

Hundreds of thousands of Haitians face deportation from the Dominican Republic

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With the passing last Wednesday of a deadline in the Dominican Republic for Haitians and those of Haitian descent to apply for regularization of their immigration status, hundreds of thousands are now effectively stateless.

As of 2012, approximately 458,000 Haitians and people of Haitian descent lived in the Dominican Republic, and only about 10 percent had “regular” immigration status. The total number of immigrants has assuredly grown since then.

Even a birth certificate does not guarantee a normal life. Juliana Deguis Pierre, for example, was born in the Dominican Republic to Haitian parents who moved there after being hired by a Dominican sugar company that never provided them with working papers. Pierre had a Dominican birth certificate, and in 2008 applied for the national identity document known as the *cédula*. Rather than issue the ID, the Dominican government invalidated her birth certificate and revoked her citizenship.

Officially, the Dominican government granted citizenship on the basis of *jus soli* (right of the soil, or the granting of citizenship to anyone born in the territory), until a 2010 change to its constitution denied citizenship to children born of undocumented parents.

Pierre, who has a child of her own, joined several others in suing the Dominican government. In September 2013, its Constitutional Tribunal handed down a brutal and politically motivated decision denying citizenship to anyone born in the country since 1929, if his or her parents had been “in transit.” It expanded the definition of “in transit”—which normally applies to short-term visitors and diplomats—to include long-term, undocumented workers. Between 210,000 and 250,000 people of Haitian descent, most of whom speak Spanish and have never set foot in Haiti, are

affected.

Pierre recently described her experience to *Harper's*: legally, she could no longer “work, marry, open a bank account, get a driver’s license, vote or register for ... university.”

The Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling, number TC/0168/13, set off an international outcry, with even conservative figures like Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa comparing the Dominican government to the Nazis. In response, the government in Santo Domingo promised a naturalization program, the National Plan for the Regularization of Foreigners (PNRE).

This program—which left long lines of people waiting at the 5 p.m. Wednesday deadline because of government arrogance and incompetence—presents nearly impossible hurdles for those who were able to apply. Among the materials required in an application were a “certificate of good living and morals,” tax documents, proof of a bank account containing at least 10,000 Dominican pesos (approximately US \$260), a home or apartment lease and the signatures of seven Dominican witnesses from the applicant’s neighborhood.

There is also an application fee of 10,000 pesos; many undocumented workers make less than half that amount per month.

Of the nearly half a million people in irregular status, only 275,000 were able to apply for regularization before the Wednesday deadline. They will now have to wait weeks if not months for the government’s decision.

As the June 17 deadline approached, news photos showed people sleeping on sidewalks for a place in line and being penned behind fences by security guards in temperatures as high as 95 F. A construction worker who has lived in Santo Domingo for 10 years told the

website *FranceTV*: “I’ve been showing up for five days and haven’t been able to enter” the ministry of the interior building, which was taking applications.

Le Nouvelliste, a French-language daily published in Haiti, quoted Mariamis Crousef, who waited in line overnight with her 18-month-old baby: “Since November, I’ve been requesting identity papers, but I still haven’t succeeded in getting them.”

Despite rumors that the Dominican government was preparing buses for mass deportations after the Wednesday deadline, none had appeared as of Friday night. Instead, press reports on Thursday described empty markets and streets in many neighborhoods, as people stayed inside out of fear. Several hundred had emigrated to Haiti by the weekend.

The Dominican government has officially announced a 45 day “moratorium” on expulsions, but Interior Minister José Ramón Fadul made the ominous announcement on Thursday that “it will be a gradual process, as it should be, without any sudden surprises.” Fadul spoke coldly about the actual plans of the government, as Major General Rubén Darío Paulino had earlier told the press about special deportation training for 2,000 police and military officers and 150 inspectors.

The Obama administration has voiced mild criticism of TC/0168/13, while at the same time providing assistance and training to the Dominican border patrol known as CESFRONT. Knowing full well that this force was rounding up people based solely on their appearance, the US embassy recently provided it with a practice shooting range.

The Dominican bourgeoisie has a long history of pitting its own workers against those of Haitian descent. Many of those affected by the Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling are the children or grandchildren of workers brought from Haiti by Dominican sugar growers when they needed cheap labor. The Dominican ruling elite also used undocumented workers to keep wages down in construction, fruit and vegetable harvesting, and housecleaning.

Now that the government is faced with an unemployment rate around 15 percent and chronically high inflation, it is using these workers and their children to distract attention from the Dominican social crisis.

Conditions facing workers in Haiti are dire. Even the

World Bank, which in December issued a report seeking to paint things in the best possible light, was forced to admit that 60 percent of Haitians live on \$2 or less per day and 2.5 million are in “extreme poverty.” By contrast, only 2.2 percent of the Dominican population, also largely poor, lives on less than \$1.25 per day, according to UNICEF statistics.

The Haitian government of Michel Martelly and Evans Paul, which has no principled differences with the Dominican regime, has issued a communiqué calling for “a patriotic dialogue” about the “victims of discrimination.” Not to be outdone, it proposes to herd these victims into a “sterilization zone” to protect against disease and the actions of “delinquents.” Once screened, the expelled workers will be used by the Haitian elite supposedly to “relaunch national production” and the “creation of riches.”



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