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## COMMENTARY

# A prayer of hope for all Haitians on this Easter

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Today, Christians around the world celebrate the risen Christ. The empty tomb of our Lord invites us to fill our hearts with faith and hope. At the same time, 101 Haitian men, women and children who arrived on our shores in a rickety boat last week still await this same hope that Easter brings.

These refugees have endured a long Lenten journey that began in poverty-stricken Haiti, long before they desperately embarked on a harrowing journey across rough seas with little food and water. Glimmers of Easter hope shone for them as they approached the coasts of beautiful Florida. They were filled with hope for a better life for themselves and their families, free from brutality and filled with opportunity for a dignified future.

However, the Lenten journey for these refugees has been lengthened by the current immigration system, which has imprisoned them and instituted an expedited-removal process designed to keep impoverished Haitians out of the country.

Justice, and the promise of Easter, requires us to release these individuals so that they may pursue their claims for political asylum. Just as Cubans come to our shores seeking relief from a wicked dictator and a totalitarian government, so, too, do these Haitians seek refuge from long-standing political brutality and extreme poverty. We must do justice by treating these Haitians with equal dignity and respect. As it stands now, the disparate treatment between Haitians and Cubans amounts to a form of "immigration apartheid."

The Haitians' release is not an immigration question; it's a question of human dignity and human rights. The government has failed to articulate a compelling security-based rationale for the continued detention of these Haitian refugees. Our moral responsibility to welcome the stranger, in this case, is staggering.

The Archdiocese has pledged and continues to pledge our resources by providing both legal and social services for these individuals. Attorneys from Catholic Legal Services and Saint Thomas University Law School have already begun representing them through the complicated legal system. Catholic Charities stands ready to shelter those who do not have family members to sponsor them. The unaccompanied minors are already being cared for by the Archdiocese at Boystown.

But the release of these individuals does not alone satisfy our moral obligations. Justice further demands that the federal government address the larger issues faced by the Haitian community already in the United States. They deserve Temporary Protected Status (TPS). This status allows individuals to remain in the United States for a temporary period of time while they are unable to safely return home due to on-going armed conflict, natural disasters or other extraordinary conditions. No country deserves this designation more than Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

We must be mindful that the brutality of life in Haiti has a profound impact on our community here in South Florida. Our Haitian brothers and sisters in Miami watch painfully, and on a daily basis, as their beloved homeland suffers continuing political and humanitarian crises. Here in the United States, they experience the shared indignity of U.S. discrimination against Haitian immigrants. Granting Haitians in the United States TPS status is the least we can do to support the people of Haiti as they try to reach a place of sustainability and for the Haitian community here as it struggles for acceptance.

I urge the federal authorities to do everything that the law allows to release these refugees and secure TPS for all in the Haitian community. Where the law as written cannot accommodate this, I urge our lawmakers to change the laws. I urge each of you to help bring the Easter message of faith and hope to these refugees. Join me in praying for peace in Haiti and justice for Haitians in the United States.

Archbishop John Clement Favalora heads the Archdiocese of Miami.