



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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What You Should Know

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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Could You Imagine What Would Happen If They Did This In New York?

You should know that the New York Daily News published an article on October 23, 2013 by columnist Juan Gonzalez titled: "Citizenship of Haitians in Dominican Republic for decades threatened by court ruling." His article began as follows: "The Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court ordered a government review of all birth certificates issued since 1929 for the purpose of determining how many Dominican-born children of foreigners were born 'in transit' and wrongly granted citizenship. Human rights advocates called it pure 'racism and xenophobia.'"

In that article, my friend and colleague, Senator Adriano Espaillat told the Daily News how this ruling particularly affects Dominicans of Haitian descent: "This is all about targeting the

Haitians ... Dominicans here need to press for a national debate on this injustice. You can't be 'born in transit' when your parents have been there for 40 years."

You should know that before 2010, the Dominican Republic defined the criteria for Dominican nationality by letting citizenship be determined by the person's place of birth. Then in 2010, the Dominican Republic redefined its criteria for Dominican nationality as follows: "Any person born within the territory of the Dominican Republic except those born to members of the Diplomatic or consular missions, and foreigners who are in transit or reside illegally in Dominican territory. A foreigner 'in transit' is any person defined as such by the laws of the Dominican Republic."

According to the Dominican Republic's new Constitution, all Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic since 1929 are deemed to be "in transit" so their children are not entitled to citizenship even if they were and are born in the Dominican Republic.

This court ruling could denationalize 500,000 Dominicans of foreign descent.

The consequences for any of the "stateless" Dominican families who may have lived in the Dominican Republic for generations is that now they may be without basic human rights.

The Jesuit Refugee Service/USA publicly refers to this injustice as civil genocide and labels it: Eso no se hace/This is not okay. They detail the real problems that many of these families will face: "Without access to the nationality to which they are entitled, these individuals are unable to attend school, work in the formal economic sector, receive medical insurance, obtain civil marriage, register their children's births, open bank accounts, purchase homes, obtain inheritance, and even leave the country that now rejects them because they cannot obtain or renew a passport."

My dear reader, I proudly stand with the growing opposition of international community leaders and civil rights groups and human rights organizations, and to stand in solidarity with half a million Dominicans – many of whom have parents and grandparents from Haiti – and who, until the September 23 court ruling, do not meet the criteria for Dominican nationality and face statelessness.

It is extremely troubling to know that the Dominican Republic's court ruling on this matter calls for the examination of the nationality of all individuals of "migrant background" born in the Dominican Republic since 1929.

We don't have to look far back into world history to recall the horrific results of state-sponsored discrimination and ethnic cleansing.

When we said this would never happen again, did we really mean it?

I ask myself: What kind of revolution would take place in New York if the United States government would take away citizenship from Dominicans and Haitians - and Mexicans - who have undocumented parents? Could you imagine what would take place here and throughout America if our government decides to take away peoples' citizenship - starting with list of resident visas? Could you imagine if the United States would change its laws to be the same as the Dominican Republic's government to take away the citizenship of thousands - if not millions of Dominicans and Haitians and Mexicans who are American citizens and have undocumented parents, and who came here and gave birth here?

Ladies and gentlemen, I love this country and I am grateful for the laws of the United States that protect the people who live here. May God bless America.

This is Senator Rev. Ruben Diaz, and this is what you should know.

