



Office of the President

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Cardinal Francis George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago

October 8, 2008

Honorable George W. Bush
President
United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, I write to ask you to designate the country of Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for a period of eighteen months. The United States Catholic Bishops Conference (USCCB) has a long history of serving the Haitian community, both in the United States and in Haiti, and has first-hand knowledge of the great humanitarian challenges facing the Haitian people.

As you know, a designation of TPS permits nationals of a designated nation living in the United States to reside here legally and qualify for work authorization. A designation of TPS is based upon a determination that armed conflict, political unrest, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions exist in a nation and that the return of that country's nationals would further destabilize the nation and potentially bring harm to those returned.

Haiti meets the standard for TPS because it has experienced political tumult, four natural disasters, and severe food shortages in the last eight months alone, not to mention the devastation of Hurricane Jeanne in 2004. In April, starving citizens took to the streets to protest rising food prices, causing political instability.

In August and September, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike and Tropical Storms Fay and Hanna passed through Haiti, causing severe damage and the death of close to 700 persons. Massive flooding from the storms has destroyed homes, crops, roads, and bridges, and largely rendered areas like Gonaives inaccessible to relief workers. Over 90 percent of Haiti has been impacted. Tens of thousands have been displaced, and the fate of thousands more is unknown. More than 300,000 children have been affected.

In addition, the conditions in Haiti are at least as bad, if not worse, than those in nations which recently received an extension of TPS. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently announced that it was extending TPS for El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras because

of “lingering effects” from the earthquakes in 2001 and from Hurricane Mitch in 2004. These effects included destroyed roads and bridges, high unemployment, and incomplete international development efforts. We agree wholeheartedly with DHS’ decision to extend TPS to these countries. However, if “lingering effects” in these countries merit a grant of TPS, then so do the conditions in Haiti, where multiple disasters this year have left immediate and devastating effects.

Some observers argue that granting TPS to Haiti would cause a massive “boatlift” that would bring thousands of Haitians to the United States. In our view, this argument holds little merit, since TPS is only available to Haitian nationals already in the United States at the time of the designation. No such boatlift occurred in 1997, when President Clinton granted Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) to Haiti, or in subsequent years when Haiti experienced increased political violence and civil unrest. Additionally, few Haitian water craft currently exist, having been destroyed by the recent storms.

Another consideration is that designating TPS to Haiti would allow Haitian nationals already in the United States to work and send much-needed remittances back to their poverty-stricken homeland. The Inter-American Development Bank reports that Haitians abroad sent close to \$1.83 billion home last year, which equals about 35% of the country’s gross domestic product. It is critical that this life-blood of the fragile Haitian economy be sustained.

Mr. President, by any measure, the conditions in Haiti meet the statutory requirements for TPS. There has been “substantial disruption” in living conditions and Haiti is “unable to handle adequately” the return of its citizens abroad. Extending this mantle of protection to struggling Haiti is a just, compassionate, and concrete step the United States can take toward alleviating the human suffering of the Haitian people.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Francis Cardinal George". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago
President