



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
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February 10, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

*VIA EMAIL*

**Re: TPS Designation for Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala**

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration (COM) and Committee on International Justice and Peace (IJP), along with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), to urge you to redesignate Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador and designate Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), pursuant to section 244(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).<sup>1</sup> Recent hurricanes Eta and Iota have devastated communities across Central America. In addition to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to populations in need, the U.S. has a moral responsibility to provide temporary humanitarian protection to foreign nationals from these countries currently present in the U.S.

In the first three weeks of November, two Category 4 hurricanes made landfall within 15 miles of each other on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. Both storms brought heavy winds and rain across the region, causing landslides and flooding as well as severe damage to roads, homes, and other infrastructure. The United Nations estimates that over 9 million people have been affected by the storm, leaving over 300,000 people in both official and unofficial emergency shelters in Guatemala and Honduras and hundreds of thousands of other individuals isolated from any humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> While immediate efforts to respond to life-saving needs are underway, long-term recovery efforts will be required. Nicaragua alone estimates that the damage and economic losses

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<sup>1</sup> 8 U.S.C. §1254(a). Section 244(b)(1)(B) of the INA requires that a foreign state officially request TPS status. Honduras and Guatemala have formally requested TPS. While there seems to be no formal requests made by Nicaragua and El Salvador, section 244(b)(1)(C) of the INA empowers the Attorney General to grant TPS where there "exist extraordinary and temporary conditions in the foreign state that prevent aliens who are nationals of the state from returning to the state in safety." We believe that Eta and Iota have created such a situation.

<sup>2</sup> USAID, LATIN AMERICA – STORMS, FACT SHEET #9, at 2 (Dec. 30, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3tHXYrp>.

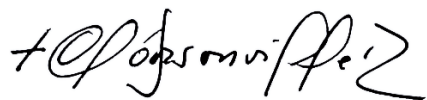
will exceed \$700 million.<sup>3</sup> Thousands of homes were destroyed and many were left without access to potable water. Also, early reports estimate that tens of thousands of acres of crops were destroyed during the storms, further increasing risks to food security.

CRS and local Catholic partners working in these affected areas continue to respond to those populations in need. They are providing humanitarian aid in the form of food, hygiene products, and basic elements for shelter, such as kitchen items. Furthermore, CRS and local partners are committed to ensuring that those who have lost their homes and livelihoods can regain food security and restore their houses and lives. However, these efforts will take time.

Undoubtedly, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are facing the aftermath of an environmental disaster. Therefore, we strongly urge you to work with the Acting Attorney General to designate TPS for these countries for a period of 18 months. Current conditions prevent foreign nationals from returning safely and managing their return would only add to existing challenges. This crisis is compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which further strains limited resources on the ground and increases the difficulty of a safe return.

As Americans, we know such a response to be supported by the values, laws, and ideals that this country holds dear; and as Christians, we are called in a special way to make this plea. We therefore join with people of faith all across the U.S. in praying for a swift recovery from these devastating storms and a humane response to those impacted by them. Thank you for considering this request.

Respectfully,



Most Rev. Mario E. Dorsonville  
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration



Most Rev. David J. Malloy  
Bishop of Rockford  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on  
International Justice and Peace



Sean Callahan  
President and CEO  
Catholic Relief Services

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<sup>3</sup> *Hurricanes Eta, Iota Hit Nicaragua with \$743 Million in Economic Losses*, REUTERS (Nov. 24, 2020), <https://reut.rs/3aS1gQa>.