

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken:

We urge you to redesignate Honduras and El Salvador for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as it is unsafe for the nationals of these countries to be returned at this time due to severe environmental damage caused by successive hurricanes and climate change-related catastrophes, combined with human rights violations and cascading political crises exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both El Salvador and Honduras face separate but equally devastating realities that prevent individuals who have fled these countries from safely returning.

Furthermore, the continued litigation in the Ramos v. Nielsen case leave many in jeopardy and, whatever its result, may still prevent thousands from accessing much-needed protection. A TPS redesignation for El Salvador and Honduras would protect eligible beneficiaries from the dangers they face if they were removed, and would also enable them to support their loved ones back home, reducing the pressure for others in these countries to resort to irregular migration.

El Salvador and Honduras were devastated by three severe environmental catastrophes in the last few years. Hurricanes Iota and Eta destroyed homes, public infrastructure, and health care systems, and crushed the agricultural sector.

In Honduras, the hurricanes displaced 937,000 people, caused widespread damage to agricultural lands and infrastructure, and affected over 4.5 million Hondurans. Honduras continued to experience environmental disasters, including floods, landslides, and tropical storms last year that displaced hundreds of thousands and could increase the number of Hondurans living in extreme poverty from 42 percent to 64 percent.

Combined, the effects of the natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic have profoundly exacerbated food insecurity, violence, and led to rising social tensions. These factors have left the country's population struggling to survive. Over a quarter of El Salvador's population lives in deep poverty and facing poor health or malnutrition, and in Honduras, an estimated 2.6 million people, nearly a third of the population, were facing a hunger crisis as of 2022.

Although these conditions alone arguably warrant a TPS redesignation, the subsequent human rights and economic crises have exacerbated the impact on public safety in El Salvador and Honduras, although both countries face unique situational contexts.

El Salvador

El Salvador has suffered severe insecurity, and the government's subsequent crackdown has resulted in discrimination and human rights violations that threaten the everyday lives of Salvadorans. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2022 country report on human rights practices for El Salvador, there have been significant human rights issues in the country, including credible reports of *"unlawful or arbitrary killings, forced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention."* In particular, the government's implementation of the State of Exception, a year-long and continuing state of emergency that is renewed monthly led to mass disappearances and the imprisonment of 2 percent of the population, and threatened the ability of communities to thrive economically.

Since the State of Exception's implementation, security officials have committed widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions, torture, inhumane treatment, and deaths in custody, specifically targeting young people in poor neighborhoods. Furthermore, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights named El Salvador the most dangerous Latin American country for women as it reported the highest number of murders of women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Each of these human rights violations mean that Salvadorans living outside of the country are unable to return to the country safely at this time.

Honduras

The impact of the environmental disasters on Hondurans has been exacerbated by high levels of politically motivated violence and insecurity. The 2021 general elections were characterized by unprecedented levels of political violence. Deadly attacks on municipal and congressional candidates and their supporters more than doubled in 2021, and at least 68 municipal or congressional candidates were murdered leading up to election day. Further, the U.S. Department of State's 2022 country report on human rights practices in Honduras concludes that there have been significant human rights issues in the country, including criminal groups committing acts of *"homicide, torture, kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, intimidation, and other threats and violence,"* particularly against vulnerable populations, including human rights defenders, judicial authorities, women, and ethnic minorities.

TPS is a humanitarian tool used by both Democratic and Republican administrations to provide relief for individuals who are unable to return to their home countries facing extraordinary and temporary conditions. The ongoing humanitarian crises in Honduras and El Salvador coupled with the devastating impact of the environmental disasters, makes the safe return of Honduran and Salvadorans in the United States inconceivable.

A redesignation of TPS would give the U.S. government an opportunity to engage in diplomacy with the Honduran government and work with civil society groups in the region to address the root causes of migration without creating further instability and volatility. The immediate and tangible humanitarian benefits of TPS would help advance life-saving and stability enhancing remittances to the region.

We urge you to redesignate TPS for El Salvador and Honduras. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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Catherine Cortez Masto
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Cori Bush
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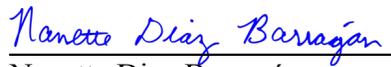
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United States Senator

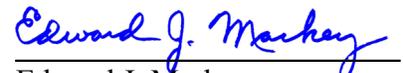


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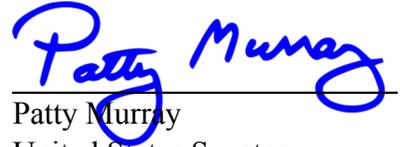

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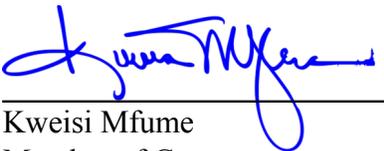
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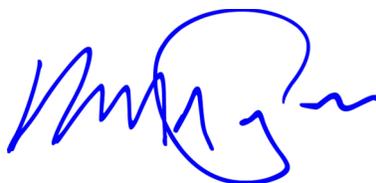
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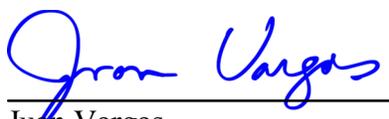
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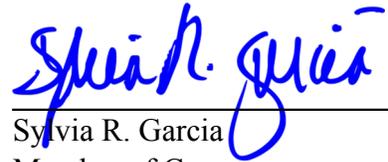
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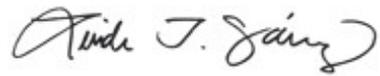
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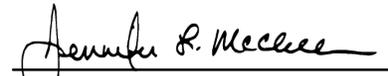
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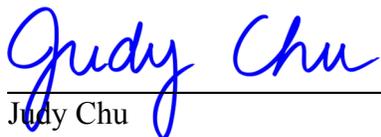
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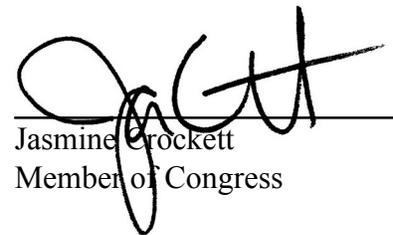
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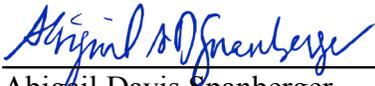
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