

Hub Haitians gather to aid their homeland

By Jules Crittenden

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A cross-section of Boston's Haitian-Americans gathered last night to see if they could unite and use their influence to support stability in Haiti as their native country descends into chaos.

Speakers told the crowd of about 200 people in the Church of the Nazarene in Codman Square in Dorchester they need to set aside Haiti's traditional politics of personality to support the development of democratic institutions.

"Put your anger aside, put your partisanship aside and focus on the country," said state Rep. Marie St. Fleur (D-Dorchester), a Haitian-American. "Can you help me find common ground in this room this evening?" The crowd responded with loud shouts of "yes."

Jocelyn McCalla of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights said, "The Haitian-American community in New York and Boston has more influence than it has used," referring to the money that is sent home to Haiti.

And here in the United States, he said, "they need to start lobbying."

Haitians who came to the meeting showed sharp political division but a desire to work together for stability.

Patrick Voltare, a payroll clerk who runs a Haitian radio program, said, "The only thing we can do is ask the government to help Haiti."

"The time has come for (President Jean-Bertrand) Aristide to go," Voltare said. "My best friend is here, he's for him. I'm against him."

Sitting next to him, his pro-Aristide friend, Ezekiel Michel, said "This is democracy. It is very important to leave him (Aristide) to finish the mandates."

PHOTO GALLERY



Family members at the capital's general hospital sit near a man who was shot by militias. (Staff photo by Kuni Takahashi)

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