

Haiti: Bishop's Group Reports Repression

By John Dash

The progress of Rochester's Haitian refugees through the administrative courts of Immigration and Naturalization Service is being closely watched by the National Emergency Coalition for Haitian Refugees, an unusually broad-based alliance of religious, academic, civic and labor bodies first convened by Brooklyn's Auxiliary Bishop Anthony J. Bevilacqua.

Bishop Bevilacqua is chairman of the coalition which counts among its members such diverse groups as AFL-CIO, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Friends Service Committee, the American Jewish Committee, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, NAACP, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and its action arm, the United State Catholic Conference, and the YMCA of the USA. In all, more than 25 groups belong.

According to coalition literature, the alliance was formed "in response to an emergency: the jailing by order of the Attorney General of all the Haitian 'boat people' who had fled across 800 miles of open seas to seek asylum in the United States. On March 2, 1982 a number of prominent religious, Haitian, labor, civil and human rights, and voluntary agency organizations formed the NECHR to secure human treatment, due process of law, and the immediate release to sponsors for the 1900 imprisoned Haitians.

"This emergency continues: pursuant to a Federal Court decision on June 29, 1982 that the imprisonment of the Haitian 'boat people' was unlawful, the 1900 Haitians were released to sponsors in 90 communities in 20 states by the end of November, 1982. Today the Haitians have many urgent problems: both legal (understanding and navigating the conditions of the release plan and the legal proceedings before the immigration service, securing qualified attorneys, interpreters and expert witnesses) and social (including securing employment and learning English.)"

Last November the coalition issued a report on the violations of human rights in Haiti, drawing on

Unity Service Planned

The annual service for Christian Unity will take place from 4 to 6 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 23, at the Gates Presbyterian Church, 1049 Wegman Road.

The program will consist of hymns, prayers, readings and discussion. An agape meal of fruit, cheese, bread and beverage will conclude the service.

ONE (our Neighborhood Ecumenical) Council of Churches of Gates and Chili sponsors the annual service. There is no charge, but a donation may be made which will go to help local social services helping the poor.

Change of Venue Denied; New Hearing Dates Set

The change of venue request made by Rochester's Haitian refugees has been denied. At the same time the date for their exclusionary hearings has been reset for Jan. 25.

The hearings are scheduled to be held in the Buffalo office of Immigration and Naturalization administrative Judge Gordon Sacks. Last December the Haitians asked the hearings be moved to Rochester.

The exclusionary proceedings originally were to have started Jan. 12. Because of a conflict on Judge Sacks' calendar, that date has now been changed.

the reports of such international bodies as Amnesty International, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

The NECHR report claims "a lack of commitment on the part of the government of Haiti to removing institutional impediments to the protection of human rights, official disrespect for the rule of law, and a pattern of gross violations of basic human rights..."

The report states that "the effects" of the November,

1981, crackdown on journalists, lawyers and human rights activists continue unabated...

"The complex network of official and semi-official Haitian security forces continues to violate the rule of law by arresting or detaining without charge or explanation persons perceived to be opponents of the Duvalier government," the report states. "These forces regularly use severe beatings as an interrogation technique. In August, 1982, a new series of arrests occurred in Port-au-Prince that resulted in the detention without charge or ex-

planation of approximately 35 persons in one of Haiti's political prisons, the Caserne Dessalines. Well known lawyers, engineers, and economists were included among those held incommunicado and naked in isolation cells. Several were threatened and mistreated and others have been prevented from leaving the country."

"The Haitian government continues to disregard its own constitution," the report continues, "and international law through the operation of state security legislation, exemplified by the 'Anti-Communist Law of 1969,' the annual suspension by the president-for-life of important articles of the constitution through enactment of the 'Plein Pouvoir' and through the systematic disregard of the rule of law by Haitian security forces."

Briefly, the report further charges that "the Haitian judicial system continues to violate various procedural rights of defendants guaranteed both by the constitution and by in-

ternational law... The Haitian government is unwilling to tolerate the existence of any person or organization that advocates the promotion of human rights in Haiti... Prisoners, in Haiti's political prisons continue to face severe mistreatment and violations of their fundamental due process rights... The Haitian government continues to suppress and stifle any effective political activity or opposition... Freedom of the press is severely curtailed... the Haitian government has systematically eliminated all legitimate free trade union activity."

The report concludes with a statement by the OAS commission: "In general, it may be said that no progress has been made in the situation of human rights in Haiti, and that there is no evidence that would lead (the commission) to suppose

that there will be any government opening in the near future that will reestablish free democratic life, ideological pluralism or the free exercise of public freedoms."


It is the contention of the federal government that the Haitian refugees who came to the U.S. in 1981 are "economic" refugees rather than "political" refugees.

That question will be debated as the Haitians move through the U.S. immigration administrative courts.

The Haitians who fled their country in 1981 were greeted here with an order from President Reagan to the Coast Guard to fire if necessary to keep the refugees from the U.S. Failing that, the Attorney General had 1,900 Haitian refugees locked up in federal prisons for more than a year.

DPC Postponed

The meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council originally scheduled for Jan. 15 was postponed to Jan. 29 last week because of the severe winter storm.



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