Haiti rebel leader names himself military chief

MARGARET NEIGHBOUR

FLANKED by other rebels and senior officers of Haiti's police force, Guy Philippe, the rebel leader, declared himself Haiti's new military leader yesterday, complicating United States and French plans to stabilise the country.

"I am the chief," he told a news conference. Asked what he meant, he clarified: "The military chief."

Mr Philippe then reiterated he had no political aspirations. "I am not interested in politics," he said. "The president is the legal president, so we follow his orders." Asked if that meant the rebels would disarm if asked, he said: "We will."

Haiti's chief justice, Boniface Alexandre, was installed as the country's interim leader on Sunday, in the hours after the former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, fled a bloody uprising and under pressure from the US and France. Mr Philippe, a former provincial police chief of Mr Aristide's, has said he wants to reform the army that ousted Mr Aristide in 1991 and which the former president disbanded in 1995.

Human Rights Watch has said Mr Philippe has a "dubious human rights record", pointing to executions of gang members committed by a deputy while he was the police chief of Port-au-Prince's Delmas section.

Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, said yesterday he did not want some rebel leaders to take any role in a new government "because of their past records".

Further complicating matters, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, the exiled Haitian dictator, said he wants to return home.

"This is my country. I'm ready to put myself at the disposal of the Haitian people," he told WFOR, a Florida television station.

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  CIA World Factbook - Haiti
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