



## Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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May 2, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen  
Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

*VIA EMAIL AND IN-PERSON*

### **RE: Extension of TPS Designation for Honduras**

Dear Secretary Nielsen,

I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) to urge you to extend the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation of Honduras for 18 months. As you know, while the current TPS designation extends through July 5, 2018, for Honduras,<sup>1</sup> pursuant to statutory requirements,<sup>2</sup> a decision to extend or terminate TPS for the country must be made by May 4, 2018. From our delegation trip to the region in Fall 2017, as well as our continued presence and work in the region and with affected communities in the U.S., we know firsthand that Honduras is not currently able to adequately handle the return of their nationals who have TPS.

The Catholic Church's deep concern for individuals from these countries is rooted in our experience as an immigrant church and in Catholic Social Teaching. Many of the dioceses in the United States have direct relationships of pastoral care and outreach with Hondurans. And, we believe that God has called on us, as part of our life of faith, to care for the foreigner and the marginalized: "For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing. So you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt."<sup>3</sup>

Bishop David O'Connell of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and Bishop Vasquez of the Diocese of Austin led the USCCB/MRS Fall 2017 delegation trip to Honduras and El Salvador to express solidarity with those impacted by the imminent decisions and to assess the countries' abilities to adequately accept and integrate individuals should TPS be terminated. As discussed in the trip report, [\*Temporary Protected Status: A Vital Piece of the Central American Protection\*](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Extension of the Designation of Honduras for Temporary Protected Status, 82 Fed. Reg. 59,630 (December 15, 2017), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/12/15/2017-27140/extension-of-the-designation-of-honduras-for-temporary-protected-status>

<sup>2</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b).

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 10:17-19, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/10>

*and Prosperity Puzzle*,<sup>4</sup> the delegation found an extension of TPS for both countries crucial for humanitarian, regional security, and economic stability reasons. Regarding Honduras, the delegation found that the country lacks the capacity to adequately receive, protect, and welcome TPS returnees at this time. Specifically, the delegation found that:

- Entire families, not just children, currently face targeted violence in Honduras;
- Large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Honduras (~174,000) continue to be displaced, illustrating already existing safety issues and the growing humanitarian protection challenges in the country; and
- The Honduran government does not have the current capacity to adequately handle the return of nationals with TPS because it lacks knowledge of the impacted population and lacks an adequate reception, protection, and integration system for the already large numbers of IDPs and returnees (almost 70,000 in 2016).

In addition to the findings in the report, it is important to note that the disputed nature of the December 2017 presidential election in Honduras has compounded the society-wide instability of the country and further inhibits the Honduran government's ability to accept returned nationals. The events around the presidential election diverted valuable resources away from improving the existing national protection and repatriation infrastructure. As a result, the capacity to reintegrate Honduran nationals remains very limited. Given this precarious state, the influx of deportees has the potential of further debilitating Honduras' human security, economy, and civil society; thus, hurting the efficacy of its cooperation with the United States.

Terminating TPS at this time would be inhumane and untenable. Given the current country conditions, Honduras is in no position to accommodate the return of an estimated 57,000 nationals who have received TPS from the United States. Doing so would likely destabilize this key strategic, regional partner and potentially bring harm to those returned. In addition, terminating TPS would needlessly add large numbers of Hondurans to the undocumented population in the U.S., lead to family separation, and unnecessarily cause the Department of Homeland Security to expend resources on individuals who are already registered with our government and whose safe return is forestalled by dire humanitarian conditions.

Based on the above facts and further analysis in our trip report, we urge you to extend the TPS designation for Honduras, pursuant to Section 244(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act,<sup>5</sup> until individuals' return and reintegration to the country can be safely accomplished. This will allow Hondurans to continue to legally work, contribute to U.S. communities in an authorized capacity, and maintain safe, stable lives, and human dignity for their families, many of which include U.S. citizens. We ask you to show compassion and patience as Honduras continues to improve its citizen security and humanitarian capacity for reception, protection, and integration.

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<sup>4</sup> USCCB/MRS, *Temporary Protected Status: A Vital Piece of the Central American Protection and Prosperity Puzzle* (October 2017), available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/upload/el-salvador-honduras-report-20171016.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b).

We appreciate your consideration of this request. The Catholic Church stands ready to support measures to protect the wellbeing and dignity of Honduran families as the country continues the path to reform, addressing citizen security and building protection infrastructure.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
William A. Canny  
Executive Director