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Haitian Earthquake Evacuees Should Not Be in Detention Centers

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BACKGROUND

On March 31, 2010, a New York Times front page article detailed the plight of more than 30 survivors who were flown to the U.S. on military planes. They were subsequently detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) because they lacked proper documentation. Although they had no criminal history, they remained in detention for over two months. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/01/us/01detain.html>)

These are survivors who had lost mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and children in the earthquake. Some have minor children in the U.S. or Haiti awaiting their return. During their prolonged and unnecessary detention, many showed signs of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Most received little or no mental health treatment for the trauma they suffered, despite offers of free services from local nonprofits.

Due to the diligence of Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center and law students from across the country, this group of survivors was released from detention shortly after the NY Times article ran. According to news reports, several more earthquake survivors remain in U.S. immigration detention facilities (<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/04/01/haiti.quake.refugees/>).

We applaud the efforts of the U.S. government and countless volunteers who, in the midst of a chaotic situation, assisted thousands of injured survivors by transporting them to hospitals in the U.S. Nonetheless, the lack of follow through for these individuals is causing needless – and preventable – additional trauma. It is crucial that immediate action be taken to remedy this situation and restore wholeness and dignity to survivors of the earthquake in Haiti.

ACTION

In order to prevent further trauma to survivors of the devastating earthquake in Haiti, **the emergency supplemental Global Food Security Act (H.R. 3077/S. 384) should include humanitarian parole for Haitians brought to the U.S. as medical evacuees, as family members of medical evacuees, or for other reasons by U.S. government personnel.**

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Mennonite Central Committee is a relief, development, and peace organization affiliated with the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches. MCC is working with those affected by the earthquake, both in Haiti and with displaced Haitians in Miami, New York, and Philadelphia.