

# NEWS

## *U.S. Senator Richard (Dick) Stone*

Florida

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### FEDERAL COMMISSION TO HEAR PROBLEMS OF HAITIANS IN U.S.

WASHINGTON, D. C. -- The plight of Haitians in the U.S. will at last get a hearing by the federal government, thanks to the efforts of Florida Senator Dick Stone.

Stone, who has accused the Carter Administration of "racism" in its policies towards the Haitians, got the commitment for hearings in Florida from U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. That is the Senate committee that handles immigration and refugee issues.

During debate Sept. 6 on a broad Refugee Assistance Act, Stone introduced an amendment which would have included "economically oppressed emigrants from Haiti" among those who would receive help under the new law. The Stone amendment was not adopted as part of the bill, but Sen. Kennedy did agree to request that the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy hold a hearing in Florida on the Haitians' problems and report back recommendations to the Senate. Kennedy, a member of the federal Commission, also said he would ask that the Commission give "special consideration" to the plight of the Haitians.

Stone followed up the floor debate with a written request for such hearings, but no date has been set yet.

In August, following the tragic drownings of six Haitians trying to escape to Florida, Sen. Stone wrote to Leonel Castillo, Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In that letter, he said, "I am personally still concerned that the Haitians who arrive in the U.S. are not being treated even-handedly. It is my concern that they are being treated worse than persons whose status is in doubt from other countries."

The letter also said, "Please examine the procedures being used by

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our government to handle the Haitians who come to our shores, in order to make certain that the treatment they receive is fair and equal to that accorded to others who enter the United States from foreign nations."

Castillo responded to Stone in an Aug. 31 letter, saying, "In the past few years, a considerable effort has been undertaken to assure that members of the Haitian community are treated fairly. Illustrations of this effort include the modification of our detention practices in late 1977 for those Haitians then in custody and our development, in the following year, of procedures for handling asylum applications for aliens in exclusion proceedings.

"While it is true that our asylum procedures would reach all aliens and not simply Haitians, it is clear that our concern for those members of the Haitian community who filed asylum claims was a key factor in the development and implementation of the new regulations.

"We share your concern in this matter and we will, as we have in the past, continue to make every effort to assure fair treatment to all aliens."

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