

Trump administration grants brief extension of Temporary Protected Status for Haitian immigrants

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On May 22, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced a six-month extension of Temporary Protected Status for some 58,700 Haitian immigrants who have been living in the United States since the 2010 earthquake. Unless DHS subsequently decides to extend the end date again, mass deportations will start on January 22, 2018.

DHS Secretary John Kelly's announcement coldly stated that "this six-month extension should allow Haitian TPS recipients living in the United States time to attain travel documents and make other necessary arrangements for their ultimate departure from the United States." That many of the affected workers have young children who were born in the U.S. will not stop Kelly from ordering the deportations.

In order to qualify for the extension, those covered by it still need to re-register and request a new Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The re-registration process includes "a biometric services" fee for anyone over the age of 14.

Temporary Protected Status means only that an immigrant can live and work in the United States during a defined period without being deported or detained by the Department of Homeland Security. It does not lead to permanent resident status, but holders of TPS are able to apply for asylum or permanent residence. TPS does not provide welfare, SNAP benefits, or other government aid.

According to the *Miami Herald*, unnamed DHS officials said on a conference call with reporters that "Kelly based his decision on conversations with Haitian government officials" and "received 'commitments and statements from the Haitian government that they actually do in fact want their TPS

recipients living in the United States to return to Haiti.'"

Paul Altidor, the Haitian ambassador to the United States, objected that his government had asked for an 18-month extension: "There was no ambiguity as to what we asked for ... at least 18 months was a key part of the conversation," Altidor told the *Herald*.

This statement is in keeping with a *Haiti Sentinel* article on May 17, which reported that Altidor had sent Kelly a letter requesting an extension of at least 18 months.

Because the awarding of TPS was tied to the earthquake as a specific event, the Trump Administration is now using the closing of the tent cities that housed hundreds of thousands of survivors in Haiti as an excuse for its vicious plans to deport tens of thousands of workers. With deportation as its goal, the administration's first **gambit** as the July 22 deadline approached was for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services staff to search out and publicize cases in which Haitian TPS holders had committed crimes.

It is likely that the DHS claims to have agreed on the six-month period with the Haitian government are a lie, but it is certain that US government claims of improved conditions in Haiti are false.

Poverty, lack of infrastructure, and the destruction left by Hurricane Matthew make large areas of Haiti vulnerable to flooding from tropical rains on a regular basis. The website Relief Web reported at the end of April that 10,000 houses in the Sud, Sud-Est, Nippes, and Grand'Anse departments had been damaged by recent rains. A few days later, rain flooded the baggage claim area at Toussaint L'Ouverture airport in Port-au-Prince.

Workers and peasants who risk their lives to emigrate are still being stymied at many borders. Thousands who found work in Brazil before its economic crisis are now trying to reach the US by land. The Mexican government is offering work visas to the approximately 4,000 Haitian immigrants who have been **stuck** in Tijuana and Mexicali since last year, but no new arrivals will qualify.

In January, a small wooden boat carrying 69 Haitian immigrants capsized as it approached the Turks and Caicos Islands 190 miles away. Twelve people drowned and survivors were arrested.

According to *Haiti Libre*, the Dominican army and border police (known by the acronym CESFRONT) have been arresting and returning on average 3,500 Haitians per month as they try to emigrate through the border city of Dajabon. The Dominican government is also adding 1,000 troops to its army deployment along the border in preparation for the UN's withdrawal of MINUSTAH soldiers and police from Haiti in October.

The replacement of MINUSTAH by the Haitian National Police (PNH) which it trained is one argument given by Trump's administration as to why conditions in Haiti have improved. Kelly's statement also claimed that plans to rebuild the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince are "indicative of Haiti's success in recovering from the earthquake."

Economically, Haitians are suffering from inflation as the gourde loses value, and there are stories of workers being paid in gourdes but having to use dollars to buy food. The national government has decreed an increase in the price of gasoline to 224 gourdes per gallon. The minimum wage is 300 gourdes per day.

On May 19, thousands of factory workers from the SANOPI industrial park in Haiti's capital went on strike, demanding an increase in the minimum wage from 300 gourdes (approximately \$4.60 per day) to 800 (approximately \$12.30). Many work for subcontractors that don't pay benefits, and union officials have already started to sell out workers by settling for a 400 gourdes per day minimum wage along with promises of old age insurance.

On Tuesday morning, the PNH fired tear gas at workers after they had met with business leaders on Monday. *Le Nouvelliste* described an "artillery" deployed in front of the factory by the police later in the week. *Haiti Liberte* wrote of the bosses that "it

seems as though they were taken by surprise and panicked."

Reflecting the desire of international capital to profit from cheap wages, The Economic Forum of the Private Sector released a note complaining that "the protests have brought economic losses for businesses as well as for the workers ... and affected Haiti's foreign image."

Some 2,700 teachers who have been working for years without receiving pay from the government are also on strike. This crisis has grown out of the corrupt Universal Free and Compulsory Schooling Program (PSUGO) established by the previous president, Michel Martelly, which funneled public funds to private schools.



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