

Bush Administration implements new Haitian Refugee Containment Policy - INS violating international conventions protecting refugees

On December 3rd, 2001, at the Biscayne National Park in Miami, the U.S Coast Guard intercepted a boatload of Haitian Refugees with 188 passengers on board. 3 died during the Coast Guard rescue, 18 swam to shore and 167 were put in indefinite detention by the Bush Administration citing that to protect human life and mass exodus of refugees, indefinite detention was being used as deterrence. Other agencies such as the national Security Council has cited that the issue of Haitian Refugees is a national security issue. In May 2002 the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center and the law firm of Kurzban and Kurzban filed a class action law suit against the Justice Department and INS. In June Federal Judge Lenard rejected case by saying that Haitian advocates must take their plight to Washington DC and speak with policymakers. Since July 29 2002 the Bush Administration began the massive deportation of those refugees all of whom have passed the credible fear interview by INS officials.

On board of the Haitian Refugee boat were 12 minors, among them a 3 months old baby. Now he has spent by 8 months in incarceration as of August 3rd, 2002.

In late December, Congressman Alcee Hastings, D-Fl., and leaders of the U.S Congressional Black Caucus sent communication to the Administration and Attorney General John Ashcroft on behalf of the Refugees, the White House has kept its silence on the issue.

In January 2002, INS had deported at least 4 of those refugees to Haiti because they did not pass the credible fear interview test which would have allowed them to apply for political asylum. The remaining was deemed to have passed the credible fear interview and could be in danger if returned to Haiti.

On January 18, 2002, Members of AFL-CIO staged protest in front of the INS building in Miami to demand fair and equal treatment for Haitian Refugees.

During the months of February and March 2002, other community groups such as FANM Aysyen Nan Miami, labor unions and others staged several rallies in front of INS to get federal authorities to abide by their own policy regarding treatment of refugees.

On June 21, 2002, when President Bush came to Miami to celebrate Cuba's independence and raise funds for his brother Jeb Gubernatorial campaign, the Haitian -American Grassroots Coalition staged a protest in the exclusive neighborhood Coral Gables to demand the release of the Haitian Refugees. The Secret Service ordered the protesters to stay away from the presidential motorcade by at least 2 miles. When asked why the protesters could not be on the presidential route, the police said, "The Secret Service do not want to have any problem in evacuating the president if there is bomb explosion

around."

On March 9, 2002, Congressman John Conyers, D-MI, ranking Member of the U.S House Judiciary Committee toured the detention facilities where the Haitian Asylum Seekers were being detained and spoke with the Haitian Refugees. It was at that time, after lying for months to Haitian-American Community leaders in Miami that the Miami INS District Director, Mr. John Bulger finally declares and admitted in fact there was a policy in detaining Haitian refugees, and directives were given to him on December 16, 2002 not to release any Haitians. Indeed at the Krome detention center, the delegation of the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition accompanying Congressman Conyers identified at least 4 Haitian Refugees who have won their political asylum case before a federal judge but still INS was keeping them behind bars indefinitely. A very upset Conyers indicated to INS Officials that the agency may be in violation of federal laws by incarcerating minor children without providing them with basic education and teaching. The Congressman indicated that he may entertain a hearing on the issue. We must put the spotlight on those Refugees, declares the Michigan Congressman. Before leaving Miami, he gave a joint press Conference with the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition regarding his findings after touring the holding facilities.

In December, several of the Haitian Women who were at the Krome Detention Camp were being raped by INS guards. Instead of removing the guards at the facility, INS authorities had instead removed the Haitian Women Asylum Seekers to a maximum security facility citing it was for their own protection. No investigation has been done so far to punish the culprit. For eight months now, none of the refugees has been able to contact their families in Haiti via letters or phone calls.

