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A man and child take cover from gunfire near the National Palace in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, March 21, 2024. (OSV New/Ralph Tedy Erol, Reuters)

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Miami — April 23, 2024

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A U.S. archbishop has denounced the Biden administration's decision to resume deportations of Haitian migrants, given the rampant violence and instability in Haiti.

"These deportations are unconscionable given the realities on the ground," said Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami in a statement to OSV News April 22.

On April 19, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced it had "continued to facilitate removal flights of single adults (and) family units" between April 15-19, with Haiti among the destinations listed.

Some 50 Haitian nationals were repatriated on an April 18 flight, the first such U.S. deportation to Haiti since January.

Wenski — who is fluent in Haitian Creole, and whose archdiocese is home to an extensive and historic Haitian expatriate community — said that the U.S. government's move equates to "sending people back into a burning house," since Haiti has been ravaged by "increasing gang violence and (a) growing humanitarian and health crisis, with no real functioning government."

The nation's systemic kidnappings, rapes, killings and widespread civil unrest led the U.S. Embassy in March to urge its citizens to leave Haiti as soon as possible.

Conditions in Port-au-Prince have continued to rapidly worsen, with gang attacks taking place throughout the city and the port itself — upon which the island nation is crucially dependent for supplies — strangled by gang feuds, leading the International Organization for Migration's chief in Haiti, Philippe Branchat, to call Port-au-Prince "a city under siege."



Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski is pictured in a file photo celebrating Mass in the chapel at the Notre Dame Grand Seminary in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Archbishop Wenski said April 22, 2024, the Biden administration's decision to resume deportations to Haiti is "unconscionable," citing that nation's gang violence and lack of a functioning government. (OSV News/Tom Tracy)

For years, Haiti has been plagued by multiple, sustained crises such as political instability, natural disasters, foreign intervention and international debt.

In July 2021, Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated; in April 2023, the head of the United Nations office in Haiti warned the nation was sliding into "a

catastrophic spiral of violence."

The Biden administration's deportation of Haitians is "inconsistent with our international treaties regarding 'non-refoulement' of asylum seekers," Wenski told OSV News.

Under international human rights law — such as the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol — the fundamental principle of non-refoulement provides that refugees cannot be expelled to territories where substantial threats to life or freedom exist.

"President (Joe) Biden has deported more than 28,000 Haitians to Haiti in the last three years," said Wenski.

Among those deported was "a convicted drug dealer and one-time insurgent who is now seeking to take power in Haiti's very complicated political system," the archbishop added.

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He noted that in the past year some 100,000 Haitians have been granted two-year humanitarian parole by the U.S. The program — also available to Cubans, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans — provides work authorization for vetted individuals who have an approved U.S.-based financial sponsor, such as a relative, and can pay for their travel to a U.S. airport.

Yet "at the same time, hundreds of Haitians have crossed the Mexico-Texas border," said Wenski. "Because of the temporary nature of the parole and the numbers crossing the border, Haitians are very apprehensive."

He said that "what is needed is the renewal and extension of TPS (Temporary Protective Status) for all Haitians in the U.S. without a permanent legal status."

Under that program, the secretary for Homeland Security can designate a given country for TPS due to temporary conditions — such as armed conflict or environmental disaster — that prevent the safe return of its nationals. Individuals recognized as TPS nationals are not removable from the U.S., for a set period of time, during which they can obtain employment and possible travel authorization.

Wenski said the Haitian community in the Archdiocese of Miami "feels increasingly apprehensive.

"The political solution championed by the U.S. (a commission made up of political parties that would appoint an acting president and prime minister and welcome foreign policemen from Kenya) does not inspire much confidence," he said. "Haitians fear that things will get worse before they get better."