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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

December 21, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20520

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

Dear Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Nielsen:

I am writing to request that the Administration grant an 18-month extension of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for El Salvador, which expires on March 9, 2018.

Established in 1990, TPS permits the United States to offer temporary humanitarian protection to foreign nationals who are unable to return to safe conditions in their homeland. In El Salvador, an acute crisis caused by a devastating earthquake has had lasting effects that have been complicated by ongoing security, economic, and environmental challenges in the country.

For nearly a decade, El Salvador has consistently suffered per capita murder rates that have been among the worst in the world. In 2016, the people of El Salvador were victims of over 5,200 homicides, an alarming rate of more than 80 per 100,000 people and the highest globally.

These troubling security statistics are compounded by the fact that 31 percent of the Salvadoran population live below the poverty line. Moreover, in 2016, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported a historic drought in the Northern Triangle – where El Salvador is located – has left some 1.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Beyond these challenges, I am concerned about the capacity of the Salvadoran government to receive the nearly 200,000 individuals who could be subject to immediate deportation. The disorderly repatriation of so many people – who would be particularly vulnerable due to limited support from their governments – could potentially exacerbate already precarious conditions in the country and increase pressures for migration. We must also take into account the more than 190,000 U.S. born children who have Salvadoran parents that are TPS beneficiaries. Forcing these parents to return would create unnecessary burdens and separate families.

Since 2014, the U.S. Government has greatly expanded its engagement with Central America in order to address the underlying factors driving irregular migration. Congress approved significant increases in U.S. assistance to the region in recent years, and has signaled continuing support for FY2018.

Vice President Pence, speaking at the June conference on Central America, reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to a safer and more prosperous region. U.S. assistance will advance progress over time, increasing security, development, and greater protections for human rights and vulnerable populations. Ending TPS could put our investments at risk.

Thank you for attention to this important matter, I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Cardin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ben" and last name "Cardin" clearly distinguishable.

Benjamin L. Cardin
Ranking Member