

Haiti parliament to choose new leader as food aid promised



Jacques Edouard Alexis was ousted in a no-confidence on Saturday during an extraordinary sitting of the Senate, for his failure to curb rising food prices which has led to more than a week of rioting and violence in the country. The move came even as he unveiled a plan to cut the price of rice.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, April 14, 2008 - A new Hatian Prime Minister will be nominated by the country's parliament following the firing of Jacques Edouard Alexis over the weekend.

Mr Alexis was ousted in a no-confidence on Saturday during an extraordinary sitting of the Senate, for his failure to curb rising food prices which has led to more than a week of rioting and violence in the country. The move came even as he unveiled a plan to cut the price of rice.

His party's 10 Senators were absent when the 16 others voted unanimously to remove him from office.

Mr Alexis, who became prime minister in May 2006, said his dismissal was "unjust".

President Rene Preval said Alexis' replacement will be decided as soon as possible by consensus of both Houses of Parliament since no party boasts a majority.

The riots over the rising cost of food have not been restricted to the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) poorest country where the price of rice, corn, beans, cooking oil and other foodstuffs have increased significantly in the last few months.

There have also been food riots in countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, as overall global food prices increase by 83 per cent, caused partly by bad weather in traditionally big food production regions, increasing energy costs and the 181 per cent hike in world wheat prices over the last three years.

Here, at least five people have been killed and scores more injured as the violence continues.

Meantime, the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) - an affiliate of the Organisation of American States (OAS) - has announced that about 400 tons of fortified rice, worth more than US\$1.5 million has been made available for delivery as emergency food aid to Haiti.

PADF Executive Director John Sanbrailo announced the proposed aid package even as he appealed to OAS member states and other interested parties to help provide some US\$200,000 to underwrite the cost of shipping the rice.

The food will be distributed largely to schools under school feeding programmes, health centres for women and children, hospitals and community groups operating in Cité Soleil, Bel Air and other locations where PADF has programmes.

Aid has also been approved by the World Bank which announced a US\$10 million grant to help ease the impact of the food prices.

"With this new US\$ 10 million grant, the World Bank will support government efforts to rapidly scale up social safety net programs, including school feeding, while pursuing longer term measures to create jobs," said Country Director for the Caribbean, Yvonne Tsikata.

A team of Bank experts will visit the country to work with the government and its international partners to put the emergency assistance in place.

The grant is expected to cover the provision of food for poor children and other vulnerable groups, partly through an expansion of the Bank's existing school feeding programme and job creation through labor intensive public works.

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