

Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations (POHDH)
National Coalition of Haitian Rights (NCHR)

Report on the Pliché Incident of November 25, 2000

On November 25, 2000, on the eve of the presidential and senatorial elections, the Church of Pliché, located in the 4th regional district of Cavaillon within the South department, was the scene of a regrettable incident. With the aim of gathering a true account of what took place, the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations (POHDH) and the National Coalition of Haitian Rights (NCHR) sent out a delegation to the scene of the incident. This report communicates the delegations' investigation and conclusion of the incident.

The account of the incident

On the eve of the presidential and senatorial elections set for November 26, 2000, the Municipal Council of Cavaillon passed a communal decree prohibiting any activities that could disturb election procedures.

Every year, the last Sunday of November is the celebration of the Patron Saint Cécile in the Pliché Church. In prelude to this celebration, on November 25, 2000, the person in charge of the Parish, in collaboration with members of the Southern Alternative Tourist Association (ATAS), organized a meeting on tourism. Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, a commando of heavily armed men barged into the Pliché Church. This armed group included Jean Candio, deputy of St. Louis, a region from the South /Cavaillon; Martel René, mayor of Cavaillon; Bailly Vincent, assistant mayor of Cavaillon; Reynold Candio, a Bonne-Fin Téléco employee; and Sanon Toussaint, the Cavaillon delegate for the District Electoral Office (BEC); as well as eight other individuals who were members of the political party *Lafanmi Lavalas*.

One of the members of this commando pointed his weapon towards the participants in the meeting, and began throwing the materials they were using and overturning the benches they were sitting on. He ordered the group to stand up and put their hands behind their heads. The armed men shoved them around before demanding that they leave the premises. The priest refused to leave the church, and then was removed by force. Once in the courtyard, the participants were searched and then told to lie on the ground. Again, the priest refused. This caused an altercation where then the assistant mayor of the town hall, Bailly Vincent, intervened on behalf of the priest.

Following these events, mayor Martel René declared that due to the elections of November 26, 2000, the doors of the Pliché Church must remain closed, as this year the Cécile Patron Saint celebration coincides with elections. To reinforce his statement, the mayor emphasized that the Cavaillon Church doors will also remain closed. Before leaving, mayor René threatened that he would return if these orders were not respected; this next time he would bring more men and they would be better armed to severely chastise the offenders.

Upon questioning of this incident, assistant mayor Bailly Vincent affirmed that a delegation, including mayor Martel René, deputy Jean Candio, several security guards, and himself, went to the Pliché Church Parish. According to Vincent, this delegation was supporting the communal decree, demanding those responsible of the Parish to postpone all church activities, including the celebration of the Patron Saint Cécile due

to the upcoming elections of November 26, 2000. This delegation intended to prevent any confrontations, as the deputy had been informed that those celebrating the Patron Saint Cécile festival had disruptive intentions. Still according to Vincent, he believes the priest is a liar; as well, he believes the priest, who is the director of a radio station called **Voix Paysans Sud** (VPS), uses the station to defame the political party **Lafanmi Lavalas**, circulating tracts and taxing the political party representatives of the elections of 21 May and 9 July 2000, saying those who were elected are contested.

Conclusion

The POHDH and NCHR denounce the actions of the deputy, Jean Candio; the mayors Martel René and Bailly Vincent; the Bonne Fin Téléco employee, Reynold Candio, and their collaborators of this barbaric act; it is a reliving of the past. To make matters worse, the incident was carried out in a church, a holy place and sacred by Law.

The Parish of Pliché incident testifies that some arbitrary people were elected who lack knowledge of the role of their position. It is not the responsibility of the municipality to intervene in the peaceful organization of religious, social, economic, cultural activities.

These actions are in contradiction with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1987 Haitian Constitution, which, in their articles, 20-1 and 31, stipulate respectively:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”

“The freedom of association and assembly without weapons with political, economic, social, cultural motives, including any other peaceful motives, is guaranteed.”