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January 9, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 2052

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

**RE: ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR EXTENSION AND REDESIGNATION OF
TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR SYRIA**

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Secretary Blinken,

The undersigned 50 national, state, and local immigration and humanitarian organizations write to urge the extension and redesignation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria for 18 months. The designation of TPS for Syria is set to expire on March 31, 2024, with the decision date coming up on January 30, 2024.

War-torn Syria continues to endure bombings, armed clashes, kidnappings, natural disasters, disease, and various human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. These include extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture. The earthquakes in early February 2023 devastated the already-fragile infrastructure throughout many parts of Syria and exacerbated a worsening humanitarian crisis. These temporary conditions make it impossible for Syrian TPS-holders to return safely to their country, and thus warrant the extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria.

I. Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

The United States can designate a foreign state for TPS if the state is experiencing ongoing armed conflict, a natural disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions that prevent nationals from the designated country from temporarily returning to that state safely.¹ TPS is a life-saving humanitarian protection; it allows its beneficiaries to temporarily stay in the United States during the designated period and receive work permits. On October 1, 2022, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) extended and redesignated TPS for Syria for 18 months.² The armed conflict that originally warranted the designation of TPS for Syria persists. With the country's humanitarian situation worsening, conditions continue to warrant an extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria.

II. Conditions in Syria Merit TPS Extension and Redesignation

A. Ongoing Armed Conflict

This year witnessed “the most significant” escalation of hostilities in the country since 2019, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).³ Since October 5, 2023, fighting in north-west Syria has killed at least 92 civilians – nearly 40 percent of them children – with over 400 others injured.⁴ More than 120,000 people were displaced as a result of

the shelling and airstrikes, and at least ten percent remain displaced in temporary shelters.⁵ Civilian facilities and critical infrastructure in north-west Syria have been significantly impacted by the escalation of hostilities, with 40 health facilities, 27 schools, and over 20 water systems damaged by the violence.⁶

In eastern Syria, heavy clashes continue to result in civilian casualties and damage to critical infrastructure, including water stations and schools. About 27,000 people remain displaced since late August, when the hostilities began.⁷ Communities in regime-held areas of Syria have also continued to clash with regime forces or Iran-backed militias, leading to casualties and temporary siege conditions.⁸ According to the U.N. Deputy Special Envoy to Syria, “the 12-year-long conflict [has] continued unabated, with airstrikes, bombardment, clashes and assassination attempts in several places.”⁹ Syria thus continues to undergo an armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions that pose a significant threat to the safety of Syrian TPS-holders if they are forced to return.

B. Extraordinary and Temporary Conditions

If Syrian TPS recipients are forced to return to Syria, they also face the risk of arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, torture, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (“ill-treatment”). All major actors in the conflict continue to carry out documented acts of these crimes to various degrees. An estimated 135,000 to 150,000 civilians in Syria are detained and forcibly disappeared, with at least 221 cases of arbitrary arrest recorded in November 2023.¹⁰ Many Syrians abroad who returned or were deported to Syria have been arrested and/or disappeared upon their return.¹¹ Authorities also continued to unlawfully confiscate property and restrict access to areas of origin for returning Syrians.¹²

In its July 2023 report to the U.N. Human Rights Council, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) found that torture and ill-treatment are still “a significant risk” in all parts of Syria, but particularly in regime-held areas, for “Syrian nationals abroad who return.”¹³ Since March 2011 and as of October 2023, at least 15,300 identified individuals have died as a result of torture in Syria.¹⁴ Corruption and extortion have also proliferated against the background of the deepening economic crisis and state decline in Syria. The COI found that regime forces in Syria “seem to be institutionalizing extortion” as they have targeted Syrians returning from abroad with phony charges and steep payments as conditions for their release.¹⁵ Several Syrian nationals reported to COI that they were either arrested or kidnapped upon their return and held, sometimes “entirely outside the legal system,” until their families paid thousands of dollars for their release.¹⁶ General criminal kidnappings for ransom have also spiked and taken place in the absence of any intervention by police forces.¹⁷

C. Environmental Disasters

Natural and environmental disasters this year have exacerbated already-stressed civil and medical infrastructures and led to the internal displacement of thousands of Syrians. On February 6, 2023, a catastrophic 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Türkiye, with an epicenter located near the border of northern Syria, which was followed by more than 11,000 aftershocks across the region in the following three weeks.¹⁸ The series of earthquakes “created a disaster of colossal proportion” in the northern, central, and coastal parts of Syria, impacting at least 8.8 million people across the country, including “almost every person living in north-west Syria.”¹⁹ In the direct aftermath, at least 5,791 people were killed by the earthquake and more than 10,485 individuals were injured.²⁰

As of March 20, 2023, 1,869 buildings had been totally destroyed, with 8,731 buildings partially destroyed.²¹ Following the earthquake, a dam collapsed in northwestern Syria, causing the overflow of the Orontes River and leading to 1,000 houses flooding and 7,000 people evacuating.²² Moreover, only months after the earthquakes, fires burned across northwestern and coastal Syria, taxing an overstretched emergency response system.²³ These disasters have compounded pre-existing humanitarian issues and resulted in a substantial disruption of living conditions in Syria, which has not yet recovered from them.

D. Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis

If forced to return at this juncture, Syrian TPS-holders would face a country struggling with a ballooning humanitarian crisis and “severe, extreme, or catastrophic conditions,” which have contributed to a breakdown in state machinery and security.²⁴ The U.N. estimates that 15.3 million people need humanitarian assistance across Syria – a 5 percent increase from 2022.²⁵ There have been recent cholera outbreaks in Syria. Over 12 million people also lack regular access to sufficient food. Nonetheless, the U.N. World Food Program will end its main assistance program across war-torn Syria in January 2024. Of the 5.5 million people in Syria who had been receiving food assistance, the “unprecedented funding crisis” would cut aid to 2.5 million.²⁶ These temporary conditions, coupled with the damage to critical infrastructure and housing this year, have added to the country’s inability to reconstruct and provide for its citizens, much less adequately handle the return of Syrians from abroad.

III. Extension and Redesignation of TPS for Syria is in the United States Best Interest

An 18-month extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria aligns with U.S. commitments to support vulnerable Syrians. The United States remains the single largest humanitarian donor to the Syria crisis response.²⁷ USAID lists Syria as “the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis of our time, driving record levels of displacement.”²⁸ Moreover, Syrian TPS-holders, while unable to return to their homeland, are contributing to the U.S. economy and enriching U.S. communities, and many served as essential workers during the pandemic. Extending and redesignating TPS for Syria would not only be an appropriate use of your authority granted by Congress, but also a critical tool to meet both your administration’s goals to enhance our nation’s security, safety, and prosperity, and your commitments to the Syrian people.

IV. Conclusion

Syria remains in the midst of armed conflict, undergoing temporary deteriorating country conditions and humanitarian crises. We urge the administration to immediately extend and redesignate TPS for Syria for 18 months and request a timely publication of the Federal Register Notice to avoid employment disruptions and other hardships that result from any delays.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

African Communities Together (ACT)

Alianza Americas

Americans for a Free Syria

Diana Konate

Oscar Chacón

Ismael Basha

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding
and Policy
Church World Service
Citizens for a Secure and Safe America (C4SSA)
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Human Rights First
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigrants Act Now
Immigration Hub
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Justice Action Center
MPower Change
Multifaith Alliance
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
Pro Justice
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Syria Faith Initiative
Syrian American Council
Syrian Christians, Education Committee USA
Syrian Forum USA
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Rebecca Ma
Cristina Moreno
Pedro Aleman-Perfecto
Kate Jastram

Cornelius Raff
Danilo Zak
Joud Monla-Hassan
Robert McCaw
Giovana Oaxaca
Marie Lucey
Guerline Jozef
Robyn Barnard
Liz Taufa
Farrah Alkhorfan, Deema Abdo
Kerri Talbot
Sunil Varghese
Tasha Moro
Yasmine Taeb
Betsy Dribben
Heidi Altman, Raha Wala
Ignacia Rodriguez Kmec
JoAnn Goedert
Lucy McDermott
Wael Sawah
Mike Poulin
Zaher Sahloul
Farouk Belal
Mirna Barq
Yaser Tabbara
Gen Slosberg
Victoria Walker
Ellen Garfinkle
Pablo DeJesus

State and Local Organizations

Adhikaar for Human Rights & Social Justice

Prarthana Gurung

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House, Washington DC
Estrella del Paso
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
Just Neighbors
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Mozaic
Nigerian Center
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

Carl Bergquist
Merwyn De Mello
Imelda Maynard
Tessa Petit
Margaret Cargioli
Lisa Parisio
Matt Lohmeier
Matt Lohmeier
Dominique Poirier
Susan Reed
Raghad Bushnaq, Suryani Omar
Gbenga Ogunjimi
Adam McGovern

¹ INA § 244 (b)(1)(C).

² Extension and Redesignation of Syria for Temporary Protected Status
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/08/01/2022-16508/extension-and-redesignation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status>

³ “OCHA tells Security Council situation remains dire in Syria.” 2023. OCHA.

<https://www.unocha.org/news/ocha-tells-security-council-situation-remains-dire-syria>.

“Today's top news: Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria.” 2023. OCHA. <http://unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-occupied-palestinian-territory-syria-1>.

⁴ Id.

⁵ “OCHA tells Security Council situation remains dire in Syria.” 2023. OCHA.

<https://www.unocha.org/news/ocha-tells-security-council-situation-remains-dire-syria>.

⁶ Id.

⁷ “Today's top news: Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria.” 2023. OCHA.

<http://unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-occupied-palestinian-territory-syria-1>.

⁸ E.g., <https://shaam.org/news/syria-news/qt-la-wjrha-llnzam-khlal-mhawlh-aqtham-hy-skny-wst-alrstn-bryf-hms>. “Syria: Government forces must lift siege on civilians in predominantly Kurdish areas in Aleppo.” Amnesty International. 2022.

