



---

November 1, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

*VIA EMAIL*

**RE: Protection for and Aid to Haitians after Hurricane Matthew**

Dear Secretaries Johnson and Kerry:

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) to share our concerns regarding the care and treatment of Haitians by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Our concerns have increased significantly due to the disaster wrought by Hurricane Matthew in Haiti.

Hurricane Matthew devastated Haiti on October 4, 2016, killing [hundreds](#) of Haitians and leaving 1.4 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Hurricane Matthew has left tens of thousands in Haiti with damaged or destroyed homes, and over 175,000 individuals remain in emergency shelters. Adding to this catastrophe is the fact that flood waters resulting from the hurricane [compromised](#) the water supply and destroyed essential crops. In addition to food shortages, we are concerned that the cholera epidemic could worsen. CRS has already provided support to nearly 12,000 households and is leading coordination of the shelter response. As the country seeks to recover from this latest disaster, we encourage our government to do all it can for Haitians presently in Haiti and arriving to the United States. This emergency is yet another reminder of the unprecedented humanitarian needs globally; we urge the Administration and its

successor to press Congress for an expansion of robust humanitarian funding in Fiscal Years 2017 and 2018 appropriations.

We are concerned about DHS's recent immigration policies which separate and detain Haitian family members. These policies are particularly inhumane in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew when our government should be showing Haitians compassion and support. Thus, we urge you to consider the following migration-related recommendations:

1) **Permanently Halt Haitian Regular Removal Policy and Reinstate Humanitarian Parole of Haitians at the U.S./Mexico Border.** While we welcome your recent [decision](#) to temporarily suspend flights deporting Haitians from the United States, we urge you to permanently halt regular removals to Haiti. DHS justified the September 22, 2016 change of policy resuming regular removals by finding that conditions in Haiti had "improved sufficiently." This assertion in the face of the devastation left by Hurricane Matthew, as well as the effects of prior natural disasters, health epidemics, violence, and political instability, is [untenable](#). With the current destruction in Haiti, placing arriving Haitians in detention and removal proceedings will only contribute to over-crowding in our immigrant detention facilities, as they cannot be safely returned to Haiti at this time. Therefore, we ask that you reinstate the humanitarian parole of Haitians as a humane but also a cost-effective measure.

2) **Redesignate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haiti.** DHS should issue TPS for Haitians currently in the United States and extend the status through the duration of Haiti's recovery. As you know, DHS [extended](#) TPS for Haiti – initially designated after the 2010 earthquake – through July 22, 2017; however, in the wake of Hurricane Matthew, DHS should redesignate Haiti for TPS. DHS has the authority to issue such a policy under [Section 244\(b\) of the Immigration and Nationality Act](#). As noted above, the hurricane has had catastrophic consequences in Haiti and return of individuals to the country cannot be accomplished safely at this time. Thus, redesignating Haiti for TPS is an appropriate and a humane administrative response that will allow individuals to work in the United States and send remittances back to Haiti. Permitting displaced Haitians to legally work will also provide them with the opportunity to support themselves and their families and live with dignity.

3) **Expand the Capacity of the Cuban and Haitian Family Reunification Parole Programs.** During this time of crisis, we ask you to fully support and expand existing programs such as the Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program, which expedites reunification for eligible Haitian family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents. As with its companion program for Cubans, the need for the HFRP Program is vast as evidenced by the fact that there are an estimated [100,000 Haitians](#) who will become eligible for the program. In the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, this need will undoubtedly grow. Thus, expanding capacity of and increasing resources to this family reunification program, as well as the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program, is vital to ensure timely, safe, and legal family reunification.

4) **Increase Efforts to Ensure Haitian Family Unity.** In recent weeks, we have learned of the toll DHS's new policy has taken on family unity. DHS is detaining approximately 2,700 newly arrived Haitians in facilities across the country. While we welcome the decision to release


pregnant women and women with children, DHS should ensure that it is strictly adhering to this policy. Unfortunately, the CARA Pro Bono Project has recently observed at least 11 Haitian families transferred from the border to the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas. We ask that you not detain Haitian families and that you not separate Haitian husbands and fathers arriving in these family units. Finally, DHS must ensure that it is making every effort to reunite family members who were separated at the U.S./Mexico border due to the September 22nd policy shift. Family unity is the foundation of our nation's federal immigration policy and a high priority of the Catholic Church. We have an obligation to uphold this priority. Consequently, DHS should ensure pregnant women and Haitian family units – including Haitian men arriving in family units – are not detained, facilitate family units being processed together at ports of entry, and make every effort to expedite processing for those individuals who have already been separated and are waiting for an appointment at the San Ysidro or Calexico Ports of Entry.

In conclusion, our nation must lead by example during this time of crisis and tragedy. We must offer aid, protection, and compassion to Haitians abroad and within the United States. As Catholic service providers, we stand ready to work with you to help assist Haiti and Haitians rebuild from this terrible tragedy. We believe these policies will help ensure that Haiti and its people are positioned for recovery.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo  
Chairman, Committee on Migration  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo  
President and CEO  
Catholic Relief Services



Sr. Donna Markham, OP,  
PhD  
President & CEO  
Catholic Charities USA



Most Rev. Kevin Vann  
Chairman  
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

cc: Felicia Escobar, Special Assistant to the President for Immigration Policy  
Cecilia Muñoz, Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy Council  
Denis McDonough, White House Chief of Staff, Executive Office of President