

Migration Chairman of USCCB and President of Catholic Charities USA Urge Humane Treatment of Haitians and Other Migrants

WASHINGTON—Over the last several weeks, there has been a substantial increase in the number of migrants present in the Del Rio Sector of the U.S.-Mexico border, roughly 145 miles west of San Antonio. The majority of these individuals are Haitian nationals, many of whom have been living in or traveling through Latin America for varying periods of time after fleeing widespread violence, political turmoil, natural disasters, and economic stagnation in their native Haiti. Conditions in Central and South America—including the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—have forced migration northward to the United States. Recent videos and first-hand accounts from southern Mexico have depicted harrowing instances of mistreatment and abuse of migrants, particularly Haitians. Conditions for migrants in Del Rio have been grim, with daily temperatures exceeding 100 degrees and limited access to basic needs, such as food, water, and shelter.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has responded to this situation by increasing personnel in the region, closing the Del Rio Port of Entry, and accelerating the removal of these migrants from the United States. This includes operating multiple deportation flights to Haiti, which remains crippled by the recent assassination of its president, a major earthquake, Tropical Storm Grace, and other challenges. It was these conditions in Haiti that led DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to recently redesignate Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), allowing certain Haitians present in the United States since at least July 29, 2021, to remain and work in the United States for a period of eighteen months. Moreover, federal authorities continue to use Title 42 of the U.S. Code and expedited removal to quickly expel migrants, largely avoiding due process.

In response to these events, Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, auxiliary bishop of Washington and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration, and

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, issued the following joint statement:

“Policies such as Title 42 and expedited removal all too often deny the reality of forced migration, disregard the responsibilities enshrined in domestic and international law, and undermine the vulnerability of those against whom they are applied. These are not hallmarks of a ‘fair, orderly, and humane’ immigration system.

“As a Church at the service of all God’s people, we embrace Christ’s call to welcome the newcomer and accompany them wherever they may be. During this National Migration Week—through which we prepare to join the Universal Church in marking the World Day for Migrants and Refugees—we are especially mindful of that obligation and saddened to see such a disregard for human dignity. After all, it is in the face of each migrant that we see the face of Christ.

“We call on the U.S. government to reassess its treatment of migrants in Del Rio and elsewhere along the U.S.-Mexico border, especially Haitians, who face life-threatening conditions if returned to Haiti and possible discrimination if expelled to third countries. In addition to those services and works provided by many Catholic institutions, we offer our prayers for these migrants and all those seeking safety, security, and the opportunity to flourish in accordance with their God-given dignity.”

Last month, Pope Francis encouraged the international community to take a shared interest in the plight of the Haitian people and join in solidarity to alleviate the consequences of recent events.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the USCCB, released statements following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and the recent earthquake in Haiti, conveying the prayers and support of the U.S. bishops for the Church and people of Haiti.

Archbishop Gomez also called on all U.S. bishops to consider taking up a special collection in their dioceses to assist with immediate emergency needs and long-term rebuilding and recovery efforts in Haiti.