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Obama Gives Haitians In U.S. Illegally Temporary Protected Status

By Frank James

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The Obama Administration announced Friday that it is giving temporary protected status to Haitians in the U.S. illegally so long as they were here before Jan. 12, 2010.

In an attempt to prevent a mass migration from Haiti, however, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano stressed repeatedly in a conference call with journalists that the U.S. would return Haitians who try to enter the U.S. after the Jan. 12 cutoff to take advantage of the new status.

Napolitano said:

Attempting to leave Haiti now will only lead to more hardship for the Haitian people and community. I'm announcing today the designation for Haitian nationals in the U.S. as of Jan. 12, 2010. Those who attempt to travel to the U.S. after will not be eligible for TPS and will be repatriated. One of the first things we're doing is sending out concurrent message as we provide relief... people should not leave Haiti with the false belief that they will be entitled to TPS in the U.S. By the way, we see no signs of that kind of migration at this time.

Napolitano said the administration estimates there are between 100,000 to 200,000 Haitians illegally in the U.S. TPS status will allow the Haitians to have legal status for 18 months. That means they will be able to work.

Napolitano noted that being allowed to work legally will allow the Haitians to send money home in the form of remittances which she called an indirect form of financial aid.

TPS status for Haitians has been controversial. For years Haitians have felt discriminated against because past administrations refused to grant it while giving it to other nationalities like Hondurans and Nicaraguans.

TPS status is meant to give illegal immigrants from nations suffering political upheavals or natural disasters a safe haven in the U.S. until the situation in their native land settles down.

Until Friday, the Obama Administration appeared to follow the precedent of past administrations, a stance which angered Haitians and immigration lawyers.

The action of giving temporary legal status to Haitians in the U.S. illegally is sure to anger many who will see it as rewarding lawbreakers.

The move also comes at a time when many workers in the U.S. legally are having difficulty finding jobs because of double-digit national employment.

But the Obama Administration could be counting on the heart-breaking images coming out of Haiti to overpower the sentiment that Haitians who illegally entered the U.S. are being rewarded.

Past administrations have also feared that granting TPS would cause a new flotilla of Haitian boat people to launch their rickety boats and point them towards Florida.

Which is why Napolitano repeatedly warned Haitians against that and asked the media to get out the word that Haitians who enter the U.S. after the day of the earthquake will be deported once the U.S. gets back to deporting Haitians in the U.S. illegally. The Obama Administration suspended such deportations on Tuesday after the earthquake.