

February 7, 2006

[Public letter to The Toronto Star concerning its reporting on Haiti]

Michael Goldbloom, Publisher
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Dear Sir:

Greetings. We write in response to the Toronto Star February 3rd editorial (included below).

Beyond our work channeling funds to community based development, enviro- and human rights projects in Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras and Chiapas, Rights Action educates about how North American governments and economic interests often contribute directly to the poverty, enviro-destruction, human rights violations and impunity in these countries.

There is no better example than Haiti.

Your editorial states that Canada and the U.S. did nothing as President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was hounded into exile. This is not true, and there are other mis-leading statements in this editorial.

Canada was actively involved - in concert with the U.S., France and violent, undemocratic sectors in Haiti - in efforts to politically, militarily and economically weaken the government of Aristide from 2000 to 2004. After the 2004 coup, Canada has taken a lead role in legitimizing and propping up the illegal and repressive interim government.

In a piece published in the Toronto Star Entertainment (!) section, Antonia Zerbisias (We turned our back on Haiti: Canada is complicit in region's troubles, Jan. 31, 2006) writes:

There appears to be blood all over Canada's hands: first because it was on board for the removal of Aristide and second because it is supporting, both politically and financially, an illegitimate government that appears dead set on violently crushing any opposition.

Importantly, Zerbisias references Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor, a book just written by Canadian authors Yves Engler and Anthony

Fenton (<http://www.turning.ca/haiti.htm>) that documents Canada's complicity, from supporting anti-Aristide NGOs in Haiti and Canada (with public funds), to supporting the illegal cutting off of international development funds from the Inter-American Development Bank, to Canada's extensive post-coup work.

The Toronto Star ñ along with all mainstream Canadian media as far as we know ñ has mis-represented issues related to Haiti. Actions of the Canadian government along with media mis-reporting contribute directly to a perpetuation of the political crimes, human rights violations and suffering of the Haitian majority.

We recommend that the Toronto Star open a public investigation into your coverage of the terrible situation in Haiti. We recommend that the Toronto Star ñ as an editorial position - call for a public inquiry into the actions of the Canadian government that have contributed to such terrible suffering.

Upon request, we can provide you with a long list of media and Haiti experts that could help the Toronto Star clearly understand these issues of life and death in Haiti.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Grahame Russell, Rights Action, 416-654-2074, info@rightsaction.org

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EDITORIAL: CANADA MUST AID HAITI'S DEMOCRATS

The Toronto Star, Feb. 3, 2006. 01:00 AM

Canada betrayed Haiti's democrats two years ago, and we were not alone. The United States also did nothing as President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a democratically elected populist, was hounded into exile by murderous thugs. Meanwhile, Haiti's small but rich elite cheered, along with U.S. Republicans. And France was equally complicit.

A few hundred U.S. Marines, Canadian commandos and French legionnaires could have saved Aristide, and democracy, in 2004. Instead, the self-styled "Friends of Haiti" stood back and watched.

Stephen Harper will have a chance to make amends for Canada's disgraceful performance soon after he is sworn in Monday as prime minister. The very next day, Haitians elect a new president and parliament.

Ottawa is sending 106 observers to show that Canada stands for "freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and compassion for

the less fortunate in all parts of the world," as Harper put it this week.

Apart from watching Haitians vote, Ottawa can also help by supporting front-running candidate René PrÉval or whoever else is elected, assuming the vote is credible and the new president tries to mend old wounds. In addition, Harper can increase aid to Haiti. Currently, Ottawa is donating \$180 million over two years. The extra money can be used to strengthen public administration, the courts, the police and services for the needy.

Haiti, a country of 8.5 million, is the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Its people eat argile, patties made of sugar and clay, to ease their hunger pangs. Canada, a rich nation and home to 150,000 Haitians, can afford to offer more than \$10 a year in per capita aid.

Harper can also beef up the contingent of 125 Canadian police who are in Haiti helping to train local police. He should also be prepared to deploy troops to help the United Nations assist the new regime in establishing its credibility. The UN now has 9,000 troops there.

There is no guarantee PrÉval will win an absolute majority in the first round of balloting. But he is the most attractive candidate in a field of 35 that includes unsavoury figures like Guy Philippe, who led the 2004 coup, former death squad chief Louis-Jodel Chamblain, and FranÁois "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

PrÉval, a moderate, is a former president and a protege of Aristide. "We have to put an end to violence and instability of every kind, to let Haitians get on peacefully with their lives and to encourage investment," PrÉval said this week. "The rich are cloistered in their walled villas. And the poor are crammed into slums and own nothing. The gap is too big."

There is support in Haiti for his view. Crowds marched in Port-au-Prince's most anarchic slum this week, chanting "PrÉval is freedom for CitÈ Soleil." At least he inspires hope.

While in office, Aristide proved a cruel disappointment. He is a fiery populist who fanned rich-poor tension, relied on gangs and tolerated corruption. But the unelected Haitian elite who chased him from office, with the approval and support of U.S. Republicans, was no better.

By doing more to help Haiti's poorest, Harper can signal Canada's engagement across the hemisphere, promoting democracy, good governance and social justice, at a time of rising tension. New leaders and movements in Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Mexico are challenging U.S. unilateralism and economic policies that widen

the rich-poor gap. Canada must promote understanding, and co-operation.

PrÈval wants the UN troops to remain indefinitely. He wants quick delivery of the \$1.3 billion in aid Haiti has been promised. He seeks to reform Haiti's predatory political culture that encourages small groups to chase power, solely to enrich themselves. He wants to build up the police, to reform the judiciary and to create jobs by repairing schools, health care, roads and water lines. He will try to get the rich and poor talking.

This is an agenda that Harper can endorse.

There is no guarantee of success. Haiti's history has been a vicious struggle over meagre spoils. But PrÈval and like-minded moderates need Canada's help. This time, we should deliver.

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WHAT TO DO:

Please re-distribute, re-publish this information. If you want on-off this elist: info@rightsaction.org.

- Please get involved in education and activism work in your home community.

Repression, enviro-destruction and poverty in Haiti are caused directly and indirectly by the actions of the governments of the U.S. and Canada, as well as our companies and 'development' institutions;

- Send your own letters of concern and denunciation to your own politicians and media;

- Consider coming to Haiti on an educational delegation;

- Consider making a tax-charitable donation for community development, enviro- and human rights organizations in Haiti.

Rights Action is a development, enviro- and human rights organization, with its main office in Guatemala. We channel your tax-deductible donations to over 50 community development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala, Chiapas, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti. We carry out education & activist work in the USA and Canada about global human rights, environment and development issues.
www.rightsaction.org, info@rightsaction.org