



Office of the President

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Cardinal Francis George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago

January 15, 2010

Honorable Barack Obama
President
United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, I write to ask you to designate the country of Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for a period of eighteen months. The United States Catholic Bishops Conference (USCCB) has a long history of serving the Haitian community, both in the United States and in Haiti, and has first-hand knowledge of the great humanitarian challenges facing the Haitian people.

As you know, a designation of TPS permits nationals of a designated nation living in the United States to reside here legally and qualify for work authorization. A designation of TPS is based upon a determination that armed conflict, political unrest, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions exist in a nation and that the return of that country's nationals would further destabilize the nation and potentially bring harm to those returned.

It is clear that Haiti merits an immediate designation of TPS after suffering the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake of January 12, one of the worst in Haitian history. Reports from Port-au-Prince indicate extensive damage to infrastructure and a high number of human casualties. Scores of buildings collapsed during the earthquake, killing or injuring an unknown number of persons. We are told that hundreds of priests and seminarians are either trapped beneath the rubble or have lost their lives, and that Msgr. Joseph Serge Miot, Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, is among the dead.

In addition, those who have survived the earthquake are in dire need of assistance. Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. Bishops' overseas assistance agency, has reported that the earthquake has destroyed countless homes, churches, seminaries, schools, and other buildings and has left millions without the basic necessities of life. Responding to the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, plus ensuring that the Haitian people have access to basic requirements such as water, food, and medicine, will take considerable time and effort.

In this regard, it is important that Haitians in the United States are allowed to receive legal status and obtain work authorization, as a designation of TPS would provide. These Haitians then would be better able to assist their families in Haiti through remittances and by working together as a community to garner other resources for their stricken homeland. The Inter-American Development Bank reports that Haitians abroad sent close to \$1.83 billion home in 2007, which equaled about 35% of the country's gross domestic product. It is critical that this life-blood of the fragile Haitian economy be sustained, especially at this critical time.

Over the long-term, we hope to work with your Administration on other issues impacting the future of Haiti, including poverty alleviation and trade preferences. This will increase the capacity of the Haitian people to respond to disasters in the future and to minimize their destruction.

Mr. President, by any measure, the conditions in Haiti meet the statutory requirements for TPS. To put it mildly, the earthquake has caused "substantial disruption" in living conditions and Haiti is clearly "unable to handle adequately" the return of its citizens abroad, as the TPS statute requires.

Extending this mantle of protection to struggling Haiti is not only appropriate, but a just, compassionate, and concrete step the United States can take toward alleviating the human suffering of the Haitian people.

We urge you to grant a TPS designation for Haiti as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago
President