July 12, 2022

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

Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20520

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

RE: ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR EXTENSION AND REDESIGNATION OF TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR SYRIA

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken,

The undersigned 112 state, local, and national immigrant, civil rights, legal and faith based organizations write to urge that Secretary Mayorkas extend and redesignate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria for an 18 month time period. We are also seeking a prompt publication of the necessary Federal Register Notice (FRN) of 180 day registration to ensure that those renewing or seeking redesignation have adequate time to apply.

There are currently 2,406 TPS cases of Syrians pending before United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).¹ We urge the administration to take into account the extreme delay and disadvantage that applicants have faced in the past and waive their application fees (forms I-821 and I-765). In addition, we request the administration to provide dedicated funding for TPS backlogs to advance the USCIS’s efforts to reduce backlogs and improve processing times.

The designation of TPS for Syria is set to expire on September 9, 2022, with the decision date coming up on July 31, 2022. More than 13.4 million Syrians have fled their country or are internally displaced, and 14.6 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.² Russia’s war on Ukraine has exacerbated the humanitarian situation, with rising food insecurity and safety concerns. The United States recognized the civil war and the daily ongoing conflict as extraordinary conditions and granted Syria Temporary Protected Status in 2012.³ A designation or redesignation of TPS for Syria will protect 8,800 Syrians from returning to the conflict and

permit them to stay in the United States without fear of deportation. The ongoing war, violence and humanitarian crises, and the staggering human cost of the war with a death toll of over 350,200 people makes the safe return of Syrians impossible.

I. Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

TPS 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 a life-saving, blanket protection, especially for those who are ineligible for or who have been denied asylum.

II. Conditions that Merit TPS extension and redesignation

An 18-month extension is warranted because the ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions supporting Syria’s TPS designation remain. In 2021, Bashar al-Assad secured his fourth term as president. The U.S. Department of State reported that government forces use irregular warfare tactics, forced conscription of child soldiers, and chemical weapons. Widespread corruption, lack of political freedom, arbitrary arrests, brutal violence and killing of civilians have been reported. War crimes and crimes against humanity have been well documented throughout the conflict.

If Syrian TPS recipients are forced to return to Syria, they risk forceful disappearance by all major actors in the country. Since 2011, at least 132,667 Syrian civilians have been arrested or forcibly displaced by Syrian regime forces, with 14,449 dying due to torture. For the first time, a 2021 trial in Koblenz, Germany used the principle of Universal Jurisdiction to find former Syrian government officials guilty for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity. However, in 2021, at least 1,271 people were killed, 2,218 were arbitrarily detained and at least 104 people died from torture. Since 2011, the Syrian regime has attacked healthcare centers more than 500 times, leaving the country unequipped to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, attacks on medical infrastructure in Idlib continued, despite the 2020 Russian-Turkish ceasefire.

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11 *A Heavy Price to Pay: Attacks on Health Care Systems in Syria 2015-2021*, Syrian American Medical Society, May 2022,
A. Humanitarian crises

In 2022, the United Nations estimated 14.6 million people require humanitarian assistance, and 90% of Syrians live in poverty. As of 2022, 12.4 million or 60% of Syria’s population suffers from food insecurity, in part due to the depreciation and hyperinflation of the Syrian currency limiting access to necessary goods such as water, food, fuel and electricity. More than 70% of Syrian citizens lack access to clean water. The shortage of water due to conflict and environmental factors has led to the loss of agricultural livelihoods and resulted in poverty. Syria’s worst drought in 70 years devastated the expected wheat harvest in 2021 by more than half. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated a shortage of wheat exports to Syria. The United Nations’ World Food Programme listed Syria as remaining a country of very high concern in their 2022 outlook. If U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585 is allowed to lapse in July, it would lead to the closure of the last remaining humanitarian aid border crossing in northwest Syria, leaving six million Syrians in Idlib without access to critical aid. Although only 55,000 infections and 3,000 deaths have been recorded since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is believed the numbers are underreported and sprawling mass graves for victims indicates the numbers are much higher. Thousands of internally displaced people and detainees live in overcrowded conditions with little access to the sanitation measures necessary to stop the spread.

