

April 20, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20050

**RE: National and Local Faith Orgs on Redesignating Temporary Protected Status for Nicaragua**

The 120 undersigned national and local faith-based organizations write to respectfully request that your administration redesignate Nicaragua for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in light of Nicaragua's deteriorating social and environmental conditions which prevent Nicaraguan nationals from safely returning to their homeland. Across our respective faith traditions, we seek to affirm the dignity and humanity of those uprooted from their homes. We call for the administration to use the tools provided by Congress to protect human life, which also ensure that our neighbors with temporary protection have a means to support themselves and their families.

We strongly urge your administration to redesignate Nicaragua for TPS, promptly release the Federal Register Notice, and provide a minimum 180-day registration period for new beneficiaries under the new designations. As you know, 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 temporarily prevent safe return.<sup>1</sup> TPS beneficiaries are not removable from the United States, can obtain employment authorization, and may be granted travel authorization. Redesignating TPS would bring relief to thousands of Nicaraguans who have been forced to flee their homes due to worsening conditions over the years. In 2022 alone, more than 250,000 Nicaraguans left their homeland.<sup>2</sup> More must be done to provide stability and security for our neighbors.

The State Department's annual human rights report released on March 20th notes multiple human rights concerns.<sup>3</sup> Since 2018, Nicaragua has also seen the exit of many religious and civil society organizations.<sup>4</sup> Some were responsible for delivering assistance to marginalized and needy persons. The human rights situation described in the 2022 State Department Report presents a reality that, when combined with the civil society atmosphere, may complicate return.

Undoubtedly, Nicaragua is facing the aftermath of an environmental disaster caused by Tropical Storm Julia at the end of 2022 as well as suffering from one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world since 2000.<sup>5</sup> Many communities on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast remain devastated from back-to-back Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2021. Farming in the Dry Corridor has become increasingly untenable due to severe and ongoing droughts and floods. Climate disaster has

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<sup>1</sup> "Temporary Protected Status". U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Retrieved on April 12, 2023. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>

<sup>2</sup> Ripley, Charles G. "Crisis Prompts Record Emigration from Nicaragua, Surpassing Cold War Era". Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved on April 12, 2023. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/record-emigration-nicaragua-crisis>

<sup>3</sup> "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nicaragua". U.S. Department of State. Retrieved on April 12, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nicaragua>

<sup>4</sup> La Gaceta: Diario Oficial, No. 186, 5 de octubre de 2022.

<http://digesto.asamblea.gob.ni/consultas/util/pdf.php?type=rdd&rdd=hIDk7wyNqk0%3D>

<sup>5</sup> Global Forest Watch. "Nicaragua". Global Forest Watch. Retrieved on April 12, 2023. [Nicaragua Deforestation Rates & Statistics | GFW \(globalforestwatch.org\)](https://www.globalforestwatch.org/)

interacted with and exacerbated other drivers of displacement across the country. Current conditions prevent Nicaraguans from returning safely and managing their return would only add to existing challenges. This is compounded with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which further strains limited resources on the ground and imposes an added layer of complication for return. Therefore, we strongly urge the Administration to designate TPS for a period of 18-months.

The TPS program was established by Congress in 1990 to protect people fleeing war-torn and disaster-ravaged nations from being deported to danger. Today, many TPS holders are vital members of our places of worship and larger society. Many TPS holders were deemed “essential workers” during the pandemic, working in critical industries like healthcare and food services.<sup>6</sup> A TPS designation would empower many more eligible Nicaraguans with the dignity and confidence to seek gainful employment, thereby justly contributing from their talents and experience to societal welfare in the US and in Nicaragua.

As faith-based organizations, we have watched with deep concern, along with so many others around the world, the unfolding events in Nicaragua and the suffering of the Nicaraguan people. We believe wholeheartedly in protecting the sanctity of all human life. This includes addressing situations in which people are needlessly put into harm’s way. In addition to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to populations in need, the US has many compelling moral reasons to provide foreign nationals from unstable countries currently present in the US with Temporary Protected Status. We know such a response is supported by the values, laws, and ideals that this country holds dear. As people of faith, we are called in a special way, to raise this concern to your attention.

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<sup>6</sup> Svajlenka, Nicole Prchal and Tom Jawetz. “A Demographic Profile of TPS Holders Providing Essential Services During the Coronavirus Crisis”. Center for American Progress. Retrieved on April 12, 2023. [https://www.americanprogress.org/article/demographic-profile\(tps-holders-providing-essential-services-coronavirus-crisis/](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/demographic-profile(tps-holders-providing-essential-services-coronavirus-crisis/)