



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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Congressman William Lehman
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Lehman:

The White House has asked me to respond to your February 6 letter, cosigned by 15 other members of the House of Representatives, expressing concern over the repatriation of Haitian migrants and urging the dispatch of a peacekeeping force and human rights monitors to Haiti.

The U.S. Government remains committed unequivocally to the restoration of the democratic process and rule of law in Haiti, and firm in recognizing Jean-Bertrand Aristide as that country's legitimate president. We continue to support the OAS resolutions of October 4 and October 8, which call for financial and commercial sanctions against the de facto regime, as the most effective means to press the regime to conclude a political settlement and restore the legitimate government.

We are encouraged by the agreement reached on February 23 between President Aristide and leaders of the Haitian parliament calling for the confirmation of his nominee as Prime Minister and the formation of a government of national consensus. The agreement included provisions that the Organization of American States would be invited to send a civilian mission to Haiti to support democratic institutions, monitor human rights and work to professionalize the armed forces and police.

We strongly support this agreement and have urged its rapid approval and implementation. The Secretary instructed Ambassador Adams to return to Port au Prince as a signal of our willingness to work with all the Haitian parties toward the ratification of the agreement and the creation of the government of national consensus. The United States has contributed \$1 million to the functioning of the OAS civilian mission, known as OEA-DEMOC, and is prepared to contribute more. We have also approached other governments at high levels to urge support for the February 23 agreement and to urge that they contribute personnel and funds to OEA-DEMOC.

We continue to repatriate Haitian migrants who have not been found to have credible claims for asylum in the United

The Honorable
William Lehman,
House of Representatives.

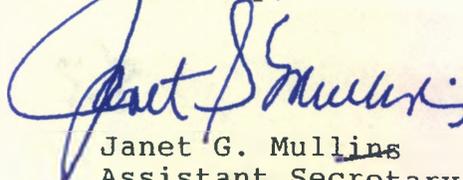
States. As you know, every Haitian who is intercepted by the Coast Guard is interviewed and screened. Those who do establish a credible claim that they will be targetted for persecution if returned are not repatriated. To date, some 35% of those screened have qualified for an asylum hearing.

With respect to those who are returned, Department has instructed the Embassy in Port au Prince to devote all available personnel to monitoring their post-repatriation situation. To enhance the Embassy's ability to monitor the current repatriations, selected Embassy personnel who departed Haiti following the coup have been returned. The monitoring effort is two-fold, consisting of spot checks around the country on the well-being of randomly selected returnees and direct, first-hand investigations into specific allegations of mistreatment conveyed to the Embassy by the Department. To date the Embassy has found no information to substantiate such claims.

In addition to investigations of the status of returnees by Embassy personnel, the Embassy also has access to a network of contacts which permits it to learn of and to evaluate possible violations of human rights in Haiti. Its Haitian contacts include key political figures at all levels and across the political spectrum, as well as business persons, the clergy, educators, the media, health care workers and human rights activists. The Embassy also maintains close contact with the international community, including private voluntary organizations working throughout the country in such areas as agriculture, health care and education; missionary and other religious groups; representatives of international organizations such as the Red Cross, OAS and UNDP; and the diplomatic corps. These contacts have proven useful and reliable sources of information about conditions throughout the country.

Finally, the Embassy has begun in-country processing of Haitians for admission to the United States as refugees. These operations will afford Haitians the opportunity to apply for refugee status and to have their applications adjudicated in their home country. This is expected to obviate the need for those with refugee qualifications to leave Haiti in order to seek admission to the United States, and is expected to contribute further to reducing the outflow of migrants through illegal and dangerous voyages on unseaworthy craft.

Sincerely,



Janet G. Mullins
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs