

# Human rights failures of Haiti transition detailed

## An independent Haitian group's report criticized Haiti's former U.S.-backed interim government on human rights.

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From the prolonged jailing of thousands of Haitians to the nearly 2,000 killed under its watch, the U.S.-backed interim government that led the country following the 2004 ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide failed to protect the rights of the country's people, according to a report Tuesday.

"Even if it is true that this government did not commit crimes of a political character like the former regime, one is forced to admit that it failed in its obligation to protect the rights of everyone," the Port-au-Prince-based National Human Rights Defense Network said in the report.

The independent group's report examines the situation in Haiti following Aristide's ouster amid a bloody rebellion to June 2006, when the country's newly elected legislature swore in new cabinet ministers.

The report points out that during the two years interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a Boca Raton resident, and interim President Boniface Alexandre governed Haiti, hundreds of Haitians were jailed, close to 2,000 were killed in "assassinations" and the country experienced a rash of kidnappings and rapes.

"The general human rights situation under the administration of the transitional government was catastrophic," the report says.

Latortue, contacted by The Miami Herald, said he would not comment on the report but added, "This government never attacked a political leader or the press, but they never mention that."

Latortue was appointed in March 2004 and promised to return security to the troubled Caribbean nation, revamp a police force that had just about collapsed and reconcile the country's bitterly divided political factions.

"They didn't do anything to improve the situation," said Pierre Esperance, executive director of the human rights group. "They were implicated in the corruption, too."

Before leaving office, Latortue announced a broad probe into allegations of official corruption. At one point, several judges were placed under investigation for allegedly accepting thousands of dollars in bribes to grant bail to jailed kidnapping suspects.

The investigation into the interim government continues amid promises by President René Préal to tackle corruption. A group in the legislature is investigating the ministry of foreign affairs, and the High Court of Accounts and Administrative Disputes is also conducting probes.