

Escalating Violence in Haiti Demands Protections for Migrants & Asylum-seekers
Statement from the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights
May 21, 2024

We are members of the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights (Rezo Emisferik pou Dwa Migran Ayisyen - REDMA), a transnational coalition of Haitian migrant rights' leaders and Haitian-led organizations who fight for the rights of Haitian refugees and migrants. We are based in 13 countries in the Western Hemisphere, including Haiti. Today, violence in Haiti has escalated dramatically and safe refuge is even more desperately needed. Despite widespread violence and increased persecution in Haiti, countries in the Hemisphere continue to reject and discriminate against Haitians seeking refuge in their territories. We call for the rights of Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers to be respected by our neighbors in the region.

Over the past several years, the violence and insecurity wrought by armed groups has terrorized Haiti's population and displaced them, both internally and across borders. The violence [escalated](#) in late February 2024, with armed groups targeting critical infrastructure, including airports, ports, and police stations. As of the end of March, [approximately 2,500 people](#) had been killed or injured by gang violence in 2024. Two months later, the violence persists. Over [360,000 people](#) have been internally displaced. A [state of emergency](#) was in place for over two months. Schools, markets, and [hospitals](#) have closed due to [violence](#); and kidnappings, killings with impunity, and sexual violence instill fear in the daily lives of Haitian people.

We are horrified to see several countries including the Dominican Republic, the United States, Bahamas, and [Turks & Caicos](#), continue interdictions, repatriations, and deportations of Haitians at this critical time, violating *non-refoulement* obligations. The U.S. government's [deportation of more than 50 people to Haiti](#) by air on Thursday, April 19th, less than a week after the United States [concluded its evacuation flights](#) of its own citizens and while the international airport in Port-au-Prince was closed, is astounding in its callousness, depravity, and hypocrisy. The U.S. government sent Haitians into the very level of danger it found unacceptable and untenable for its own citizens. Less than a month later, on May 16th, the U.S. sent another [deportation flight](#) to Haiti. The Dominican Republic ["closed"](#) its air and land borders with Haiti, and yet deportations continue unabated. These deportations as well as the [United States' interception and repatriation of 65 Haitians](#) on March 12th, and the Bahamas' [repatriation](#) of 263 Haitians by boat on March 20th (a measure taken since international air travel had been suspended) show profound disregard for the lives and human rights of Haitians. They also violate international legal and treaty obligations.

Immigration authorities often violate Haitian peoples' rights and dignity in the process of detention and deportation. As many of our member organizations have documented, including [Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés \(GARR\)](#), violations against Haitians in the Dominican Republic have become increasingly commonplace and widespread. More than [250,000 Haitians were deported](#) from the Dominican Republic last year. Haitian women and children have been repeatedly victimized and violated by authorities, including immigration authorities. For over two years, the Dominican Republic has been intentionally [conducting immigration raids in maternity clinics and hospitals](#) to target Haitian pregnant women for detention and deportation. In April 2024, a 14-year old Haitian girl and her family [reported](#) to the police that she had been raped by a man who presented himself as an immigration agent in the Dominican Republic. In September 2023, [an immigration agent was arrested for raping a Haitian woman](#) in the presence of her 4-year old son at the Las Americas International airport in the Dominican capital of Santo Domingo. These are not isolated incidents;

they point to the systemic dehumanization and abuse of Haitian people by the Dominican government and immigration authorities.

