



# Shame on the Dominican Republic

The Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic made a ruling in September 2013, that denied citizenship to thousands of people of Haitian origin who are resident in the Republic since 1929 and their descendants. While the ruling has shocked many Dominicans, it legalized actions the state has been carrying out for many years. Since the 1990s, thousands of people have been refused national ID cards, necessary to work, register children, get married, open bank accounts, attend public universities and participate in many other civil activities.

Researchers have already noted the impact of the ruling. *"The deliberate creation of a stateless underclass increases the already formidable risks of exploitation,"* said a recent report by US trade unions. It warned that the ruling could worsen poverty among those affected, because without an identity card people are relegated to informal jobs and have little bargaining power in relations with employers. Children are being turned away from school, forcing some into underage labour.

## Pressure

Caricom condemned the decision by suspending consideration of the request by the Dominican Republic for membership of the Caribbean Community. Such pressure appeared to work, particularly when the Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves, announced that he would call for the DR's suspension from the Petrocaribe scheme of subsidised oil supply at the body's summit in Caracas.

Venezuelan President Maduro announced that he had brokered an "historic" decision by the heads of state of Haiti and the DR to form a "high-level bilateral commission" to find "a just, proper and balanced solution" to the problems affecting both governments. Haitian migrants' rights organisations, were sceptical. Rightly so, as it turned out, as both governments used the bilateral commission to bury the question and started

negotiating away the sufferings of thousands to benefit the economic and political interests of the elites on both sides of the island. Thanks to the Haitian government collaboration, the DR government found a breathing space and ammunition with which to prepare its propaganda counter-offensive, as well as intensify the intimidation of domestic opponents.

## Law

However, after intense pressure, the DR Congress passed a law at the end of May that will regularise children of migrants who have birth certificates and allow descendants of irregular migrants who never had papers to naturalise. This new law will create different categories for people depending on whether they have documents proving they were born in the Dominican Republic. This is a step forward, but is still hugely discriminatory.

The rulings are driven by nationalism and racism, but such racist views are mainly limited to a tiny elite. The press have been trying to aggravate ethnic tensions and frequently quote prominent supporters of the verdict, such as the archbishop of Santo Domingo. *"The great problem here is this unholy alliance between the conservative press, the conservative church, the political sphere and the economic sphere,"* says Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, who leads the UNHCR's Dominican Republic office. The hard-line supporters are few but they are people with political pull.

## Scandal

The government and the racist right wing in the Dominican Republic are not to be trusted and, if their record is anything to go by, they will try to wriggle out of even this shabby compromise. We need to keep the pressure up and the eyes of the world focused on this human rights scandal.

*Thanks to the Haiti Support Group*  
[www.haitisupportgroup.org](http://www.haitisupportgroup.org)

## Marikana Massacre Update

President Zuma is stifling the Commission of Enquiry. It will end on 31 July. So far, not a single policeman who fired a shot has given evidence, nor any employee or director of Lonmin, nor Cyril Ramaphosa, and no Government minister.

And the ministers are now off the hook as Zuma has changed the terms of reference for the Commission, deleting all reference to ministers. Which probably means Ramaphosa is off the hook too. This is not good news for the families of the dead miners, or the 270 injured and arrested miners.

### Book

There has always been a question mark over the outcome of the Commission and with that in mind, the Marikana Support campaign has been working on a proposal to publish a book - *A People's History of Marikana*. They have a publisher, a journalist working on the copy, and funding to produce 10,000 copies in isiXhosa, the majority language of those who worked and died at Marikana. It is hoped that it will be ready by the end of the year or early next year. It will be a record of the strike, of the working conditions in the mines, of the men who died, their history and their struggle.

Together with Rehad Desai's film, *Miners Shot Down*, it will ensure the story of Marikana is not buried by the in-coming ANC government or rewritten to their own liking - a handful of policemen and women may be blamed, perhaps the Police Commissioner sacrificed, but the NUM, the Government, Lonmin exonerated.

### Strike

Meanwhile, the South African platinum miners' strike enters its fifth month and hardship is biting. It is winter in South Africa. Miners can't afford heat, food or medical care. Many have had to take their children out of school because they can't pay the fees. But solidarity relief from around the country and across the world is helping to keep them going and the bosses are desperate to end the strike, which is hitting so hard it has shrunk the national economy. Mining production has seen its greatest fall since 1967. According to statistics released last week mining GDP was down 24 percent over the last quarter. Companies claim that the strike has cost them almost £1.2 billion in lost revenue. Platinum miners are demanding a living wage of 12,500 rand (£698) a month. With solidarity they can win and that would be a victory for us all.

## Tivoli Gardens Support Committee UK

The "Tivoli Gardens Support Committee UK" has been set up to advance the campaign for justice for the citizens of Tivoli Gardens in Kinston Jamaica who were the victims of assaults and killings by the Jamaican police and armed forces in May 2010 when they moved in to arrest Christopher Coke, wanted in the USA for drug and arm-trafficking charges.

Supporters have been raising the issue in the British trade union movement and resolutions supporting the position of the Tivoli Committee have been passed by Camden UNISON, UCU London Retired Members, Waltham Forest and Camden Trades Union Councils and the Greater London Association of Trades Councils.

### Jamaica

Meanwhile, in Jamaica, the Tivoli Committee and residents of Tivoli Gardens assembled in front of Gordon House on Tuesday May 27 as planned. They attempted to deliver an open letter to parliamentarians calling on them to end their silence and complicity with the 2010 massacre, and to make changes to the terms of reference. The police officer in charge absolutely refused to allow any of them to go near the arriving parliamentarians. He also refused to allow a female Tivoli resident whose two sons were executed by the security forces to deliver the letter to the Orderly of the House. He in effect overruled another officer who gave permission and who instructed a policeman dressed in paramilitary gear to accompany her into the building.

The event was covered by the two television stations and ample pictures and sound bites were used in their broadcasts. The most moving scene was the image of Marjory Williams telling the story of the killing of her two sons.

The government has since announced that Professor Anthony Harriot of UWI will be a new member of the Commission of Enquiry. However, Harriot has been far too close to the Jamaica Constabulary Force to inspire confidence in his impartiality. We continue to demand that the matter be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity meets on the first Sunday in the month at 12 noon at Islington Pensioners Forum  
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See our website at <http://www.cls-uk.org.uk>