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Biden Administration to Haitians and Cubans: Do Not Try Coming to U.S. Illegally Because of Upheaval in Your Countries

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U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro N. Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, CMC – The Biden administration's secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro N. Mayorkas, has issued a stern warning to Haitian and Cuban migrants not to attempt to come to the North American country illegally, especially in the wake of the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse and the unrest in Cuba.

Mayorkas told reporters that while the Joe Biden administration supports the people of Haiti and stands in solidarity with the Cuban people, Washington is closely monitoring “any activity that may indicate increases in unsafe and irregular maritime migration in the Florida straits.”

“The time is never right to attempt migration by sea. To those who risk their lives doing so, this risk is not worth taking. Allow me to be clear: if you take to the sea, you will not come to the United States,” Mr. Mayorkas said.

The Biden administration's treatment of Cuban and Haitian immigrants is in stark contrast to those on the U.S. border with Mexico, where the administration is preparing to end a pandemic-era emergency order, known as Title 42, that prevents people who enter the U.S. illegally from seeking asylum. Those people are instead immediately expelling them to Mexico.

Once the order is lifted, families that have requested asylum at the border will be permitted to stay in the United States for the duration of their cases, a process that can take years to complete.

Mr. Mayorkas said Homeland Security Task Force Southeast, which is responsible for the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) response to maritime migration, “exists to prevent and respond to maritime migration in the Caribbean.”

“Our mission and operations in the Southeast remain unchanged, and we will continue to interdict migrants attempting to enter the United States irregularly,” he said, adding that the U.S. Coast Guard maintains “a continual presence in the Florida straits and the Caribbean Sea, particularly around Puerto Rico and our maritime approaches, patrolling with air and sea military assets.”

“Any migrant intercepted at sea, regardless of their nationality, will not be permitted to enter the United States,” he said. “Migrants who do attempt to enter the United States by sea put their lives at incredible risk. The waters in the Straits of Florida in the Caribbean are dangerous, especially now as we have entered hurricane season. People will die.”

Mr. Mayorkas added, “The transit is dangerous and unforgiving. We have seen twenty lives lost in recent weeks as a result of these dangerous voyages. In addition, the threat of serious illness when boarding vessels in subpar conditions is greater at this time during a pandemic.”

Mr. Mayorkas said the U.S. Coast Guard recently sent two cutters to the coast of Haiti, in addition to three others already in nearby waters.

Mayorkas recalled that, in May, he announced the designation of Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), making it clear however that TPS is not an immigration program but benefits Haitian nationals who are already in the United States at the time of designation.

He said TPS eligibility applies only to Haitians who are already residing in the United States as of May 21, 2021 and who meet all other requirements.

“Again, I repeat: do not risk your life attempting to enter the United States illegally,” Mayorkas stressed, adding, “you will not come to the United States.”

He said DHS is “closely monitoring conditions on the ground in Haiti and Cuba.”

“We are committed to supporting the Haitian government as it seeks justice in this case, and we affirm the United States’ support for the people of Haiti,” he said.

“We also stand in solidarity with the Cuban people and their call for freedom from the repression and economic suffering that the Cuban’s authoritarian regime is causing. DHS is working with our partners to support the Haitian and Cuban people.”

A United States delegation of top officials visiting Haiti in the wake of the assassination of President Moïse has also reaffirmed the Biden administration's support for the French-speaking Caribbean country.

“In all their meetings, the delegation committed to supporting the Haitian government as it seeks justice in this case and affirmed the United States' support for the people of Haiti in this challenging time,” said Emily Horne, a spokesperson for the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) in a White House statement on Monday.