

January 23, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

**RE: REQUEST TO RE-DESIGNATE AND EXTEND THE LIFESAVING TPS DESIGNATION FOR SYRIA FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER 18 MONTHS**

Dear Secretary Nielsen,

As 231 faith leaders and 64 faith-based organizations from across traditions, we call on you to re-designate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria to March 31, 2018 and extend the designation for at least another 18 months in order to protect more recently-arrived Syrians from the horrors of war. We are united by our collective American and faith values that we must welcome and protect those made vulnerable by the violence and tragedies caused by the Syrian war. We pray that you show compassion in your discernment process, as we must not turn our backs on those who have lost so much. As Islamic doctrine teaches: "They love those who emigrated to them and find not any desire in their hearts of what the emigrants were given, but rather give them preference over themselves, even though they are in privation. Whoever is protected from the greediness of his own soul, then those will be successful." (Surat Al-Hashr 59:9)

Terminating TPS for Syria would go against basic principles of human dignity, justice, and mercy. Approximately 5,800 Syrian TPS holders live in the United States today.<sup>1</sup> TPS holders are an integral part of the fabric of our community; they are our neighbors, peacefully living their lives, caring for their families, and contributing to the U.S. economy. Failure to extend TPS for Syria would result in the forcible return of thousands of our neighbors to a country that has been decimated by a war that continues to shock the world's conscience and has produced the largest refugee crisis of our time.

Syria was first designated for TPS in 2012, as the civil war plaguing the nation made country conditions unlivable and unsafe.<sup>2</sup> A violent government repression of what began as peaceful demonstrations by the public in 2011 has become one of the most destructive and fatal conflicts in recent history. Over 5.4 million people have fled Syria since the conflict began, and the United Nations estimates that more than 400,000 people have been killed.<sup>3</sup> Reports have surfaced documenting the use of chemical weapons against civilians as recently as April, 2017.<sup>4</sup> In addition to government-sponsored humanitarian and human rights violations, the Syrian people have also been subjected to violence at the hands of terrorist groups, primarily ISIS.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of the war on civilians is exacerbated by the inhumane tactics used by many of the warring parties, such as siege warfare, and deliberate deprivation of food, medicine and water.<sup>6</sup> There have been deliberate attacks on areas predominantly populated by civilians such as hospitals and schools, violating

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<sup>1</sup> 81 Fed. Reg. 50533 (Aug. 1, 2016), [www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/08/01/2016-17933/extension-and-redesignation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status](http://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/08/01/2016-17933/extension-and-redesignation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status); Messick, Madeline, and Claire Bergeron. "Temporary Protected Status in the United States: A Grant of Humanitarian Relief That Is Less than Permanent." *Migrationpolicy.org*, 2 July 2014, [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent).

<sup>2</sup> USCIS, "Temporary Protected Status Designated Country: Syria," <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-syria>.

<sup>3</sup> "Syria Envoy Claims 400,000 Have Died in Syria Conflict." *Syria Envoy Claims 400,000 Have Died in Syria Conflict | United Nations Radio*, 22 Apr. 2016, [www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2016/04/syria-envoy-claims-400000-have-died-in-syria-conflict/#.V87iafkrldV](http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2016/04/syria-envoy-claims-400000-have-died-in-syria-conflict/#.V87iafkrldV).

<sup>4</sup> BBC, "Syria Chemical 'Attack': What We Know" <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39500947>.

<sup>5</sup> "Country Chapters: Syria." *Human Rights Watch*, 12 Jan. 2017, [www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria).

<sup>6</sup> Associated Press, "Syrian Food Shortage in Besieged Region 'an Outrage': UN Official", 27 October 2017.

international humanitarian law and leaving no safe places for Syrians.<sup>7</sup> As you consider whether to re-designate and extend the TPS designation for Syria, we implore you to remember that the TPS program exists to protect people from being returned to harm, such as armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions, and the situation in Syria is one of the worst civil wars in decades.

We pray that you heed our call to re-designate TPS for Syria to March 31, 2018 and extend the designation for at least another 18 months. Without an extension, 5,800 Syrians would lose their legal status and face deportation to a nation at war. As people of faith, we are reminded of Leviticus 19:33-34, which tells us: "Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God." We implore you to think about the moral imperative to love our neighbor and welcome the sojourner, particularly those fleeing violence.

