

Haiti Needs Free and Fair Elections!

November 28 Election is Exclusionary and a Violation of Democratic Rights

Statement of the Canada Haiti Action Network

October 22, 2010

The Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN) is once again expressing its grave concerns about exclusionary elections in Haiti.ⁱ It joins with the many Haitians as well as human rights organizations in Haiti and abroad in condemning these elections as serving the interests of Haiti's wealthy elite and the foreign powers that have dominated Haiti's past and present.

A national election for president and legislature has been called for November 28. While the focus of international media has been the candidacy of popular hip-hop artist Wyclef Jean and his exclusion from the ballot, the arbitrary exclusion of the candidates of Fanmi Lavalas is of much greater concern. It is the largest and most representative party in Haiti.

This is the third time in the past year that Fanmi Lavalas has been formally excluded from elections in Haiti. The party was excluded from the two-round, partial senate election held in April and June 2009 and from the presidential and legislative election scheduled for late February 2010, cancelled after the devastating January 12 earthquake. Voter turnout in April/June 2009 was less than five per cent.

Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) has provided no credible justification for refusing to register Fanmi Lavalas in the upcoming election. The body is widely regarded as a biased tool of President René Préval and the foreign powers that back him.

Recent protests outside the offices of the CEP and the U.S. and French embassies demonstrate Haitian popular resistance to ongoing international interference in Haiti's sovereignty. Many Haitians disparage the upcoming elections as 'selections.'ⁱⁱ

The push for elections in Haiti is coming from the international powers that sponsored and assisted the overthrow of the elected government and presidency of Jean Bertrand Aristide in 2004. It is a part of the sweatshop labour model for Haiti's future development being touted by Haiti's elite, foreign governments and Bill Clinton and other representatives of UN agencies and international financial institutions. Canada announced on October 5 that it would fund the elections to the tune of \$5.8 million.

As Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon put it last May, "The sooner we have political stability, the sooner we're going to be able to get economic stability and growth in that country." "Political stability" for Haiti is imperial doublespeak for policies that deny social justice and political sovereignty to the poor and oppressed people of that country.ⁱⁱⁱ

Fanmi Lavalas leader Maryse Narcisse recently told the IPS news service, "For us, this isn't just the exclusion of Fanmi Lavalas... What they want to exclude is the majority, the people."

She says that Fanmi Lavalas will not participate in the election. "For us this is a selection, not an election."

As U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Walters and 44 other representatives recently wrote in an open letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Haiti's next government will be called upon to make difficult decisions in the reconstruction process that will have a lasting impact on Haitian society, such as land reform and allocation of reconstruction projects among urban and rural areas. Conferring these decisions on a government perceived as illegitimate is a recipe for disaster."

Fanmi Lavalas and its presidential candidate, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, won an overwhelming victory in the 2000 national election. In February 2004, President Aristide and the Haitian legislature and senate were overthrown in a coup d'état backed by U.S., French, and Canadian armed forces.^{iv}

The Canada Haiti Action Network calls on the Canadian government to end its support for the sham election of November 28. It must cease its ongoing interference in Haitian sovereignty, which only results in disenfranchising Haiti's poor majority. Suppression of popular dissent by UN and other foreign forces or foreign-funded Haitian police agencies must stop.

We urge members of Parliament and Canada's local and national media to speak out for democracy and national sovereignty for Haiti. No meaningful recovery from the earthquake can take place without the fullest democracy, including popular participation in decision making. Much more Canadian government resources are required for earthquake relief and reconstruction. None should go to continued interference in Haiti's political affairs.

Signed, the following member committees of the Canada Haiti Action Network:

Haiti Action Montreal
Toronto Haiti Action Committee
Winnipeg Haiti Action Committee
Haiti Solidarity BC (Vancouver)

To contact the Canada Haiti Action Network: canadahaiti@gmail.com, or Roger Annis at 778 858 5179 or Niraj Joshi at 416 731 2325.

Please voice your concern to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada. See a suggested letter of concern here:

<http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/statements><http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/statements>

ⁱ See CHAN statements: April 16, 2009, 'Haiti's Unfair Elections' and December 28, 2009, <http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/node/158>; and 'Haiti: Flawed election in the making', <http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/node/66>

ⁱⁱ For background on recent elections in Haiti: <http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/content/haitis-election-unfair-and-undemocratic>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2010/05/21/mtl-cannon-haiti-elections.html#ixzz11WQeCr8c>

^{iv} See Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood* (Verso Books, 2008)