



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
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April 4, 2019

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary, Department of State
Washington, DC, 20520

VIA EMAIL

RE: TPS Designation for Venezuela

Dear Secretaries Nielsen and Pompeo,

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to urge you to designate Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), pursuant to Section 244(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.¹ Given the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, its nationals cannot safely be returned home at this time. Our nation has the legal ability, as well as the moral responsibility, to provide Venezuelans in the U.S. with temporary protection.

The ongoing political unrest, violence, and shortages in Venezuela have caused millions of citizens to flee the country. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Venezuelan Bishops Conference have recently noted the numerous violations of fundamental human rights inflicted by the police and threats to citizens' access to health and medicine.² And, as you well know, while stability in Venezuela has been tenuous since 2015, it is continuing to deteriorate at an alarming rate, which is evidenced by the Department of State's (DOS) issuance of a Level 4 "Do Not Travel" advisory for Venezuela on March 12, 2019. This advisory came just a day after DOS announced that it would be temporarily suspending operations at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas and withdrawing diplomatic personnel from the country. In issuing the subsequent travel advisory, DOS explained that in addition to violent political demonstrations and shortages in basic necessities (food, water,

¹ 8 U.S.C. § 1254(a).

² Linda Bordoní, *Venezuelan Bishops Urge Prosecutors to Uphold Human Rights in the Face of Violations*, VATICAN NEWS (Feb. 20, 2019), available at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-02/venezuela-bishops-justice-human-rights-violations.html>.

electricity, and medical care), the country suffers from high rates of violent crime, such as homicide, armed robbery, and kidnapping.³

These well-documented conditions have also been seen firsthand by our Catholic partners on the ground. Catholic Relief Services supports partners who report that of 15,000 children under age 5 being monitored, 76 percent show signs of nutritional deficit, and another 13 percent are living with acute malnutrition.⁴

For these reasons, we urge you to immediately designate Venezuela for TPS for a period of 18 months. The distressing conditions discussed above show that such a designation would be appropriate and could be made either on the grounds that: (1) Venezuela is suffering from “ongoing armed conflict within the state” and, consequently, return of nationals to the country would “pose a serious threat to their personal safety,”⁵ or (2) that it is facing “extraordinary and temporary conditions” that prevent nationals “from returning to the state in safety.”⁶

We believe providing a TPS designation for Venezuela is also a moral, compassionate and needed response. TPS would ensure that an estimated 150,000 qualifying Venezuelans here in the U.S. are not returned to dangerous and life-threatening situations⁷ and give them an opportunity to live with dignity, work lawfully, and provide for their families’ well-being until they can safely return home.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. We are praying for Venezuela’s swift recovery and for the day when those who have fled to the safety of other countries may return home.

Respectfully,



Most. Rev. Joe Vásquez
Chairman
USCCB Committee on Migration



Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services

³ *Venezuela Travel Advisory*, DEPARTMENT OF STATE (March 12, 2019), <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/venezuela-travel-advisory.html>.

⁴ CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES, *VENEZUELA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS 1* (JAN. 25, 2019), *available at* <https://www.crs.org/resource-center/venezuela-humanitarian-crisis-emergency-fact-sheet>.

⁵ 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(A).

⁶ *Id.* at § 1254a(b)(1)(C).

⁷ *US: Offer Venezuelans in US Temporary Protection*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (March 8, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/08/us-offer-venezuelans-us-temporary-protection> (“The Venezuelan American National Bar Association estimates that there are about 150,000 Venezuelan nationals in the US who would qualify for Temporary Protected Status.”).