



Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
Fighting for the human rights of Haiti's poor

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New York City Council Joins Chorus Urging a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program

The New York City Council on February 29 passed Resolution 1096-A urging the Obama Administration's Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program to help Haiti recover from 2010's devastating earthquake and to save lives. The resolution had 23 sponsors including Council Members Mathieu Eugene and Daniel Dromm, Chair of the Council's Immigration Committee.

<http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=993472&GUID=9BBDDD36-84A7-4144-B3B2-D446FC520FE9&Options=ID|Text|&Search=1096>

Currently 112,000 Haitians are beneficiaries of family-based visa petitions which U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident family members in the United States have filed and which DHS has already approved. All are "legal" and will eventually be joining their families here. But they remain on a wait list of nearly three to eleven years in Haiti, where many may not survive given conditions there.

The Obama Administration can easily remedy this situation but so far has chosen not to do so. It has authority without need for any congressional action to expedite the reunification of these families by promptly paroling into the United States some or all of the DHS-approved Haitian beneficiaries. And there is recent precedent for doing so. In 2007, the Bush Administration created a Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program under which since 2009 alone over 30,000 approved Cuban beneficiaries have been paroled into the United States. Republican U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. Senator John Kerry, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and nearly 100 of their House and Senate colleagues have urged DHS to create a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program to "mirror" the Cuban program. So too has Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, that state's Black and Latino Legislative Caucus, and many others.

The *Miami Herald*, *Los Angeles Times* and other editorial boards, the Center for Global Development and others have noted the Cuban precedent and more importantly the prospective benefit to Haiti's recovery from the 2010 earthquake of creation of a similar Haitian program via creation of additional life-sustaining remittances to needy relatives back home. One of the first to urge expedited legal immigration from Haiti to help Haiti recover was Republican Elliot Abrams in a *Washington Post* op-ed on January 22, 2010, ten days after the quake. The *Washington Post's* editorial board was the first of at least ten editorial boards to urge expedited Haitian family reunification in a January 29, 2010 editorial, the first of its two urging this action. In at least 14

editorials, editorial boards which have urged this program include those of the *Miami Herald*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Antonio Express News*, *Newsday*, *Star-Ledger*, and *Palm Beach Post*, in addition to the *Washington Post*.

In its July 17, 2010 editorial, for example, the *Boston Globe*'s editorial board called this the "most effective way" to show U.S. leadership in helping Haiti recover, which President Obama promised two days after the January 12, 2010 earthquake.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, Philadelphia's City Council, and the City of North Miami have all passed resolutions urging the Administration to create a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program. 87 members of the U.S. Congress -- Senators and Representatives, Republicans and Democrats -- did so in a strong December 15, 2011 letter; 8 members of Florida's U.S. congressional delegation including Senators Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson did so in a December 22, 2011 letter; 8 members of Massachusetts' U.S. congressional delegation including Senators Scott Brown and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Senator John Kerry did so in a October 25, 2011 letter; Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick did so in a September 22, 2011 letter.

The White House is aware of this broad support from political, editorial, municipal, and Haitian-American leaders but so far has failed to act. DHS indicates it won't act without "go ahead" from the White House.

So where is President Obama on this? The proposal makes sense, has precedent, costs little. The White House should instruct DHS Secretary Napolitano to either create a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program or to begin expeditiously paroling into the United States some of the most deserving or vulnerable DHS-approved beneficiaries, for example the subgroup of about 15,000 minor children and spouses of legal permanent residents, beneficiaries on a wait list of nearly three years in Haiti.

New York's City Council is to be commended for urging this common-sense step to help Haiti recover and save lives. It is time for the Administration to heed this call.

For information on how you can help for example by circulating a petition urging expedited Haitian family reunification, please contact Immigration Policy Coordinator Steven Forester at steveforester@aol.com.

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