

December 9, 2024

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken:

We write on behalf of our respective organizations to express gratitude for the December 14, 2023, extension of re-registration of Nicaraguans for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), the extensions and redesignations of TPS for Syria, Ethiopia, Haiti, and Somalia earlier this year, and the more recent designation of TPS for Lebanon. Today, we urge you to make further and full use of your TPS authority in the remaining days of the Biden Administration. In particular, we write in strong support of a TPS redesignation and extension for Nicaragua and the designation of TPS for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Additionally, we encourage the Administration to review the conditions in countries with existing TPS designations set to expire in the next few months and consider more timely and immediate redesignations and extensions for those countries, especially where conditions are unlikely to change significantly in the next several months so as to allow for safe return.

The Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Secretary of State and others, may designate a country for TPS if conditions in the country meet statutory requirements for such designation, including ongoing armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions that prevent safe return.¹ TPS serves as a life-saving protection that allows people from a designated country to remain in the United States while conditions in their home country make safe return impractical, impossible, or detrimental to local recovery efforts.

As Catholics and as Americans, we believe wholeheartedly in protecting the sanctity of every human life. TPS is an important tool created by Congress to protect human life, reduce strain on countries impacted by certain conditions, and further the wellbeing of American communities by providing those who remain in the United States with the ability to support themselves and their families, consistent with their God-given dignity.

While there are several countries with ongoing conditions that warrant the protections of TPS for their nationals living in the United States, we especially seek to draw your attention to Nicaragua and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both of which we approach with a unique perspective as organizations of the Catholic Church:

Nicaragua

- Conditions preventing people from safely returning to Nicaragua have only been exacerbated since its original designation in 1998. Nicaragua, originally designated for TPS

¹ 8 U.S.C. 1254a(b)(1).

in light of the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch, continues to be extremely vulnerable, being classified at the “highest risk level for climate-related and other natural disasters” by the World Bank.² The impacts of Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020, and most recently Tropical Storm Sara in 2024, continue to be seen throughout the country.

- Nicaragua is experiencing extraordinary levels of civil unrest, political and religious persecution, and the arbitrary deprivation of human life, including mass disappearances and extrajudicial killings.
- Since the human rights crisis began in Nicaragua in 2018,³ over 5,000 civil society organizations have had their legal status cancelled and assets confiscated by the state, including more than 1,200 religiously-affiliated foundations.⁴ The Catholic Church has been targeted specifically, with nearly 300 vowed religious being forced to abandon the country—four bishops and 141 priests being included among those expelled. Just last month, the Bishop of Jinotega, who also serves as the president of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, was added to the list of those arrested and expelled from the country.
- Additionally, the most recent constitutional reform by the Nicaraguan government, enacted just weeks ago, ceded virtually unlimited power to the country’s president and will have “dire and far-reaching consequences. . . to the fundamental rights of Nicaragua’s people.”⁵
- Recognizing these volatile conditions in the country, the Biden Administration extended Executive Order 13851, declaring a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to national security Nicaragua posed to its citizens and the United States. Given these considerations and others, we believe a redesignation of TPS for Nicaragua is not only warranted in this case under the requirements laid out at 8 U.S.C. 1254a but long overdue.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

- The United Nations estimates that more than 6.9 million people have been displaced due to widespread violence and conflict in the DRC, and “[f]or decades, the Congolese people have been living through a storm of crises.”⁶
- The conditions in the DRC continue to worsen throughout the country. Food and water insecurities and cholera outbreaks affecting thousands of children contribute to the ongoing crises. Deportation flights to the DRC continue despite there being an ongoing mpox outbreak.

² *Pooling Catastrophe Risk to Protect against Natural Hazards: Nicaragua’s Experience in Disaster Risk Management and Finance* (Nov. 1, 2021), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2021/11/01/pooling-catastrophe-risk-to-protect-against-natural-hazards-nicaragua-s-experience-in-disaster-risk-management-and-finan>.

³ UNHCR, *Nicaragua: UN Report Highlights Continued Human Rights Violations and Erosion of Civic and Democratic Spaces* (Sept. 3, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/nicaragua-un-report-highlights-continued-human-rights-violations-and-erosion>.

⁴ IACHR, *IACHR Condemns Massive Closure of Civil Society and Religious Organizations in Nicaragua* (Aug. 22, 2024), https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2024/189.asp.

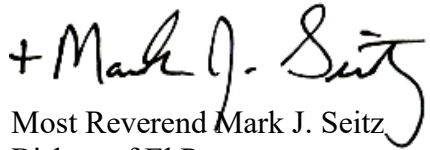
⁵ UNHCR, *Nicaragua: UN Group of Experts Alarmed by Far-reaching Change to the Constitution* (Nov. 25, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/nicaragua-un-group-experts-alarmed-far-reaching-change-constitution>.

⁶ IOM, *Record High Displacement in DRC at Nearly 7 Million* (Oct. 30, 2023), <https://www.iom.int/news/record-high-displacement-drc-nearly-7-million>.

- Armed conflict and sexual violence previously caught the attention of the United States, which has imposed sanctions on senior members of armed groups to hold them accountable for their widespread human rights abuses.⁷
- The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) communicated with the State Department previously regarding the situation in the DRC, amplifying the concerns of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo,⁸ one of the only trusted civil society institutions in the country, which we also urge you to consider as direct evidence in support of a TPS designation for the DRC.

Across each of our organizations, united in our Catholic faith and devoted to the teachings of the Gospel, we are called to act in solidarity with and on behalf of those who are in need. Expanding TPS protection to nationals of both Nicaragua and the DRC would safeguard human life, keep families together, provide economic benefits, and underscore the Biden Administration's enduring commitment to human rights. Similar positive impacts could be provided in the case of other TPS designations, redesignations, and extensions. We ask that you not delay in acting within the bounds of your authority to achieve such effects. Thank you for considering our requests and for your work on behalf of the common good.

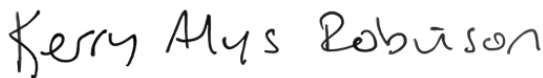
Respectfully,



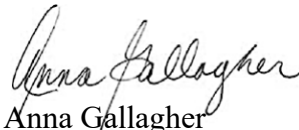
Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz
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Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan
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Secretary, Office of Justice and Ecology
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the
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⁷ Migration Policy Institute, *After Deportation, Some Congolese Returnees Face Detention and Extortion* (May 23, 2019), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/after-deportation-some-congolese-returnees-face-detention-and-extortion>.

⁸ USCCB, Letter from Bishop David J. Malloy to Secretary of State Antony Blinken (Aug. 8, 2023), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Letter%20to%20Secretary%20of%20State%20Blinken%20Regarding%20Deteriorating%20Situation%20in%20the%20Democratic%20Republic%20of%20the%20Congo,%20August%208,%202023.pdf>.

CC: The Honorable Ur Jaddou, Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Mr. Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor
Ms. Neera Tanden, Domestic Policy Advisor
Ms. Melissa Rogers, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and
Neighborhood Partnerships