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Rights and Democracy shake-up an “extraordinary scandal!” -- Broadbent Public appointments process is used to pursue ultra-conservative political agenda

By Ish Theilheimer

OTTAWA -- Rights and Democracy, the agency that promotes democracy internationally and in Canada, is the latest victim of the Harper government's drive to stamp extreme conservative views on everything it can, says its founding president.

Ed Broadbent, founding president of the Montreal-based organization formally known as the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, calls recent developments there an “extraordinarily serious scandal”.

Troubles there became public in early January. Rights and Democracy's president, Rémy Beauregard, died of a heart attack immediately after a turbulent board meeting in which he and the Centre's staff were viciously attacked by recent political appointees over grants to organizations working on social justice issues in the Middle East. Harper's recent appointees charged the grants were going to anti-Israeli organizations with terrorist connections, despite extensive vetting with Canadian and international authorities.

“You have a government that has put people there not for their commitment to make independent judgments about hu-

man rights but to have a specific political agenda.”

“This is a situation in which the government is using the appointment process to pursue a very specific political agenda that has resulted in an attack on the very integrity of Rights and Democracy,” Broadbent told PublicValues.ca in a phone interview. Until now, the organization has always had political appointments, he said, “but it has never been subject to direct political influence.”

Broadbent specifically requested people with political experience from all political parties to staff the organization. “I wanted people with political experience. The mandate was human rights and democratic development. There's nothing wrong with that. But never once did any cast a vote that had any political connection.”

Now, he says, “you have a government that has put people there not for their commitment to make independent judgments about human rights but to have a specific political agenda, specifically about the Middle East. It's incredible.”

The entire 47-member staff of Rights and Democracy has demanded that three board members, all recent political appointees, resign. They include David Matas,

a lawyer with the pro-Israel B'nai Brith Canada; evangelist Michael Van Pelt of the think tank Cardus, and Jacques Gauthier, “who spent 20 years working on a doctoral thesis in which he argues that Jerusalem belongs to the Jews by international law” according to Paul Wells of *Macleans*, the reporter who has followed this story best and most closely.

“There has been an incredibly vicious assassination of the integrity of an institution established to be independent of the government of the day,” said Broadbent. “It's an attack on the internal work of the Centre's staff that has immense international credibility.”

“What this does is it reflects on the ongoing interference of this government in so-called independent agencies.” He cited the RCMP review, the firing of Linda Keen from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and the recent attacks on diplomat Richard Colvin over detainee abuse as further examples. “This government either repudiates advice or attacks personally the people who give it, or they don't reappoint people who demonstrated ability and commitment to human rights and democracy.”

Broadbent is alarmed by the ban that Gauthier, now president of Rights and De-

mocracy, has put on staff talking to media, the confiscation of cell phones from top staff, and the suspicious disappearance, in a reported “break-in”, of three laptop computers from top staff's offices, all located in an 11th floor office building.

“It's pretty appalling for an organization dedicated to human rights,” he said.

Some news articles of interest include:

“How the Harperites ambushed the rights agency”, Haroon Siddiqui, *Toronto Star* www.thestar.com/opinion/article/757981--how-the-harperites-ambushed-the-rights-agency.

“Rights and Democracy: Did the right hand know what the right hand was doing?”, by Paul Wells, *Macleans*; www2.macleans.ca/2010/01/31/rights-and-democracy-did-the-right-hand-know-what-the-right-hand-was-doing/

“Rights and Democracy rips itself apart”, Paul Wells, *Macleans*, posted: February 1, 2010

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Getting medical resources to Haiti's victims--a dire challenge

By Diane Walsh

What exactly does the word “security” mean anyway? Apparently not saving lives, that's becoming abundantly clear. The standing so-called “security” policy governing the logistics of medical delivery to Haiti's quake-victims—really bites. Medical attention is reported to take second place to security in the stricken-areas of Port-au-Prince and Jacmel.

Something has to change. More and more people are dying needlessly under an American version of what security-priority looks like, and that can be pretty scary if left unchecked. Instead of pooling vital information and centering policy on life-saving intervention and logistical-distribution efforts, military-type security has become the top priority. The result, supplies are stuck at the airport. Doctors are ready to serve people in pain but can't reach them [see: www.msf.ca and www.doctorswithoutborders.org].

The temptation is to blame it on the US since they're in charge. What about the Haiti government? Good question: it appears it is merely succumbing to pressure, toeing the line, as everyone seems to have to do when receiving “aid from America”.

