

HAITIAN REFUGEE CENTER

1260 N. W. 62 St.
Miami, Florida 33147
Tel. 691-2095, 2096

FACT SHEET ON THE HAITIAN REFUGEE PLIGHT

Background Information:

On December 12, 1972, sixty-five Haitians who survived a nineteen-day open air trip on a battered sailboat were washed ashore in Pampano Beach, Florida. They claimed that they could no longer live under the government of Haitian President Jean Claude Duvalier. Despite their claims of persecution, jailing and torture, the United States Immigration Service determined that they were ineligible for either lawyers or hearings. Since they were poor, they must be "economic" refugees and not "political." Instead of a warm welcome they received jail cells.

WHO ARE THE HAITIAN REFUGEES:

- 8,000 men, women and children who fled from the Duvalier regime, the right wing dictatorship which governs Haiti.
- Age range is nine month to sixty years.
- The refugees are Black and their language is Haitian Creole.
- The average education level of the Haitian Refugee is low, but among them there are merchants, carpenters and seamstress who have never had formal education.
- Most of the Haitian refugees came 714 miles to our shores in small fishing boats and sailboats. Others have come via the Bahamas.

WHY ARE THEY HERE?

In 1971, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who established the family regime in 1957 died. His son, Jean Claude Duvalier, who was 19 years of age, inherited the Presidency. Control of Haiti for life. The Haitian refugees have sought political asylum in the United States of America for the main purpose of escaping the terrible oppression of their native land. The heavy yoke of oppression has taken various forms:

1. It is estimated that thousands of Haitians have died by government violence, usually the dreaded Tonton Macoutes, or VSN (Volunteers for National Security).
2. Many refugees testified that if they were believed working against the government or complaining about the government they were tortured, beaten, raped, starved, their families were killed, their businesses or homes were expropriated and they were imprisoned for indefinite periods of time.

Therefore, the refugees are here in America seeking political asylum from their oppressive government.

WHAT IS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S POSITION?

The U. S. Government is trying to play both sides of the fence on the issue of human rights in Haiti. Their February, 1979, Report on Human Rights, is a perfect example:

- 1) They know that they must push for certain political reforms if they are going to maintain a facade of liberalization. Consequently, they admit the following: "organized political opposition is not permitted, the system of authoritarian rule continues," "implementation of due process

guarantees has been slow and erratic," "corruption..has been criticized as impeding development," and most revealing, "an extensive security intelligence apparatus monitors criticism of the existing political system."

- 2) Since, however, they are fearful of jeopardizing U. S. investments and agonizing the Duvaliers by acknowledging the extent and nature of oppression against the general populace of Haiti, they ignored the following evidence:
 - a) During the visit of O.A.S. Inter-American Human Rights Commission in August, 1978, many Haitians who had been deported from the United States, Bahamas and Cuba were rounded up and jailed. The names of eight of these were given to State Department in January. We now have the personal testimony of ten others who managed to escape and are now in New York.
 - b) The Macoutes/VSN are still not only very much in evidence, but during the February Carnival, were the only military personnel permitted to have guns. The U. S. government permits sale of small arms and ammunitions, even though they know they are not to be used for internal police work and the average annual military grant to Haiti is \$500,00 for communications/surveillance equipment and training.
 - c) During the February elections, opponents to the Duvalierist candidates were jailed, denied access to the media and forbidden to hold office gatherings. Since then, checkpoints throughout the island have been reactivated.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP HAITIAN REFUGEES:

I. Write your Congressmen

*Senator Ricahrd Stone and Lawton Chiles

U. S. Senate, Washington, D. C. 20510

*Representative Dante Fascell, Claude Pepper, William Lehman, Dan Mica

U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, D. C. 20515

- a) Thank them for their support for social services for the refugees. (they should hear from us whenever they have helped).
 - b) Ask them to use their appropriate committee assignments to request hearings on conditions in Haiti and prejudicial Immigration and Naturalization (INS) treatment of Haitians here.
2. REQUEST THE FOLLOWING FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL GRIFFIN BELL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20530:
 - a) Parole status for Haitian refugees already here
 - b) Due process procedures for those who come in the future
 - c) Stop deportations and "voluntary departures" without prior access to legal counsel/independent translators.
 - d) Authorization of Haitian asylum applications for work and social services while their claims are pending
 3. DONATE THE FOLLOWING: jars of baby food, bay cereal, rice, beans canned/dried, cooking oil, sugar, salt, canned/powdered milk, canned tomatoes, tomato paste, canned vegetables, and fruits, (no exotic vegetables and fruits unless you are familiar with the Haitian diet); diapers (regular disposable), soap, shampoo, tooth paste, deodorant, hair pomade, combs, brushes.

4. PUBLIC EDUCATION: Contact the Haitian Refugee Center for speakers and background materials to use with your church, civic groups, friends and relatives. Help spread the word about the Haitian Refugees.
5. We have limited funding and continuing expenses for our legal defense and assistance programs. Checks may be made payable to:

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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