

Grant Temporary Protected Status for Haitians

By Brian Averill

“Thousands of Haitians currently live in the U.S. due to political, economic, and environmental crises in Haiti.” I wrote that statement before Haiti saw one of the most devastating events of its history on January 12, 2010. Both former President George W. Bush and President Obama have ignored desperate pleas for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians living in the United States. Even before Tuesday’s catastrophic earthquake centered near Haiti’s capital city, Haiti qualified under U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services eligibility guidelines for TPS. Now, President Obama must come to the aid of Haitians in the U.S. or risk exacerbating the situation in Haiti.

Although conditions in Haiti have warranted TPS, other American countries received protection while Haiti has been ignored. Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador are the largest TPS-designated groups in the U.S. Honduras and Nicaragua suffered at least 6,500 killedⁱ during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. El Salvador endured two earthquakes, over 1,000 dead, and \$3 billion in damage within one month in early 2001,ⁱⁱ leading the Bush Administration to grant TPS.ⁱⁱⁱ Haiti has faced similar damage without the benefit of TPS.

Since the ousting of President Aristide in February, 2004, Haiti has been devastated by numerous storms and political violence. From February, 2004, to December, 2005, Port-au-Prince alone witnessed 8,000 murders and 35,000 rapes and sexual assaults.^{iv} Hurricane Jeanne killed an estimated 3,000 Haitians later that year.^v Four hurricanes struck Haiti in 2008, killing an estimated 800 people. The city of Gonaïves’ 300,000 residents faced immediate crisis in the aftermath. One in seven buildings had collapsed while an additional two thirds of the city’s buildings were damaged. From these storms, Haiti faced \$900 million in damages.^{vi} The World Health Organization noted that “the only referral hospital in Gonaïves...was severely damaged and cannot function as a hospital in the future.”^{vii} Without medical care, Gonaïves expected an outbreak of health problems since “all sanitation and latrines [were] virtually non-existent” and mosquito populations were on the rise.^{viii} Six months after the storms, Gonaïves’ streets and drainage system remained clogged with mud and a new permanent lake had formed from the rain water.^{ix}

Before the earthquake, Temporary Protected Status enjoyed broad support. Last Fall, United Nations Special Envoy to Haiti, Bill Clinton, stated that both he and Secretary of State Clinton support TPS.^x In March of 2009 a UN expert on human rights in Haiti urged Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano not to deport tens of thousands of Haitians, citing the damage inflicted by the previous years’ storms.^{xi} Democrats and Republicans alike have expressed support for TPS in Congress. The ranking Republican in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee reiterated her support for TPS in July, 2009, after a brief visit to Haiti. With such widespread support and this week’s devastating events, President Obama must come to Haiti’s aid both here and abroad. Now is the time to assist Haitians in the U.S. so that one day they can return to a peaceful and prosperous home.

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ⁱ“After Mitch,” *The Economist*, November 7, 1998, 33.

ⁱⁱ Eric Schmitt, "Salvadorans Illegally in U.S. Are Given Protected Status," *New York Times*, March 3, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/03/us/salvadorans-illegally-in-us-are-given-protected-status.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sacchetti, "Temporary immigrants forge enduring ties."

^{iv} Athena R. Kolbe and Royce A. Hutson, "Human rights abuse and other criminal violations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti: a random survey of households," *The Lancet*, Volume 368, Issue 9538, (2006): 864-873.

^v Neil MacFarquhar, "Living in a Sea of Mud, and Drowning in Dread," *New York Times*, March 23, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/24/world/americas/24haiti.html?scp=1&sq=Gonaives&st=cse>.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} World Health Organization, "Consolidated Updated on the Health Impact of the 2008 Hurricane Season in the Caribbean," September 18, 2008, http://www.who.int/hac/crises/update_18sept2008/en/index.html.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} MacFarquhar, "Living in a Sea of Mud, and Drowning in Dread."

^x Jacqueline Charles, "Bill Clinton sees big opportunity for Haiti," *The Miami Herald*, September 30, 2009, http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/haiti/story/1258666.html?asset_id=1257548&asset_type=gallery.

^{xi} OHCHR, "UN expert urges US government not to deport thousands of migrants back to hurricane-hit Haiti," March 6, 2009, http://www.ijdh.org/articles/article_recent_news_3-9-09.html.