

U.N. Peacekeepers Raid Slum in Haiti

Battle Rages as Troops Track Gang Boss

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb. 9 -- U.N. troops fought a block-by-block gun battle with gangs in one of this capital's notorious slums Friday, in the force's largest offensive since being deployed here in 2004.

At least two U.N. soldiers and six gang members were injured in heavy fighting that sent the loud clap of automatic weapons fire into the air above Cite Soleil, where poverty is rampant and canals serve as open sewers. By late afternoon, the 700-member U.N. force had seized control of a large section of the slum but failed to capture the main target of the raid, a powerful gang boss known as "Evens."

Evens is said to run a kidnapping and extortion empire in Cite Soleil. U.N. officials suspect him of being a cannibal and say he earned the nickname "Little Knife" because he carves the bodies of his victims, according to Edmond Mulet, head of the U.N. mission in Haiti. Mulet said Evens is also suspected of killing cats in ritualized voodoo ceremonies because he considers them bad luck.

"He's a psychopath," Mulet said in an interview Friday at the heavily guarded Hotel Christopher, which now serves as U.N. headquarters in Port-au-Prince.

U.N. troops spent much of Friday trying to corner Evens in the twisting streets of Cite Soleil, where he and other gang leaders are known both for terrorizing residents and for doling out the social services that Haiti's barely functioning government cannot provide. U.N. troops monitored Evens's calls on multiple cellphones, cutting off service each time they intercepted a call in hopes of isolating him.

At times it appeared that Evens was trying to talk his way out. In the afternoon, a man believed to be Evens was on a Port-au-Prince radio station offering to give up his weapons. He also attempted to reach authorities but was given only two options: "Surrender or surrender," Mulet said.

"I don't want to kill him," the U.N. mission chief added. "I just want him to give up, surrender and face justice."

Haiti has a notoriously corrupt and dysfunctional justice system. But Mulet said a special team of prosecutors and judges has been identified by the year-old administration of President René Préval to handle high-profile cases. Préval was elected in February 2006 after foreign diplomats negotiated a settlement to avert a runoff and end days of protest. Préval replaced the interim government that struggled to rule Haiti after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was toppled in 2004 and flown into exile on a U.S. plane.

U.N. forces provide much of the law enforcement for the country, and oversee elections and many basic services. The United Nations maintains a 9,000-member force made up of troops and police from 13 countries, with the largest contributions from [Brazil](#) and Uruguay.

After initially trying to negotiate with gang members, Préval has agreed to support an expanded military force. The United Nations has conducted a series of raids since mid-December, when a sharp increase in kidnappings sent panic through Port-au-Prince.

The threat of kidnapping is a daily concern for both poor and wealthy Haitians. On Friday, a Haitian American missionary, Nathan Jean-Dieudonne, was released five days after being kidnapped in Croix-de-Bouquets, a town outside Port-au-Prince.

U.N. officials believe Evens primarily finances his criminal organization with ransoms, which can range from \$50 for a street vendor to tens of thousands of dollars for working professionals. Gang leaders also frequently force workers to turn over a portion of their earnings. In return, gangs dole out food and money to cement support from the poor.

As U.N. troops sealed off entrances to Cite Soleil on Friday, residents clustered on the outskirts, waiting hours to return to their homes. Soldiers searched women leaving the slums with baskets of fruit balanced on their heads. Some residents applauded the raid; others, stoked by radio commentators who want the U.N. force out of Haiti, railed against it.

Most just wanted to get home as the operation, which began at 3 a.m., stretched into the late afternoon. As night fell, the fighting subsided, but U.N. forces remained stationed in Cite Soleil.

Earlier in the day, Miken Gay, a 45-year-old resident of the slum, tried to escape the sun by hunching beneath the wooden cart he and seven friends were using to haul the frame of an abandoned car that they hoped to sell as scrap metal.

"We want the gangs out of Cite Soleil," Gay said. "But I'm tired. I've been here all day."

Just a few days ago Gay was walking down the same street, he said, with a pocket full of cash, a rare payday of about \$3 after selling a stack of scavenged metal. A gang member he knew greeted him by leveling a revolver at his head.

The man with the gun didn't have to say a word. Gay handed over the money and walked away.