

Martelly elected new President of Haiti

Written by Karen Juanita Carrillo - Special to the NNPA from the New York Amsterdam News
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Preliminary results indicate that the singer Michel Joseph Martelly has been elected the new president of Haiti.

Following the fiasco of the Nov. 28, 2010, elections, a second round of voting was held on March 20 between two run-off candidates, one of whom will succeed René Prével as president.

And, yet even the March 20 vote had problems, with many voters not finding their names on voting rolls, earthquake survivors who are still homeless having little access to the polls and others arriving at polling stations where election officials did not have correct ballots and were unable to process votes.

Still, the results coming in from the country's Conseil Électoral Provisoire (Provisional Electoral Council/CEP) show that Martelly's party, Repons Peyizan, won 67.5 percent of the votes cast while his rival, former first lady Mirlande Manigat of the Rassemblement des Démocrates Nationaux Progressistes (Rally of Progressive National Democrats/RDNP) party, received 31.7 percent of the vote.

Manigat's RDNP has the opportunity to challenge the election results before they are declared final on April 16.

The 50-year-old Martelly, popularly known as "Tet Kalé" (créole for "Bald Head") or "Sweet Micky," is nationally known as an actor and kompa musician whose politics are largely viewed as right-wing.

Martelly lived in Florida for a while, working in construction and running a nonprofit organization with his wife before returning to Haiti in 1987 to open a dance hall. In Haiti, Martelly established friendships with Haitian police officers and members of the Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haitien (Front for Advancement and Progress/FRAPH), a group organized by the CIA-funded spy, Emmanuel "Toto" Constant. FRAPH infamously used terror tactics to overthrow former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991.

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Haitian-American hip-hop musician Wyclef Jean heavily supported Martelly's presidential campaign. Martelly and Jean have been friends for years and have collaborated on various musical projects. Jean's efforts to help Martelly gain votes led to his being shot in the hand in Port-au-Prince on March 19. Reports are that Jean has fully recovered.

Jean was with Martelly when he got the news of the election results, and said, "The Haitian youth have spoken and Michel Martelly has been elected president. It's time for every Haitian, poor or not, to dream again. It's time for every Haitian in the Diaspora to reclaim his or her heritage and country."

Pras Michel, who supported Martelly when he initiated his candidacy, said, "There are no words for this historical event, but we must not be intimidated by the work ahead of us."

Jimmy Rosemond, who organized a concert with Busta Rhymes that was instrumental to the final rally to push voters to come out, said, "Haiti's rich history is now a current event. The former government never asked people in the Diaspora to help, but Martelly has extended his hand. We are Haitian and we want to help our country."

Haitian-American boxer André Berto, the current WBC welterweight champion, responded when he heard the news by remarking, "Congrats to Michel Martelly! With him in office, we have someone who can really identify with the young people that are the majority there. I see change coming to Haiti."

Barring a challenge from Manigat, Martelly will take office as president of the Republic of Haiti on May 7 and is due to serve for a total of five years.

He will begin his administration with an acknowledged lack of experience in government. The new president will be learning to govern in direct view of two of Haiti's former rulers, both of whom still have numerous followers and have recently returned to the island. Former dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier returned to the country on Jan. 16, after 25 years in exile. Authorities have so far charged Duvalier with corruption and embezzlement and they have confiscated his passport.

The nation's last popularly elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, also returned to the island just two days before the elections, on March 18. Aristide spent seven years in exile in South Africa, and his Fanmi Lavalas party was not allowed on the ballot for this last round of presidential elections. There is little doubt that Lavalas' critical voice will play a role in how the nation is governed in the near future.