

Haiti reinstated by Caricom

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana - (AP) -- A Caribbean regional group has lifted its 28-month suspension of Haiti in response to the country's return to democratic rule after elections earlier this year.

The 15-member Caribbean Community suspended Haiti's membership shortly after former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled in 2004 after a bloody revolt.

The group refused to recognize a U.S.-backed interim government, calling it unconstitutional.

Caricom had said it would reinstate Haiti if February's presidential and parliamentary elections were deemed free and fair. Haitians elected René Préval, an agronomist and former Haitian president, as their leader.

"Heads of government wish to congratulate the people of Haiti who, through their patience, resolve and courage, demonstrated their attachment to the democratic process," the Guyana-based secretariat said in a statement late Tuesday.

Preval will make a speech at Caricom's annual conference in St. Kitts in July. On Tuesday, Préval named a coalition government in a bid to unite the impoverished nation. Haiti's Parliament must approve the Cabinet in a vote due to be completed Wednesday.