

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 36/007/2004 (Public)  
News Service No: 36  
18 February 2004

## **Haiti: preparations for possible refugee outflows underway as human rights abusers lead armed rebel forces**

The joining of notorious perpetrator of human rights violations Louis Jodel Chamblain and his followers with armed rebels accused of past abuses in the Central Plateau would create another devastating threat to respect for human rights in Haiti, Amnesty International said today.

Over the last two days former paramilitary leader Louis Jodel Chamblain, convicted of involvement in the assassination of a prominent pro-democracy activist ten years ago, has led a group of former soldiers from Haiti's disbanded military in attacks in the Central Plateau. Other attacks by alleged former soldiers in the area, such as the July 2003 ambush and killing of four Ministry of the Interior employees, have previously been denounced by Amnesty International as human rights abuses.

"As rebel forces, under leadership of convicted perpetrators of human rights violations, expand their control in the centre and north of the country, and the population of conflicted areas is cut off from supplies of food and medicines, fears of a mass population outflow from Haiti are bound to increase," Amnesty International stressed.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has offered to help neighbouring countries in forming contingency plans for a mass exodus of Haitians.

Authorities of the neighbouring Dominican Republic have reportedly closed border crossing points in affected areas.

United States officials have said that the US is considering setting up a camp within the US military base at Guantánamo Bay to temporarily house Haitians intercepted while trying to flee the country by boat for the US.

"Given the precedent of a dozen years ago, in which Haitians were interdicted on the high seas by US forces, transferred to Guantánamo Bay and subjected to inadequate screening procedures for asylum claims, there is a real risk of violations of the rights of asylum seekers in the event of a mass outflow from Haiti," Amnesty International said.

"US authorities, and those of other nearby countries, must ensure that they meet their obligations under international refugee law as they plan for a possible mass outflow from Haiti, so that no breaches of their duty towards fleeing Haitians occur."

## **Background Information**

In September 1995 Louis Jodel Chamblain was among seven senior military and paramilitary leaders convicted *in absentia* and sentenced to forced labour for life for involvement in the September 1993 extrajudicial execution of Antoine Izméry, a well-known pro-democracy activist. Chamblain had gone into exile to avoid prosecution.

Antoine Izméry was gunned down in the Church of the Sacred Heart in Port-au-Prince on 11 September 1993, while attending mass. The mass was being held to commemorate the fifth anniversary of a massacre committed during an attack on Jean Bertrand Aristide, then a parish priest, on 11 September 1988 at the St. Jean Bosco Church in La Saline, a shanty town on the outskirts of the capital.

Chamblain has reportedly joined forces with the leaders of the armed opposition based in Gonaïves. Another of the leaders, Jean Pierre Baptiste, alias "Jean Tatoune", is also a former paramilitary leader who was sentenced to forced labour for life for participation in the 1994 Raboteau massacre.

Louis Jodel Chamblain and Jean Tatoune both belonged to the paramilitary organisation FRAPH, formed by military authorities who were the de facto leaders of the country following the 1991 coup against then-President Aristide. FRAPH members were responsible for numerous human rights violations before the 1994 restoration of democratic governance.

After the 5 February attack in the Artibonite town of Gonaïves, unrest spread to nearly a dozen towns in the center and north of Haiti. Concerns are increasing about the humanitarian situation in the towns under control of anti-government forces and other areas cut off by the conflict.

Reports emerging on the 16 February rebel attack on Hinche, capital of the Central Plateau department, indicate that former soldiers were among the uniformed assailants who took control of the town under the leadership of Chamblain. The police commissioner and two others were reportedly killed by the attackers, while other police officers fled. Rebels burned the police station and freed the inmates of the local prison in Hinche, and are also said to have burned police stations in the nearby towns of Maïssade and Pandiassou.

**For more information, please see: "Haiti: Abuse of human rights: political violence as the 200th anniversary of independence approaches",**  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR360072003>

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