

Seventeen dead, dozens rescued after Haitian migrant boat capsizes in the Bahamas

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Bahamian security forces reported at least 17 dead and 25 rescued after a boat carrying as many as 60 Haitian migrants capsized Sunday off the coast of New Providence island. Prime Minister Philip Brave Davis said in a statement that the dead included 15 women, one man and an infant. Authorities reported the boat transporting the poor victims was engaging in a “smuggling operation” to the United States.

In his comments Prime Minister Davis treated the incident as a national security issue rather than a humanitarian disaster, saying that an “investigation is still continuing” into how the impoverished refugees entered the Bahamas and who orchestrated their exit. The boat’s overturn represents the latest and deadliest marine incident in the region, with dozens of Haitian migrants drowning at sea on the Caribbean coast due to the anti-immigrant and inhumane policies of the US and other governments.

A preliminary investigation by Bahamian authorities accused two Bahamian citizens of attempting to “smuggle” Haitian refugees into Miami, Florida. Members of the Royal Bahamas Police and Royal Bahamas Defense Force responded to reports of a capsized vessel shortly after 1 a.m. Sunday, Deputy Commander Capt. Shonedel Pinder said, which likely faced tumultuous weather conditions. Migrants are often forced to travel on overcrowded, makeshift vessels not designed to bear turbulent Caribbean waters.

Pinder noted that in recent months security forces have launched an iron-fisted operation aimed at deterring seaborne migration off the island’s coast, using increased defense patrols and surveillance to detain asylum seekers. He boasted that there had not been a successful landing of migrants in the Bahamas in several months and spoke harshly against any future migrant transporting operations.

Vessel crossings have skyrocketed in the last several months, as Haitian nationals have sought to escape a deepening social and political crisis facing Haiti’s working class and poor. This is driven by soaring inflation, mass hunger, and gang violence that is tied to corrupt factions of the ruling class and police forces.

The Bahamas Department of Immigration has intercepted a staggering 830 Haitian migrants since the beginning of the year. Immigration officers and Royal Bahamas police officers

detained five Haitian nationals last week after responding to reports of a beach landing on the west side of Nassau.

There have been a number of widely reported attempts to reach US territory:

- In January the US Coast Guard reported at least one person dead and 38 others missing after a boat carrying a group of 40 migrants capsized near the coast of Florida.

- In April, US Coast Guard crews rescued 88 Haitian migrants from a sinking vessel in the Straits of Florida.

- In May, 11 people died and at least 38 were rescued after a boat carrying migrants capsized about 10 nautical miles north of Desecheo Island northwest of Puerto Rico.

- In May, a boat carrying 842 Haitian migrants, headed for the United States, instead wound up in Cuba.

- Last Thursday morning, officials with the US Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Coast Guard, and Miami-Dade police units intercepted a sailboat containing more than 150 migrants near Boca Chita Key. The small boat was captured on camera filled with people, including several children.

The refusal of the Biden administration to allow Haitian refugees to remain in the US is all the more criminal given the humanitarian crisis which is forcing thousands of desperate Haitians to flee gang warfare and mass death. Hundreds of children and adults in the Delmas Commune of Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince were forced to take shelter at a high school on Saturday, after fleeing a shooting spree in a neighborhood where fighting between two rival gangs in recent weeks has led to dozens of deaths and destroyed homes.

A week ago, the UN humanitarian affairs office reported that 99 people had been killed in the fighting in Port-au-Prince’s Cite Soleil up to that point. Jeremy Laurence, spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Council, said most of the victims “were not directly involved in gangs,” but were targeted by them. According to the UN, gangs are denying access to drinking water and food in order to control the population, thus aggravating already extreme levels of malnutrition and starvation. For the six months from January through June, the UN put the death toll at 934, with 684 more people wounded. A total of 680 kidnappings also occurred during that period.

Gang violence has proliferated in the past two years due to tensions between rival factions of Haiti’s political and financial

elite. The Haitian bourgeoisie sees their presence as a tool for oppressing Haiti's working class and rural masses.

