

Dominican Republic: US government endorses President Abinader's racist violence

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US Subsecretary of State Wendy Sherman's April visit to Santo Domingo served to ratify the strategic character of the Dominican regime's subordination to the US and to iron out the differences that arose during the year 2022, when US customs suspended sugar imports from Central Romana due to its imposition of forced labor on thousands of workers, mostly Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, as well as released a travel alert advising African Americans to take precautions due to Dominican immigration operations based on racial profiling. Sherman ended her visit by brazenly calling on Americans to do tourism in the Dominican Republic and describing the Dominican regime as a "vibrant and energetic democracy."

It is no secret that the U.S. company Central Romana, whose main owners are the Cuban-American Fanjul brothers, has built its sugar empire with the complicity of the Dominican state on the basis of semi-slavery and the most violent labor practices, preventing union organization of the workers, forcefully expelling them from their homes, keeping the "bateyes" (the worker settlements surrounding the sugar plantations) in conditions of social and economic marginalization, with precarious access to public services and health care, in addition to the racist policy of successive Dominican governments of denying sugarcane workers access to their pensions. The sanction against Central Romana comes after decades of denunciations and hundreds of protests by sugarcane workers. As the Dominican Republic continues to enjoy the largest U.S. sugar import quota with preferential tariffs, the first beneficiary of the Central Romana sanction has been its competitor CAEI, owned by the oligarchic Vicini family, whose anti-worker practices are not

substantially different.

The violence of these immigration operations has been such that it has not spared the arrest of pregnant women in hospitals, as well as children in uniforms on their way to school, expelled from the country unaccompanied by their families. Illegal house raids have also abounded. The regime systematically violates its own laws and its own Constitution when it comes to persecuting the Haitian immigrant community, presented as a supposed threat to Dominican national security by President Abinader and his Minister of the Interior, Jesus Vasquez.

President Abinader's racist campaign of mass deportations has reached record figures of more than 171,000 deportations in 2022, almost entirely Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Black Dominicans are also arbitrarily detained, even if their detention does not result in banishment. There are also documented abuses against U.S. citizens, including those with dual nationality, who are subject to aggression by immigration authorities who presume every black person is Haitian until proven otherwise.

Agreements and "shared values"

Sherman, on behalf of the Biden administration, affirmed that this "alliance" with Abinader is based on "shared values". Undoubtedly, Biden and Abinader believe in US political tutelage and US military and economic domination of the Caribbean. That is why the main demand of the Dominican government to Sherman during her visit, as has been expressed before all UN and OAS meetings, or in conversations with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, has been the military invasion and occupation of Haiti. Biden and Trudeau have responded to Abinader that the Dominican Republic should apply sanctions to Haitian businessmen and politicians linked to gangs. The Dominican regime has collaborated in the development of the Haitian crisis, supporting the 2004 coup d'état and allowing large-scale arms trafficking to the gangs to pass through Dominican territory en route to Haiti.

It is notable that there is hesitation in U.S. and Canadian imperialism as to which interventionist formula to apply against the Haitian people. The imperialist invasion and occupation from 2004 to 2017 failed, resulting in the current political, economic and social decomposition, in the framework of which armed gangs have flourished and developed alliances with sectors of the corrupt PHTK regime. In that occupation of Haiti, the US was able to count on the Minustah, made up mainly of troops provided to the United Nations by pseudo-progressive Latin American governments such as Lula of Brazil, Kirchner of Argentina, Evo of Bolivia, Mujica of Uruguay, Correa of Ecuador, Bachelet of Chile, among others. Today, back in power, Lula does not seem willing to participate in a new occupation.

Dominican capitalists have benefited from a trading relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti that is tilted in favor of Dominican exports by a ratio of almost 98-2. This bourgeoisie has historically enriched itself with the super-exploitation of both Dominican and Haitian workers. Additionally, there are direct links between Abinader and Haitian tycoon Gilbert Bigio. Both appear in the Pandora Papers leaks. When finally, after Sherman's visit, Abinader yielded to pressure and issued sanctions against a list of Haitian individuals identified by the US as being linked to gangs, Bigio, former President Martelly and former Prime Minister Jean Henry Ceant were excluded from any sanction. Bigio owns the Chevron-Texaco gas station network in the Dominican Republic through the GB Group. Pablo Daniel Portes, who is financial advisor to President Abinader, is also regional CEO of the GB Group and legal representative of the business group to the stock exchange.