Despite community outcry and intervention of policymakers from both sides of aisles advocating for fair treatment for Haitian Refugees, the Bush Administration has remained indifferent to the Refugees' plight. On Monday, July 29, 2002, INS had deported 25 Haitian Refugees, among them are 21 who came on the ill-fated trip of December 3rd, 2001. Responding to the deportation of those refugees and their mistreatment, the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition and member organizations have upped the ante and orchestrated several rallies in Miami. On Friday, August 9, 2002, the Grassroots Coalition has called for a "National Day of Action" in major U.S metropolitan areas such as Miami, Boston, New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Rhode Island and other places by organizing prayer vigils to bring moral support to the Refugees and add grassroots pressure on the Administration. Other direct actions are being planned as well among advocacy groups here in Miami. Efforts are under way to get Senator Patrick Leahy, Chair of the U.S Senate Judiciary Committee to open hearing on the matter. In Miami, the Prayer Vigil will take place in front of the Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center at 7000 N.W 41 Street from 5:00 P.M - 11:00 P.M where the Haitian women are incarcerated. Religious services will be conducted for them inside the facility as well.

Who is controlling the fate of the Haitian Refugees?

The Democracy Directorate, a shadow agency inside the U.S National Security Council, under the leadership of Elliott Abrahams is at the helm of the U.S Caribbean policy and specifically haiti. Mr. Abrahams is well known for his ultra conservative agenda and was found guilty under the Regan Administration for his dealings with the Iran - Contra scandal. He and Oliver North were the stars directing the overt and covert operations in Central American countries such as: Nicaragua, El salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Panama.

Partial list of sponsors of the Haitian Grassroots Coalition Prayer Vigil:

ACLU, Miami-Dade NAACP, Haitian Women of Miami, SEIU-1199, AFL-CIO Women Alliance of Miami-Dade and Broward, The Willie Velasquez Institute, SVREP of Florida, People for the American way Foundation, Catholic Charities, Women for Human Rights International, GUIA, Pan-American Coalition, American Guatemalan Association, Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas Office, Miami-Dade County Commission District - 3 (Commisisoner Dr. Barabara Carey Shuler), Jobs with Justice of Florida, Little Haiti Housing Association, VEYE-YO, UNITE, Unite For Dignity, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, ACORN of Florida, Amnesty International (Broward County Chapter), and the National Coalition For Haitian Rights.



Many have visited Haitian Refugees at maximum security jail

In addition to Congressman John Conyers, many national figures have visited the Haitian Women at the Turner Guilford jail. This facility has become like a pilgrimage for immigrant, and human rights advocates for the past few months. In May 2002, the Leader of the National Action Network, Reverend Al Sharpton and Abner Louima have paid visit to the Refugees.

On June 20th, 2002, the famous Senator Kendrick Meek soon to become Congressman Meek along with leaders of the Greater Miami - Dade Chamber of Commerce, Peter Roulhac and Chris Lee have toured the facility.

On June 21, 2002, Members of the U.S Commission on Civil Rights, including the Chair Mary Frances Berry spent three hours inside the facility to speak with the refugees and jail officials. In that meeting, the Chair vowed to know who had directly issued the directive to detain the haitian Refugees indefinitely.

On July 9, 2002, at the insistence of Senator Bob Graham and Senator Nelson, the INS Commissioner James Ziglar, after much hesitation, had visited the refugees at the jail. Inthere he indicated to Senator Nelson, he was

afraid to release the refugees because he did not want them to flee. Historically, Haitian Refugees always kept their end of the bargaining in showing up for their hearing.

On July 27, 2002, the famous Hollliwood Star Danny Glover spent hours consoling the Refugees at the Turner Guilford Center



National Media Reaction to indefinite detention of Haitian Detention

Coming soon - stay tune!

How to get involved?

If you are in Florida:
Contact the Haitian -American Grassroots Coalition by sending e-mail to :
jrlafortune@lycos.com

To sign a petition, contact: Haitian Women of Miami
at 305-756-8050 or send e-mail to FANM@juno.com

If you are in Boston contact Carline at Haitian Women for Human Rights

If you are in New York contact DAW FANM or (NCHR) Dina Paul Parks at DPParks@NCHR.org

If you are in Los Angeles, contact Antonio Velasquez
at 323-343-9299

If you are in San Antonio Texas, contact Roberto Vargas at 210-222-8014