Despite an outpouring of charity from around the world, disorganization and lack of infrastructure on the ground in Haiti mean that medical supplies and personnel are just not getting to the people in crisis, in the way that they should—and could. Speaking on CNN, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, a neurosurgeon (and the network's chief medical correspondent) identifies what's called, “preventable deaths” going on there.

That's the point. This security policy is causing needless additional hardship for so many who could be helped if only government policy could be challenged effectively. But how? Preventable deaths, that is deaths and/or illnesses leading to death, are continuing to rack up unnecessarily in the streets of Haiti, caused, reprehensibly, by an across-the-board vacuum in medical-intervention-planning [see www.pagingdrgupta.blogs.cnn.com].

For instance, in Port-au-Prince, with hospitals decimated to rubble by the dreadful earthquake, Dr. Gupta finds patients roaming the open streets for hours, day after day, hoping to find medical assistance. No one should die because they suffered a crushed arm, an infection from a soft-tissue wound, or even more unthinkable, from thirst, Dr. Gupta believes and he's speaking out about it. For that, Oprah is calling him a hero and many people agree.

Who's in charge in Haiti? Who's responsible for putting someone in charge of supply distribution? With deadlocked traffic, clogged roads, and absurd channeling, there is still no unified distribution strategy. Even Doctors without Borders had trouble getting to Haiti and now they can't get to victims systematically, reports CNN's chief International correspondent Christiane Amanpour.

Just getting to Haiti is proving enormously difficult amid all the regulations and military ops—never mind the clug-a-lug of kaki machines. Sheer confusion around Haiti's government policy awaits anyone arriving at the airport, which is said to be “directed” by the US government.

Among the many medical teams not able to get through to help victims is L'Association Haitienne de Developpement Humain, or AHDH, a group which has been going to Haiti to provide socialized community-based medicine for years. Based in New Orleans, AHDH is facing the making-resources-accessible-to-victims conundrum [see Google: www.haitiahdh.org].

Led by Dr. Charles Rene, the coordinator of the AHDH Project in Haiti, this long-standing experienced humanitarian medical team is facing a dire challenge in trying to serve his native homeland in its time of need. So much so that on January 18, Dr. Rene and his ready and fully-equipped medical team were literally calling around for assistance in hailing a plane. Dr. Rene was forced to approach philanthropist organizations in a desperate attempt to get the message out that transport is a major problem while at the same time medical intervention is constrained to the point of inhumane conditions being further perpetuated beyond the disaster of the quake. Like a sick situation made even sicker by human stubbornness.

What's interesting, though, is the action Dr. Rene takes next, sending an email dated January 18, to Mimi Mireille, of the Green Foundation, in Miami, as well as to his medical colleagues Yvelyne Germain-McCarty, Jacqueline Simon, and Nicole Michael.

“Bonjour encore Mimi (Green Foundation, Miami),

I thank you again for the conversation we just had. I am a co founder of the Association Haitienne de Developpement Humain, in New Orleans, since 1986 (Please, visit us at www.haitiahdh.org). We have a hospital in La Vallee de Jacmel, we just left, in early December, fully supplied, and we just need to get there. Based on an

early promise of a plane for 30 passengers and a helicopter to ferry us from Dominican Republic to Jacmel, we have mustered an 18 MD and RN team and 4 pallet strong of medical supplies, in New Orleans. But no plane materialized.

We are certainly ready to trim our plan and get to Haiti as many doc/RN as we can. We would appreciate any help you can get us.

Cordially,

Charles Rene, MD

No word as of yet. Can you imagine such a scenario? Ah, but it's quite common. While we hear of news such as Hollywood actor John Travolta chartering his own plane to bring nurses to Haiti, it's still not clear if Dr. Rene's team has arrived in Haiti to this day.

Please turn to page 2, Getting medical resources to Haiti's victims



Jean-Bertrand Aristide has twice been deposed as president of Haiti.

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Getting medical resources to Haiti's victims from page 1

If you do happen to want to help, go to www.firstgiving.com/baugustin, which is the AHDH organization's on-line fund-raising page where you can have your name listed as a donor if you so choose. If you happen to own a plane and want to offer transport help, make contact with Dr. Rene at chasrene46@bellsouth.net.

Anyone attempting to go to Haiti should know that the situation there is precarious at the moment—this makes the airport a dicey place, to say the least, a hot-bed of political struggles of various kinds (both between countries and between various groups trying to gain control and for good and bad).

