

PRESS CONFERENCE

May 13, 1980

TIME: 12 Noon

PLACE: 1302 Longworth HOB

Supporters of political refugee status for Haitian refugees will host a press conference today condemning the Administration's continued vacillation on resolving the Haitian refugee crisis. Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, yesterday, indicated that the Administration is still considering treating Haitians differently than all other refugees. The use of "humanitarian parole" for Haitians, as suggested by Ambassador Palmieri, would clearly designate a second-class refugee status for Haitians as well as not providing any refugee resettlement assistance to states and localities.

Press Conference Participants:

Rep. Walter Fauntroy

Rep. William Lehman

Rep. Mickey Leland

Tom Melia, Sen. Moynihan's Office

Richard Womack, AFL-CIO

Norman Hill, President, A. Philip Randolph Institute

Maudine Cooper, National Urban League

Randall Robinson, Executive Director, Transafrica

Lester Hyman, American Jewish Committee

Robert Berry, United Presbyterian Church

PRESS STATEMENT

A diverse and broad-based coalition of political, Black, labor, religious and civil rights groups today again decried the Administration's inhumane and deceitful policies on Haitian refugees.

Condemning the eight years of blatantly discriminatory treatment of the Haitian boat people, representatives of the coalition charged that testimony given on May 12th, before the Senate Judiciary Committee, by Victor Palmieri, U.S. Ambassador for refugees, cynically ignored the gravity of the suffering the Haitians have endured.

The coalition specifically referenced efforts over the last several years to persuade the Administration to end and remedy 8 years of inhumane treatment by granting those Haitian refugees currently in Florida political refugee status before the President's authority to do so terminates on May 15th. They attacked Ambassador Palmieri's statement that the Administration would not be stampeded into the "precipitous action" to grant the Haitians refugee status.

U.S. policies of expelling Haitian asylum applicants as quickly as possible from the country, as well as the continual denial of due process rights in asserting their asylum claims over the last 8 years is only further evidence

of the discriminatory treatment that Haitians have received.

Coalition members further charged that Haitians have faced imprisonment, torture and death when they have been forcibly returned to Haiti. Federal Court testimony, according to coalition members, has revealed that the Presidential guard had standing orders to seek out and destroy all Haitians returned from the U.S. because they were viewed as "grievous traitors" by the Duvalier regime.

Recent news reports indicate that the Duvalier regime is tightening its surveillance to prevent other refugees from fleeing Haiti. As recently as April 13th, 400 boat people were drowned "by smugglers". Sixty more, caught soon after, were imprisoned.

"Are the Haitian boat people expendable because they are Black?", was a central theme raised by Coalition members. "Eight years of discrimination must not only be ended, but remedied, if we are to be convinced that racism is not a significant factor in U.S. refugee policy."

"Only by giving Haitians refugee status by May 15th can the Administration convince us that a break with the past has been made. May 15th is a real deadline and any attempts to grant "humanitarian parole" as suggested by

Palmieri, will be viewed as a continuation of racist refugee policies by the Administration, charged the coalition members.

Members explained that no other status, other than refugee status, will give Haitians refugee resettlement benefits which have been accorded to all other refugees that have been welcomed to our shores.