



# ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

*Office of the Archbishop*

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Anthony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Monty Wilkinson  
Acting Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20530

February 26, 2021

## **Re: Moratorium on Deportation and Expulsion of Haitians**

Dear Secretary Mayorkas, Secretary Blinken, and Acting Attorney General Wilkinson:

Following a letter I sent to your predecessors in June,<sup>1</sup> I again write to express my enduring concern for the continued deportation and expulsion of Haitian immigrants from the United States, particularly at this time. Amid the ongoing political turmoil in Haiti, exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, returning these individuals to Haiti is not only contrary to our national values but also unnecessary for ensuring public health and safety in the United States and could contribute to further destabilization. Since my ordination to the priesthood almost forty-five years ago, I have been blessed to work with and minister to the Haitian people, both in the United States and in Haiti. Now, as the archbishop of Miami, the wellbeing of Haitian communities in my archdiocese, as well those in Haiti itself, remains of great importance to me personally. As such, I renew my request that the deportation and expulsion of Haitian migrants immediately end.

The Archdiocese of Miami has the largest percentage of Haitian-Americans of any metropolitan area in the United States, with many more spread throughout the country, notably the New York City and in Boston metros.<sup>2</sup> They are members of our parishes and enrolled in our schools. They are also essential workers, supporting our nation during this difficult time and contributing to its recovery. Nevertheless, many Haitian migrants are facing deportation and expulsion, contrary to President Biden's Executive Order on Inauguration Day.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://bit.ly/2Zlj2QH>.

<sup>2</sup> *Haitian Immigrants in the United States*, MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE (Aug. 12, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3sq3fCt> (finding the number of Haitian immigrants in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach metro to be over 200,000).



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While the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas has temporarily blocked the deportation moratorium, it has not inhibited the federal government from exercising prosecutorial discretion on an individual basis, nor has it undermined the government's ability to meet domestic and international asylum obligations. President Biden has stated that he will be taking a more humane approach to immigrants and refugees and I urge him to put those words into action in the case of Haitians facing deportation at this time.

Continuing deportations and expulsions to Haiti at this critical juncture risks furthering the spread of COVID-19—among passengers traveling from the United States, to those on the ground in Haiti, and to those charged with overseeing their removal. Haiti is the poorest country in the

Western Hemisphere. Healthcare infrastructure in Haiti is fragile and ill-equipped to accommodate large numbers of people at once, especially those in need of intensive care. Haiti also continues to grapple with political instability and civil unrest, economic stagnation, food insecurity, and the aftermath of natural disasters. Facilitating this instability with a surge in infections would only worsen the “push factors” that force families to flee Haiti in search of protection. Moreover, the ongoing political crisis has reached a tipping point, with my brother bishops in Haiti stating, “The country is on the brink of an explosion. The daily lives of the people revolve around death, murder, impunity, and uncertainty.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, there exists “extraordinary and temporary conditions” in the country that prevent Haitian nationals from “returning to the state in safety,” warranting a designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS).<sup>4</sup> While a new TPS designation could be warranted, it is also important to note the precarious existence of those Haitians currently living in the U.S. with TPS, as they have faced cancellation of TPS and could face that uncertainty again.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Haiti, there have also been multiple instances of Haitian families being returned to Mexico under Title 42, the vast majority of whom are asylum seekers denied the opportunity to file their asylum claims. Those expelled have even included women with newborns less than a week old.<sup>6</sup> In Mexico, Haitians face the same dangers as other asylum seekers. Unlike their Central and South American counterparts, however, Haitian migrants are especially vulnerable to persecution and discrimination on account of their race and inability to speak Spanish. This leaves them isolated and ripe for exploitation in a region struggling with criminal enterprises, corruption, and human rights abuses. Meanwhile, in recent months, public health officials and medical experts from across the country have opposed the use of Title 42 as a justification for expelling asylum seekers during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Haiti Bishops Warn of Catastrophe*, AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED (Feb. 9, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3qMYEKn>.

<sup>4</sup> 8 U.S. Code § 1254a(b)(1)(C).

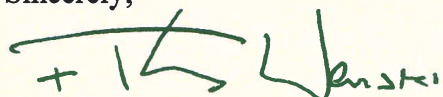
<sup>5</sup> While the U.S. government has extended TPS through October 4, 2021, due to ongoing litigation, *Ramos et al. v. Wolf et al.*, No. 18-16981 (9th Cir., Sept. 14, 2020), the litigation was a result of the Trump Administration cancelling TPS for Haiti and other countries.

<sup>6</sup> Tanvi Misra, *Revealed: U.S. Citizen Newborns Sent to Mexico under Trump-Era Border Ban* (Feb. 5, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3uao8TV>.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Letter to Acting HHS Secretary Cochran and CDC Director Walensky, <https://bit.ly/3s3bhRC> (“Imposing restrictions on asylum seekers and other migrants based on immigration status is discriminatory and has no scientific basis as a public health measure.”).

I again respectfully request that you halt the deportation and expulsion of Haitian immigrants back to a country that is experiencing widespread political unrest in order to prevent further destabilization and loss of life in Haiti, as well as to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. I also encourage you to consider long-term measures that reduce the need for migration. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your leadership teams on how to best care for Haitians here in the United States, while balancing public health and safety concerns with our country's legal and moral obligations. Thank you for the opportunity to address these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "T. Wenski". The signature is stylized with a horizontal line above the first part and a vertical line extending downwards from the end.

Most Reverend Thomas Wenski  
Archbishop of Miami