Dominican Republic deportations increase tensions with Haiti

John Marion
29 August 2015

The Dominican Republic has deported hundreds of Haitians and people of Haitian descent in recent weeks, while tensions along the border led to an exchange of gunfire earlier this week.

Dominican Foreign Minister Andrés Navarro told a press conference on August 14 that "what the government is doing is the regular enforcement of the immigration law." An August 19 report on the web site of Diario Libre gives an idea of the nature of this "regular enforcement": 25 men and 10 women were grabbed from streets, businesses and homes and shipped off on a bus with "certain commodities." The previous weekend 18 people had been "repatriated."

Abysmal conditions for those being deported will become even worse as hurricane season develops. Tropical Storm Erika was predicted to pass over the northern part of the country on Friday.

Reports have also appeared in *Business Insider* and *Foreign Affairs* of a detention center just outside of Santo Domingo. On August 15 BI reported being told by armed guards at the Haina facility that, "an undisclosed number of Haitians had been detained."

There have not yet been reports of stateless people refused entry to Haiti after deportation, but that possibility faces thousands of people. At least 200,000 living in the Dominican Republic did not register for "regularization" of their status by the June 17 deadline. The failure of the Haitian government's Program of Identification and Documentation for Haitian Immigrants (PIDIH), which has contributed to a governmental crisis, means that the Haitian government has not provided birth certificates to many who will be denied Dominican documents.

Even those who applied for Dominican papers—often at an exorbitant price—have been deported. The number is likely much higher than has been reported by the Dominican government or in the bourgeois press, but the International Organization for Migration described individual stories in a July 14 press release.

For example, Saint Soi, an agricultural worker with a wife and four children, told the IOM that "I registered in the regularization plan, but didn't have the means to obtain all the requested documents." Despite his having lived in the Dominican Republic since the age of 7, he was deported by the military after his house was invaded by unidentified thieves.

According to the IOM, people who have spent as much as 20,000 Dominican pesos on applying for "regularization" were rejected nonetheless.

Reflecting the attitude of the Haitian government, Foreign Minister Lener Renauld told a hearing of the OAS in July: "We will not accept Dominican citizens in the territory." In other words, those who cannot prove Haitian citizenship will be treated as stateless if deported by the Dominican Republic.

Quoting unidentified but "excellent" sources, OAS General Secretary Luis Almagro told reporters on August 18 that many people are likely to become stateless.

The US State Department is showing no mercy. An August 14 statement recommended that the Dominican government "conduct any deportations in a transparent manner that fully respects the human rights of deportees." In a July 16 visit to the northern Haitian city of Ouanaminthe—in which she avoided the desperate camps that have sprung up along the border further south—US Ambassador to Haiti Pamela White told AlterPresse that she saw no humanitarian crisis and that "there were even things that work quite well for the moment."

US Ambassador to the Dominican Republic James Brewster has been less diplomatic. In a visit to the

© World Socialist Web Site

border town of Pedernales, “Brewster, who had posed for photos with the heads of the Dominican army, border patrol and migration directorate, praised the Dominican security forces and denied that Santo Domingo was violating human rights,” according to *Foreign Affairs.* Brewster’s intervention foreshadowed not just a vicious attack on workers and peasants, but also dangerous tensions along the border. The United States has armed and trained the Dominican National Police and CESFRONT (el Cuerpo Especializado en Seguridad Fronteriza), which patrols the border. The United Nations, with US participation, has armed the Haitian National Police (PNH), which it intends to take the place of the hated MINUSTAH forces in that country.

These forces are now coming to blows. On Wednesday, shots were fired between them at the Malpasse border crossing. *Le Nouvelliste* reported that the conflict erupted when a member of the PNH told a returning Haitian student not to pay 2,000 Dominican pesos to a smuggler.

Although Malpasse has been a focus of the immigration crisis, the conflict is also part of a growing dispute over trucks carrying imports and exports across the border. Further north, in Ouanaminthe, union leaders on Monday blocked access to the busy border market that it shares with the Dominican city of Dajabon. The closure was in retaliation for the detention by Dominican customs of a Haitian truck carrying sugar and other goods. This detention followed other struggles over trucking.

At the end of July, the Dominican truckers’ organization FENATRADO threatened to suspend all shipments across the border after Haitian protesters broke windows and burned tires on 60 Dominican trucks. FENATRADO claimed that 20 Dominican truckers were injured in the violence.

Among other freight, trucks crossing the border carry textiles to the Haitian industrial park at Caracol, a sweatshop complex built after the 2010 earthquake under pressure from the Clinton Foundation and USAID. In response to this week’s crisis, the US Embassy in Haiti announced that, “the Haitian National Police has dispatched special troops to guarantee a security corridor to facilitate the delivery of items necessary for the functioning of the Caracol industrial park.”

“Thousands of people could lose their jobs if this situation is not resolved immediately,” it went on, echoing the threats of Lafito Industrial Free Zone Director Georges Sassine. “The government of the United States believes that the Haitian government has done everything necessary to guarantee the security of the trucks.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site