

Tuesday, April 16th, 2024

This is a joint statement with the organization's members who have signed.

We are members of the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights (Rezo Emisferik pou Dwa Migran Ayisyen (REDMA), a transnational coalition of Haitian migrant rights' leaders and Haitian-led organizations who fight for the rights of Haitian refugees and migrants. We have network members based in 13 countries in the Western Hemisphere. Today, violence in Haiti has escalated dramatically and safe refuge is even more desperately needed. Despite increased and widespread persecution in Haiti, discriminatory and disparate treatment of Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers continues throughout the Western hemisphere. We call for the rights of Haitians seeking refuge to be respected by our neighbors in the region.

Over the past several years, the violence and insecurity wrought by armed groups has terrorized Haiti's population and displaced them, both internally and across borders. The violence escalated in late February 2024. As of March 22, over 1,400 people have been killed this year. Armed groups targeted critical infrastructure, including airports, ports, and police stations. These attacks accomplished their stated goal of preventing the de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry from returning to the country, and led to his announcement that he would resign. Six weeks later, the violence persists. The country has been under a state of emergency for over a month. Schools, markets, and hospitals have closed due to [violence](#); and kidnappings, killings with impunity, and sexual violence instill fear in the daily lives of Haitian people.

We are horrified to see several countries including the Dominican Republic, the United States, Bahamas, and Turks & Caicos, continue interdictions, repatriations, and deportations of Haitians at this critical time. These actions violate non-refoulement obligations. The U.S. government's decision to deport more than 70 people to Haiti by air on Thursday, April 19th, less than a week after the U.S. concluded its evacuation flights of its own citizens and while the international airport in Port-au-Prince remains closed, is astounding in its callousness, depravity, and hypocrisy. The Dominican Republic "closed" its air and land borders with Haiti, and yet deportations continued unabated. The aforementioned deportations as well as the United States' interception and repatriation of 65 Haitians on March 12th, and the Bahamas' deportation of 263 Haitians by boat on March 20th (a measure taken since international air travel had been suspended) show profound and utter disregard for the lives and human rights of Haitians as well as international legal and treaty obligations.

Immigration authorities often violate Haitian peoples' rights and dignity in the process of detention and deportation. Over 250,000 Haitians were deported from the D.R. last year. Haitian women and children have been repeatedly victimized and violated by authorities, including immigration authorities. For over two years, the Dominican Republic has been intentionally conducting immigration raids in maternity clinics and hospitals to target Haitian pregnant women for detention and deportation. In April 2024, less than two weeks ago, a 14-year old Haitian girl and her family reported to the police that she had been raped by a man who presented himself as an immigration agent in the Dominican Republic. In September 2023, an immigration agent raped a Haitian woman in the presence of her 4-year old son at the Las Americas International airport in the Dominican capital of Santo Domingo.

These are not isolated incidents; they point to the systematic dehumanization and abuse of Haitian people by the Dominican government and immigration authorities.

The U.S. has a long and egregious history of violating the rights of Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers that continues to the present. New York Times and ProPublica's December 2023 investigative reporting on the [U.S. Coast Guard's treatment of unaccompanied minors](#) included multiple Coast Guard and immigration officials from USCIS acknowledging that Haitians "faced a systematic disadvantage making a successful claim for protection since almost no one working on Coast Guard boats can speak or understand Creole." We denounce and condemn the U.S. government's announcements that they are prepared to expand the use of Guantanamo if there are a spike of attempts to reach the U.S. by boat from Haiti. One of our network members witnessed first-hand the horrors and human rights violations that occurred in the 1990s when Guantanamo was used to detain thousands of Haitians fleeing violence. The proposal to expand its use—again in response to the fear of Black bodies arriving on U.S. shores – is an affront to the Haitian-American community, and to proponents of human rights around the world.

We are calling on the governments in the Western hemisphere to meet this moment and expand the legal protections that their countries offer Haitian nationals. There is an urgent need to extend asylum and refugee status, as well as expand protections against deportation and detention, to Haitians. **Further, ALL deportations and expulsions must stop.**

We are also calling on the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, and the International Organization for Migration to provide more support to Haitian refugees throughout the region. A regional coordination mechanism, like the [one coordinated by UNHCR and IOM for Venezuelans](#), should be established for Haitians to begin remedying the longstanding failure of woefully insufficient protections and support for them in the region. Haitian migration has transformed to span the entire hemisphere, and requires hemisphere-wide solutions. We welcome the UNHCR's new guidance on [International Protection Considerations](#) for people fleeing Haiti and its recognition that there are several categories of Haitian people that are likely eligible for asylum under the 1951 Convention on Refugees, as well as significant evidence of "generalized violence, massive violations of human rights... and other circumstances that seriously disturb public order" in Haiti— circumstances that qualify someone as a refugee under the Cartagena Declaration. The UNHCR also reiterated its call from November 2022 to stop deportations and forced returns to Haiti. We believe it is critical to recognize that Haitians have been fleeing the violence and deteriorating conditions outlined in UNHCR's guidance for several years, and regardless of when they left, there is no safe possibility for return at this time.

We call on signatory countries of the Cartagena Declaration to reverse their current practice and recognize that Haitian nationals merit the protections that the Declaration rightfully affords them. We welcome the analysis and report recently published by Mexican human rights center, [Fray Matias], and NYU Law's Global Justice Clinic, that illustrates why Mexico must apply the Cartagena Declaration to Haitians, and grant them refugee status.

We join and amplify the demands our network member, Haitian Bridge Alliance, made in a letter sent to the United States government on March 26, 2024, calling for a redesignation of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians, an immediate release of detained Haitians, and to expedite the processing of Haitians' family reunification and humanitarian parole applications. We call on all governments throughout the region to immediately expand opportunities for family reunification.

We also join and amplify the recent open letter to the government of the Dominican Republic from our network members from Reconocido and #HaitianosRD, in collaboration with Amnesty International, in which they described the myriad human rights violations being carried out against activists, Haitians on the move, and Dominicans of Haitian descent.

We call on those who seek to stand in solidarity with Haitian and Black migrants to condemn the inaction of their countries' governments, and demand them to enact policies of welcome and protection for Haitians. Haiti is often recognized and remembered as the forefather or foremother of the freedoms of so many— those of the African diaspora as well as many in Latin America. But let remembrance not be the extent of one's engagement. Our Haitian brothers and sisters at or within a country's borders are in need of solidarity, but that solidarity cannot be in rhetoric alone – it must be accompanied by action and advocacy for policy changes and increased immigration protections. As Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers have discovered at every turn, anti-Blackness (and anti-Haitianism) knows no borders. The solidarity we need must not either.

Now is the time to halt the longstanding discriminatory and racist treatment of Haitian nationals and treat them with the understanding that we are all people seeking to survive for our children and for our loved ones. Haitian refugees must no longer be met with violence and neglect after fleeing violence.

Haiti

The following members of the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights

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In solidarity with the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights: