

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We are writing to urge you to designate the Republic of Haiti for the Temporary Protected Status Program (TPS).

As Haiti celebrates 201 years of independence from French colonial rule, the people of Haiti are hardly able to exercise their freedom. Rather, they remain trapped under constant fear of violence and chaos. The tumultuous events of 2004 alone consisted of violent uprisings, the departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, massive floods displacing tens of thousands in May, and Tropical Storm Jeanne in September leading to more than 3000 deaths in the ensuing floods. The U.S. Ambassador declared Haiti a disaster after the destruction in May and September. All the while, political unrest and a failed justice system continued to condemn the island to chaos.

In October 2004 the Haitian Government requested Temporary Protected Status for Haitians in the U.S. With thousands of people killed in the natural disasters and hundreds of thousands left homeless, Haiti is temporarily unable to handle the return of nationals. Granting TPS would allow Haitians already in the U.S. to live in peace and security while Haiti recovers. As you know, in 1998 the U.S. government set a precedent when it granted TPS to nationals from four Central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch.

Last year, the Department of Homeland Security included the following lines in a response to a Congressional letter regarding TPS for Haitians:

"The Secretary of DHS may designate a foreign state for TPS based upon: (1) an ongoing armed conflict that poses a serious threat to the safety of returning nationals; (2) an environmental disaster that results in a substantial, but temporary, disruption of living conditions, or (3) extraordinary and temporary conditions that prevent a country's nationals from safely returning to that country, unless the Secretary finds that such designation is contrary to the national interest of the United States."

We would argue that the Republic of Haiti meets the above conditions and deserves serious reconsideration for Temporary Protected Status eligibility.

As you are aware, the tragic situation in Haiti has not substantially improved to sustain the impoverished citizens on the island, especially in the wake of the recent disasters. Eighty percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and only half the population can read and write. Many schools have yet to reopen after the massive flooding. Additionally, looting and lack of road security impedes food deliveries from reaching needy citizens. The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)—created to ensure a secure and stable environment—has aided in the disaster relief efforts but is having difficulty maintaining law and order, especially considering MINUSTAH does not have the maximum 6,700 troops and 1,622 civilian police authorized by the Security Council.

Haiti is a mere 600 miles off the coast of Florida, and both our countries would be well served if the United States granted TPS to Haitians living in the U.S., to prevent their deportation to a disaster-ridden, impoverished and oftentimes violent country. In the new year as the United States is eager to show compassion for the victims of the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean and the earthquake and tsunami in Asia, it is time to reconsider granting Temporary Protected Status to Haitians.

Thank you for your consideration.

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