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By ESEC at 8:17 am, Apr 10, 2024



**AFRICAN
COMMUNITIES
TOGETHER**

April 9, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Secretary Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

RE: ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR DESIGNATION OF TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS AND SPECIAL STUDENT RELIEF FOR THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Secretary Blinken,

Under the leadership of African Communities Together (ACT) and Congolese community leaders, the undersigned 160 civil rights, immigrant rights, human rights, faith, educational and grassroots organizations write to urge the administration to review country conditions and **designate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Special Student Relief (SSR) for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**. A TPS and SSR designations are essential to mitigate the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing armed conflicts present throughout the country that have internally displaced over 6 million people.¹

The DRC has experienced ongoing brutal conflicts that have only escalated as peace agreements between the Government of DRC (GoD) and insurgent armed groups fail, and the involvement of violent non-state actors or rebel groups become increasingly ingrained within the territories of DRC.² In late 2022, the resurgence of the armed group “Mouvement du 23 mars” or March 23 Movement (M23) resulted in intense fighting with government forces.³ The resurgence of the M23 has led to the displacement of over one million people since the end of December 2023⁴. M23 have committed unlawful killings, attacks, gender-based violence, lootings, and the burning of

¹ “Democratic Republic of the Congo situation” The UN Refugee Agency, 2024
<https://www.iom.int/news/record-high-displacement-drc-nearly-7-million>

² “Democratic Republic of the Congo,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, May 18, 2022,
<https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>.

³ “Thousands displaced as M23 rebels near key DRC city of Goma” Aljazeera, Nov 15, 2022,
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/15/hundreds-flee-as-congos-m23-rebels-near-key-city-of-goma>

⁴ “Massive Needs Everywhere as Displacement Reaches Unprecedented Levels in DRC”, Reliefweb, December 20, 2023 <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/massive-needs-everywhere-displacement-reaches-unprecedented-levels-drc#:~:text=In%20eastern%20Democratic%20Republic%20of,people%20to%20flee%20their%20homes>

villages.⁵ Clashes involving militant groups over territory and natural resources, extrajudicial killings by security forces, political violence, and rising tensions with neighboring Rwanda have contributed to the dire situation.

“Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in North Kivu are leaving behind a growing trail of war crimes against civilians,” said Thomas Fessy, senior Congo researcher at Human Rights Watch.⁶ Over five million people have been displaced in 2023.⁷ From October 2023 fighting in the eastern provinces escalated breaking the ceasefire between M23, non-state armed groups (NSAG), and Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC). On December 15, 2023, the United States announced a two-week extension of the 72-hour ceasefire in eastern DRC.⁸ The renewed escalations are leading to further mass displacement and an anticipated worsening of the conflict.⁹ “This crisis is on the way to becoming a humanitarian catastrophe.”¹⁰

We believe that the escalating armed conflicts, humanitarian situation, environmental crises and the extraordinary and temporary conditions in DRC warrant an immediate designation of TPS and SSR. Further, we reiterate the necessity to combat racial disparities in decisions regarding TPS designations for black and brown-majority countries that meet the statutory requirements.¹¹

Temporary Protected Status

Temporary Protected Status allows people from a designated country to remain in the United States while conditions in their home country make safe return impossible. The Secretary of Homeland Security can designate a country for TPS if the country is experiencing ongoing armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. TPS allows its beneficiaries to stay in the United States during the designation period and receive work permits. It is lifesaving, blanket protection, especially for those who are ineligible for or who have been denied asylum. Hence, TPS is a crucial tool the Biden administration has at its disposal to safeguard vulnerable people in the United States when safe return to their home countries is impossible.

⁵“A Year of Anguish: Remembering the Killings and Sexual Violence in Kishishe”

<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/year-anguish-remembering-killings-and-sexual-violence-kishishe>, Reliefweb, December 1, 2023

⁶ “Rebel attacks deepen displacement crisis in DRC’s Ituri province” Aljazeera, April 27, 2023,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/27/rebel-attacks-deepen-displacement-crisis-in-drcs-ituri-province>

⁷ DR Congo Emergency, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/dr-congo-emergency>

⁸ “Statement from NSC Spokesperson Adrienne Watson Welcoming the Two-Week Ceasefire Extension in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo” The White house, Dec 15, 2023,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/12/15/statement-from-nsc-spokesperson-adrienne-watson-welcoming-the-two-week-ceasefire-extension-in-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>

⁹ “Democratic Republic of the Congo: Situation Report” OCHA Services, Reliefweb, Nov 30, 2023,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/wfp-democratic-republic-congo-situation-report-53-30-november-2023>

¹⁰ “Democratic Republic of the Congo: The humanitarian crisis in North Kivu is escalating” ICRC, March 13, 2023, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/democratic-republic-congo-humanitarian-crisis-north-kivu-escalating>

¹¹ “Request for Investigation of Racially Disparate Decisions Regarding the Use of Temporary Protected Status,” TPS-DED AAC, May 11, 2022,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b79f3630f94f1039bdo125/t/63d316e6df53037ccc98476a/1674778343486/2022-04-06+Letter+to+Admin.+re+Failure+to+Utilize+TPS.pdf>.

Special Student Relief

Special Student Relief (SSR) by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) gives international students more flexibility related to their duration of status, course load, and employment eligibility in recognition of emergency circumstances occurring in their home countries. SSR is an option when emergent circumstances occur in a given country— “world events that affect F-1 Students from a particular region and create significant financial hardships, such as but not limited to natural disasters, wars, and military conflicts.”¹²

Need for designation of Temporary Protected Status for DRC

a. Armed conflict

In November 2022, the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo escalated, when members of the M23 executed over 130 civilians in the villages of Kishishe and Bambo.¹³ Armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the March 23 Movement (M23), CODECO, and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), are responsible for horrific violence perpetrated against civilians, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, kidnapping, forced recruitment, and extortion.

The armed conflict in the last year has resulted in the deaths of at least 1,2111 civilians in the Ituri province alone.¹⁴ Civilians live in fear and are being subjected to rape and sexual violence, war crimes, massacres, abduction, forced recruitment of children, and pillage by state and non-state factors.¹⁵ The State of Siege put in place by the Congolese government in 2021 has bolstered security forces to arbitrarily detain civil society leaders, including journalists, students, and human rights activists, with impunity.¹⁶ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) [noted](#) that “sexual violence has soared in Eastern DRC in 2023,” noting that women and girls “have reported that they are at risk of rape and sexual assault, exacerbated by the need to travel outside of camps in search of supplies for their basic needs and for domestic purposes and work. There are also reports of displaced women and girls who are forced to trade sex for survival, including in IDP sites.”

Sexual violence is not limited to the areas most affected by armed conflict. In 2022, the US State Department found that, “Rape and other forms of gender-based violence were widespread throughout the country, even in areas without armed conflict. Survivors seldom reported this for cultural and social reasons, and perpetrators were rarely punished. Rape and sexual mutilation were also common and used as tactics in areas of armed conflict.”

¹² Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, “Automatic Special Student Relief Announcement to Accompany Temporary Protected Status Country Designation,” March 1, 2022, <https://www.presidentsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-03-01-TPS-SSR-Memo-Final.pdf>.

¹³ “DR Congo conflict: M23 rebels executed over 130 civilians - UN” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63899461>, BBC, December 8, 2022

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Democratic Republic of Congo: Events of 2023” in *World Report 2023, 2024*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo>

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Democratic Republic of Congo.”

¹⁶ “DRC: One Year on, ‘State of Siege’ Used as a Tool to Crush Dissent,” Amnesty International, May 10, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/drc-one-year-on-state-of-siege/>.

In 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded that the internally displaced people (IDPs) have climbed to an alarming 6.9 million people across the country.¹⁷ The IOM cited that the conflict in DRC has led to the country facing the largest “internal displacement and humanitarian crises in the world” with minimal resources being available to sufficiently assist these IDPs.¹⁸ In the regions of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika, where M23 are the most active, there exist around 5.6 million IDPs who are caught in the crossfires of this and other rival rebel groups in the area.¹⁹

While in eastern DRC, civilians grapple with the presence of more than a hundred non-state armed groups, a lack of state authority in numerous regions, and security forces that are often inefficient or abusive, since 2022, significant portions of western DRC, including areas near the capital Kinshasa, have been swept up in intercommunal violence. The [UN Group of Experts](#) on the DRC observed that since August 2023, one armed group, the Mobondo “controlled a vast territory, including over half of Kwamouth territory...and Bandundu territory in the north, westwards to the periphery of Maluku commune of Kinshasa, and southwards to the vicinity of Kimvula and Popokabaka in Kongo Central.” The conflict in DRC has not only intensified but is also widespread throughout the country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reported in November 2023 that there were as many as 1,039,646 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers within East Africa and worldwide. As the conflict continues, these numbers are expected to grow, as many will face the daunting choice to stay and risk confrontation with these groups or flee from their livelihoods.

b. Environmental disasters

DRC is one of the ten countries most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Heavy rainfall has affected parts of the DRC, particularly the eastern and southern areas, causing floods and triggering landslides that resulted in casualties and damage.²⁰ OCHA estimates over 2 million people, 60% of whom are children are in the need for humanitarian assistance due to the rainfall and flooding. This has led to a significant number of cholera cases in the region as well.²¹ Torrential rains in May 2023 resulted in over 400 civilians killed,²² close to 200 missing,²³ and entire villages washed away. Over 3,000 homes were damaged or destroyed in the following floods and landslides. In December 2022, major flooding²⁴ affected over 84,000 people in Kinshasa and affected 7,336 homes, of which 806 were destroyed. Today, health

¹⁷ A Record 6.9 Million People Are Internally Displaced in Dr Congo, Says UN”, France 24, October 10, 2023 <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20231030-record-6-9-million-internally-displaced-in-dr-congo-un-says>

¹⁸ Id.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2024-000009-cod>

²¹ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-strengthens-response-drcs-worst-floods-60-years-and-growing-cholera-outbreak>

²² "Over 400 Killed in DRC Flooding as U.N. Chief Points to Climate Change" Democracy Now, May 8, 2023,

https://www.democracynow.org/2023/5/8/headlines/over_400_killed_in_drc_flooding_as_un_chief_points_to_climate_change

²³ "DR Congo floods death toll surpasses 400" Aljazeera, May 7, 2023,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/7/dr-congo-floods-death-toll-surpasses-200>

²⁴ "Democratic Republic of Congo: Floods in Kinshasa" Operational Update, OCHA Services, Reliefweb, April 28, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/democratic-republic-congo-floods-kinshasa-operational-update-mdrdco39>

concerns remain, as residents continue to suffer²⁵ health complications from exposure to harmful gasses as a result of volcanic eruptions. As observed by the World Food Programme (WFP), “The climate crisis is multiplying catastrophic weather-related events and is straining food systems which causes hunger to rise in DRC. The increase in the number and severity of these extraordinary extreme weather events has led to destructive incidents claiming lives and uprooting people from their homes.”

But climate hazards are not limited to flooding. USAID has noted, for instance, that potential consequences of climate change in the DRC include “increas[ed] temperatures, greater frequency and duration of heat waves, more variable and more intense precipitation, and increased dry spell and drought frequency.” All of these changes could exacerbate the DRC’s ongoing food crisis. USAID explained further that “Climate change is likely to bring about adverse consequences across the DRC’s agricultural value chain, affecting the country’s food security.” Irregular precipitation, rising rainfalls, and temperature changes brought about by climate change “have the potential to reduce yield potential, modify production costs, damage crops post-harvest, and reduce labor productivity.”

c. Other extraordinary and temporary conditions

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the world’s most neglected displacement crisis, according to a report by the Norwegian Refugee Council.²⁶ It is also among the five poorest nations in the world, with nearly 64 percent of Congolese living on less than \$2.15 a day.²⁷ An estimated 19.6 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, half of whom are children.²⁸ The World Food Programme additionally classifies the DRC as one of the most prominent hunger hotspots worldwide, with an estimated 26.4 million people facing food insecurity, making the DRC the most food insecure country globally.²⁹

The DRC also suffers from a crippling health care system, as the ongoing conflicts have destroyed key infrastructure and state institutions, severely impacting the country’s capacity to recover, prepare and respond to outbreaks. Diseases such as cholera, measles, polio, yellow fever, monkeypox, and COVID-19, have overburdened the healthcare system and exhausted available resources.³⁰ In 2023, more than 52,400 cholera cases and 462 deaths were recorded in DRC, making it one of the largest outbreaks in the world, according to the World Health Organization. Communities in eastern DRC, where the conflicts are most prominent, suffer from the lack of safe water, crowded and unsanitary living conditions, inaccessibility to

²⁵ "The eruption of Mount Nyiragongo: its health effects will be felt for a long time" UNDRR, Prevention Web, Patrick de Marie C. Katobo, June 4, 2021, <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/eruption-mount-nyiragongo-its-health-effects-will-be-felt-long-time>

²⁶ Jessica Wanless, “DR Congo: The World’s Most Neglected Displacement Crisis,” *Al Jazeera*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2022/6/1/photos-dr-congo-the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crisis>.

²⁷ “The World Bank in DRC,” World Bank, accessed January 23, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>.

²⁸ “Democratic Republic of the Congo Archives,” Amnesty International, accessed January 23, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

²⁹ “Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA)”, Reliefweb, July 13, 2023

³⁰ Id.

routine supplementary immunization, and induced displacements that exacerbates their vulnerability to preventable and easily treatable diseases.³¹

The United States must designate TPS for the DRC

In the latest report from Refugee Council USA, DRC ranked highest among countries of origin for refugees resettled in the United States. Of the top five countries – DRC, Syria, Afghanistan, Burma, & Guatemala, **DRC is one of the two countries not designated for TPS.**³² In FY23 over 24,000 Africans were resettled, of those 18,000 were Congolese.³³

Despite the acknowledgment of the severity of the country's conditions, including the armed conflict, violence, environmental disasters and humanitarian crisis, the Biden administration has delayed providing a designation of TPS and SSR for the DRC. Due to the threat of armed conflict, the U.S. Department of State maintains a Level 4: Do Not Travel advisory.³⁴ Over 1 million DRC refugees and asylum-seekers have migrated to neighboring countries seeking safety. The recent upsurge in violence, climate disasters, and humanitarian crises poses a significant threat to nationals. According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, no improvement in the humanitarian situation is expected in 2023 and 2024.³⁵ USAID issued a report stating that between 7.5 and 10 million people across the DRC will face severe levels of acute food insecurity through March 2023.³⁶

On the 62nd anniversary of the DRC's independence, the Biden administration stated that “the United States is committed to furthering our partnership to advance efforts to promote peace, security, prosperity, and human rights in the DRC.”³⁷ Vice President Kamala Harris has committed to working with the DRC to support stability and peace in the region.³⁸ TPS and SSR align with the strategic national interest in improving U.S.-Congo relations. By protecting lives and granting work authorization, TPS serves key national and regional security interests, advances moral and strategic U.S. engagement with Africa, and provides other benefits to the United States such as economic growth through increased workforce contributing to the GDP and our communities. In early 2023, over 115 organizations led by African Communities Together

³¹ Id.

³² US Refugee Admissions Report, Fiscal Year 2023, Refugee Council USA, <https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FY23-Year-End-Arrivals-Report.pdf>

³³ Admissions and Arrivals, Refugee Processing Center, FY23, <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

³⁴ Democratic Republic of the Congo Travel Advisory, U.S. Department of State, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-travel-advisory.html>

³⁵ “Democratic Republic of the Congo: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 at a Glance” OCHA Services, Reliefweb, March 3, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/democratic-republic-congo-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-glance>

³⁶ “Democratic Republic of the Congo | Humanitarian Assistance,” U.S. Agency for International Development, December 9, 2022, <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>.

³⁷ Joe Biden, “President Biden Letter to President Tshisekedi on the Occasion of 62nd Anniversary for DRC Independence,” U.S. Embassy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, June 30, 2022, <https://cd.usembassy.gov/president-biden-letter-to-president-tshisekedi-on-the-occasion-of-62nd-anniversary-for-drc-independence/>.

³⁸ “Readout of Vice President Kamala Harris Call with President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” The White House, February 26, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/26/readout-of-vice-president-kamala-harris-call-with-president-felix-tshisekedi-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

urged³⁹ Secretary Mayorkas to review country conditions and designate TPS for DRC with no avail. **It is more important than ever for the administration to use the full breadth of its executive power to provide essential humanitarian protections for Congolese nationals in the United States.**

Conclusion

The Democratic Republic of Congo is experiencing ongoing armed conflict and other extraordinary and temporary conditions that make the safe return of Congolese from the United States impossible. As highlighted above, the country conditions in the DRC meet the statutory requirements for a designation of Temporary Protected Status and Special Student Relief. We urge President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, Secretary Blinken, and other relevant decision-makers in the administration, to review country conditions and immediately designate TPS and SSR for the DRC. We request that an initial designation of 18 months is granted, along with a prompt publication of the Federal Register Notice (FRN), a 180-day registration period for eligible applicants to submit their applications, and a community-driven outreach campaign for awareness about the relief. Congress created TPS as a mechanism to provide humanitarian relief to those who cannot and should not be returned to dangerous conditions, **including Black and Brown immigrants**. Past designations by the administration have reflected racial bias in the TPS decision-making process. **The Biden administration must prioritize equity in the consideration of TPS for the DRC. This request is an opportunity for the United States to exercise its leadership and alleviate the pain of the Congolese people.**

Sincerely,

National

African Communities Together

Africa Working Group International Religious Freedom Roundtable

African Immigration Initiative

America's Voice

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Americans for Immigrant Justice

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)

Black Alliance for Just Immigration

Borderlands Resource Initiative

Cameroon American Council

CASA

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

³⁹ Organizations Call For Designation Of Temporary Protected Status And Special Student Relief For The Democratic Republic Of Congo,
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60b79f3630f94f1039bdo125/t/63da9f99a56551384764e6e7/1675272090034/2022-11-14+NGO+Letter+re+TPS+for+DRC.pdf>

Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law
Center for Popular Democracy
Church World Service
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids
ECDC
EMPOWER NEXT GENERATIONS
Friends of the Congo
FSPA
FWD.us
Global Refuge
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Human Rights First
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigrants Rising
Immigration Committee: Sisters of St. Joseph, Concordia, Kansas
Immigration Hub
Justice Action Center
Mark's Bookmark Bookseller
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters, Justice Office
MPower Change
Muslim Advocates
National Council of Jewish Women
National Employment Law Project
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC)
National Partnership for New Americans
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nicaragua Center for Community Action
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
Oasis for Immigrants, Inc
PCUSA Washington Office of Public Witness
People's Action

Presente.org
Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator
Radio Africa Online
Rebirth Hub Africa
Refugee Congress
Refugees International
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Central Pacific Province
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership and Sisters of Charity of Nazareth
Congregational Leadership
Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Sisters of Mercy
Sisters Of Notre dame
Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa
Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg, Indiana
Sisters of St. Francis, Sylvania, OH
Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
SMC
Tabilulu Productions
The All Nations Law Firm
TPS-DED AAC
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
UndocuBlack Network
Union for Reform Judaism
We Are All America (WAAA)
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights

