Days of Prayer for the Displaced in Haiti and the Dominican Republic

A seven-day prayer and advocacy campaign for those affected by the Haitian-Dominican migration crisis
How to use this guide

We believe in the power of prayer to stir the hand of God and transform situations of injustice and suffering.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) invites you to use this guide as a church, small fellowship group, or individually, to direct your prayers for those affected by the growing humanitarian crisis in Haiti caused by statelessness and deportations in the Dominican Republic (D.R.). While this guide is associated with a campaign running from August 31 to September 6, 2015, we hope these materials and the advocacy action item on page 10 can be of use to you and your community after these dates.

*All photos MCC/Ted Oswald unless otherwise credited

Background

The D.R. is poised to dramatically increase the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Haitian migrant workers and Dominicans of Haitian descent stripped of their citizenship and rendered stateless, fueling a humanitarian crisis on the Haitian side of the shared border.

A controversial D.R. Constitutional Court order in 2013 retroactively stripped 210,000 Dominicans of Haitian ancestry of their citizenship. The order was the culmination of a series of laws meant to restrict Dominican citizenship, and represents a grave violation of international human rights law. Bowing to international pressure, the Dominican Congress adopted a law in May 2014 that provided a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship to its newly stateless individuals. Only 8,755 were able to assemble the necessary documents, pay fees and bribes, and clear bureaucratic hurdles to benefit from the program before its expiration in February 2015.

An estimated 524,000 foreign-born migrant workers, primarily Haitian, are severely impacted by the D.R.’s increased immigration enforcement. The D.R. has tacitly accepted and invited the entrance of low-wage Haitian laborers to work in sugar fields, construction industries, and domestic settings for decades. Though the government recently created a regularization program to allow for the legal residency of certain long-term migrant workers, applicants faced difficulties in getting necessary documentation from both Haitian and Dominican authorities.

Haiti and the D.R. have a centuries-long history of strained relations. Conflict between the countries dates back to colonial times when France and Spain struggled for control of Hispaniola, the island Haiti and the D.R. share. The nations remain separated by language, past violence, wealth disparity, and widespread racial discrimination directed toward Haitians.
Over 66,000 have entered Haiti fearing imminent deportation since June. Facing the options of forced deportation or return to Haiti with their families and possessions intact, many have chosen to return. The Dominican Government has begun openly deporting individuals without proper papers after a 45-day moratorium that expired in early August. Many of those who returned without family or community ties have settled in drought-stricken areas with minimal access to housing, food, water and sanitation services, putting a strain on generous but under-resourced welcoming communities. The Haitian Government has thus far proven unable to offer meaningful support, and local and international organizations are struggling to meet the growing need.

Join us for seven days of prayer as we bring to mind those who are currently displaced along the Haiti and Dominican border, and for the many more who are under threat of displacement.

MCC’s Response to the Crisis

MCC has monitored the situation at the border closely. It has a series of partner-implemented projects underway, including:

- **Distribution of material aid**: Use of pre-positioned aid as well as an emergency shipment of canned meat, comforters and relief kits.
- **Cash assistance for family reunification**: Working with a partner on the northern border to provide cash grants to vulnerable families who wish to reunite with extended family in Haiti’s northeast.
- **Know-your-rights publications**: Partnering with international and local organizations to create posters and informational pamphlets in Haitian Creole and Spanish to help those at risk of deportation to know their rights.

MCC has distributed aid at a camp in Fond-Parisien where approximately 80 individuals (over 30 of whom are children) have been displaced since June. They live next to a community established by local and international organizations ten years ago to welcome repatriated persons from the D.R. and help them rejoin their families when possible.
Prayer guide
Day 1: Pray for Justice

PSALMS 33:5 (NIV)
The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Pray for justice on the island of Hispaniola. Justice is needed to reverse the policies that made so many Dominicans stateless and protect the rights of Haitian migrant workers in the D.R.

We want to see the effects of the 2013 court ruling that stripped 210,000 Dominicans of their citizenship reversed, and we want every person made stateless to be protected from expulsion to Haiti, a country that is not their home. For Haitian migrant workers affected by reforms in the law that affect their legal status, we want their dignity protected under the law and in society.

Ketlen (at right) was born in the D.R. to Haitian parents. She is twenty years old. She reported that on July 7, Dominican officers came to her home and told her that Michel Martelly, Haiti’s president, asked that she go vote in Haiti’s upcoming elections. Not understanding their ploy, Ketlen left her three-year-old in her sister’s care and went with the officers and her six-month-old to be dropped off at the border. When she arrived, she noticed “no one was waiting for me. Not a car, not a motorcycle, nothing.” She is now separated from her family, living in a tent camp in Fond-Parisien on the Haitian side of the border with 44 other families.

