

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

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

Dear Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas:

We write to express our concerns about the uptick in armed violence in Venezuela, and growing humanitarian needs resulting in people being forced to flee Venezuela, and to appeal for you to extend and redesignate Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

On March 8, 2021, the Biden administration designated Venezuela for TPS for a period of 18 months. Since the designation over a year ago, threats to civilians by armed actors, the complete erosion of the rule of law, and the systemic collapse of vital infrastructure have forced nearly half a million additional people to flee the country, bringing the total number of Venezuelan refugees to over six million. According to UNHCR, “People continue to leave Venezuela to escape violence, insecurity and threats as well as lack of food, medicine and essential services.” As Human Rights Watch explains, “Venezuela is facing a severe humanitarian emergency, with millions unable to access basic healthcare and adequate nutrition. . . [t]he exodus of Venezuelans fleeing repression and the humanitarian emergency represents the largest migration crisis in recent Latin American history.” We therefore request that you extend and redesignate Venezuela for TPS on the basis of extraordinary levels of violence and humanitarian needs.

The Maduro regime’s kleptocratic approach to governance has led to the proliferation of groups recognized by the United States as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) in Venezuela, including dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The FTOs have captured Venezuelan territory, increasing the complexity of the violence that drives displacement. On January 7, 2022, Colombia’s Attorney General’s Office issued a warning that the fight between dissident forces of the FARC and the ELN was expanding. Thousands of people have been displaced – but data is severely lacking due to the Maduro regime’s constraints on humanitarian access.

In addition to the uptick in violence over the past year, humanitarian needs have increased, contributing to the extraordinary and temporary conditions that merit a TPS redesignation. The Maduro regime has continued perpetuating crimes against humanity, turned a blind eye to the forced recruitment of children, generated an increase in refugees and displaced people, exacerbated food insecurity, and limited access to water, medical care, and humanitarian assistance. As a result, six million people have fled the country, and seven million people in Venezuela are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, according to the United Nations.

Despite these deeply troubling conditions, the Maduro regime has taken steps to constrain the operations of humanitarian organizations trying to assist Venezuelans.

Ensuring legal protections for Venezuelans temporarily in the United States has garnered bipartisan support. President Trump, on the very last day of his presidency, announced Deferred Enforced Departure for Venezuelans. After President Biden took office, his administration designated Venezuela for TPS almost immediately. Last March, USCIS estimated that approximately 323,000 people would be eligible for TPS under the current designation. As of May 5, 76,450 Venezuelans had been approved for TPS status and protected from returning to unsafe conditions. Many have filled critical job vacancies in the United States, aiding our economic recovery from the pandemic. The TPS designation has also sent an unmistakable signal of support for victims of Maduro's repression and crimes against humanity.

An estimated 250,000 Venezuelans arrived in the United States in 2021 and during the first half of 2022 – a fraction of the total number of displaced Venezuelans in the region. Since the extraordinary and temporary conditions preventing their safe return continue to persist, a redesignation of TPS will allow Venezuelans who have arrived since the previous TPS designation to economically support themselves and the communities that have welcomed them. Denying access to TPS to more recent arrivals will not serve as an effective deterrent to future border crossings given the desperation of Venezuelans to flee unsustainable conditions. It will simply ensure that Venezuelans will live in poverty and at risk of deportation in the United States, with no other options.

We acknowledge your efforts to coordinate a whole of region response to the unprecedented refugee and migration challenges in our hemisphere. We commend the Colombian government's February 2021 announcement of a ten-year temporary protection status (TPS) for over 1.8 million Venezuelans currently living in the country and those entering via official checkpoints. We urge your continued efforts to protect displaced Venezuelans wherever they are, including in the United States.

We ask that you acknowledge the deteriorating conditions in Venezuela since the March 8, 2021 designation and take the necessary steps to extend and redesignate Venezuela for TPS.

We thank you for your commitment to these issues, and look forward to engaging further.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator




Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Chris Coons

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Tom Carper

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Patty Murray

Patty Murray
United States Senator