

US to deport thousands of Haitian workers

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In a statement issued last Thursday, US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson announced that deportations of Haitian immigrants—which had been suspended after the January 2010 earthquake—will resume. Johnson’s statement cited “policies prioritizing the removal of ... individuals apprehended at or between ports of entry while attempting to unlawfully enter the United States.”

In other words, Haitians who have committed no crime other than seeking a better life will be denied that opportunity. The policy is being applied to anyone who arrived at the border on Thursday or afterward.

Those stuck at the border have been forced to sleep outside or seek food and beds at shelters in Tijuana. According to the *San Diego Union Tribune*, Tijuana’s “four main shelters have found themselves overwhelmed”; more than 2,800 people have stayed in just one of the shelters, Desyunador Salesiano Padre Chava, this summer.

The trigger for DHS’s decision is a more than 10-fold increase in the number of Haitians entering or trying to enter the United States through the San Ysidro, California border crossing. During the year ending September 30, 2016, more than 5,000 have entered the United States on parole. The previous year saw fewer than 350 Haitians enter at San Ysidro. The humanitarian parole process allows people to enter the US and stay for up to three years while an immigration court hears their case. Since the deportation policy was announced, Homeland Security officials have told the press that 2,000 people will be deported.

This brutal policy is being implemented not by Republican Donald Trump, but by President Barack Obama and the same Democratic Party that postures as a friend of immigrants and uses identity politics in a cynical attempt to corral voters.

Media reports indicate that the policy change was made unilaterally by the US government, which

complained that the Haitian government is not well prepared to process the deportees. Interim Haitian President Jocelerme Privert, in New York to address the UN General Assembly, found out about Johnson’s decision the day it was announced, according to *Le Nouvelliste*.

Thousands of Haitians migrated to Brazil after the earthquake, at a time when that country’s economy was still booming and its unemployment rate was low. Even while it was supplying many of the generals who oversaw the UN’s MINUSTAH “peacekeeping” force of soldiers and police in Haiti, the Brazilian ruling elite was happy to increase its own supply of low-paid labor through immigration, and therefore offered work visas. Now that Brazil’s economy is in crisis, the Haitian workers are making the more than 7,000 mile trip from Brazil to the US by land. The long, life-threatening and expensive voyage can cost as much as US \$13,000.

MINUSTAH troops, who have occupied Haiti since 2004, have sexually abused hundreds of Haitians, including children under age 18. The crimes are so serious that Privert raised them in his address to the General Assembly last week.

Johnson’s September 22 statement claimed that “the situation in Haiti has improved sufficiently to permit the U.S. government to remove Haitian nationals on a more regular basis.” This, at a time when the number of cholera cases and deaths in Haiti is increasing, when its interim president has warned the UN General Assembly that the Zika and chikungunya viruses are still rampant, and when flooding from any tropical storm this season will increase the death toll from these diseases. Fox News reported two weeks ago that 25,000 cholera cases were registered in Haiti from January to July of this year, a more than 20 percent increase from the same period in 2015.

Haiti’s economy has not “improved sufficiently” either. Citing World Bank figures, the *Miami Herald*

has reported that the country's economic growth is likely to be less than 1 percent this year, and that foreign aid—which was more than \$2 billion in 2011—is now only \$250 million per year. A sharp decrease in the value of the Haitian Gourde against the US dollar is driving up the cost of food imports, while parts of Haiti are suffering from severe drought.

Appeals for political asylum from new arrivals or those being processed in US immigration courts are likely to fall on deaf ears. Presidential elections in Haiti are scheduled for next month, the legislature is again in session and mayors are starting to be elected instead of appointed. The US government will use these developments to deny asylum applications, even though they do nothing more than reverse the policies of US client president Michel Martelly, who ruled by decree during his last year in office.

Nor have conditions “improved sufficiently” for Haitians trying to emigrate elsewhere. Suriname is now denying entry to Haitians—even on commercial flights—French Guiana is beginning deportations and the Dominican Republic continues to force tens of thousands of people across its border. *Alterpresse* reported this weekend that since June 2015, approximately 120,000 families and more than 1,600 unaccompanied children have crossed into Haiti from the Dominican Republic. Nearly 24,000 have been officially transported to the crossings at Ouanaminte, Malpass, and Belladère during that time by the Dominican government.

Johnson's statement does continue the exemption from deportation of Haitian immigrants who entered the US in Temporary Protected Status after the earthquake, but only through July 22, 2017. To qualify for the extension, a person needs to “have been continuously residing in the United States since January 12, 2011.”



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