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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, May 6, 2010 4:35 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Haiti prez to extend term if election not held

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From: Reynoso, Julissa
To: Mcdonald, Kara C; Merten, Kenneth H; Lindwall, David E; Mills, Cheryl D; Curtis, Meghann A; Warnholz, Jean-Louis
Sent: Thu May 06 00:42:42 2010
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To: southcom_news_alerts_members_list@lists.fma.sosilt.com
<southcom_news_alerts_members_list@lists.fma.sosilt.com>
Sent: Thu May 06 00:37:39 2010
Subject: Haiti prez to extend term if election not held

Haiti prez to extend term if election not held JONATHAN M. KATZ, Associated Press Writer

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) □ Haitian President Rene Preval said Wednesday he will stay in office up to three months past the end of his term if his earthquake-ravaged nation does not hold a presidential election as scheduled.

His aide said the extension is needed to avoid chaos in case a ballot cannot be held to choose Preval's successor. The announcement set off an outcry from opposition lawmakers, who called the move unconstitutional and compared Preval to brutal dictators of the past.

Preval's five-year term is scheduled to end Feb. 7. But electoral officials are struggling to hold the election as scheduled this fall as it copes with the loss of its headquarters and records, destroyed polling places and some 1.6 million displaced or deceased voters.

The electoral council, now operating out of a gym seized in a drug raid, is also embroiled in controversy. Opposition candidates barred from February legislative elections that were canceled after the quake have accused council members of favoring Preval's newly formed Unity party. One council member also faces dismissal on charges of embezzlement.

In a decree dated Tuesday, the 67-year-old Preval said that if an election is not held before Nov. 28 he can remain in office for an extra three months □ until May 14, 2011. That date falls five years after Preval's delayed 2006 inauguration, which was pushed back by wrangling over the vote count.

"If President Preval were to leave on Feb. 7, while the new president is not elected, we would find ourselves in an impossible situation," his chief of staff, Fritz Longchamp, said.

He said Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and Cabinet members who signed the decree "want to make sure that the country is not going to slip into chaos."

Opposition lawmakers slammed the decision. Senator Youri Latortue said the move violated the constitution and pledged to challenge it before Haiti's supreme court.

Acluche Louis-Jeune, a deputy with the Struggling People's Organization party, told Haiti's Channel 11 that Preval is trying to stay in office to profit from the \$12.7 billion-and-counting pledged in reconstruction aid.

"He's trying to make himself president for life like (ex-dictators Francois and Jean-Claude) Duvalier," he said.

Longchamp said Parliament's approval is needed for the extension, but lawmakers will have to act fast: On Monday all seats in the lower chamber and a third of the seats in the Senate expire. The Feb. 28 election to replace them could not be held because of the chaos following the Jan. 12 earthquake.

Preval also served as president from 1995 to 2000. He stepped down as scheduled when his term ended and handed power back to the man who preceded him, the re-elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

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