
Rep. Waters' letter to Amb. Foley on behalf of Ron Voss and Visitation House
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February 24, 2005
By Facsimile

Ambassador James Foley
U.S. Embassy in Haiti
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Dear Ambassador Foley:

I write to express my concerns about the safety of Ron Voss, an American citizen who operates Visitation House, and individuals who are residents and guests of Visitation House, a compound in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, that provides medicine, nutrition, education and a sports facility for local residents and serves as a guest house for international delegations visiting Haiti.

Yesterday, I received disturbing reports that Visitation House was being surrounded by armed police officers. Several U.S. citizens, including Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, Michigan; William Quigley, Professor of Law at Loyola University in New Orleans; David Robinson, Executive Director of Pax Christi USA; and Ron Voss were inside Visitation House at the time.

Ms. Kathleen Sengstock, my Legislative Assistant, contacted the U.S. Embassy and spoke with Douglas M. Griffiths, the Deputy Chief of Mission, to express my concern for the safety of Visitation House and its residents and guests. Mr. Griffiths informed Ms. Sengstock that the U.S. Embassy was monitoring the situation and that the Haitian National Police had arrested one individual at Visitation House who is an American citizen and subsequently left the premises. Mr. Griffiths also reported that Embassy officials had informed Haitian authorities that they expected the rights of the American citizen to be respected.

I have since learned that it was Ron Voss, who operates Visitation House, who was arrested, and that the police also had confiscated Ron Voss's computer and a camera belonging to David Robinson. Ron Voss was questioned for six hours and then released but was ordered to return to the police station today for further questioning.

I am deeply concerned about Ron Voss's safety, and I am also concerned that these events may be part of an effort on the part of the Haitian National Police to harass and intimidate the American individuals

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and delegations who operate and visit Visitation House.

I urge you to ensure that Ron Voss is released unconditionally and not subject to further harassment. I also urge you to take all necessary action to protect Visitation House and ensure the safety of the residents and guests of this facility. I am grateful for the Embassy's attention to this situation, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Maxine Waters

Member of Congress

cc: President George W. Bush

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Douglas M. Griffiths, Deputy Chief of Mission

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Ambassador James Foley
U.S. Embassy in Haiti
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Dear Ambassador Foley:

I recently learned that Haiti's former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert are being transferred from the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince to a prison in St. Marc, north of Port-au-Prince.

I am deeply concerned about the safety of Ministers Neptune and Privert, as I explained in a letter I sent to President Bush yesterday, and I fear that they will be killed if the United States does not intervene immediately to protect their lives. I urge you to take action immediately to ensure their safety during this transfer and after their arrival in St. Marc. I appreciate the Embassy's attention to my request, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress
