

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

## OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY/SPOKESMAN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 18, 1991

## HAITIAN BOAT PEOPLE

THE UNITED STATES IS DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY OF THE HAITIAN BOAT PEOPLE. OVER THE PAST THREE WEEKS NEARLY 2,000 HAITIANS HAVE PUT OUT TO SEA, IN UNSEAWORTHY VESSELS, WITH THE MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT THEY WILL BE PICKED UP AND BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE PLAUSIBLE CLAIMS FOR ASYLUM.

THE UNITED STATES HAS WORKED URGENTLY WITH THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM) TO CREATE TEMPORARY SAFEHAVEN FACILITIES IN THIRD COUNTRIES AS A REGIONAL SOLUTION TO THIS HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM.

WE REGRET THAT IT NOW APPEARS THE SAFEHAVEN PLAN WILL NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO DEAL WITH THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM. AS OF MONDAY MORNING, NEARLY 1,800 HAITIANS HAD BEEN PICKED UP.

IN THE ABSENCE OF A SUFFICIENT SAFEHAVEN OPTION, THE COAST GUARD HAS BEEN DIRECTED TO RETURN MOST OF THE BOAT PEOPLE TO HAITI BEGINNING ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18.

ONLY THOSE WHO MAY BE ABLE TO QUALIFY FOR ASYLUM WILL BE BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES. TO DATE SOME 50 HAITIANS HAVE MET THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA. THEY ARE BEING BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES TODAY. OTHERS WHO QUALIFY FROM INTERVIEWS ON THE COAST GUARD SHIPS WILL BE BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

WE FEAR THAT ANY ACTION BY THE UNITED STATES TO BRING LARGE NUMBERS OF HAITIANS WITHOUT CLAIM TO ASYLUM TO THE UNITED STATES WOULD CREATE A MASSIVE OUTFLOW, RESULTING IN LARGE NUMBERS OF DEATHS ON THE HIGH SEA.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THOSE INDIVIDUALS RETURNED TO HAITI WILL BE SUBJECT TO PERSECUTION THERE. THERE IS NO HISTORY OF SUCH PERSONS BEING PERSECUTED.

WE HOPE THIS RETURN OF BOAT PEOPLE TO HAITI WILL DETER OTHERS FROM RISKING THEIR LIVES BY TAKING TO THE SEA IN UNSEAWORTHY BOATS.