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Dominican Government Denounced For Treatment Of Haitian Workers

by John Neagle

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On Jan. 28, a truck carrying over 85 Haitian workers fell into a ditch some 36 km. from Santo Domingo, resulting in the deaths of 48 men and women, and injuries to another 36 persons. Survivors said they had been rounded up by soldiers and labor contractors near the border between the two countries, and then loaded into the truck "like animals." The Haitians were being transported to private plantations close to the capital for work as cane cutters. Trade union organizations issued immediate protests forwarded to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and human rights groups. The government was condemned for its "slave practices." The State Sugar Council (CEA), the government agency which manages sugar refinery operations in the country, said it bore no responsibility for the recruitment and transport of the Haitian cane cutters. The CEA is directed by Vice President Carlos Morales Troncoso. However, in recent weeks, the CEA has requested that Haitian cane cutters be hired to successfully conclude the sugar harvest initiated in November. About 90% of all cane cutting in the Dominican Republic is carried out by Haitians. The Dominican Republic has been criticized several times by Amnesty International for its practices related to Haitian cane cutters. One of the survivors, Manuel Yang, who lost his wife, a son and brother in the accident, told reporters that he and many others were recruited by a Dominican labor contractor in the Juana Mendez area, located a few kilometers from Dajabon. He said the Haitians were forcibly removed by soldiers from to Dajabon, where they met up with a group of 35 Haitians. From there, after being loaded onto the truck, the two groups of Haitians set off for Bayaguana, some 40 km. outside Santo Domingo. The cane cutters were to work on the land of private sugar growers who sell cane to CEA refineries. (Basic data from AP, 01/28/89)

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