

The Promise Institute for Human Rights calls for international human rights and humanitarian norms to be upheld at the United States - Mexico Border

U.S. actions at the southern border violate domestic and international law on the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Comments and Context

LOS ANGELES, CA - September 22, 2021 - The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA Law, the home for human rights at UCLA, joins the diverse voices calling for international human rights and humanitarian norms to be upheld at the United States-Mexico border. Currently, the [dehumanization and racist treatment of Haitian asylum-seekers taking place](#) is so shocking that it begs important questions about the United States' purported values. The situation must be urgently addressed if the American government is to move forward with integrity.

“The right to seek asylum is guaranteed under United States and international law and must be respected. Furthermore, the treatment of Haitian asylum-seekers emerging in images from the border cannot be justified on any moral or legal grounds,” said Kate Mackintosh, Promise Institute Executive Director. “We ask the Biden Administration and responsible government bodies to follow the law, and treat these asylum seekers with humanity.”

“For many Haitians and other Black migrants, their [journey through South America](#) and [daily lives in Mexico](#) are unstable, unsafe and impacted by anti-Black racism, and so it should surprise no one that many of them have continued through Mexico in search of safety and security in the United States,” describes S. Priya Morley, Racial Justice Policy Counsel at the Promise Institute.

The legal and moral path forward involves the Biden Administration repealing Title 42, (a Trump-era policy being used maliciously under the pretext of public health) immediately halting deportations, and allowing Haitians to seek asylum in accordance with international law. In a country that has recently been forced to reckon with its own histories of settler colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy in response to the movement for Black lives, the ongoing violence against Haitians at the United States-Mexico border brings home the persistent impacts of these histories today.

For media interested in talking to Promise Institute experts on human rights law, race, and migration, please contact Natalie Monsanto, monsanto@law.ucla.edu

FOR CONTEXT AROUND THESE EVENTS:

Many of the Haitians arriving in Texas and elsewhere on the United States-Mexico border have been traveling for months - if not years - in pursuit of safety and security. After the 2010 earthquake, subsequent natural disasters, and political instability that has gripped the country in the intervening decade, thousands of Haitians were forced to flee their homes. The situation in Haiti has only become more untenable this year, following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse whose unpopular administration had been propped up [by American support](#), and [another earthquake](#) and tropical storm that recently killed thousands and displaced more. In fact, in August 2021 the US Department of Homeland Security itself [recognized](#) that “Haiti is grappling with a deteriorating political crisis, violence, and a staggering increase in human rights abuses” and designated Haiti for Temporary Protected Status.

Large numbers of Haitians who fled after the 2010 earthquake first settled in Brazil and then Chile, only to be ostracized both by an increase in anti-Black racism and xenophobic immigration policies championed by right-wing governments to mobilize electoral support. This forced many Haitians to seek refuge again, embarking on a dangerous journey north, traversing as many as eleven countries before arriving in Mexico. One notoriously dangerous part of this journey is the 100-mile Darien Gap rainforest which must be traversed on foot. Those crossing the area report being violently targeted, robbed, sexually assaulted, and discovering bodies of those who traveled before them.

At [Mexico’s southern border](#), they encountered a Mexican National Guard with orders to detain and violently block their movement. In direct coordination with the United States, the Mexican administration has militarized its immigration enforcement to stop migrants from even reaching US territory to seek asylum.

Even though it is dangerous to travel north, Haitians persist because the risks of continuing [pale in comparison](#) to what awaits them in Haiti. They make this dangerous journey with an understanding of the United States’ commitments to human rights and its storied history as a beacon of hope and safety for people seeking asylum.

However, instead of respecting these asylum-seekers’ rights once they reach the United States, the Biden Administration has for months been blocking, detaining and deporting them, operating from the wanton standards set under the Trump administration instead of reinstating legal norms. This treatment of Haitians is a continuation of a [long history](#) of anti-Black - and particularly anti-Haitian - immigration policies in this country.

About the Promise Institute

The Promise Institute for Human Rights is the center of human rights education, research and advocacy at UCLA Law and around the region.

