

February 9, 2011

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW Suite 5906  
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Janet Napolitano  
Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Clinton and Secretary Napolitano:

We write to express our support for the approval of Temporary Protected Status for Guatemalans in the U.S. The crisis created by the eruption of Volcano Pacaya and Tropical Storm Agatha at the end of May 2010 has created a situation which necessitates humanitarian action by the U.S. government. Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom formally made a TPS request on June 4, 2010. His request deserves the same consideration that other nations have been given in the past when confronted with severe natural disasters.

The tropical storms over the past six months and the accompanying landslides and floods have affected nearly 500,000 people to date and resulted in at least 274 deaths. Economic damage has reached U.S. \$1.55 billion, or 4.1% of Guatemala's GDP. Organizations in Guatemala continue to document severe economic hardship for many communities, as well as increased abuses, particularly against women. Civil society affirms that the Guatemalan government has not had the resources or capacity to implement a swift or effective recovery for its citizens in the aftermath of the storms and it would be difficult for the government to support the return of more Guatemalans should their deportation from the United States continue.

Guatemala's request for TPS status has governmental and popular support across the United States. Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote to President Obama in July 2010, strongly urging him to grant Guatemalans Temporary Protected Status "like we have for others facing similar crises – it is the only fair thing to do."

In October 2010, the Chicago City Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of Guatemala's request for TPS. The resolution stressed that "support of the international community, including that of the United States, is crucial for Guatemala's recovery, and as part of this support, granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for a period of eighteen months to Guatemalans currently living in the United States would provide significant economic and humanitarian benefits." Furthermore, the resolution recognized the important role TPS would play to "relieve pressures on basic service infrastructures that have been damaged, assist the Guatemalan government to focus its resources on those in dire need of assistance, and restore peace of mind for a people who have already suffered more than their share of hardship."

In December 2010, the World Bank also recognized the devastating impacts of the series of natural disasters between June and September by approving a US\$100 million loan to provide emergency assistance to preserve health and education services.

While monetary support will be important for maintaining teacher salaries and keeping health centers open in affected areas, neither domestic programs nor international support is set up to provide adequate support to Guatemalans who have been deported back to storm-affected communities. In 2010, there were over 29,000 Guatemalans deported from the U.S. That number is estimated to increase in 2011.

Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan families depend on remittances now more than ever for basic survival. Secretary Napolitano, in your address on the importance of immigration reform in

November 2009, you spoke of the need to “bring people out of the shadows” to increase the number of people working legally in the U.S. and becoming “full-paying taxpayers.” You also stressed the need to have an immigration system that works and that people can trust. This should apply not only to the development of functional border security and law enforcement, but also to the just and appropriate implementation of the humanitarian tools built into the system to respond to emergency conditions in other countries.

TPS would allow Guatemalans currently in the U.S. to have access to legal work permits and continue to send money home, thereby relieving stress on domestic resources and decreasing the likelihood and necessity of increased migration to the U.S.

The United States should strongly consider providing the same protections to Guatemalan citizens as it has to neighboring countries El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, among others, who have received Temporary Protected Status after natural disasters.

In support of the Guatemalan community, we urge you to approve President Colom’s request for TPS for an initial period of 18 months to allow families in the U.S. both a reprieve from deportations and access to more a stable income while the nation begins to implement its plans for recovery.

Sincerely,

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***Guatemala Scholar's Network, addendum***

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