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Dominican Republic: Haitian migrants denied basic rights

(Santo Domingo) Deep-rooted racial discrimination against Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic is causing arbitrary mass deportations and the denial of birth certificates to thousands of children, according to a new study published by Amnesty International on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

“From the workplace to the streets, Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic are at the very bottom of the social ladder. They and their Dominican-born children are being denied the most basic rights before the eyes of the Dominican state and society,” said Gerardo Ducos, Amnesty International researcher on the Caribbean.

At least half a million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, working in the agriculture and construction sectors. Fleeing the poverty of their homeland, they undertake poorly paid and arduous jobs.

Between 20,000 and 30,000 Haitians are expelled from the Dominican Republic every year, in most cases, without any judicial oversight.

Deportations are so arbitrary that even Dominican nationals have been expelled from their own country because they “look like Haitians”.

On 4 January 2006, Matilde, an 8-year-old girl, was seized by officials in the streets of Santo Domingo. She was slapped across the face twice, hard enough to make her mouth bleed. She was then taken to a detention centre for irregular migrants, without being allowed to contact her parents, and held overnight. She was only saved from being expelled to neighbouring Haiti when a local human rights organization proved she was a Dominican national. Officials had assumed she was Haitian and in the country without legal permission because she was black.

Amnesty International’s report also revealed that racial discrimination prevents Dominicans of Haitian descent from obtaining birth certificates. Without a birth certificate, Dominicans of Haitian descent are unable to study beyond primary level or claim an identity card when they become 18, barring them from the formal job market and from voting.

Eduardo was born in the Dominican Republic. He is 42 years old but doesn’t have a birth certificate or any form of identification because his parents are Haitians. His four children also lack any form of identification,

despite having been born in the Dominican Republic. For Eduardo to even apply for a birth certificate he would have to pay a fee of US\$ 147 – more than a month of the family’s income – but even then the government could refuse to give him one.

“The Dominican Republic must take action to protect the rights of Haitian migrants and their Dominican children. It is their legal responsibility to do so,” said Gerardo Ducos.

Amnesty International called on the Dominican authorities to end arbitrary expulsions of Haitian migrants and discriminatory policies that prevent Dominicans of Haitian descent from obtaining Dominican nationality.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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