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Probe requested in death of Haitian man in federal custody

Immigration rights advocates along with a local U.S. Congressman are calling for the Bush administration to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of 81-year-old Joseph Dantica, a Haitian pastor who died in federal immigration custody days after arriving at Miami International Airport.

Dantica and his son Maxo left Haiti on a Miami-bound flight Oct. 29. Both were immediately detained by U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials and sent to the Krome Detention Center after asking for political asylum.

The elder Dantica was later hospitalized and died Nov. 3 of an inflammation of the pancreas. U.S. Department of Homeland officials have said it was a pre-existing condition. His son told The Herald that his father's medication was taken from him when he was sent to Krome.

In a letter to U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Thomas Ridge, U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Miami, said Dantica's death is "a very serious matter that warrants higher level attention than it has received, particularly in light of previous complaints about the treatment of Haitians and others at Krome Detention Center in Miami."

In addition to Meek, the Miami-based Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center and the New York-based National Coalition of Haitian Rights are also demanding an investigation into the causes of Dantica's death, stating that after locking Dantica up, immigration authorities "took away his medication, denied him proper medical care and refused access to his family."

Dantica is the uncle of acclaimed Haitian author and South Florida resident, Edwidge Danticat.

-- JACQUELINE CHARLES