

U.S. to revoke all Haitian visas

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The Clinton administration plans to revoke the U.S. visas of virtually all Haitian passport holders in an attempt to further isolate Haiti's military rulers and their wealthy supporters who regularly travel to and from the United States, according to senior diplomats.

The action, which could come as early as this week, would be the latest in a series of U.S. economic and political sanctions targeted specifically against those Haitians who have backed the military regime.

Because of their wealth and U.S. connections, Haiti's pro-army elite have largely been immune from the international trade embargo that has hurt the impoverished Caribbean nation's population.

Compiled from Times WiresHAITI-SENATO

Haiti's rich are frequent visitors to the United States, particularly South Florida, where many have extensive financial holdings and real estate and business connections.

The United States on Wednesday imposed an expanded freeze on the U.S. assets of all Haitian citizens living in Haiti. Only the wealthiest Haitians would be affected by the freeze, which was written to exclude Haitian exiles such as President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his supporters.

The new visa policy effectively would revoke the visas of any Haitians who do not hold U.S. passports. No new visas would be issued or honored except in the case of asylum-seekers and a handful of exceptions, the diplomats said.

The visa freeze would put the finishing touches on the Clinton administration's efforts to quarantine the Haitian military officers who ousted Aristide in a September 1991 coup and reneged on a promise to restore him in October, the diplomats said. Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest, is living in exile in the United States.

The administration has been increasing international pressure on the military rulers in hopes of forcing them to step down and averting possible U.S. military action to restore Aristide to office.

The steps include a worldwide trade embargo, a freeze on all Haitian assets in the United States and a U.S.-led ban on commercial air traffic to Haiti, which takes effect Saturday.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Stanley Schrager said he could not comment on the freeze on U.S. visas, which are held by thousands of wealthy Haitians.

Supporters of Aristide welcomed the latest U.S. steps.

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"The embargo is finally serious," said Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul, an Aristide ally who has long criticized the international sanctions for hurting the poor and leaving loopholes for the rich. "The psychological pressure is very strong. If they refuse to leave, the only means left to oust them is military intervention."

Meanwhile, Haiti banned Florida Sen. Bob Graham from entering the country because of his call for U.S. military intervention there.

"He cannot come here and recommend military action against Haiti," a government spokesman said.

Two U.S. journalists were detained briefly for visiting the coastal city of Gonaives without authorization. Reporter Jose de Cordoba of the Wall Street Journal and freelance photographer Maggie Steber were arrested but later returned to their hotel in Port-au-Prince, the Journal said.

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