

STATEMENT BY CLAUDE CHARLES BEFORE

HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

September 19, 1979

My name is Claude Charles. I direct the Haitian Unit of the Community Mental Health Center which is supported by Federal grants to the Public Health Trust of Dade County, Florida, and to the University of Miami. We have been providing services to the Haitians for six years.

In addition to the mental-emotional problems typical of individuals coming to mental health services, I would like to tell you a little of the related issues which Haitians do not seem to be able to resolve for themselves, and which seem to make their mental-emotional problems much more intense and dangerous:

1. Modern medications are designed for people who have normal patterns of eating. The malnutrition experienced by so many Haitian patients causes unexpected side-effects, sometimes dangerous, and certainly a surprise to physicians who prescribe them.
2. Young people who have successfully completed public school, who have an aptitude and a desire to go on to college, cannot do so because their legal status is not established. We know of over two hundred Haitian youth in this dilemma. Unresolved this can only be a source of real trouble for many of them who are truly refugees from what seems to them to be an arbitrary and capricious process of government.
3. Many children with a legal status in the Bahamas, or another country, come to Miami to be with their family, or friends of their family. The formation of many extended family groups is very important and desirable, but at the same time encourages an informal system of home day-care in which many children are left every day in the care of other children. This does not provide adequate protection or care or the nurturing growth experiences which young children need. When an emergency occurs, it can be very dangerous.
4. To survive under the conditions we see in Miami, young people enter into primitive economic relationships in which shelter and food and companionship, protection and some level of physical security, are bartered in the establishment of new households. Then, a child is conceived to be born in the United States as a citizen in the expectation

that it may provide another legal leverage for their survival. The powerful forces which move these people to adopt such primitive strategies to survive as refugees are not the best foundation for building a healthy life. We see these circumstances give birth to violence, to severe interpersonal exploitation, and to unbearable stress.

In conclusion, let me say that even if these people were welcome refugees and were given a warm reception by the government agencies, their poverty, their lack of education, their lack of preparation for living in an urban slum, their linguistic and cultural separateness from the greater community, would be reason enough to expect problems. Add the pressures of living as undocumented aliens, often illegal, usually seeking to avoid notice by any agent of government, and we have a ghetto life that is dramatically unhealthy and destructive.