State/Local

Adhikaar for Human Rights & Social Justice
African Advocacy Network
AKWAABA QC
Anawim Faith Community
Archdiocese of Miami
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Asylum Program of Arizona
Asylum Seeker Volunteer

Ayuda
Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group
Building One Community
Carolina Immigrant Alliance
Catholic Multicultural Center
Catholic Social Services - Scranton
Central American Resource Center
Central American Resource Center - CARECEN- of California
Church Council of Greater Seattle
Congoese Community of Nevada
Congoese Community of New Jersey
Congoese Community of Washington Metropolitan
Congo Democratic Initiatives
Congoese Integration Network
CONGOLESE UNITED FOUNDATION
Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Cross Cultural Community Services
CSA
East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
Everyday Canvassing
Faith in Florida
FEA Foundation Ministries
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Florida Policy Institute
Florida Student Power Network
Food Justice DMV
FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF PERPETUAL ADORATION
Haitian Community Development of Pacific Northwest
Health care organization
Hope Acts
Hope Community Center
Hub for Urban Initiatives
Immigrant ARC
Immigrant Connection at City Life
Immigrant Connection- Spartanburg
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigration/Refugee Initiative. St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Naperville, IL
Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW

Just Neighbors
La Colmena
Latino Community Association
Lindseys for the Congo
Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants
Maine People's Alliance
Mary House, Inc.
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Mfouambila Kongo Dance Company
New York Immigration Coalition
Nigerian Center
Opening Doors International Services, Inc.
PDX Friends of Refugees
People's Budget Orange County
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Save the World
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York
Social Justice Fund NW
SSND
St. Cronan Catholic Church
St. Athanasius School
The Family of Richard W. Hammer
Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition
United African Organization
Unity
WA State Coalition African Community Leaders
Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network
Wellington United Church of Christ
Western Illinois DREAMers
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Workers Center of Central New York
Year



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

May 14, 2024

African Communities Together
127 West 127th Street
Suite 221
New York, NY 10027

Dear African Communities Together:

Thank you for your April 9, 2024 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in support of a designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and an alternative pathway for protection for Congolese nationals in the United States. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

As you may know, the Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a country for TPS based upon specific statutory criteria. In order to designate a country for TPS, the Secretary must find one or more of the following: (1) there is an ongoing armed conflict within the country that would pose a serious threat to the personal safety of the country's nationals if they were returned; (2) there has been an environmental disaster resulting in a substantial, but temporary, disruptions of the living conditions in the area affected, the country is temporarily unable to handle adequately the return of its nationals, and the country has officially requested TPS designation; or (3) there exist extraordinary and temporary conditions in the country that prevent nationals from returning in safety, and the Secretary does not find that permitting the country's nationals to remain temporarily in the United States would be contrary to the national interest of the United States.¹

I appreciate the information you shared about conditions in the DRC. Please be assured DHS continues to monitor conditions in the DRC and remains committed to administering its programs, including TPS, in an equitable manner. In addition to TPS, USCIS also offers immigration relief that may be available upon request to assist eligible noncitizens affected by emergencies or unforeseen circumstances in the DRC.² Such relief may include:

- Change or extension of nonimmigrant status if eligible nationals are currently in the United States, even if the request is filed after the authorized period of admission has expired;

¹ See Immigration and Nationality Act § 244(b)(1), 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1).

² Additional information is available at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/special-situations>.

- Expedited processing of requests for advance parole documents;
- Expedited adjudication of requests for off-campus employment authorization for F-1 students experiencing severe economic hardship;
- Expedited adjudication of employment authorization applications, where appropriate;
- Assistance if applicants received a Request for Evidence or a Notice of Intent to Deny and were unable to appear for an interview, submit evidence, or respond in a timely manner because of an emergency or unforeseen circumstance; and
- Replacement of lost or damaged immigration or travel documents issued by USCIS, such as a Permanent Resident Card (Green Card).

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this response with the other organizations that cosigned your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director