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## Office of the President

Most Reverend Joseph A. D.O.  
Bishop of Galveston-Houston  
**President**



March 25, 1999

Honorable William Jefferson Clinton  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear President Clinton:

I write on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the United States to ask your assistance for Salvadorans and Guatemalans as they struggle to overcome the challenges they face as a result of Hurricane Mitch. The U.S. Catholic Conference has been in close contact with your Administration and the Congress regarding debt relief, reconstruction, and development assistance in the Central American region. While these remain major concerns of the U.S. Catholic bishops, in this correspondence we specifically ask you to consider two changes to current immigration policy as it relates to El Salvador and Guatemala.

On November 16 of last year, Bishop Anthony Pilla, then President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote to you asking for a designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for the countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. We applaud and support your decision, announced in December, to designate Honduras and Nicaragua for TPS for a period of 18 months. We remain concerned for nationals of El Salvador and Guatemala, who, at the time, were given a stay of deportation for 60 days. The extension expired March 8 and the United States has begun the deportation of Salvadoran and Guatemalan nationals.

As you know, the Catholic Church in Central America and in the United States has been very involved in assisting with the recovery efforts following Hurricane Mitch. It is our view that the impact of the storm was regional and deserves a regional response. Deportation of Salvadoran and Guatemalan nationals at this time would only serve to slow the recovery effort in the region. We ask that you reconsider your decision and designate El Salvador and Guatemala for TPS equal to the time period given Honduras and Nicaragua. At the least, we ask that you again stay deportation of these nationals until the region can recover from this humanitarian disaster.

We also request that your Administration grant a group-specific designation of extreme hardship for the approximately 240,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans affected by the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) of 1997. Regulations proposed by your Administration interpret this law in a restrictive manner, despite your statement upon signing the