Sincerely,

### **Faith Leaders**

Sister Sara Aldridge, Sisters of St. Francis  
Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen, United Methodist  
Rev. Dr. Eileen Altman, First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, UCC  
Rev. Dr. David Ames, Episcopal  
Reverend Eric Anspaugh, Antioch COB  
Mary Faith Balawejder, Local Justice and Peace Coordinator, Felician Sisters of North America  
Sister Ruth Battaglia, Sisters of St. Agnes Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office  
Rabbi Renee Bauer, Jewish Social Services of Madison  
Rabbi Philip Bazeley, Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple  
Rev. Dave Bean, Pioneer United Methodist Church  
Georgette F. Bennett PhD, Founder, Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees  
Rev. Jason Bense, Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer  
Rev. Frank Bergen, Episcopal Church of St. Matthew  
Sister Elizabeth Bickar, Sisters of Charity Halifax  
Rev. Lindsay Louise Biddle, Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Annabel Boissevain, Floating Zendo  
Sister Carol Boschert, Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, MO  
Rev. Dr. James Boston, St. George Episcopal Church  
Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Interfaith Center of New York  
Rev. Dr. Norman Broadbent, United Church of Christ  
Rev. Gail Brooks, United Methodist Church  
Rev. Arthur Brown, Board of Social Action, Plymouth Congregational UCC  
Reverend Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Church of the Brethren  
Sr. Kathleen Bryant, Religious Sisters of Charity  
Rev. Ross Carmichael, St. Andrew Lutheran Church - ELCA  
Sr. Mary Carr, Dominicans of Adrian  
Rev. Mary Carson, St. James Episcopal Church  
Sr. Rosalie Carven, Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood, NY  
Rev. Koshin Casey, Member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the North American Buddhist Alliance  
Janice Cebula, President, Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa  
Rev. Natalie Chamberlain, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Dr. Arturo Chávez, Mexican American Catholic College  
Dr. Joseph Chuman, Ethical Culture  
Rev. Charles Claycomb, United Methodist Church - Retired  
Sr. Sister Benita Coffey OSB, Promoter of Social Justice, Benedictine Sisters of Chicago  
Mrs. Joanne Coghill, First Church in Windsor, UCC

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<sup>7</sup> "Syrian and Russian Forces Targeting Hospitals as a Strategy of War." *Amnesty International*, 3 Mar. 2016, [www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/03/syrian-and-russian-forces-targeting-hospitals-as-a-strategy-of-war/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/03/syrian-and-russian-forces-targeting-hospitals-as-a-strategy-of-war/).

Sr. Melda Comeau, Sister of Charity  
Sr. Patricia Connolly, Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul  
Sister Patricia Corbett, Congregation of St. Joseph  
Pastoral Minister Tom Cordaro, St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church  
Sr. Patricia Cormack, Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross  
Fr. Daniel Corrou, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Parish  
Dr. James Croft, Ethical Society of St. Louis  
Rev. Dr. Chuck Currie, Pacific University Center for Peace and Spirituality  
Sr. Denise Curry, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur  
Fr. Richard Czyzynski, Priests of the Sacred Heart  
Sr. Colleen Dauerbach, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia  
Sr. Carol De Angelo, Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York  
Sr. Hortensia Del Villar, Diocese of San Bernardino  
Rev. Sophia DeWitt, United Church of Christ  
Sister Lisa Marie Di Sabatino, Felician Sisters of North America  
Father John P. Duffell, Blessed Sacrament  
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Sr. Patricia Eck, Congregation of Bon Secours  
Rev. Reuben Eckels, Church World Service  
Ms. Vonny Eckman, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Mechanicsburg, PA  
Rev. Elizabeth Eddy, Good Shepherd Episcopal Church  
Rev. Dr. Becky Edmiston-Lange, Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church  
Sr. Margaret Efke, Ursulines of Cincinnati  
Sister Kathleen Erickson, Sisters of Mercy  
Rev. Diane Faires, St. Paul's Christian Church  
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Rev. Julie Fleurinor-Moore, Calvary UMC  
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Rabbi Ruth Gais, Chavurat Lamdeinu  
Rev. Dr. Daniel Gangler, The United Methodist Church  
Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes, St. Matthew's United Methodist Church  
Rev. Alice Geils Nord, New Hope Presbytery/ PC  
Rev. Dr. Gordon Gibson, Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church  
Sr. Rosemarie Goins, Felician Franciscan  
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Rev. Tom Hagood, Columbia Presbyterian Church  
Sr. Rita Mary Harwood, Catholic Diocese of Cleveland  
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Rev. Nathan Hill, University Christian Church  
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Rev. Joyce Hollyday, Circle of Mercy

