

*Haitian Refugee Center
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[Note: This letter was sent to all members of the Florida Congressional delegation.]

October 7, 1991

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
5757 Blue Lagoon Dr., Ste. 240
Miami, FL 33126

Dear Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen:

It has been one week since President Aristide was forcefully removed from office by armed militia. It is our understanding that hundreds of innocent Haitians have been killed, as leaders of the coup try to intimidate and control the populace who support Aristide. Indeed, the French Embassy has reported that as many as 1200 Haitians have been killed since the coup began.

The U.S. State Department has referred to the situation in Haiti as extremely dangerous and warned U.S. citizens not to travel to that country and those already there to remain inside. The U.S. marines are stationed at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba so that they can evacuate U.S. citizens, if necessary.

Under the immigration reform bill which recently passed, the Attorney General has the authority to provide a temporary safe haven in the U.S. for individuals of a foreign state providing there exist "extraordinary and temporary conditions in the foreign state that prevent aliens who are nationals from returning safely." INA §244A, 8 USC §1254A.

Haitian nationals currently residing in the U.S. are understandably fearful of being forcefully returned to Haiti at this time. Last Monday, the day we learned of the coup, we asked the Acting Attorney General, William P. Barr, to immediately suspend the deportation of Haitians in this country. We have also asked INS District Director Richard Smith to suspend the deportation of Haitians under his jurisdiction.

Until the political situation in Haiti stabilizes, Haitians returned there will be in great danger. Even if Aristide were returned to power this week, the political situation in Haiti is volatile and, given Haiti's political past, the protection requested should remain in place until we can be assured the situation there has stabilized.

The Haitians have never been granted temporary protected status by our government, despite the political tyranny in their homeland. Now is the time to let the Haitian people know that our government does care about their fate, that it will use its power to offer them the protection they desperately need and deserve. To fail to do so would be cruel and inhumane.

We urge you to join the call for suspension of deportation of Haitians. We also ask you to urge our administration to cease interdiction of Haitians at this time and to bring any Haitians interdicted to shore.

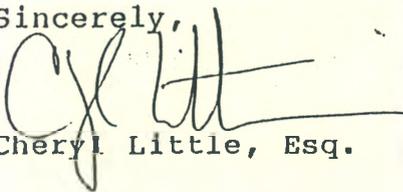
Amnesty International has asked our government to adopt these measures at once. There has also been widespread support of this request from a cross section of Jewish, African American and Cuban organizations in Miami, as well as from religious and political leaders (please see attached list). In fact, never has there been so much local support for such a request.

On October 4, an emergency application for suspension of the Haitian interdiction program and deportations to Haiti was filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the OAS. The application was made on behalf of Haitian human rights groups in Haiti and the United States, including the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami, the Haitian Centre for Human Rights (Port-au-Prince, Haiti), Centre Karl Leveque (Port-au-Prince, Haiti), National Coalition for Haitian Refugees (N.Y., U.S.A.), Haitian Centers Council (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.), Haitian-Americans United for Progress (N.Y., U.S.A.) and Washington Office on Haiti (Washington, D.C., U.S.A.). An emergency petition was also sent by these groups to the Acting Attorney General.

Every day since the coup, we have received calls from Haitians facing imminent deportation. They are extremely anxious about their fate, as are their loved ones. To date, we have received no response to our requests for suspension of deportation and interdiction. There is an urgent need to acquire this relief and to help ease the minds of Haitians in our country who are devastated enough by events in their homeland.

We urge you to support this request for humanitarian relief at once. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Little, Esq.