“Syria: Government forces must lift siege on civilians in predominantly Kurdish areas in Aleppo.” Amnesty International.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/syria-government-forces-must-lift-siege-on-civilians%20-in-predominantly-kurdish-areas-in-aleppo/>.

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- ⁹ United Nations. 2023. "Syria: 'A dozen different powder kegs' | UN News." UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1144082>.
- ¹⁰ Syrian Network for Human Rights. 2022. "At Least 221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in November 2023, Including of 19 Children and 14 Women." SNHR. <https://snhr.org/blog/2023/12/02/at-least-221-arbitrary-arrests-detentions-documented-in-november-2023-including-of-19-children-and-14-women/>;
- "Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Political and Humanitarian Situations in Syria." 2023. United States Mission to the United Nations. <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-political-and-humanitarian-situations-in-syria-5/>
- ¹¹ "Lebanese authorities must halt summary deportations of Syrian refugees." 2023. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/lebanon-halt-summary-deportations-of-syrian-refugees/>.
- ¹² Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/syria>
- ¹³ "No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023." 2023. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coisyria/A-HRC-53-CRP5-Syria-Torture.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ Syrian Network for Human Rights. 2023. "Death Toll due to Torture." Syrian Network for Human Rights. <https://snhr.org/blog/2023/06/14/death-toll-due-to-torture/>.
- ¹⁵ "No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023." 2023. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coisyria/A-HRC-53-CRP5-Syria-Torture.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ Id.
- ¹⁷ Horani, Nawwar. 2022. "Child kidnappings haunt civilians in Syria's Daraa." Al-Monitor. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/03/child-kidnappings-haunt-civilians-syrias-daraa>.
- ¹⁸ "2023 Turkey-Syria Earthquake." Center for Disaster Philanthropy. <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2023-turkey-syria-earthquake/>.
- ¹⁹ "Flash Appeal: Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake (February - May 2023) [EN/AR] - Syrian Arab Republic." 2023. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/flash-appeal-syrian-arab-republic-earthquake-february-may-2023-enar>.
- ²⁰ Id.; "Syria Earthquake Injury Assessment." 2023. Assistance Coordination Unit. https://acu-sy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACU_Syria_EQ_Injury_Assessment_March-2023.pdf.
- ²¹ Assistance Coordination Unit. 2023. "Syria Earthquake Impact." <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMzcwN2M2NWItZTczMio0N2E4LWE4ZmU0OTc1NDY4MGM1ODVkIiwidCI6ImZiMTU5MTQzLTlhNTYtNDRIYS04MWMzLTNiM2NkNGJkMmQ2NyIsImMiOiJl9&pageName=ReportSectionacfd2148f51fece9657>.
- ²² "Syria - Dam break and floods (NOAA-CPC, UN OCHA, media floodlist) (ECHO Daily Flash of 14 February 2023) - Syrian Arab Republic." 2023. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-dam-break-and-floods-noaa-cpc-un-ocha-media-floodlist-echo-daily-flash-14-february-2023>.
- ²³ Chamaa, Mohamad E. 2023. "As Syria burns, and its economy collapses, firefighters appeal for support." The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/19/syria-fires-latakia-idlib-assad/>.
- ²⁴ Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2023-humanitarian-needs-overview-december-2022-enar>.
- ²⁵ Id.
- ²⁶ Kareem Chehayeb, "The World Food Program will end its main assistance program in Syria in January, affecting millions," December 4, 2023 <https://apnews.com/article/syria-world-food-program-food-aid-5daed470afbb1761dffe19e1fc4a8520>.
- ²⁷ "The United States Announces \$920 Million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for the People of Syria," USAID, June 15, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jun-15-2023-united-states-announces-920-million-additional-humanitarian-assistance-people-syria#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20remains%20the,the%20start%20of%20the%20crisis>.
- ²⁸ "Syria," USAID, Country Overview, <https://www.usaid.gov/syria>.



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

March 13, 2024

Ms. Diana A. Konate
Policy Director
African Communities Together
700 Pennsylvania Ave SE, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Ms. Konate:

Thank you for your January 9, 2024 letter to the Department of Homeland Security urging the extension and redesignation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

I appreciate the concerns you outlined regarding the situation in Syria and your interest in its extension and redesignation for TPS. On January 26, 2024, after careful consideration, including a thorough review of country conditions and consultation with interagency partners, Secretary Mayorkas announced the extension and redesignation of Syria for 18 months.¹ This extension and redesignation will be in effect from April 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025. More information about TPS registration, re-registration, and applicable deadlines is available in the Federal Register Notice.²

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this response with the other organizations that cosigned your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ur M. Jaddou". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director

¹ See USCIS Press Release, *Secretary Mayorkas Announces Extension and Redesignation of Syria for Temporary Protected Status* (Jan. 26, 2024), available at <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/secretary-mayorkas-announces-extension-and-redesignation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status#:~:text=WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%93%20Secretary%20of%20Homeland%20Security,in%20Syria%20hat%20prevent%20individuals>.

² See *Extension and Redesignation of Syria for Temporary Protected Status*, 89 Fed. Reg. 5,562 (Jan. 29, 2024), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/01/29/2024-01764/extension-and-redesignation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status>.