

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Condemning Actions Of D.R. Government Against Haitians, Organizers Of D.R. Independence Day Event Celebrate Inclusion

Caribbean / **Published On February 27, 2017 01:56 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Sunday's eighth annual Dominican Republic Independence Day Parade that began at the Basin Triangle in Christiansted and culminated at the Canegata Ballpark, took place against a backdrop of continued violence and discrimination against people of Haitian descent living in D.R., many who are being violently dragged out of their homes -- even if they were born on the Dominican Republic side of Hispaniola, which is shared by Haiti and D.R.

But organizers of the independence day event, whose chairman roundly condemned the government's actions on Sunday night during an interview with The Consortium, made it a point to include Haitians in yesterday's parade as a show of support for those suffering the injustices.

"We are against what our government is doing, definitely we are against that," said Ovelto O'Neal, chairman of the Dominican Action Committee. "We are against it because it's not their fault, okay? It's our political system's fault."

According to historical accounts, Haitians began their migration to D.R. [in the 20th Century](#), and their integration became more pronounced during the rule of dictator Rafael Trujillo -- a former president of D.R. from 1930 until his assassination in 1961 -- who brought Haitians to D.R. [during his 30-year rule](#) to cultivate sugarcane. During that time, some Haitians crossed the border back to their side of Hispaniola, while others integrated themselves and built families on the D.R. side.

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"The majority of Haitians stayed in the Dominican Republic -- having children who were born there, raised there and went school there -- and they'd never been bothered by immigration or anything. And now, decades later, our government is discriminating against them, and we're definitely against that system," Mr. O'Neal said.

President Trujillo was responsible for the massacre of what has been estimated to be between [9,000 to 20,000 Haitians](#) during what became known as the [Parsley Massacre](#).

According to an Amnesty International report, the Dominican Republic, in its recent actions beginning mid-2015, violated the human rights of tens of thousands of people by stripping several generations of citizenship.

The report details decades of discriminatory practices codified into laws that have turned Haitians and their D.R.-born children into "ghost citizens". These stateless people lack identity papers for work, healthcare, schooling or the right to live in either nation on the island.

"The ruling was outrageous," said Chiara Liguori, Amnesty's expert on the Caribbean and the author of the report. "Most of these people have never claimed Haitian nationality," she said. "Dominicans who've never been to Haiti, have no ties there, are now obliged to prove themselves: to say first, 'Look I'm a foreigner,' and then apply for naturalization over two years. And to apply doesn't mean they'll get it."

The ruling rendered people stateless even outside the country, prompting protests in the U.S. and international denunciations from human rights groups who say the government is depriving people of basic needs.

In 2012, a United Nations and European Union survey found more than 200,000 people in the Dominican Republic had at least one foreign parent and were of Haitian descent.

Mr. O'Neal said the committee has been about unity from the onset, and pointed to the inclusion of a group from St. Kitts and Nevis that was invited to perform during Sunday's parade as a show of a broader coalition that goes beyond the organization's D.R./Haiti

unity effort.

"Everybody understands that the Dominican Republic in the early 1900s was the bread and butter for the whole Caribbean," Mr. O'Neal said. "So today we're coming back to these islands and saying we want to be a part of the Virgin Islands, and we appreciate that the Virgin Islands has accepted us."

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