

May 17, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Secretary Kelly,

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to renew temporary protected status (TPS) for Haitians in the United States.

As humanitarian, international development, and human rights organizations, many of which currently provide direct services on the ground in Haiti, we respectfully disagree with the assessment of James W. McCament, Acting Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), that conditions in Haiti no longer support its designation for TPS.¹ In the seven years since the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake which prompted the U.S. government to grant TPS to certain eligible Haitians, the country's recovery has been undermined by additional natural disasters including three consecutive years of drought,² the strongest hurricane in 50 years, prolonged economic instability, and public health crises including a historic cholera epidemic. These persistent and ongoing disasters—combined with the extreme poverty of its population—mean that the country is in no position to reintegrate more than 50,000 Haitians who now have temporary protection in the United States.

A recent Refugees International field report outlines the fragile recovery efforts following Hurricane Matthew, a Category 4 storm which hit Haiti in October 2016, killing hundreds and affecting nearly 20 percent of the country's population.³ The storm's 150 mile per hour winds, torrential rains, and flooding resulted in widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure. Wiping out the agricultural, fishing, and livestock sectors, the hurricane was particularly devastating for Haitians who rely on those industries for livelihood and sustenance. The United Nations agrees, reporting that "Hurricane Matthew has once more demonstrated Haiti's weakened ability to cope, recover, and adapt to shocks from natural disasters."⁴ A December 2016 USCIS memo also finds that "the deleterious impact of Hurricane Matthew [...] has further hindered Haiti's ability to recover from the 2010 earthquake."⁵ While the McCament memo from April 2017 concludes that Hurricane Matthew did not disrupt recovery efforts following the 2010 earthquake, it notes that the disaster caused "extensive damage to crops, housing, livestock, and infrastructure across Haiti's southwest peninsula," killed 546 people, left more than 175,000 people homeless, and sparked a potential food crisis throughout the country.⁶

¹ USCIS Memorandum for the Secretary re: Haiti's Designation for Temporary Protected Status, as [published by the Miami Herald](#) (10 April 2017).

² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, [El Nino Response Plan, Haiti](#). 2016.

³ Refugees International Field Report, [Two Steps Back: Haiti Still Reeling from Hurricane Matthew](#). April 2017.

⁴ United Nations (UN) [2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), p. 25.

⁵ USCIS Memorandum, TPS Considerations: Haiti (December 2016), as [published by the Miami Herald](#).

⁶ McCament memo, p. 4.

The UN's humanitarian response plan for Haiti indicates that 2.7 million Haitians across the country will require assistance over the next two years.⁷ In addition to 1.2 million people whose homes and livelihoods were devastated by Hurricane Matthew and who need assistance to recover, 1.5 million people face high levels of food insecurity while an additional 1.65 million are at risk of cholera infection. Adding to this are the urgent needs of 46,000 people who remain displaced as a result of the 2010 earthquake. At present, \$291 million is needed to meet these urgent humanitarian needs, only 16% of which had been contributed as of mid-April.⁸

Among those most affected by these recurrent disasters are women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those in single parent-headed households. Most Haitians living in acute poverty are women and 40% of Haitian families are female-headed. It is widely recognized that the risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) increases in the aftermath of disasters. In Haiti—where one in four women experiences physical violence by age 15—the risk of SGBV is a major protection concern.⁹ Children in disaster-affected areas are also acutely vulnerable in Haiti since families in hardship often place their children in foster care or send them to live with relatives or strangers. This is all exacerbated by food insecurity, lack of access to water and sanitation, and low education rates.

Cholera continues to be a persistent threat to Haiti today, seven years after the outbreak began near a United Nations peacekeeping base. The Centers for Disease Control declared it “the worst cholera outbreak in recent history”¹⁰ and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently reported that cholera remains a serious threat for the most vulnerable Haitians, with a 32% increase in cases and 56% increase in deaths due to the illness in the last year.¹¹ Cholera and other public health issues will likely persist given lack of safe water and sanitation.

As organizations familiar with the time and resources needed to help a country recover from a disaster such as the one that befell Haiti in 2010—even under the best of circumstances—we remain deeply concerned about the significant shortfall in funding provided by the national government and the international community. In times of crisis, remittances from relatives living abroad often provide an effective way to allow families at home to recover from natural disasters and other crises. According to the World Bank, remittances from family members living abroad account for 25% of Haiti's gross domestic product (GDP).¹² Just in 2015, an estimated \$1.344 billion—15% of Haiti's GDP—was sent to the country by family members living in the United States alone.¹³ This financial support from private individuals is urgently needed to help families in Haiti achieve some measure of stability and safety. Ending TPS would further hamper recovery efforts by cutting off that lifeline, eliminating the ability of recipients to work lawfully in the U.S., and requiring them to return once more to Haiti.

⁷ UN [Humanitarian Needs Overview, January 2017 to December 2018](#).

⁸ UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [Haiti: Humanitarian Funding Overview](#) (11 April 2017).

⁹ Supra note 3, p. 10.

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Cholera in Haiti](#) (7 November 2014).

¹¹ Supra note 3, p. 9.

¹² World Bank, [Personal Remittances \(% of GDP\), Haiti \(2015\)](#).

¹³ Pew Research Center, [Remittance Flows Worldwide in 2015](#) (31 August 2016); World Trade Organization, [Haiti](#).

Simply put, Haiti is still recovering from the 2010 earthquake, a cholera epidemic, the 2013-2016 drought, the 2016 hurricane, and countless issues in between. Recovery efforts remain incredibly fragile and complex, and this is no time to send TPS holders back to Haiti. Doing so would mean sending them to entirely avoidable risks of poverty, illness, and malnutrition, and would risk destabilizing an already fragile situation.

Sincerely,

Action Against Hunger
American Friends Service Committee
American Jewish World Service
American Red Cross
Americares
Association Inscire
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
CARE USA
Church World Service
Disciples Home Missions
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Fondasyon Mapou
Fondation Connaissance et Liberte, FOKAL
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Haitian Neighborhood Center, Sant La
HIAS
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
International Rescue Committee
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Latin America Working Group
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Oxfam America
Plant With Purpose
Protect the People (PTP)
Refugees International
RefugePoint
Scalabrini International Migration Network
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team
StoreHouse Ministries
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
UURISE – Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant Services Education
Women’s Refugee Commission
World Relief