District Seven (Ole)
Facsimile Transmission

To: \_
Location: OLE

From: JT
Location: MIAMI

Telephone: 
Voice: 
Fax: 267-4632

Comment: FYI

Date: 17 MAR 91
Time: 1000
Number of pages including cover: 2
Haitians get longer hearings at sea

By LIZETTE ALVAREZ

For 10 years, Haitian boat people interdicted at sea have had five minutes or less to tell their stories to government officials.

That's the time they were given to convince a U.S. immigration official aboard a Coast Guard cutter that they faced persecution — or death — if sent back to Haiti. Exhausted, hungry and bewitched, they were usually unprepared to answer personal questions that would decide their fate, refugee advocates say.

The new rules, while perhaps not letting in every legitimate asylum seeker, do mean more time for the Haitian refugees. The process has been accelerated in recent years and some agents have felt they were not able to determine whether a claim was legitimate. The new guidelines may mean more time for Haitian refugees.

The new guidelines, which require agents to conduct interviews and gather more evidence, could mean a longer wait for the Haitian refugees. Some have suggested that the new rules could also lead to more denials of asylum requests.

At some point, the Haitian refugees will be questioned in a more detailed interview. Refugee advocates have long complained that Haitian boat people, who are often poor and uneducated, are not treated fairly by the U.S. immigration system.

But some都认为, the new rules will mean more time for the Haitian refugees and a better chance of being heard. "These are Haitians who have endured long journeys and extremely arduous circumstances," said Arthur Melton, an attorney with the New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, who is involved in the program. "They have been confronted with an author figure in the high seas. It's not reasonable to expect they will be for coming with information."

Duke Austin, a spokesman for the INS in Washington, said Friday that the new rules were a "significant improvement." He said the agency had already started implementing them in the last few months.