Of note, on January 26, *The San Francisco Chronicle* (in a piece by Lea Suziki) reported a noticeable rally that had taken place in the streets of San Francisco "seeking a change of guard in Haiti". Holding up Haiti's national flag, protesters were calling for the US to return exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. And members of the Haiti Action Committee (www.bapd.org/ghanee-1.html) were present to make the point that the US military take-over of the Port-au-Prince airport "slows delivery of food and supplies to victims". That's quite a statement.

Only days later, the BBC reported, on February 1, that, "the US agrees to resume airlifts of quake victims", to move them to—other—hospitals in the US. The US military had stopped airlifting people because the claim was hospitals were being overloaded, especially in Florida, to the point that there was a request (from Florida) that Obama crack open the safe for domestic disasters to be used for the Haiti situation.

The medical doctors on the ground in Haiti had been insisting that the airlifts continue and were frankly quite horrified when they were halted for a time. But there are many hospitals that could take victims—even when airlifts were stopped—so the halt doesn't really make sense. An executive decision was taken to go outside of Florida (seeing as it complained of being overwhelmed by the needy from Haiti) and so now the US military is delivering victims of the quake to other states. The point that's being made is the US military and the US government did not have any qualms about halting the airlifts—for a time—as victims suffered.

Why care for Haiti—Why should it matter to us?

Michaëlle Jean: A Canadian touched personally by Haiti's pain.

It is well known in Canada that Canadian Governor-General Michaëlle Jean was born in Haiti.

In her early years, she lived in Port-au-Prince (and Jacmel, her mother's home town), both of which were devastated by the earthquake.

In 1968 Jean's family was forced to flee from Haiti to escape persecution, unlike Dr. Rene, who left by choice. The regime of Dictator François Duvalier tortured Jean's philosopher father, keeping him part from his family for more than 30 years. Jean's family left for a better life in Canada, settling in Thetford Mines, PQ.

As many readers will remember, Jean was a successful reporter both at the CBC and a number of prominent French shows; and, she's been a broadcaster, hosting *The Passionate Eye* and *Rough Cuts*. In 2004, Jean hosted her own show entitled, *Michaëlle*. Jean was

also a filmmaker. With her husband, filmmaker Jean-Daniel Lafond, she made the award-winning movie, "Haïti dans tous nos rêves", translated—Haiti in All Our Dreams. View it! Jean's adopted daughter is an orphaned child from Haiti.

Who is Dr. Charles Rene?

Originally from Haiti, Dr. Charles Rene calls both the US and Haiti his home. He trained as a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist, qualified to practice in both places.

Keenly aware of the plight of so many disenfranchised Haitians, Dr. Rene is ideally suited to speak out about the logistical medical nightmare going on at this time.

It's worth noting that Dr. Rene is highly credentialized. He first attended medical school, at State University Medical School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He did his ob/gyn residency training at the Hospital Justinien, in Cap-Haitien, Haiti. But over this period, Duvalier's reign of terror is taking its harsh toll—both on Dr. Rene's sensibilities and on the suffering people of Haiti. Dr. Rene, embittered by it, decided on a self-imposed exile—moving to the US during the latter part of Duvalier's dreadful reign.

Since a "twice-over" education (as it were) is something that's highly valued among the medical community in Haiti, he decided to do a second internship at Mercy Catholic Medical Center in Philadelphia, and then another ob/gyn residency at the Jersey City Medical Center in New Jersey.

In the early '80s, he ran a private practice in New Orleans. He served as chief of OB/GYN, at Pendleton Methodist Hospital, then went on to private practice in New Jersey while serving as a clinical instructor, assistant director and ultimately director of the OB/GYN Diagnostic Center. In 1986, he returned to Haiti—to his humanitarian missions—to help build a democratic order, specifically his dream of the people's access to socialized modern medicine. There he focused his attention on The Commune of La Vallée de Jacmel in the Department of South-East—his mother's birthplace—working at the Joseph Hospital.

Over the last 20 years, Dr. Rene's team sought to provide medical treatment to the "peasant" population—of course, free-of-charge. Supplies would be brought in from the US with the aim to provide outpatient care, both minor and major surgery, including pregnancy-related emergency operations. But now his work is simply to help quake victims—if only he could get logistical assistance...]

