

## I. Introduction

This preliminary report is based on a two-week fact-finding mission to the Dominican Republic conducted by an Americas Watch representative in April 1989. Americas Watch, a non-partisan, non-governmental organization based in New York, monitors human rights in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Americas Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, which also includes Africa Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch.

The Americas Watch representative, Maryse Fontus, an attorney on the staff of the organization, spent approximately one week in Santo Domingo meeting with people who work in various capacities with Haitian cane-cutters, including trade unionists, academics, members of church groups, lawyers and representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She also spent approximately one week travelling to sugar-cane plantations in the eastern and southern parts of the country, interviewing numerous Haitian workers and examining the bateys where they live. Ms. Fontus, who is fluent in Spanish, French and Creole, conducted all interviews personally without the need of an interpreter.

Americas Watch plans to return to the Dominican Republic in June 1989 to continue its investigation and to meet with representatives of the Dominican government, as well as officials of the State Sugar Council (Consejo Estatal del Azucar) (CEA). A more comprehensive report will follow completion of that

investigation. In the meantime, because the International Labor Organization (ILO) is about to examine the situation of Haitian sugar-cane cutters in the Dominican Republic, we issue this preliminary report so that the ILO might have the benefit of our initial research.

## II. The Structure and History of the Sugar Industry in the Dominican Republic

Sugar is the most important export crop of the Dominican Republic. There are sixteen sugar mills (ingenios) in the country. Twelve belong to the state-owned CEA. The remaining four are owned privately. The President of the CEA, Carlos Morales Troncoso, is Vice President of the Dominican Republic.

The majority of the workers in the sugar mills are Dominicans who are not of Haitian decent. They live in villages surrounding the sugar mills called bateys centrales. Attached to the sugar mills are the sugar-cane plantations. The cane-cutters (braceros), approximately ninety per cent of whom are Haitian, generally live in dwellings near the sugar-cane fields called bateys.

The annual harvest takes place roughly from the end of November to the beginning of June. Approximately 40,000 workers are currently needed for the harvest. Because sufficient workers willing to cut cane cannot readily be found within the Dominican Republic -- many if not most Dominicans disdain the grueling and poorly paid plantation work -- the Dominican government