

Haiti Revolution Marks a Milestone in African History

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Government says the aim of President Thabo Mbeki visit to Haiti was to consolidate the African Renaissance with Africans in the Diaspora and highlight the Haitian revolution as an important milestone in African history.

Frank Chikane, the Director General in the Presidency, who decried the "deliberate falsification of information" about President Mbeki visit to Haiti saying it was important for the President to attend the 200th anniversary of the Haiti revolution.

The Haiti revolution is one of the important milestones in black history in which the Caribbean island became the first Black Republic in the world when African slaves defeated their French masters and gained independence in January 1, 1804.

He added that since the world recognised other revolutions such as the American and French revolutions, it was also critical that in the spirit of the African rebirth, the Haiti revolution was highlighted and given its place in history despite the present civil strife in that Caribbean island.

"The visit there had nothing to do with supporting any government or party. It had to do with the bi-centenary. You would have internal difference every year and those differences should not stop you from celebrating the very critical and historic moment.

"But you need to understand that there is history from the underside which was suppressed completely and after the Haiti revolution it was isolated...the freeing of slaves had not even come. So Haiti was an aberration to the world of its time and that why that history was suppressed," said Reverend Chikane.

He added that the President's visit to Haiti signified government belief that "the history of the underside must also come out. You can't suppress it forever."

Acting Foreign Affairs Minister Lindiwe Sisulu also refuted claims that President Mbeki was "mediating" between Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his opponents.

Opposition parties in Haiti accuse Mr Aristide of intimidation and charge him of failing to promote and entrench democracy in the impoverished Caribbean island.

"Accordingly, the President has no intention to mediate in Haiti. However, he has indicated that South Africa stands ready should we be requested to lend some help," said Ms Sisulu.

Reverend Chikane said opposition leaders confirmed during a meeting with President Mbeki "that they have a problem with [President] Aristide."

President Mbeki also met with Mr Aristide.

Dr Chikane said despite strong opposition against President Aristide's rule, all Haitians celebrated the 200th anniversary of the revolution.

"It just happened the celebrations came as there was opposition against President Aristide," Chikane said the opposition parties told President Mbeki.

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