



Exclusive: 344 groups call on Biden administration to halt deportations to Haiti

BY RAFAEL BERNAL - 08/30/21 10:00 AM EDT

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A broad coalition of organizations on Monday called on the Biden administration to expand relief for Haitian migrants, including halting all deportations to the country.

In a letter to President Biden and his top foreign policy and immigration officials, 344 groups said they are "alarmed" that deportation flights to Haiti have proceeded, even after the political and natural crises that have hit the Caribbean nation.

Haiti was hit by an earthquake on Aug. 14 that destroyed around 120,000 homes, killed 2,200 people and injured another 12,000.

Haiti, which has long been the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, was still reeling from the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7 when the earthquake hit.

Still, deportation flights to the country have continued, according to the letter's signatories, with at least 130 people deported to the country since Moïse's assassination, including some infants.

"Since February 1, 2021, the Administration sent at least 37 deportation flights to Haiti, even as your officials acknowledged internally that those being deported 'may face harm' on return and the COVID-19 pandemic raged," wrote the groups.

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"By March, the Biden-Harris Administration had removed more Haitians since taking office than during all of fiscal year 2020," they added.

The Biden administration has taken some steps to protect Haitian migrants, most notably expanding the country's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation in May.

That expansion potentially tripled the number of Haitian nationals allowed to remain and work in the United States, with up to 150,000 Haitians eligible for the program.

"The Biden administration already acknowledged how dire the circumstances were in Haiti prior to the earthquake when it redesignated Haiti for TPS. How can they justify any deportations to Haiti now?" said Gabrielle Apollon, supervising attorney and Haiti Project Co-Director at the NYU School of Law's Global Justice Clinic.

"Deportations should have been halted since COVID-19 began ravaging our world. Halting deportations to Haiti immediately is the least the Biden administration can do to affirm that Black immigrant lives matter," added Apollon.

Still, many Haitians who had fled their country to reach the United States are stuck in Mexico along the U.S. border and face poverty, criminality and the potential for deportation from Mexico back to an unstable Haiti.

The advocates in the letter called on the Biden administration to grant humanitarian parole to allow Haitians stranded in Mexico to enter the United States, as well as protection for migrants who don't qualify for TPS and the release of Haitians from immigration detention.

The United States has previously halted deportations to countries that are deemed too dangerous or unstable to receive deportees, including Haiti.

During the Obama administration, while Biden was vice president, deportations to Haiti were halted twice: Once in 2010 after an earthquake killed more than 200,000 people, and once in October 2016 after Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti.

"Is the goal of the U.S. government to continue to contribute to the destabilization of Haiti?" said Guerline Jozef, executive director of Haitian Bridge Alliance.

"President Biden stated that the United States will continue to be a 'close and enduring friend to the people of Haiti.' Words are empty unless proven by action. We call for the administration to act for the people of Haiti and to end the external violence that continues to deepen the instability in Haiti," added Jozef.

The Hill has reached out to the White House for comment.

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