

## **Statement of communities of faith on the ruling of the Dominican Constitutional Court denying citizenship to four generations of Dominicans of Haitian descent**

November 26, 2013

***"Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." -- Proverbs 31:8, 9***

We represent churches, interdenominational groups and faith-based organizations with long presence and ties in the Dominican Republic. As communities of faith, we express profound concern at the September 23 ruling of the Constitutional Court that the children of all persons "in transit" in the country since 1929 are not Dominican. The decision particularly affects Dominicans of Haitian descent, potentially stripping them of their nationality, and putting them at risk of being stateless and/or subject to deportation.

Dominican citizens of Haitian descent are often among the poorest of the poor. They are the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Haitians who crossed the border in search of a better life, and of migrant workers contracted by the Dominican government to help harvest sugarcane and other crops. They have helped build the wealth of communities, labored at the most difficult jobs, and contributed tremendously to Dominican society and economy. These Dominican citizens for generations have been fully integrated into Dominican society and have long since lost ties to Haiti.

As churches and faith based organizations working and living in the country and accompanying this population directly, or those who serve them, we have directly observed the impact on them of increasing hostility:

- We have seen the discrimination and neglect experienced by Dominicans of Haitian ancestry, witnessed their economic and social marginalization in the bateyes, and observed racial discrimination in their personal lives and the public domain.
- We have noted the impact on this population of the Dominican government's failure to comply with the 2005 ruling of the Inter-American Court which called for the restitution of birth documents withheld from Dominicans of Haitian descent. This inertia has emboldened some elements to be more vocal in their anti-Dominico-Haitian sentiments, causing Dominicans of Haitian descent to live in fear of xenophobia and racism in their own country.
- We have noted that since 2005, further rulings of the Dominican Central Electoral Board have authorized civil registry offices to withhold birth certificates, and confiscate ID cards and passports from Dominicans of Haitian descent, simply because of their ancestry. Hundreds of Dominicans have lived in limbo since then, as without their documents they are unable to go to school, access medical services, open bank accounts, get married, or make needed purchases. Many of these denationalized Dominicans of Haitian descent are young people awaiting their documentation to rebuild their lives.
- We have heard the stories of Dominican citizens who have been deported to Haiti because of their dark skin.
- We have witnessed the attempt made by institutions of the Dominican government to strip Sonia Pierre, human rights advocate and leader of the Movement of Dominico-Haitian Women, of her

citizenship as she courageously fought for the nationality and citizenship rights of the Dominico-Haitian population to be respected.

This latest ruling of the Dominican Constitutional Court will dramatically worsen the already unjust situation of discrimination and economic marginalization. Retroactive application is illegal under international law and also violates several articles of the Dominican constitution itself. UNCHR, UNICEF and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission have deplored this Court decision, and called upon the government of the Dominican Republic to ensure that the fundamental human right to nationality is respected.

We urge the Dominican government to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to safeguard the nationality and citizenship rights of Dominico-Haitians. This includes ensuring that relevant ministries expedite processing the backlog for issuing of birth certificates and national I.D. cards to Dominicans of Haitian descent born prior to January 2010, whose Dominican nationality is protected by Dominican law as well conventions signed by government.

As people of faith, we cannot remain silent as one entire section of the community is dehumanized simply because of the color of their skin and their cultural heritage. Jesus Christ welcomed all into the beloved community, and we cannot honor and follow our Lord and Savior by remaining silent in the face of such extreme injustice.

**AG Missions Inc, (AMI)**

**Center for Human Rights and International Justice, Boston College**

**Community of Christ**

**Christian Haitian Entrepreneurial Society, Inc.**

**Church World Service**

**Conference of Major Superiors of Men**

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).**

**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**

**Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office**

**Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate**

**The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)**

**NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby**

**Our Lady of Grace- Chelsea/Everett Haiti Committee**

**Pax Christi Ayiti**

**Pax Christi USA**

**Presbyterian Church USA**

**United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society**

**United Methodist Women**