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Clinton: Immigration Status For Haitians Extended In US

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Many thousands of undocumented Haitians who live in South Florida and other parts of this country will be given a temporary legal immigration status to prevent their deportation, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton indicated on Thursday

When asked on CBS' Early Show whether officials are considering giving Haitians temporary asylum in Florida or elsewhere, Clinton responded:

"Well, we have, as you know, many Haitian Americans. Most are here legally. Some are not documented. And the Obama administration is taking steps to make sure that people are given some temporary status so that we don't compound the problem that we face in Haiti."

The administration already has suspended deportations of Haitians in the immediate aftermath of a devastating earthquake in Haiti. But officials have stopped short of changing the immigration status of Haitians, which would extend beyond the crisis.

For many years, Haitian-Americans and South Florida members of Congress have been urging President Obama and his predecessors to grant "temporary protected status" to undocumented Haitians so they can live and work here legally.

Advocates say it makes no sense to send Haitians back to an impoverished land devastated by a series of natural disasters and periodic outbursts of political violence and turmoil. Far better, they say, to allow Haitians to work here and help sustain their homeland by sending remittances to their families.

Congressmen Kendrick Meek, Alcee Hastings and others renewed the call on Wednesday.

But several administrations have been reluctant to grant TPS for fear it would encourage more Haitians to flee the island on dangerous voyages bound for Florida. Critics in Congress say it would reward illegal immigration and strain schools and social services in places like South Florida.

Meek predicts that the Obama administration will grant TPS over the next few days or weeks.

Clinton's comments on Thursday indicate the process may be underway.