



December 20, 2017

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

VIA EMAIL

RE: EXTENSION OF TPS DESIGNATION FOR EL SALVADOR

Dear Secretary Nielsen,

We, the undersigned, write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN), and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) to urge you to extend the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for El Salvador by 18 months. As you know, El Salvador's TPS designation currently extends through March 9, 2018.¹ Pursuant to statutory requirements, a decision to extend or terminate TPS for a designated country must be made at least 60 days prior to the current expiration date.² This letter follows a prior request sent to Acting Secretary Elaine Duke on October 26, 2017, which discussed why an extension of TPS for the country is both warranted and humane and included current country conditions justifying an extension. We hope that you will consider this information as you make your decision by January 8, 2018.

The Catholic Church's deep concern for TPS holders is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and our experience with welcoming and integrating large populations of immigrants to the U.S. and around the world. The teachings of the Church make clear that all people have the right to migrate to protect their lives and the lives of their families. Under Catholic doctrine, TPS holders, like all immigrants, have the right to safety and to care for their families. And while the Church recognizes the right of nations to regulate their borders, this right must be exercised with justice and mercy and balanced with immigrants' rights to human dignity and life.

In August 2017, a delegation led by the USCCB traveled to El Salvador on a fact-finding mission regarding TPS. Consistent with the long experience of CRS and the local Catholic Church in El Salvador, the report from this delegation overwhelmingly demonstrates that El Salvador is currently not in a position to adequately handle the return of the nearly 200,000 Salvadoran TPS holders from the U.S. The delegation's trip report, [*Temporary Protected Status: A Vital Piece of the Central American Protection and Prosperity Puzzle*](#),³ shows that:

- Entire families, not just children, currently face targeted violence;
- Large numbers of people in El Salvador (approximately 220,000 - 400,000) are internally displaced, illustrating already existing safety issues and the growing humanitarian protection challenges; and

¹ 81 Fed. Reg. 44,645 (July 8, 2016), www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/07/08/2016-15802/extension-of-the-designation-of-el-salvador-for-temporary-protected-status.

² INA § 244 (b)(3)(A).

³ *Temporary Protected Status: A Vital Piece of the Central American Protection and Prosperity Puzzle*, USCCB/MRS (Oct. 2017), www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/upload/el-salvador-honduras-report-20171016.pdf.

- The Salvadoran government does not currently have the capacity to adequately handle the return of its TPS population. This is evidenced by its failure to address citizen safety and humanitarian concerns related to its large-scale internal displacement, as well as by its lack of an adequate reception, protection, and integration system for internally displaced people and annual returnees (52,560 in 2016).

Even according to the most recent Federal Register Notice extending TPS for El Salvador, the country suffers from widespread housing shortages, lack of access to clean water, disease and food insecurity as a result of the 2001 earthquakes and subsequent natural disasters.⁴

Terminating TPS for El Salvador now would be inhumane and untenable; El Salvador is in no position to accommodate the return of roughly 200,000 Salvadorans. In addition to potentially bringing harm to those returned, terminating TPS for El Salvador would likely destabilize this key strategic, regional partner, undermining the tremendous investments of the U.S. government.⁵ It would also divide American families as many parents would not bring their U.S. citizen children back to the Northern Triangle where they would face acute integration challenges, violence, and potential persecution.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. We ask you to show compassion and patience as El Salvador continues to improve its citizen security and humanitarian capacity for reception, protection, and integration. The Catholic Church stands ready to support measures to protect the well-being and dignity of Salvadoran families here and abroad.

Respectfully submitted,



Most Rev. Joe S. Vásquez
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration



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⁴ 81 Fed. Reg. 44,645, *supra* note 1.

⁵ The current administration has thus far budgeted \$1.8 billion to enhance the prosperity, security, and governance of the Northern Triangle, prominently including El Salvador. *Negative Consequences of Ending Temporary Protected Status in El Salvador and Honduras for U.S. Interest in Promoting Prosperity, Security, and Governance in the Northern Triangle*, ALIANZA AMERICAS, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, KIND, LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP EDUCATION FUND, (Aug. 29, 2017), http://lawg.org/storage/documents/Importance_of_TPS_to_U.S._Interests_in_Central_America_public_08_29_17.pdf.