Our hope is Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent would not be treated unjustly under Dominican law. Pray that lawmakers and those in positions of power would act swiftly to find sustainable solutions to the immediate and longer term needs of so many vulnerable families.

ISAIAH 58:6-7 (NRSV)
Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”
**Day 2: Pray for Protection**

Pray for the protection of the vulnerable. On the Haitian side of the border, thousands of recently returned families are struggling to re-establish themselves. While some are able to settle in home communities, others without ties are setting up encampments in under-resourced areas hit hard by drought and suffering from food insecurity. Where tents are not provided, homes are being fashioned out of materials like cardboard, branches and bed sheets. Pray for protection from harsh weather and disease.

In a southern border town, Anse-a-Pitres, where 700 displaced families have set up camp, a young woman shares her story: "I was born [in the D.R.]. My mother died a couple of years ago but I stayed to work. It's all I know. I know no one in Haiti, but my Dominican neighbors said they would burn me, so I walked away from the city and walked toward the forest until I reached Haiti." * Women and children, like Darlene Pierre and her son (pictured at left), are especially vulnerable while crossing the border. Pray for those still in the D.R. fearing deportation and under threat by their neighbors.

Corruption is also commonplace on the Dominican side of the border where a number of organized groups, including guards, extract bribes from deportees and people trying to cross. Pray against abuses of power by any people involved in immigration enforcement and deportation proceedings.

In solidarity with those who are fearing for their security and their very lives today, pray through Psalm 91.

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**PSALMS 12:5 (NRSV)**

"Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now rise up," says the LORD; I will place them in the safety for which they long."

**PSALMS 91:1-2 (NRSV)**

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

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*Story courtesy of Nancy Dorsinville*
Day 3: Pray for Provision

**PSALMS 145:16 (NIV)**
You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Pray for immediate provision of humanitarian assistance. Assistance is needed to reach families who have left their belongings and livelihoods in the D.R. and are now living in precarious conditions in Haiti.

Basic supplies such as food, drinking and bathing water, and durable shelter are needed by returnees and deportees all along the border. Jobs are also desperately needed for families considering how to establish themselves in their new settings.

Andre Joseph, his wife Roseline, and their 15-year-old son (at right) were recently gathered up in the middle of the night and forced to leave their home in the D.R. Andre, now 53, spent 43 years working in the agricultural sector in the D.R. Unsure of where his family roots are in Haiti, Andre is looking to re-establish himself in the land of his birth. He is particularly worried about the lack of work. “There is nothing for us here,” he said.

Though aware of the needs of the displaced, the Government of Haiti has proven ill-equipped to respond during the early stages of its response. For now, a few local and international humanitarian organizations, including MCC, are primarily providing material aid. Pray for the leadership of the Haitian Government and these organizations, that they will respond quickly with appropriate resources to relieve suffering and help families integrate.

**PSALM 23:1-3 (NRSV)**
The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.
Day 4: Pray for Compassion

ZECHARIAH 7:9 (RSV)
Thus says the L ORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another[.]

Pray for compassion for those in need. Many communities on the Haiti side of the border have already opened their homes to displaced families coming from the D.R., demonstrating overwhelming hospitality and compassion as they share their extremely meager resources with those in greater need.

Meet Miatrice and Michana, at left. Two months ago, Michana was living in the D.R. with her 9-month-old son. One day she was plucked from the streets of her town, dropped off at the border and made to cross. Miatrice saw her crying on the side of the road and asked her father if Michana could come live with them in the small town of Terre Froide, near the border. Miatrice and her family of ten have opened their hearts and home to Michana and her son.*

Similarly, pray for Haitian families who are receiving relatives that migrated to the D.R. for work and have not been seen for many years. Returnees can feel shame at needing to leave the D.R. with so little in hand. Many were expected to provide for their relatives back in Haiti but find themselves in the position of needing provision.

*Miatrice (L) and Michana (R) in Terre Froide.*

MATTHEW 25:35-36 (RSV)
“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

*Story and photo courtesy of Ted Barlow of Operation Blessing
Day 5: Pray for Church Engagement

**GALATIANS 3:28 (NRSV)**
There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Pray for the Church’s engagement in responding to the displacement crisis. As the Church, we are called to care for neighbors, strangers, widows, the impoverished, and the oppressed. Pray that churches in Haiti and the D.R. existing in a climate of high social tension would rise above their societies’ fears and prejudices and follow the example of Christ.

