

Haitian Immigrants Protest Bush at Rally

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**by Imran Vittachi - Chicago Tribune**

Accusing the Bush administration of backing a coup in Haiti, scores of Haitian immigrants rallied in the Loop Saturday in support of the Caribbean nation's exiled president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Rev. Jesse Jackson, members of his Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and local officials joined the protest that started at Federal Plaza.

"What they did was anti-democracy," Jackson said in an interview. "The U.S. has its hands all over this."

Jackson and others have insisted that Aristide did not resign his presidency and criticized the U.S. for denying him asylum.

"We did not offer Aristide asylum to come to the United States, as we did with the Shah [of Iran]," Jackson said.

At Saturday's demonstration, the protestors held up signs proclaiming, among other things, "Bush/Cheney, keep your bloody hands off Haiti." They chanted anti-U.S. government and anti-CIA slogans in French, Creole and English, and marched in circles for an hour in front of the Kluczynski Federal Building.

They then marched to the front of the French Consulate, in a building at 205 N. Michigan Ave.

The government of France, Haiti's former colonizer, and the Bush administration did not oppose Aristide's exile last weekend to the Central African Republic, saying in official statements that he had stepped down voluntarily. President Bush and French President Jacques Chirac have deployed troops to Haiti to safeguard their countries' interests.

Jackson and others have alleged that the Bush administration aided the arming of leaders of last month's Haitian uprising and denied Aristide due process in the courts.

The demonstrators echoed charges made by Aristide and his Haitian-American supporters that the White House and Chirac's government conspired to force Aristide out of power.

"We short-circuited due process," said Larry Suffredin, Cook County commissioner (13th). "We gave Aristide two options--either you go, or we let the mob in here to tear you apart."

U.S. Rep. Jan **Schakowsky** (D-Ill.) said that she had talked on the phone with Aristide's American-born wife, Mildred Trouillot, hours before the couple left the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, and that Trouillot had not said anything about an imminent departure.

"I'm telling you that this was not a woman who was preparing to pack her bags," said **Schakowsky**, who called for a congressional investigation into the circumstances around Aristide's demise.

This year marks the bicentennial of Haiti's independence from France, which resulted from a rebellion led by former slave Toussaint L'Ouverture.

The Haitian immigrants protesting Saturday in Chicago said Aristide had a right to be judged through a democratic court system on charges that he had become corrupt and oppressive.

"Let's assume that [the charges are] true," said Haitian-American Ald. Lionel Jean-Baptiste (2nd) of Evanston. Then "let the people speak. Period."