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Haitian Folk-Singing Legend and ex-Political Prisoner So An Auguste on her Arrest by US Marines and the US Role in Haiti's Ongoing Turmoil

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Popular Haitian-American folk singer and political activist Annette "So An" Auguste, was released in August after spending over two years in a Haitian jail. So An was jailed by US Marines shortly after the 2004 coup that ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. She joins us [Democracy Now] in our firehouse studio.

Annette "So An" Auguste. Legendary Haitian folk singer, activist, and former political prisoner. So An spent over two years in a Haitian jail. She was jailed in 2004, Popular Haitian-American folk singer and political activist Annette "So An" Auguste, was released in August after spending over two years in a Haitian jail. So An was jailed by US Marines shortly after the coup that ousted former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

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AMY GOODMAN: Today, So An joins us here in the firehouse, and we welcome you to Democracy Now!

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: Thank you.

AMY GOODMAN: It is wonderful to have you with us. We are also joined by Kim Ives, who will help translate. Thanks so much for being here. How does it feel not only to be out of jail right now in Haiti, but to have come to the United States?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] First, I thank you. And everybody who struggled with us to get us out of jail, I say thank you to them, especially to Amy and Juan Gonzalez. I thank them a lot, because I know all the work you've done for democracy. Thank you very much.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you describe the day you were arrested? What was the scene? Who arrested you? When was it?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] The day they arrested me, it was the Marines who arrested me, US Marines. It was a very dark day. It was with grenades they came into my house. The first grenade they threw blew off the head of my dog, which ended up in a tree. When they came, they said they were looking for guns, but they couldn't even find a big knife. They arrested me. I was hoping they would have somebody to translate for me, but they didn't have anybody to translate. It was just Americans.

America is a country that promotes about democracy all the time. It's not their prerogative to come and arrest somebody without a warrant. And they didn't just arrest me. They arrested everybody at my house, even a little five-year-old kid. They put handcuffs on all of them. To arrest somebody like that, with all your kids at home, it really traumatizes you. I think those were injustices, and they should have reparations for that. It's not possible to come into somebody's house and do all that damage like that without reparation. They broke everything I had. Without any proof at all.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And once they jailed you, did they inform you of any charges? Did you ever go to trial on any charges? What happened during the period of your incarceration?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] It's been two years. Nothing. At the end, when Preval became president, a decision was taken. Because the people who were there before, they wanted to bury me even deeper. Latortue.

JUAN GONZALEZ: So there were no legal proceedings during the entire time you were in prison?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: No.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And upon your release, what has been your situation, your personal situation in Haiti?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] My situation is even worse. A person living at their house normally, you leave prison, everything you had is gone. So the situation for me isn't good at all. And it's also not good for the people I used to help.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about the position of those who support the ousted president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide? Do you feel they are targeted today?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] Up until now, nothing has really changed. If you look, there's Rene Civil, another Lavalas activist, who they just arrested. The same thing is continuing. There's a lot of people in prison. A lot of people are still in prison. I don't consider myself free. A lot of people who were arrested under the same conditions I was are still in prison. Those people don't have anybody to speak for them. I have become the voice of the voiceless, because they have nobody to speak for them.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Last week on the show, we had a segment on the recent massacre in Cite Soleil that involved United Nations peacekeepers or United Nations occupation troops there. What has been the role of the United Nations troops there, and how do you and other Haitians regard their presence in your country?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] This is a real aberration, I think, because they can't come in and kill people like that without them having proof that the people are â€” I was there when the first attack happened on the 22nd. They came in. There was a tank which was broken down. They thought that the tank was going to shoot on them, so they were very happy when it didn't, and they thought it was a gift to them. And they took apart the tank, and then they shot everybody for that. Yeah, all the children there, are those kidnappers? Those 60-year-old, 80-year-old people, are they kidnappers? They sent gas over everybody, and six people died the first day. Poison gas.

AMY GOODMAN: I'm looking at a report that says, according to Pierre Alexis, the Haitian Red Cross coordinator in Cite Soleil, the UN soldiers prevented the Haitian Red Cross from treating children injured during the assault and stopped Red Cross ambulances from entering the area. This was in the attack of December 22nd.

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] They knew that if the Red Cross came in, they would see there were more people who had died, because that day more than 50 people died.

AMY GOODMAN: What do you think has to happen right now in Haiti, So An Auguste?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] Haiti is a country which is occupied. Everything that happens, those are the people who are in front. The United Nations troops are in front.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And in terms of the role of Preval, an ally of President Aristide for so long, why has he allowed this to go on?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] He's a so-called friend of Aristide. Because if Aristide were in Preval's position, he would do everything possible and imaginable to make sure that Preval would return to the country. When you look at all those people that they call the freedom fighters, people like Guy Philippe and other of the rebel leaders who have done terrible crimes, they not only have taken over the country, but they're even candidates for the presidency. Since the people are those who elected Aristide, if they didn't feel that Aristide was in their very skins, they wouldn't still be asking for Aristide's return. With all those assassins in the country, why can't Aristide come back to his country?

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think President Aristide will return to Haiti from South Africa?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] Haiti is President Aristide's country. We're going to struggle until he gets back.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think the US plays a large role in Haiti now? In 2004, when Aristide was ousted, he described to me, when we followed the delegation of Maxine Waters, the congress member from Los Angeles, and the founder of TransAfrica, Randall Robinson, when I followed them to the Central African Republic and they took the Aristides back to Jamaica, he described that it was the number two man in the US embassy who went and told him that he could die, thousands of Haitians could die, if he didn't leave. And then he was hustled onto this plane with US military and security and sent off to " he didn't know where at the time, but it was the Central African Republic.

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] All those things were a way to have the monkey business go forward. In passing, I want to salute Maxine Waters and all the congressmen who fought for us a lot. President Aristide was a president elected constitutionally by the people. We can't say it was just the Americans who were responsible for Aristide being removed from Haiti. It was also the French who were involved, because we demanded restitution and reparations for slavery from France. This was the demand that really pushed them to kick Aristide out.

AMY GOODMAN: Your final statement to the American people?

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] I know that the American people are good people. The establishment shouldn't enter into things that don't concern them " US establishment. They have to do things correctly, so people in the world will respect them the way they used to be respected. We say that the US people are good people, but the establishment, it is completely reactionary.

AMY GOODMAN: We're going to have to leave it there. So An, thank you very much for joining us in our studio.

ANNETTE AUGUSTE: [translated] And for me, to thank you, because you allow me to say a couple of words in America.

AMY GOODMAN: So An Auguste, very well-known in Haiti, throughout the world, Haitian folksinger and political activist, jailed for more than two years in Haiti, recently released.