A criminal federation of nine of the strongest gangs, "G9 and Family," was founded in June 2020 in Port-au-Prince by a former police officer-turned-gang leader, Jimmy Chérizier. Chérizier was closely linked to assassinated president Jovenel Moïse and his ruling Haitian Tèt Kale Party (Parti Haïtien Tèt Kale – PHTK). The coalition has been notorious for sabotaging elections and quelling social unrest in gang-controlled neighborhoods.

Violent clashes have proceeded for years with the backing of the US government and United Nations. The UN's Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) was installed in 2019 to supposedly establish a social and political equilibrium in the nation, but instead turned a blind eye to the Moïse regime's tactic of support and use of gang networks to massacre residents and suppress opposition.

The unending suffering exemplified by the recent string of fatal marine disasters is the inevitable product of the criminal and reactionary immigration policy of the Biden administration and American ruling class. All the pretenses that Biden and the Democrats would carry out a more compassionate and humane policy towards refugees and asylum seekers than his predecessor Trump have been shattered since his presidency began, as the same xenophobic and predatory policies remain in place.

The Biden administration expelled nearly 4,000 Haitians on 36 deportation flights in May alone, a significant increase over the previous three months, after renegotiating agreements with the island nation. The expulsions have come primarily from Title 42, a section of the public service act invoked during the Trump era that has allowed border officials to quickly expel migrants under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. The central concern of Biden has not been overturning the anti-democratic clause, but instead the problem of where to ship immigrants after they are detained.

Enforced expulsions have been facilitated and supported by a significant section of the Democratic Party. Following a federal court ruling allowing the end of Title 42, the Democratic majority in the House Committee on Appropriations amended a health, labor and education spending bill to keep the public health clause in place for 60 days after the Surgeon General lifts all COVID-19 health emergency declarations.

Even then, the amendment would allow the Surgeon General to preserve expulsions through consultations with federal, state, local and tribal governments under the pretense of COVID-19 management and argue for congressional approval to prevent "a possible influx of entries and imports" into the country. The Appropriations Committee which green-lighted the amendment is composed of 33 Democrats and 26 Republicans.

The Supreme Court handed down a ruling last week blocking Biden from inaugurating a September directive from the Homeland Security Department prioritizing deporting

immigrants that pose the greatest "threats to public safety." The Biden administration's updated guidance was a transparent effort to burnish his pro-immigrant credentials by removing a Trump-era policy that removed migrants from the country regardless of criminal history or community ties.

The Supreme Court's 5-4 decision on Thursday rejected the President's request to reinstate a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration enforcement policy after it was blocked by a lower court, with the justices scheduling the case for arguments in December. The DHS guidance from last September directed immigration officers to prioritize certain groups of undocumented immigrants for deportation over others, with a focus on those who pose a threat to public safety or "national security." The policy also directed officers to make a more comprehensive assessment of noncitizens before proceeding with an arrest or removal.

The DHS guidance, however, amounts to an entirely hollow attempt to restrict migrant expulsions. The limitation of forced deportations but with "national security" and "public safety" as caveats is totally meaningless since it would still grant federal, state and local officials sweeping powers to round up and expel migrants at their discretion. The court case further proves that the Biden White House has abandoned its pledge to terminate or roll back Title 42, since it is adopting and arguing in court for the same stipulations which sanctioned the summary expulsion of migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean seeking entry into the US from Mexico under the guise of combating the spread of COVID-19.

This brutal policy, which Biden has continued, was implemented in March 2020 by the Trump administration as part of its fascist persecution of immigrants. Trump's fascist advisor Stephen Miller engineered the idea of using the COVID-19 pandemic as the pretext for invoking a provision of the 1944 public health law in order to attack and banish migrants seeking to cross the southern border, including those seeking asylum, without any due process.

In their contempt for the lives of working people and mad obsession with wealth, the world's capitalist oligarchies see the Caribbean as a source for both tax evasion and quiet vacation spots, while repression and national divisions are created to suppress the working class and most destitute. The recent tragedies at sea prove why capitalism is incapable of resolving the most basic problems in a progressive fashion and that the working class must fight for the socialist overturn of the capitalist system, dismantling national borders and granting workers the right to live and work where they desire.



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