We, the Hemispheric Network for Haitian Migrants' Rights, make and amplify the following demands:

We join and amplify the recent [open letter](#) to the government of the Dominican Republic from Amnesty International and our network members from [Reconocido](#) and [#HaitianosRD](#) that describes the human rights violations being carried out against human rights activists, Haitians on the move, and Dominicans of Haitian descent. **We join their call for an end to the government's collective expulsions and [de facto racist migration policies](#).**

We denounce and condemn the U.S. government's [announcements](#) that they are prepared to expand the [use of Guantanamo](#) if there are a spike of attempts to reach the U.S. by boat from Haiti. [Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees](#), one of our member organizations, had several staff members who [witnessed first-hand](#) the horrors and human rights violations that occurred in the 1990s when Guantanamo was used to [detain thousands of Haitians fleeing violence](#). The proposal to expand its use—again in response to the fear of Black bodies arriving on U.S. shores—is an affront to the Haitian-American community, and to proponents of human rights around the world. Haitians who attempt to reach U.S. shores by boat already face systematic discrimination due to the absence of language interpretation. In a 2023 investigation into the [U.S. Coast Guard's treatment of unaccompanied minors](#), multiple Coast Guard and immigration officials acknowledged that Haitians “faced a systematic disadvantage making a successful claim for protection since almost no one working on Coast Guard boats can speak or understand Creole.”

We join and amplify the demands our network member, [Haitian Bridge Alliance](#), made in a [letter](#) sent to the United States government on March 26, 2024, calling for a re-designation of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians, an immediate release of detained Haitians, and to expedite the processing of Haitians' family reunification and humanitarian parole applications. We call on all governments throughout the region to immediately expand opportunities for family reunification.

We are calling on governments throughout the Western Hemisphere to expand the legal protections that their countries offer to Haitian nationals. There is an urgent need to extend asylum and refugee status, and to expand protections against deportation and detention. **ALL deportations and expulsions to Haiti must stop.**

We call on all signatory countries of the Cartagena Declaration to recognize that Haitian nationals merit the protections that the Declaration affords them. We welcome and affirm the analysis and [report](#) recently published by Mexican human rights center, CDH Fray Matias, and NYU School of Law's Global Justice Clinic, that shows why Mexico must grant Haitians refugee protections under the Cartagena Declaration to comply with its legal obligations.

We welcome the UNHCR's new guidance on [International Protection Considerations](#) for people fleeing Haiti and its recognition that there are several categories of Haitian people that are likely eligible for asylum under the 1951 Convention on Refugees, as well as significant evidence of “generalized violence, massive violations of human rights... and other circumstances that seriously disturb public order” in Haiti—circumstances that qualify someone as a refugee under the Cartagena

Declaration. The UNHCR also reiterated its [call from November 2022](#) to stop deportations and forced returns to Haiti. We believe it is critical to recognize that Haitians have been fleeing the violence and deteriorating conditions outlined in UNHCR's guidance for several years, and regardless of when they left, there is no safe possibility for return at this time.

We are calling on the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to accompany its recent pronouncements with the provision of more material and legal support to Haitian refugees throughout the region. Haitian migration has transformed to span the entire hemisphere, and requires hemisphere-wide solutions. **A regional mechanism for Haitians, like the [R4V platform coordinated by UNHCR and IOM for Venezuelans](#), should be established to begin remedying the longstanding failure of woefully insufficient protections and support for them in the region.** A comparable comprehensive needs analysis and coordinated funding mechanism for Haitian migrants, which R4V has facilitated for Venezuelans, is long overdue.

We call on those who seek to stand in solidarity with Haitian and Black migrants to condemn the inaction of their countries' governments, and demand policies of welcome and protection for Haitians. Haiti is often recognized and remembered as the forefather or foremother of the freedoms of so many—those of the African diaspora as well as many in Latin America. But let remembrance not be the extent of one's engagement. Our Haitian brothers and sisters are in need of solidarity that is not in rhetoric alone – it must be accompanied by increased immigration protections. As Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers have discovered at every turn, anti-Blackness (and anti-Haitianism) knows no borders. The solidarity must not either.

Now is the time to halt the longstanding discriminatory and racist treatment of Haitian nationals and treat them with the understanding that we are all people seeking to survive for our children and for our loved ones. Haitian refugees must no longer be met with violence and neglect.

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* Communications signed by NYU law clinics do not purport to represent the school's views, if any.