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Sr. Bernadine Karge, Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa  
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Layman Don Leach Jr., Non-Denominational  
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Dominica Lo Bianco, Hispanic Leader, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia  
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Sr. Patricia Lowery, Medical Mission sisters  
Rev. Eve MacMaster, Emmanuel Mennonite Church  
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Lay Pastor Sandra Miller, Seekers Church  
Rev. Akiko Miyake-Stoner, United Japanese Christian Church  
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Rev. Dr. Donna Morton, United Methodist Church  
Rev. Eliot Moss, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts  
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Dr Siraj Mufti, Islam  
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Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters  
Rev. Bernard Nord, Presbytery of New Hope/PC(U.S.A.)  
Sr. Karen Nykiel, Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart

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Rabbi Andrew Paley, Temple Shalom  
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Andrea Paret, Peace with Justice Coordinator, The Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church  
Sr. Annelle Paszyna, Felician Sisters  
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The Rev Christine Payden-Travers, retired Episcopal priest  
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Sister Theresa Pietrzak, Felician Sisters  
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Sister Joan Quinn, St. Benedict  
Rev. Erin Racine, West End United Methodist Church  
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Deacon Michael Rich, Park Avenue Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Arlington, MA  
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Sister Ceil Roeger, Dominican Sisters of Houston  
Mr. Roberto Rojas, Catholic Church  
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Sister Laura Santos, Sisters of the Holy Cross  
Rita Schmitz, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet  
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Rabbi Drorah Setel, Temple Emanu-El  
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Sister Aquinas Szott, Felician Sisters  
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Rev. Dr. Allison Tanner, Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church  
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Reverend Wendy Taylor, THE UNITED CHURCHES, UCC/Presby  
Reverend Wendy Taylor, UCC/Presby The United Churches

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Sister Susan Wilcox, Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, NY  
Rev. Mary Kay Will, United Methodist Church  
Pastor (CRE) Ruth Willford, Spirit Lake Presbyterian Church (PC/USA)  
Rev. Sharon Williams, Nueva Vida Norristown New Life Mennonite Church  
Patrice Williams, Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren  
Rev. Sherry Williams, Episcopal church  
Rev. Merrilee Wineinger, Edgehill United Methodist Church  
Cantor Shulamit Wise Fairman, Kehilla Synagogue  
Rev. Dr. Bruce Wismer, Pine Shores Presbyterian  
Pastor Ben Woodward-Breckbill, Shalom Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church USA  
Rev. Linda Wygant, Grace Seeds Ministry  
Rev. Allan Wysocki, St. Paul Lutheran  
Ms. Eleanor Yasgur, Buddhist  
Sister Angela Ybarra, Felician Sisters of North America  
Rev. David Young, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
The Rev. Johanna Young, St. John's, Walpole  
Rev. Dr. Paul Ziese, MacArthur Park Lutheran Church  
Bro. Anthony Zuba, Capuchin Franciscans

### **Faith-based Organizations**

Adores of the Blood of Christ  
African American Ministers In Action  
Agencia ALPHA  
Arab American Association of New York  
Bethany Christian Services  
Brandeis Catholic Community  
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston  
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri  
Catholic Charities of West TN  
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.  
Church of the Blessed Sacrament, Manhattan  
Church World Service  
DC-Maryland Justice for Our Neighbors  
Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services, Inc.  
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids  
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon  
Emgage Foundation  
Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding  
Faith in Public Life  
Franciscan Action Network  
Franciscans for Justice  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Immigrant Family Support Network - Wichita

Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity  
Interfaith Welcome Coalition  
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA  
Jesuit Social Research Institute  
Justice Team of the Congregation of St. Joseph  
Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Priests of the Sacred Heart, US Province  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Mount Grace Convent  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches  
NHCUCC Immigration Working Group  
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)  
Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America  
Oregon Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice - IMIJ  
Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church  
Partnership for Global Justice  
Pax Christi USA, Illinois, Seed Planters  
Pilgrim United Church of Christ  
Priests of the Sacred Heart  
Project IRENE  
Scalabrini International Migration Network  
School Sisters of Notre Dame - Central Pacific Province  
School Sisters of Notre Dame Atlantic-Midwest Province JPIC Office  
Sisters of Bon Secours, USA  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership  
Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York  
Sisters of Charity, BVM  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Institute Justice Team  
Sisters of Mercy South Central Community  
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community  
Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet  
Sisters of St. Joseph, TOSF  
Sisters of the Holy Family  
Sisters of the Most Precious Blood Leadership Team  
Sisters of the Presentation of Mary  
Thrive International Programs  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries