

# Refugee Council USA

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## **REFUGEE GROUPS CALL FOR HUMANE POLICY FOR HAITIAN REFUGEES**

Refugee Council USA -- the nation's leading coalition of refugee and human rights organizations -- stated its profound shock and disappointment with President Bush's statement last week, "I have made it abundantly clear to the Coast Guard that we will turn back any refugee that attempts to reach our shore." With these words, President Bush has rejected the legal and ethical obligation to protect refugees, and has compromised our country's moral standing in the arena of international refugee protection.

In a letter sent to President Bush today, the Refugee Council USA stated that Haitians in distress at sea should be rescued and brought to a safe place, on land, where their rights will be respected and where they will find immediate protection, and ultimately durable solutions, for their plight. The current US policy of interdiction and forced return is completely unacceptable under international law and incompatible with America's most cherished traditions.

At a time when our nation should be a credible leader in refugee protection, it is with great dismay that we see a policy that undermines this vital leadership.

Mark Franken, Chair of Refugee Council USA stated, "Our country should offer the greatest protection to our Haitian neighbors when they are facing persecution, oppression and violence. The Administration should reconsider its policy of return and renew America's leadership on refugee protection, as this policy has profound humanitarian implications."

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