Pray that churches in Hispaniola would be “cities on a hill,” actively caring for those in need and working for positive social change. Pray too that the global church would be active in calling for a just resolution to these crises and walk alongside local churches through devoted prayer and assistance.

**MATTHEW 5:14-16 (NRSV)**
“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

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**PRAYER FROM PASTOR LESLY BERTRAND, HAITIAN MENNONITE BISHOP**

Haiti and the Dominican Republic are a single bird’s two wings. If the bird loses one wing it cannot fly, and this is like the island of Hispaniola. Each country needs the other to advance. Without peace on the island, there cannot be development for its people. Peace brings prosperity and well-being so that all of society can advance.

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to touch the hearts of the leaders of both these countries for the benefit of the people. God’s all-powerful blessing can bring Shalom to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Shalom! Shalom! Shalom!
Day 6: Pray for Diplomacy

Pray for improved diplomatic relations between Haiti and the D.R. Dialogue based on mutual trust and respect needs to be reestablished to find solutions that respect the dignity of all of God’s children — documented or otherwise. Pray for wisdom and compassion for national leaders, that they can overcome complicated politics and envision a way forward. Haitian and Dominican governments, like all governments, ought to be forces for order, peace, and the flourishing of the common good. Pray that international organizations and other countries can play a positive role in encouraging mediation and dialogue.

Here are some scriptures to help guide your prayers for governmental authorities:

**1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2 (NRSV)**
First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

**PROVERBS 29:14 (The Message Translation)**
Leadership gains authority and respect when the voiceless poor are treated fairly.

**MICAH 4:1-4 (NRSV)**
In days to come the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.
Day 7: Pray for Reconciliation

1 JOHN 4:20 (NRSV)
Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

Pray for reconciliation within and between Dominican and Haitian societies. Many Haitians and Dominicans share strong family, community, and economic ties, and the D.R. gave substantial aid following Haiti’s 2010 earthquake. These cannot be forgotten. At the same time, racism, discrimination, and mob violence directed at Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the D.R. are a part of recent history.

Haitians and Dominicans predominantly identify as Christian. Pray for their common faith to help heal communities and families being broken apart by deportations and the unresolved crisis of statelessness in the D.R. Pray Christians and other peacemakers can be voices for tolerance, compassion, inclusion and peace in these difficult times, and that communities in each country can see their neighbors first and foremost as God’s children worthy of protection. Pray that interpersonal, community, and governmental relationships might be transformed by the Holy Spirit and marked by a new mutual respect and concern.

MATTHEW 22:36-40 (NRSV)
“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”
Action Item

We believe advocacy is a powerful opportunity to engage decision makers from a faith-based perspective and show love for our neighbor in a tangible way.

For U.S. residents, add your signature to the MCC U.S. Washington Office’s petition to Secretary of State John Kerry (text seen at right).


“As a person of faith, I am writing to share my concern over the migration and citizenship crises facing nearly 500,000 Haitian migrant workers and 200,000 stateless Dominicans in the Dominican Republic (D.R.). I have recently participated in Days of Prayer for the Displaced, a campaign that focused on praying for justice and protection for the people made vulnerable by recent Dominican citizenship and immigration policies, including the 66,000 people recently returned or deported to Haiti. In response to my engagement with this campaign, I am writing to ask the U.S. Government to:

Ensure the Protection of Stateless People. The U.S. government should urge the Dominican Republic government to restore the full nationality and citizenship rights of Dominican-born individuals and ensure they are not deported. It should strongly encourage Dominican authorities to immediately reopen and improve access to programs allowing for the registration of such stateless people.

Ensure the Fair Treatment and Protection of Migrant Workers. The U.S. government should ensure that the U.S.-funded Dominican border police do not engage in deportations in a manner inconsistent with international human rights standards and also push the Dominican Republic government to reopen and extend deadlines for regularization programs for migrant workers.

Work to Build Trust and Compromise. The U.S. government should use its strong ties to both Haitian and Dominican governments to foster dialogue and support solutions that respect the rights of all, especially those Dominicans rendered stateless.

In closing, these recommendations stem from my firmly held belief that every human life is of immeasurable value and worthy of protection. I believe the entire island of Hispaniola will benefit from more just policies that protect the rights of Dominican and Haitian citizens and that the international community will play an important role in working toward this goal.”