



ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

Office of the Archbishop

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

The Honorable Michele J. Sison
U.S. Ambassador to Haiti
Tabarre 41
Route de Tabarre
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

June 19, 2020

Re: Moratorium on Deportations to Haiti during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador Sison and Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write to express my grave concern regarding U.S. deportations to Haiti during the COVID-19 pandemic. In my career as a Priest, Bishop, and now the Archbishop of Miami, I have been blessed to work with and minister to the Haitian people, both in the United States, primarily in Florida but also in Haiti. The well-being of the Haitian community in my Archdiocese in Miami and as well as in Haiti is of utmost importance to me personally and to the Catholic community. The numbers of COVID-19 cases in Haiti are quickly rising. I am concerned that deportations of potentially COVID-19 positive individuals would worsen the outbreak. Haiti's health system's capacity to respond to COVID-19 cases is already at its limit making the possible influx of new cases especially dangerous. I urge you to stop the deportations of individuals to Haiti at this time during COVID-19 in the interest of public health and stability in Haiti.

Deportations at this time risk furthering the spread of COVID-19, both among COVID-19 negative passengers traveling with COVID-19 positive ones, as well as to people on the ground in Haiti. An ongoing surge of infection could destroy an already weakened economy and exacerbate political instability. These conditions would exasperate those "push factors" which force Haitians desperate for work, security and survival to leave Haiti.

I recognize and appreciate the efforts by the federal government to respond to COVID-19. However, I do note that at this time, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have limited testing and treatment capacity to ensure that all detainees are tested. As a result, certain ICE detention facilities have become [sites](#) of COVID-19 outbreaks. ICE itself has [reported](#) that only 20 % of detainees had been tested for COVID-19, and of those tested about one-third tested positive for the virus (1,709 confirmed cases). As the weeks and months pass, we are seeing a significant increase in COVID-19 cases among both ICE detainees and detention facility staff.

While COVID-19 cases exceed 2 million in the U.S., 3,259 cases and 51 deaths have been confirmed in Haiti. As the Ministry of Health and other experts race to put together more resources, Haiti's scientific community strongly opposes receiving any more deportees during the pandemic. Haitian health experts estimated that there are 39 physicians to manage COVID-19, 124 ICU beds and the capacity to ventilate 62 people in a country of 11 million. Haiti's economy and political stability have been devastated by successive crises: the 2010 earthquake, a cholera epidemic that took over 10,000 lives, Hurricane Matthew in 2016, and violent elections in 2015/2016. If the Haitian government and its friends are unable to contain the spread of COVID-19 and cases proliferate, the country could be on lockdown for months, exacerbating unemployment and insecurity, and cause a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

I again respectfully request that you halt deportations during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent further destabilization in Haiti, and to prevent massive loss of lives. There is precedent for temporarily suspending deportation flights to Haiti due to extreme hardship. In January 2010, DHS suspended deportations in light of the earthquake. More narrowly tailored measures are available to protect U.S. interests, such as monitoring and releasing detainees to shelter in place with their families, rather than deporting them to a country already buckling under an overburdened infrastructure. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your leadership teams on how to best care for detained Haitians here in the United States and balance public safety and health concerns.

More than a million American citizens of Haitian descent live in the United States. Because of their ongoing ties to Haiti, including supporting relatives through remittances, they do not want to see Haiti further destabilized by a deportation policy that threatens to undermine the public health and safety of the people of Haiti. Thank you for the opportunity to raise this important issue and I thank you for your service and welcome the chance to work together.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Thomas Wenski
Archbishop of Miami

cc: Honorable President Jovenel Moïse
Honorable Prime Minister Joseph Jouthe
Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs Claude Joseph
Honorable Ambassador Hervé H. Denis
Honorable Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi
Honorable Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy
U.S. Senator Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator Rick Scott
U.S. Representative Ted Deutch
U.S. Representative Mario Diaz-Belart
U.S. Representative Lois Frankel
U.S. Representative Alcee Hastings
U.S. Representative Debbie Mucasel-Powell
U.S. Representative Donna Shalala
U.S. Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz
U.S. Representative Frederica Wilson