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January 14, 2010

In Quake Aftermath, U.S. Suspends Deportations to Haiti

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

Responding to the devastation from the [Haiti](#) earthquake, Obama administration officials on Wednesday temporarily suspended deportations of illegal immigrants from that country.

Homeland Security Secretary [Janet Napolitano](#) said Haitian deportations would be halted “for the time being,” without specifying a time period. [Immigration](#) officials said it was clear they could be putting Haitians’ safety at risk by sending them back to a country staggering from the vast destruction of the quake. About 30,000 Haitians in the United States are facing deportation orders, immigration officials said.

Lawmakers and immigrant advocacy groups renewed calls for the administration to grant Haiti a special status that would shield Haitian immigrants in this country from deportation for an extended period and allow them to work legally. The Haitian government and advocates here have been asking Washington to grant the status, known as temporary protected status, since late 2008.

Haiti has sought the status after a punishing series of natural disasters, starting with floods in 2004 that left more than 5,000 people dead or missing. In 2008, four big storms killed at least 800 people and destroyed most of Haiti’s food crops.

The Bush administration decided against granting Haitians the temporary status in December 2008, and the Obama administration decided last March to continue deporting Haitians.

Among those calling on Wednesday for the Obama administration to reconsider were Senators [Charles Schumer](#) and [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) of New York, both Democrats, and Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart of south Florida, both Republicans, as well as John C. Favalora, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Miami.

“If this is not a slam-dunk case for temporary protected status, I don’t know what is,” said Kevin Appleby, a spokesman for the bishops. He said the status would allow Haitian immigrants here to work here and send money back to relatives in Haiti trying to recover from the quake.

The homeland security secretary can grant temporary protected status for a designated period for immigrants from countries facing natural disasters. Currently El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Somalia and Sudan have the status.

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