III. Extension and Redesignation of TPS for Syria is in the United States’ Best Interests

With the State Department’s announcement that “humanitarian needs in Syria and the region are greater than at any other time since the start of the conflict,” it is imminent that the United States must renew TPS for Syrians.

TPS for Syria would not only be an appropriate use of the authority granted by Congress, but a critical tool to meet the goals of your administration to enhance our nation’s security and safety. USAID lists Syria as “the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis of our time, driving record levels of displacement.” U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Security Council Linda Thomas-Greenfield recognized the cataclysmic situation: “As the humanitarian crisis reaches disturbing new heights, we must fully commit ourselves to supporting the needs of vulnerable Syrians.” The administration has pledged $800 million in humanitarian aid to Syria, the largest pledge made by the United States to date. The Biden-Harris administration has already committed in its Plan for Partnership with the Arab American community to “protect vulnerable Syrians.” An 18 month extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria is in line with US commitment to support vulnerable Syrians. Returning these nationals to the country poses a serious threat to their personal safety.

IV. Conclusion

Syria is in the middle of armed conflict, deteriorating country conditions and humanitarian crises. We urge the administration to immediately redesignate TPS for Syria for 18 months, publish timely Federal Register Notice (FRN), provide a minimum 180-day registration period, and launch a public information campaign to notify the impacted community of the decision. We urge the administration to take into account the extreme delay and disadvantage that applicants have faced and waive their application fees, and we request the administration to provide dedicated funding for TPS backlogs to advance the USCIS’s efforts to reduce backlogs and improve processing times. Finally, we request an engagement with the relevant decision makers at the DHS, USCIS, State, and the White House, to meet with our country and issue experts to discuss our request further. Please contact Hazem Rihawi, rihawi.h@arcsyria.org, Shannon Wilson, wilson.s@arcsyria.org or Lora Adams, lora@masadc.com with any questions.

Sincerely,

National
African Communities Together
Alianza Americas
America’s Voice
American Coalition for Syria

American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)
Americans for a Free Syria
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Big Heart Foundation
Bridges Faith Initiative
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Church World Service
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel
Disciples Peace Fellowship
Engage Foundation Inc
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR-USA)
FWD.us
Hispanic Federation
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
InReach
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Jesuit Social Research Institute, Loyola University New Orleans
Kaylay’s List PAC
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
MedGlobal
Mercy-USA for Aid and Development
MPower Change
Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees
NAHRA, Nicaraguan-American Human Rights Alliance
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Employment Law Project
National Immigration Law Center
National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)
National Partnership for New Americans
NuDay
Presente.org
Pro-justice
RAICES
Rochester, Minnesota Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners
Sisters of Charity Federation
Sisters of Charity, BVM
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
Swasia Charity Foundation
Syria Faith Initiative
Syria Relief & Development
Syrian American Council
Syrian American Medical Society
Syrian Forum USA
The Campaign for Hong Kong
The Episcopal Church
The Syria Campaign
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
Venezuelan American Caucus
We Are All USA
World Relief

**State/Local**
ACER. Inc
Ayuda
Boston University International Human Rights Clinic
Casa de Venezuela Orlando
Central American Resource Center of Northern CA - CARECEN SF
Centro Romero
Church of Our Saviour/La Iglesia de Nuestro Salvador
Connecticut Shoreline Indivisible
Dominican Sisters of Houston
Emerald Isle Immigration Center
Envision Freedom Fund
FEDELCMI/Casas Michoacan
Greater Cleveland Immigrant Support Network
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigrant Legal Center of Boulder County
Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center
International Institute of New England
Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice
Jewish Voice for Peace, Atlanta chapter
Just Neighbors Ministry
La Casa de Amistad
Latin American Coalition
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC)
MinKwon Center for Community Action
New Hampshire Conference United Church of Christ, Immigrant & Refugee Support Group
New York Immigration Coalition
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Rian Immigrant Center
Seattle Immigrant Rights Action Group
Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
Commission
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA
Sisters of the Humility of Mary
Social Justice Coalition
Syrian Christians education committee
SyrianCommunityNetwork
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Legal Aid Society (New York)
The Legal Project
True Alliance Center Inc
Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA)
Wayne Action for Racial Equality
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration (WJCI)
Wilco Justice Alliance (Williamson County, TX)
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center