



## Ambassador Noriega's Remarks to the Organization of American States

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*As Prepared for Delivery*

Mr. Chairman. Mr. Acting Secretary General. Ambassadors and friends. Thank you for the opportunity to report on measures by my government to contribute to the return to stability, the consolidation of democracy, and the recovery of economic opportunity in Haiti. It's appropriate that my delegation report to this body because the OAS continues to play a central role in this worthy effort.

On December 1, I accompanied U.S. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell on a brief but critical visit to Haiti. We were in a position to measure for ourselves both the achievements of and the challenges facing the Interim Government of Haiti as it seeks to jumpstart the economy, provide basic security, and prepare for democratic elections in 2005.

Secretary Powell knows Haiti well and has visited many times, as have I. Achieving progress there has been challenging and, at times, frustrating, but the U.S. commitment to Haiti is steadfast. As Secretary Powell told Prime Minister Latortue on December 1 in Port-au-Prince: "I have again come to Haiti to demonstrate that the United States is ready to support bringing democracy, prosperity, and, most of all, hope to the people of Haiti."



Today, the international community is demonstrating this tangible commitment through the OAS and the United Nations. The UN mission, ably led by South American soldiers and diplomats, is making steady progress in helping the Haitian authorities meet the daunting political, economic, and security challenges.

Today, I'd like to briefly review what my government has been doing to help Haiti and provide our perspective on the current situation there.

Let's make no mistake about it: 2004 was a difficult year in Haiti. Under former President Aristide, despite massive sums of international aid, Haiti sank into despair and anarchy. Haiti's troubles didn't end after Aristide's resignation and departure, however. Aristide bequeathed the Interim Government a country whose institutions had been corrupted, its treasury looted, and its police politicized.

In the months that have followed, the Interim Government has sought to re-establish security and the rule of law, even as the country was hit by several severe tropical storms, saw resurgent violence by thugs loyal to the former president, and, finally, suffered the disaster in Gonaives, which left thousands dead and many, many more homeless.

### **Support for the Interim Government of Haiti (IGOH)**

The international community has played a critical role this year in bolstering the Interim Government's ability to weather these challenges. The United States has done its part, pledging \$38 million for disaster relief this past year, in addition to the \$230 million we pledged at the World Bank Donors' Conference earlier this year.

Though making assistance available is important, we recognize it is only the first step in returning Haiti to the path of stability and prosperity. The political support of the international community is just as essential. Some of the governments represented here are among those who have demonstrated their leadership in helping the Haitian people with more than mere words.

Secretary Powell has reiterated our view of the essential need in Haiti for justice, respect of the rule of law, and the recognition and respect of the human rights of all people. Our assistance to Haiti has focused on these needs and we will stand with the Interim Government to assure these needs are met.

The Interim Government is relying on brittle institutions that have been undermined by a decade of misrule. But the Interim leadership must make good on its essential tasks of providing security, preparing for elections, and defending the human rights of all Haitians.

The Interim Government must demonstrate through word and deed that Haitians from all walks of life and political persuasions will have a role to play in the political and economic life of the country. And it must obligate itself to provide due process to any Haitian detained on whatever charge. I believe that every member state in the OAS can and should support the Interim Government in these efforts. And, when a democratically elected government is in place, we are prepared to continue to work with a government freely chosen by the Haitian people.

The United States is well aware of the long-term needs of the Haitian people. We are still at the beginning of a journey that we do not know how long will last, but to again quote Secretary Powell, "We will be with you all the way."

### **Need for an Inclusive National Dialogue**

During his visit Secretary Powell also spoke with Haitian authorities and civil society leaders about the need for a broad national dialogue in Haiti. And, he urged all peace-loving Haitians to participate in the effort. We understand that the Interim Government, with the support of the UN, plans to convoke such a dialogue next month.

We believe that any party that accepts democratic principles and rejects the path of violence should have a place at the table.

### **MINUSTAH and Security**

Mr. Chairman, the harsh reality is that you cannot pay anyone in this Hemisphere less than you can pay a poor Haitian for an honest day's work. But we do not see investors rushing there. Indeed, in the past decade, we have seen capital fleeing Haiti because of the near absolute absence of the rule of law to protect property and personal security. Therefore, UN's work to establish the rule of law is an essential part of any strategy for the economic recovery of Haiti.

The UN Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH)--under the able command of Brazilian General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro and comprised in part of troops from OAS member states Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay--demonstrates the commitment of the Western Hemisphere to peace and stability in Haiti. We are proud to work alongside these countries that have extended a helping hand to a less fortunate neighbor.

MINUSTAH demonstrated it has the will and the resources to deliver security to the Haitian people, consistent with its mandate.

Yesterday, MINUSTAH began an operation to curb gang activity and apply the rule of law in Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil neighborhood.

Mr. Chairman, Cité Soleil is a desperately poor slum area, notorious worldwide because of its gang violence. But it also is a place that many Haitians call home. And it is for the benefit and the security of the vast majority of decent Haitians that MINUSTAH is seeking to impose the law upon those thugs who wield violence as a political weapon and rely on criminality as a way of life.

I met with the Secretary General's Special Representative Ambassador Juan Gabriel Valdés yesterday morning, and I was again impressed by his tireless resolve, creativity, and commitment to help the interim government and people of Haiti to build a better future.

Ambassador Valdez and General Heleno also know that in order to do their work, essential economic assistance to give people hope must flow in as MINUSTAH imposes stability. Security and economic recovery are equally critical and mutually reinforcing.

#### **Status of Election Planning**

My government is pleased to support the work of the OAS and the UN in helping Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, or CEP, to prepare for elections. There is no task more important before the international community and the Interim Government than guaranteeing the opportunity for Haitians to participate in robust and peaceful campaigns and credible and inclusive elections during the coming year.

Indeed, the Interim Government will perform its greatest service when it hands over power to leaders duly elected by the Haitian people.

Overcoming its initial difficulties, the CEP has circulated for public comment an election decree laying out the parameters for the process. The Council will formalize these rules within a few weeks. And, we expect that an ambitious elections calendar will be approved soon.

The United States is among those countries contributing generously to this effort through the OAS. Ambassador Valdez told me yesterday that additional contributions will be required to fully implement these elections, and we hope that others will contribute financially to this essential task.

#### **Foreign Assistance: Accelerating Disbursement**

The overwhelming support shown by the international community at the World Bank Donors' Conference last July served as a concrete symbol of the international community's ongoing commitment to help the Haitian people. More than \$1.3 billion was pledged to help Haiti.

It is important to remember, however, that pledges alone will not improve conditions in Haiti. We must work to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles in each of our governments and institutions to release the funds that were pledged at the Conference.

This is a complex challenge. On the part of the international community, including my own government, it requires maximum flexibility and teamwork. Because of the institutional weaknesses within the Interim Government and the high priority on accountability, these funds are not moving as quickly as they should.

I am pleased to note that the Core Group is meeting at the World Bank today, with the participation of an Interim Government representative, to explore these issues further. We will be consulting with all donors and Haitian authorities to find fixes to get effective aid programs up and running as quickly as possible.

#### **Haiti in the Regional Context**

As Secretary Powell and I have often repeated, Haiti should be a priority for its neighbors. We have asked the Hemisphere to stand with the Haitian people and help them move beyond their conflicted past.

I look to Haiti's future with great optimism, because I know that the international community stands willing and able to help Haitians get the honest leadership and good government that they have always deserved but rarely had.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

