

For Immediate Release

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NCHR expresses concern over arrival of 200 Haitian refugees by boat in Florida

New York, October 30, 2002 - The National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) is deeply concerned over the treatment of the 230 Haitians who arrived off the shores of Miami on Tuesday afternoon. The refugees were quickly detained by the Miami police and INS officials as they frantically tried to safely make it to land. "We are truly concerned with the way these new Haitian entrants will be treated by US authorities," said Dina Paul Parks, NCHR's Executive Director, adding that, "unfortunately, history has repeatedly shown how Haitians remain the only ethnic group who continue to be treated unlawfully once in the hands of US authorities." NCHR wants to ensure first and foremost that every single Haitian who arrived off the coast of Miami by boat on Tuesday is safe and that US authorities comply with US laws guaranteeing asylum seekers from all countries equal treatment and access to due process.

Since last December, when a boat of 167 Haitians was brought to shore by the Coast Guard, NCHR has been focusing and relentlessly working with key allies, such as the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC), Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition, Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, and US Conference of Catholic Bishops, to reverse the US Justice Department's Haitian-only detention policy which was enacted last December. Four weeks ago, NCHR and its allies held a successful hearing in Washington D.C. at the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration, entitled "The Detention and Treatment of Haitian Asylum Seekers." As a result of the hearing, Senators Kennedy and Brownback pledged to collaborate with NCHR and its allies to put together a joint letter to the Justice Department to call for a reversal of this unjust policy towards Haitian asylum-seekers and would also request for a private meeting with the key officials there.

NCHR is committed to continue working with its partners to stop the INS from unlawfully detaining Haitians asylum-seekers and deporting them to Haiti where they fear even greater persecution. "In light of this new incident, we are now even more determined to renew our fight against this Haitians-only detention and deportation policy and will push for our people's right to fair treatment, representation, and due process," added Ms. Paul Parks.

The National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization that seeks to promote and protect the rights of Haitian refugees and Haitian-Americans under U.S. and international law, and to advance respect for human rights, the rule of law and support for civil and democratic society in Haiti.

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