First Wave of Haitian Deportees Leaves Dominican Republic

Crosby Girón

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Authorities in the Dominican Republic have announced that more than 200 people have been deported back to Haiti since the deadline to join the Régimen Especial de Naturalización y Regularización de Extranjeros (Plan for the Regularization of Foreigners) elapsed (NotiCen, June 26, 2014). The government also announced that "tens of thousands" of Haitians have voluntarily returned to their country after the deadline expired on June 17.

Amnesty International (AI) has expressed concern that thousands of people are being forcibly expelled. In fact, 32% of the 6,000 Haitians interviewed by AI between June 17 and Aug. 13 said they had been deported.

The interviews also revealed that 27% of those interviewed claimed they had been born in the Dominican Republic and 3.8% said they had Dominican identification papers. This contradicts the Dominican government’s pledge to respect human rights and its assurance that no one who had been born in the country would be deported.

For this reason, AI has insisted that "it is crucially important that the Dominican Republic should establish clear protocols that guarantee that people who have the right to Dominican nationality are not expelled from the country." AI says that, if mistakes are made, the Dominican authorities must take steps to facilitate the return of people who have the right to Dominican nationality.

Although AI has been able to confirm that many Dominicans of Haitian origin have obtained ID papers or are in a position to obtain them, many others have not been able to regain their Dominican nationality despite the regularization plan implemented by the government. One of the most serious concerns is the fate of people who have no other nationality and who risk becoming stateless and being arbitrarily deported to Haiti.

International organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have often spoken out about immigration issues in Caribbean states and have stated that they hope the Dominican authorities can adopt immigration policies that respect human rights.

**PARLACEN weighs in**

The Dominican authorities have been bolstered in their stance by a recent resolution by the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) in support for its immigration policy. In the general assembly held on Aug. 28, PARLACEN also urged the international community to support Haiti so that it can develop the necessary institutional capacity to provide ID papers and generate employment.

This regional organization is made up of 120 PARLACEN representatives from member countries, who have supported the initiative put forward by PARLACEN president Armando Bardales. The resolution was approved by all PARLACEN members from Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.

PARLACEN also approved a resolution to reform its founding treaty through its heads of state and the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA), so that its terms regarding regional
integration issues are legally binding. Added to this, it approved an initiative so that SICA member states can establish a regional agreement on immigration issues with the aim of guaranteeing citizens’ right to freedom of movement in Central America and the Caribbean.

**Historic origins of Dominican Republic’s immigration problem**

A recent article published by Venezuelan TV network teleSUR analyzes the historic origins of the immigration issue. Journalist Justin Podur says that, to understand the origins of the immigration crisis, it is important to analyze the role played by US foreign policy in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Podur points out that, in 1991 and 2004, the US supported the overthrow of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (1991, 1994-1996, 2001-2004), whose policies were perceived as being contrary to US economic interests, but it has hardly said a word since the approval of the Régimen Especial de Naturalización y Regularización de Extranjeros. Podur also quotes an article by Greg Grandin, published in The Nation magazine, that describes the immigration crisis as "a slow motion, undercover pogrom."

Podur says recent US media interest in the issue has revived debates on the Haitian invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1822. Podur quotes historian Anna Ellner, who states that there was a time when the two countries were "brothers in the fight for freedom" against a common enemy: the US.

Between 1915 and 1934, the US invaded and occupied Haiti, and it invaded and occupied the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924. Added to this, the US supported the dictatorships of Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier (1957-1986) in Haiti. The US also supported the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961) in the Dominican Republic. In 1937, the Perejil Massacre occurred, in which Haitians in the Dominican Republic were rounded up based on their pronunciation of the word perejil (parsley) and killed.

Today, the conditions in which the Dominicans of Haitian origin are being deported to Haiti are terrible. Journalists in the area have reported that the transportation they have been provided, for which they are forced to pay up to US$60, is more suitable for cattle than for human beings.

Podur quotes an article by Todd Miller, published in The Nation, claiming that, since 2013, US immigration officers have trained Dominican immigration officers on the border, which highlights US responsibility for the current crisis.

Added to this, Podur points out that the Haitian state is in a state of collapse to the point that it is governed by foreign powers and is therefore unable to help the deportees in any way, just as it was unable to help those displaced by the 2010 earthquake. The Haitian government is controlled by international donors, the US, and the UN. And Haitian President Michel Martelly is more concerned about electoral politics than the humanitarian crisis on the Haitian-Dominican border (*NotiCen*, Aug. 20, 2015).

Another recent article, published by the BBC, highlights the economic cost for the Dominican Republic in dealing with so many Haitian immigrants (*NotiCen*, March 19, 2015). The BBC says that 180,000 people have been expelled from the Dominican Republic, with huge economic, political, and humanitarian consequences.