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WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1039 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4506
FAX: (202) 226-0777

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111 N.W. 183RD STREET
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10100 PINES BOULEVARD
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PEMBROKE PINES, FL 33026
(954) 450-6767
FAX: (954) 450-6768

CONGRESSMAN KENDRICK B. MEEK

January 25, 2005

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As a follow up to your inaugural speech last week, in which you committed the United States to the expansion of individual rights and democracy throughout the world, I write to request that you use your influence to invite and strongly encourage the government of Haiti to allow Haitian citizens living in the United States to cast their ballots here, in the United States, in the upcoming Haitian national elections.

I also ask that the government of the United States assist the government of Haiti with the funding and administrative assistance necessary to ensure that the election is conducted fairly and efficiently.

Allowing Haitians residing in this country to cast their ballots in the Haitian election from abroad is a decision that must be made by the Haitian government, and I have written to Prime Minister LaTortue to urge his support. A copy of my letter is enclosed, as well as a copy of my letter to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. However, since Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, your support for this proposal will be undoubtedly crucial for its success.

There are over a quarter million U.S. legal residents of Haitian origin. Those who are eligible must currently return to Haiti to vote and may not vote at Haitian consulates or by absentee ballot. However, Haiti is still recovering from the devastating tropical storm and floods that resulted in thousands of deaths and which also severely strained local food distribution, transportation, medical and housing resources. At the same time, Haiti is also experiencing lawlessness in the streets, particularly in Port au Prince, where the main airport is located.

It makes no sense to require legal U.S. residents to accept the burden and expense of international travel, and the necessary time away from work and family, by requiring them to return to Haiti just to participate fully in the democratic process. A sound alternative exists. Certainly, we would not require Iraqis in the U.S. to return to Iraq to vote for the same reasons. Our standards should be as high for Haitians.

Several other countries already allow their citizens to vote abroad, including France, the Philippines, Ukraine, and of course, Iraq. In the United States, Haitian consulates are located in a number of cities, including Miami, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, Trenton, New York City, Washington D.C. and Houston. The ability of Haitians to vote at one of those locations would eliminate some of the obstacles and allow them to exercise their right to vote and be a meaningful part of their country's democracy.

Just last year, Haiti celebrated the bicentennial of its independence from France. Haiti was the world's first black republic and only the second country in the Western Hemisphere to gain its independence. Please help Haitians achieve the promise of democracy by using your influence, and the help and support of our nation to help Haitians living in America to vote.

Thank you for your kind attention to this important matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendrick B. Meek". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

KENDRICK B. MEEK
Member of Congress

Enclosures