Dr. Rene's humanitarian efforts in the mid 1980s were a precursor to the formation of many humanitarian organizations that have now come into fruition, all with the aim of offering health, education, financial aid, and—importantly, human-rights protection. These include his "baby", the Haitian Association for Human Development (AHDH), based in New Orleans, established in 1986; Support Committee to Restore Democracy (COSURED), established in 1991; The Haitian Organization for Health Services, Inc. (HOHS), based in Washington, DC, and formed in 1993; and The Fondation Ertha Pascal Trouillot (FONDEPT), established in Haiti, in 1996—all still existing in one form or another to this day. As does Dr. Rene's core team, including his wife Sandra Birdsall-Rene, RN, Critty Hymes, MD, Nicole Vincent, MD, Arshi Michael, MD, Anika Michael, MD; Michael Beauford, and many volunteers.

Jack Layton announces he has prostate cancer; will stay as leader of NDP

NDP Leader Jack Layton called a press conference February 5 to inform Canadians that he has prostate cancer. Here's his brief speech.

"As some of you may know, I hurt my back last week. Everyone who leads an active lifestyle knows what it's like to pull a

muscle at the gym—it can be pretty painful.

"My back is better now, but today I want to let you know about an unrelated health matter.

"This year, more than 25,000 Canadian men will be diagnosed with treatable prostate cancer and I have recently learned that I'm one of them.

"It's the same kind of prostate cancer that my father was diagnosed with 17 years ago. "He, like the overwhelming majority of Canadian men with prostate cancer, fought it and won.

"His treatments were successful, and I intend to tackle this with the same determination that he did.

"Like my dad, I am a fighter. And I will beat this.

"My treatment plan is now underway and everything is on track. In the coming weeks, the schedule of my treatment regime means I may have a bit more time to catch the Olympics.

"The hard work and drive of our Canadian athletes will be an inspiration.

"I want to assure my constituents and the Canadian public that this will not impede my ability to serve as either the Member of

Parliament for Toronto Danforth or as leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada.

"I have an amazing team, great friends and a loving, supportive family.

And my wife Olivia knows a thing or two about taking on cancer, having been diagnosed with thyroid cancer just a few years ago. "She won her battle and so will I.

"Recently, the Party marked the 7th anniversary of my becoming leader. Without question we have accomplished much. But we also recognize there is a lot more to do to build a more caring and greener Canada.

And I can't wait to roll up my sleeves Monday morning and get back at it."



Jack Layton, his wife Olivia behind him, are seen in a screen grab from CBC NewsWorld.

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Just \$900,000 left to raise for \$5.3 million Access building

Victoria — AIDS Vancouver Island and Victoria Cool Aid Society have announced that another \$100,000 has been raised for the Access Health Centre.

This \$5.3 million building project is supported by the partner agencies, government, foundations, businesses and individuals. Just \$900,000 remains to meet the mortgage-free goal.

The building at 713 Johnson Street, occupied since September 2009, is now home to counsellors from the Victoria Native Friendship Centre offering renewed downtown access to urban First Nations services. Later in the year, VIHA will also be moving some of their mental health and addiction services onto the second floor.

These valuable partners will add to the integration of services available at the Access Health Centre which provides primary care, dental care, counselling and mental health services to the homeless and other vulnerable, at-risk populations, with a team approach that has been applauded by government, health care professionals and the community.

Significant donations in the last two months include:

- Over \$25,000 – Individual Cool Aid donors, local physicians and dentists
- \$16,000 - BMO Bank of Montreal (BC Division)
- \$13,500 - The Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children to pay for dental equipment used in the treatment of children
- \$10,000 - CIBC
- \$9,000 - Gifts from Victoria Foundation donors
- \$2,000 – St. John the Divine Anglican Church members

Victoria Cool Aid Society and AIDS Vancouver Island continue to accept donations to retire the mortgage so all funds can be devoted to services. A \$1 million donor interested in naming rights or an anonymous gift for the downtown heritage building at 713 Johnson Street is also being sought.

If the capital campaign's goal of \$5.3 million is surpassed, an endowment fund will be set up in perpetuity at the Victoria Foundation to help pay for the annual costs associated with the Access Health Centre and its services.

For further information, visit: www.AccessHealthCentre.ca or www.CoolAid.org or www.Avi.org or phone Kathy Stinson, executive director, Victoria Cool Aid Society, 250-383-1977 or email her at kstinson@CoolAid.org or Andrea Langlois, communications manager, AIDS Vancouver Island, 250-384-2366 ext. 2268, or email her at andrea.langlois@Avi.org

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