

HAITI - The disappearance of Lovinsky Pierre Antoine

Roger Annis, ZNET

Wednesday 17 October 2007, posted by [Dial](#)

Vancouver, Canada, September 19, 2007 - On August 12, one of Haiti's best-known and respected advocates of human and social rights, Lovinsky Pierre Antoine, disappeared. The Haitian National Police later confirmed that he was kidnapped.

There has been no communication with alleged kidnappers since the early days of his disappearance. As the silence continues, it seems increasingly evident that his disappearance is a political act, that is, some among the Haitian elite and its foreign backers have decided to silence Lovinsky. If true, the implications for democracy and political rights in Haiti are very disturbing.

Lovinsky was working as an adviser to an August 5 to 18 human rights investigative delegation to Haiti when he was kidnapped. I was a member of that delegation. He disappeared at the end of a day of activity of our delegation. On August 15, I and another Canadian member of the delegation visited the Canadian embassy to urge Canadian ambassador Claude Boucher to make a public statement of concern about Lovinsky's disappearance. That request was refused by the embassy, and it has made no such statement to date. This is unacceptable.

Haiti is living through an unprecedented economic and social calamity. Everything is in decline. Basic human and social rights such as jobs, clean water, health care and education, and reliable electrical service are unavailable to most Haitians. Garbage and sewage disposal is a luxury that only a small minority enjoy.

It has been three and a half years since a right-wing rebellion and foreign military intervention shattered Haiti's democracy and its social and civil infrastructure. The country has not recovered from the two-year regime of human rights violations that followed the overthrow of the country's president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, and other elected institutions on February 29, 2004.

The presidential election of February 2006 opened political space for the people to recoup and reorganize. But that space may now be closing. None of the country's pressing social and economic needs are being tackled, the horrendous conditions in the prisons remains largely unchanged, and the new government has embarked upon an ambitious program of privatisation and layoff of workers in the remaining public institutions.

There is a growing clamour in Haiti for a sharp shift in government and occupation policy, away from a regime of foreign police and military occupation, and toward a regime of road building, economic investment, and creation of social programs. President René Préval voiced some of that concern on August 1 when he told the visiting Secretary-General of the United Nations that the institution needed to "reinvent" its presence in Haiti and make a sharp shift of resources towards economic and social programs.

Lovinsky Pierre Antoine is a vital and important voice in the growing movement of the Haitian people for change. His September 30 Foundation campaigns to win the release of the hundreds of political prisoners still being detained from the time of the illegal, 2004-06 "interim government." It campaigns for the rights of the estimated 4,000 common prisoners, many of whom are imprisoned in violation of the country's constitution and legal code. The Foundation issued a stark public challenge to the United Nations

authority in late July at the time of the first visit to Haiti of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: help us build a country of prosperity, or you're not welcome in Haiti.

Let's open up the newspapers and airwaves across Canada and Quebec to reports on the situation in Haiti and to critical examination of Canada's role there. It is important that a vigorous, public debate on Lovinsky's fate take place. A fine article has appeared in the current issue of the Montreal weekly Hour; more are needed.

Lovinsky's supporters in Haiti are holding rallies and press conferences in order to pressure authorities to conduct a full investigation and win his safe release. Rallies demanding the same have taken place in Montreal and San Francisco. Here too, more is needed.

Let's end the silence surrounding the disappearance of Lovinsky Pierre Antoine.

Roger Annis traveled throughout Haiti from August 5 to 18 on an investigative human rights delegation. His reports can be read at www.thac.ca/blog/9. He is a member of Haiti Solidarity BC, in Vancouver, and the Canada-Haiti Action Network. He is traveling and speaking across Canada in October and November to report on the delegation's findings. He can be contacted at rogerannis[AT]hotmail.com.

To contact the Foreign Affairs department of the Government of Canada and express your concern about Lovinsky's disappearance, phone 1-800-267-8376. You can send an e-mail message to the [International Education Division of Foreign Affairs](#). You can also contact the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), tel: 011-509-244-0650/066, fax: 011-509-244-9366/67; or fax the office of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York: 212-963-4879.

Text published by [ZNET](#) on September 27, 2007.

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