These facts serve to understand the hypocrisy of Abinader and his chancellor Roberto Alvarez, when they affirm that the "international community", by not invading Haiti, would be "burdening" the

Dominican Republic with the Haitian crisis. The idea of a “globalist” conspiracy to impose a “Dominican solution to the Haitian crisis” is frequently put forward, not only by Abinader but also by ultra-nationalist right-wing sectors, including the so-called “Patriotic March”, a movement with clear fascist elements headed by the Instituto Duarte, a state institution. Abinader has attempted to champion the most fanatical anti-Haitianism and give impetus to projects such as the border wall, which aims to cover half of the border between the two countries.

For Abinader and his officials, moreover, the presence of pregnant Haitian women in the country is said to be an unbearable budgetary burden and a danger because of an “invasion of wombs”, a local formulation of the racist “great replacement” conspiracy theory. However, the Socialist Movement of Workers of the Dominican Republic (MST-RD) has demonstrated that the public health expenditure represented by the births of Haitian women is less than 1% of the public health budget, which is in deficit for other reasons, basically because of Abinader’s decision not to allocate to public health the 4% of the GDP required by Dominican law, preferring to finance the private health business.

Abinader no longer even limits the Dominican regime to murdering Haitian workers inside Dominican territory, moving on to perpetrating attacks on Haitian border territory, such as his criminal attack against the village of Tilory. The irony is that the so called “energetic and vibrant democracy” that commits these crimes in Haitian territory, is the one that alleges that Haitian violence can cross into the Dominican Republic, and that uses this alleged risk to persecute even Haitian students, mostly enrolled in private universities.

The virulence of Abinader’s racist speeches and policies have antecedents in the genocide ordered by Dominican dictator Trujillo in 1937. It is estimated that between 15 to 25 thousand Haitians and black-skinned Dominicans were murdered by the regime’s henchmen. The Trujilloist discourse of “peaceful invasion”, “Haitianization” and “defense of sovereignty” continues to be reproduced today. In the 1990s, these discourses were used against the social democrat leader Peña Gómez, who had some grandparents who were Haitian. Peña Gómez was a leader of the PRD, the predecessor of Abinader’s PRM, but, ironically, it was this same PRD that used its majority in the Senate in 1997 to declare the author of those racist discourses, former dictator Joaquín Balaguer, as the “propellant of Dominican democracy”. Abinader has taken to new extremes this practice of raising the flags of Balaguer and Peña Gomez simultaneously, while continuing to impose the denationalization of some 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent, who are today stateless.

One island, one big boat

If the racism of the Dominican regime pretends to deny that the majority of the country’s population is of African descent, the official xenophobia pretends to also hide the fact that it is a country of net emigration. The Instituto de Dominicano y Dominicanas en el Exterior (INDEX) put its February 2022 estimate at 2.8 million Dominican emigrants. That is more than one in four people who find it necessary to live outside their country in the face of the absence of social rights, the lack of freedom of association, low wages, criminal violence and police brutality. The routes that thousands of Dominicans take to the United States and Puerto Rico, crossing the Caribbean Sea in precarious boats, or crossing the Darien Gap to Mexico facing all kinds of dangers, along with other Central American and Caribbean migrants, demonstrate the unwavering will of so many people to seek a future that the racist Dominican capitalist regime denies them. A reality similar to that affecting Haitian migrants and migrants from other countries in the region. Last February, at least two Dominicans died in a terrible bus accident while traveling from Mexico to the United States. Haitian and Dominican migrants have also died trying to reach Puerto Rico in small boats.

Haitian and Dominican socialists must continue to demonstrate the extent to which we have common

enemies in our respective capitalist classes and U.S. imperialism. Local and imperialist capitalists find it convenient to divide us. Our liberation depends on our ability to confront them together and build bonds of solidarity, following the example of 1965, when Dominican and Haitian internationalist fighters took up arms together against the U.S. invaders.