiti and is cloistered reviewing the elections' ballots and tally sheets. "The mission can only be successful if it is allowed to have access to all information to make its own independent assessments," said OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin.

Now, the OAS findings, which are expected possibly next week, will constitute the election's results. In essence, the OAS has usurped the CEP's role as "final arbiter" outlined by Haiti's Constitution and Electoral Law.

But the OAS mission's real purpose is not to sort out technical glitches but to resolve the political stalemate between the presumed top three presidential rivals - former senator and first lady Mirlande Manigat, official Unity party candidate Jude Célestin and pro-coup popular konpa musician Michel Martelly - and find a way to have the Haitian people swallow a vote which is patently fraudulent and flawed, whoever supposedly wins.

"The Organization of American States and UN should not be trying to legitimize a fundamentally illegitimate election," said economist Mark Weisbrot, the co-director of the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR). "If the OAS certifies this election, this would be a political decision." The CEPR has independently recounted and reviewed the CEP's 11,171 tally sheets and found massive irregularities, errors and fraudulent vote totals.

The election was illegitimate not only due to Haitians' widespread disenfranchisement on Nov. 28 but because, a year earlier, exiled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's political party, the Lavalas Family (FL) - Haiti's largest - was excluded from running. The result was that only 23% of Haiti's 4.7 eligible voters, according to the CEP's own figures, went to the

polls, a phenomenally low turn-out from a people denied the right to choose their head of state for three decades under the dictatorial Duvalier dynasty (1957-1986). Some would-be voters reported walking past cholera victims' dead bodies on the street in search of a polling station with their name on the voters' list only to find the name of their neighbor who died in the Jan. 12 earthquake.

The take-over of Haiti's sovereign elections is being denounced not just by Haitians, but by OAS officials themselves. "We are deciding for them," said Brazilian diplomat Ricardo Seitenfus, who was the OAS Ambassador to Haiti, in a BBC interview. "Now we are getting involved in the electoral process. Let Haitian institutions solve their own problems."

A week earlier, Seitenfus was dismissed from his post after telling a Swiss paper that "we want to turn Haiti into a capitalist country, an export platform for the U.S. market, it's absurd." He also criticized the United Nations Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH), as the occupation force is called: "When the level of unemployment is 80%, it is unbearable to deploy a stabilization mission. There is nothing to stabilize and everything to build." UN officials have repeatedly rejected Préval's pleas to turn MINUSTAH's "tanks into bulldozers," even after the earthquake.

"Instead of taking stock, we sent more soldiers," Seitenfus said. "We must build roads, erect dams, participate in the organization of the State, the judicial system. The UN says it has no mandate for that. Its mandate in Haiti is to keep the peace of the cemetery."

Meanwhile, 12 Haitian board members of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC) - a 26 member body already dominated by foreign banks and foreign governments that decides where to spend the billions slowly being donated to Haiti's reconstruction - presented a letter of protest to IHRC co-chairman Bill Clinton at the commission's latest meeting on Dec. 14 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

The Haitians complained of being "completely disconnected from the activities of the IHRC," provided no background information on the projects they are supposed to fund, and given "time neither to read, nor analyze, nor understand - and much less respond intelligently - to projects submitted" the day before they're voted on. There is no follow up on previously approved millions, and they "don't even know the names of the consultants who work for the IHRC nor their respective tasks," the 12 fumed.

They concluded that "in reality, Haitians members of the board have one role: to endorse the decisions made by the Executive Director and Executive Committee."

The IHRC's Executive Director they denounced was Gabriel Verret, a long-time U.S. State Department employee at USAID as well as a U.S. informant inside President René Préval's inner circle. "'Préval appears not to trust his advisers or ministers to make key decisions, or even to implement key decisions," former U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson wrote in a Mar. 7, 2007 an Embassy cable made public last month by WikiLeaks. "The most recent account of the council of ministers meetings provided by Gabriel Verret to the Ambassador describes Préval going through the action items of each ministry and demanding status reports."

Verret, who according to Sanderson was "both a trusted confidante and influential policy advisor" to Préval, is the third fiddle on the IHRC Executive Committee with Clinton and the other IHRC co-chair, Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive.

So the fig leaf barely hiding Washington's heavy hand on Haiti's rudder has fallen away in

the last month as both the foreign-controlled reconstruction and election have foundered.

As the Jan. 12 anniversary of the earthquake arrives next week, Haitians everywhere are calling louder than ever for an end to foreign meddling. "Since 2004 [when the U.S., France, and Canada backed a coup, occupied Haiti, then turned over the mission to the UN], the new colonists have painted the face of us who are Haitian with the mud of humiliation," wrote Aristide in his traditional year-end long letter-poem to the Haitian people on Dec. 21. "Up until now, the minority which excluded the majority cannot admit that it made a big mistake by accepting to saw off the branch that it was sitting on."

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