

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 10, 2022

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

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

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our concerns about ongoing humanitarian needs in Central America and to appeal for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) redesignations for El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and a new TPS designation for Guatemala. It is our assessment that the severe damage caused by back-to-back hurricanes just over one year ago, combined with extreme drought conditions, and the social and economic crises exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, warrant such an action by the Administration. The Guatemalan government has requested a TPS designation, and U.S. Embassies have issued disaster declarations for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in recognition of the urgent needs. TPS designations and redesignations would provide critical protections for eligible beneficiaries and enable them to support basic needs of loved ones back home and invest in safer alternatives to irregular migration. Lastly, such designations would be consistent with the Administration's commitments to address climate migration.

The crisis in Central America is urgent. In the past year, the region has experienced extreme weather events, including two hurricanes followed by a months-long drought. According to the World Food Program (WFP), farmers in the region face the worst dry farming season in 35 years. Hunger in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua has increased almost fourfold over the past two years, according to WFP, from 2.2 million people in 2018 to close to 8 million people in 2021. Eight in ten households are resorting to crisis coping measures, selling their lands, tools, and livestock, and missing meals or eating less nutritious meals. It will take years to repair damage to roads, schools, bridges, wells, and other physical infrastructure caused by hurricanes Eta and Iota, which continue to impede citizens' livelihoods. The pressures have led to an uptick in outmigration from the region. In January, 15 percent of people surveyed by WFP said they were making concrete plans to migrate — double the number two years ago. Media report that the region's citizens are having to choose between migrating or facing hunger. Despite U.S. Embassies' disaster declarations, which activated the delivery of U.S. humanitarian assistance, 8.3 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in July 2021, including 5.5 million who were in desperate need of food as of September 2021, according to the Famine Early Warning System Network.

The International Monetary Fund says that remittances initially supported the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, but tropical storms Eta and Iota interrupted progress, damaging crops and halting manufacturing. In 2020, Honduras' GDP dropped nine percent, El Salvador's GDP dropped nearly eight percent, Nicaragua's dropped two percent, and Guatemala's by 1.8 percent. The IMF supported the region with emergency financing to cope with these shocks. However, the enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lagging vaccination campaigns, especially in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, will prolong the region's economic recovery.

Combined, the effects of the natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic have profoundly exacerbated food insecurity, violence, and led to rising social tensions. Forced displacement continues to plague the region. Over one million Central Americans have been displaced by violence and insecurity. Gender-based violence continues to be a major driver of displacement, with rates increasing dramatically throughout 2020. On November 3, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights named El Salvador the most dangerous Latin American country for women. Additionally, countries in the region have suffered severe democratic backsliding and political persecution is on the rise, including through the consolidation of a dictatorship in Nicaragua, the dismantling of independent judiciaries, and efforts to intimidate and silence civil society and independent media.

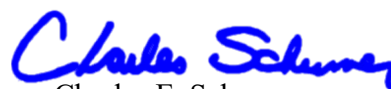
TPS is a humanitarian tool used by both Democratic and Republican administrations to provide relief for individuals who are unable to return to countries facing extraordinary conditions. The Biden administration must act and provide certainty for eligible individuals from Central America during this challenging moment. These temporary designations would give the U.S. government more time to partner with governments and civil society in the region to ensure that the return of a large number of individuals to Central America does not create further instability and volatility. They would also provide immediate and tangible humanitarian benefits to new status holders and help mitigate the factors driving dangerous outmigration by securing life-saving remittances.

It is our view that El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua meet the standards for TPS. We look forward to working closely with and supporting the Biden administration as it takes this important step to uphold humanitarian protections, safeguard U.S. national security interests, and defend American families. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



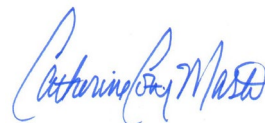
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



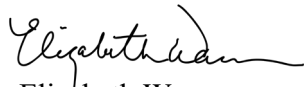
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



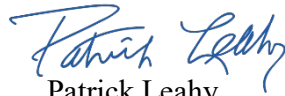
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



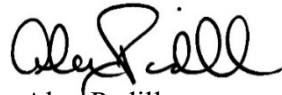
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
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Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



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Kirsten Gillibrand
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Michael F. Bennet
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Jacky Rosen
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United States Senator




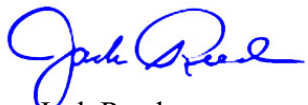
Richard Blumenthal
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Amy Klobuchar
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Martin Heinrich
United States Senator


Chris Van Hollen
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Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

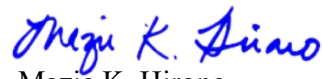

Jack Reed
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

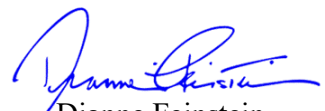

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator


Thomas R. Carper /s/
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
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