

Deportations making Haiti crisis worse, says former U.S. envoy



Haitian migrants use a dam to cross into the United States from Mexico, at Del Rio, Texas [File: Eric Gay/AP Photo]

Washington, October 10 (RHC)-- The former U.S. envoy for Haiti, who resigned last month in protest of the Biden administration's mass deportations of Haitian migrants, has warned that sending people back to Haiti will worsen conditions in the crisis-hit Caribbean nation.

At a congressional briefing this past week, Daniel Foote said deporting Haitian asylum seekers is "not the answer" to a recent increase in arrivals at the U.S.'s southern border with Mexico.

"Haiti is too dangerous," Foote told US lawmakers. "Our own diplomats cannot leave our compound in Port-au-Prince without armed guards." He added that the Haitian government is struggling to deliver essential services.

One of the poorest countries in the world, Haiti has been suffering from periodic natural disasters, gang violence and a longstanding political crisis made worse by the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July. "Deportation, in the short term, is not going to make Haiti any more stable; in fact it's going to make it worse," Foote said.

Last month, thousands of Haitian migrants gathered on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border at Del Rio in southern Texas in hopes of gaining asylum in the United States. But many were pushed back to Mexico by US border agents, some of whom threatened the migrants with whip-like horse reins, drawing widespread condemnation.

Invoking a public health rule known as Title 42, the Biden administration has expelled thousands on flights back to Haiti. The deportations have stirred outrage against President Joe Biden, who had promised to pursue more humane immigration policies than his predecessor Donald Trump.

In his resignation letter last month, Foote slammed US policy towards Haiti as "deeply flawed." "I will not be associated with the United States' inhumane, counterproductive decision to deport thousands of Haitian refugees and illegal immigrants to Haiti," Foote wrote.

On Thursday, the former envoy, who previously served at the U.S. embassy in Kabul, told U.S. lawmakers that the security situation in Haiti is comparable to the crisis in Afghanistan.

"We're not repatriating people to Afghanistan right now," Foote said. "And having served in both places, the security situation [in Haiti] is not that dire but it's not far off, and we're deporting people to Haiti."

Haiti has been in political turmoil since armed men stormed Moise's private residence in the capital, Port-au-Prince, on July 7 and fatally shot him. Last month, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry postponed an already delayed election and constitutional referendum previously set for November.

Henry was appointed by Moise days before the assassination but did not assume office until after the president's death. He was not the only candidate vying for the post after Moise was killed, but received the backing of the CORE Group of international diplomats, which includes the US.

Last month, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to Henry by phone and expressed his "appreciation" for the assistance the prime minister's government provided to repatriate Haitian migrants.

But some of Haiti's top civil society leaders, who are calling for a two-year transitional government to help stabilise the country before elections are held, have rejected Henry's authority.



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