

CARICOM Leaders must act to find solution to Dominican Republic ruling

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CCSJ calls on CARICOM Leaders to work with the authorities in the Dominican Republic (DR) and with other regional and international organizations, such as the Organisation of American States, to find a solution to the potentially devastating effects of the September 23 ruling by the Dominican Constitutional Tribunal that “foreigners with no residence permit in the country must be equated with the category of foreigners in transit, under which their children are not eligible for Dominican citizenship, even though they were born in Dominican territory.”

While CCSJ recognizes the sovereignty of the DR and of its Constitutional Court, this Commission calls on the Government of the DR to bear in mind its human rights obligations and not to act on this ruling which is retroactive to 1929, and which, as human rights observers have stated, could cause a human rights crisis.

As Amnesty International has stated: “It is unclear how many people are affected by the ruling of the Constitutional Court. A recent survey conducted by the National Statistics Office, found that 244,151 people were the children of ‘foreign’ parents. Of those, 86% were of Haitian origin.” Most of those affected by this ruling, therefore, are of Haitian descent and black.

If acted upon, this ruling will leave tens of thousands of people born in the DR to undocumented immigrant parents as far back as 1929 stateless. They could face deportation and discrimination. A recent statement by the UN refugee agency states, inter alia: “Should this process indeed be carried out without the necessary safeguards, three generations of Dominicans of Haitian descent could become stateless.” For them human rights such as freedom of movement, education, work and access to healthcare will be a forlorn dream.

Catholic Relief Services state that: “The most marginalized people in the Dominican Republic are Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent living in rural area border towns, urban slums and bateyes (shantytowns once used to house sugar industry workers). Though there are Dominicans living in conditions of poverty in the Dominican Republic, Haitian immigrants face additional threats to their well-being, including racial discrimination, exploitation and deportation.”

Love of neighbour has global dimensions. CCSJ, therefore, calls on all citizens to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of Haitian origin, our neighbours, in the DR who will be affected by the Court ruling. We are one human family. The Catholic Church urges us “to consider every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his/her life and the means necessary for living it with dignity. Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural programme must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 132).

CCSJ also invites all the people of Trinidad and Tobago to actively encourage and support action by our government which currently holds the Presidency of CARICOM to move swiftly to help protect the basic rights of some of the poorest and most marginalized people of our Caribbean. Let us stand together to promote human rights and the dignity of the human person.

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