

ACTION ALERT: TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR COLOMBIANS

(May 13, 2001)

In recent years violence in Colombia has led to the displacement of over two million people. To help ease the plight of the Colombians who have fled to the United States, we are asking you to write or call your Representative in Congress, and urge him or her to sign onto a letter to President Bush being prepared by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL).

Background

Because of direct threats to themselves or their families, more than 100,000 people have left Colombia and sought temporary refuge in the United States. Most live in Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Georgia, and Texas, with others spread throughout the country. Many Colombians entered the United States on six-month tourist visas that have since expired, leaving them without legal status. They are desperately afraid of being deported to Colombia and are in urgent need of temporary protection.

Granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Colombians in the United States could provide this protection. TPS, created by Congress in 1990, empowers the Attorney General to designate a country for this status when he or she determines that "there is an ongoing armed conflict within the state and, due to that conflict, return of nationals to that state would pose a serious threat to their personal safety." Tens of thousands of Salvadorans, Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and others from countries in conflict have benefited from this protection. With thousands killed every year, hundreds of thousands displaced annually, and thousands of others kidnapped or subjected to extortion, Colombians should qualify for a TPS designation - a view shared even by the Colombian government. When Colombian President Andreas Pastrana met with President Bush in February, he made a personal appeal for TPS for his fellow citizens. Colombians appear to be in precisely the situation that Congress envisioned when it passed TPS as a humanitarian response to circumstances where people would be at risk if returned to their home countries.

Action Requested

You can help ease the plight of the Colombian people by contacting your Representative and asking him or her to sign onto the TPS for Colombians letter. They should be encouraged to call Jessie Torres in the office of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen at (202) 225-3931 to join in this effort. Below is a sample letter to use in your advocacy.

Sample Letter on TPS for Colombians

The Honorable [name]
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Re: Temporary Protective Status for Colombians

Dear Representative [name]

I am writing to ask you to sign onto a letter being prepared by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen urging the Administration to protect Colombians who have sought temporary refuge in the United States by designating them for Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

Because of direct threats to themselves or their families, more than 100,000 people have left Colombia and sought temporary refuge in the United States. Most are in Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Georgia, and Texas, with others spread throughout the country. Many Colombians entered the United States on six-month tourist visas that have since expired, leaving them without legal status. They are afraid to return to the dangers that would await them back in Colombia, and are in urgent need of temporary protection.

The U.S. government has the means to provide Colombians in this country the protection they need, but has yet to do so. TPS, a form of protection created in 1990, empowers the Attorney General to designate a country for TPS when he or she determines that "there is an ongoing armed conflict within the state and, due to that conflict, return of nationals to that state would pose a serious threat to their personal safety." Tens of thousands of Salvadorans, Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and others from countries in conflict have benefited from this protection.

With thousands killed every year, hundreds of thousands displaced annually, and thousands of others kidnapped or subjected to extortion, Colombia should qualify for a TPS designation - a view that is shared even by the Colombian government. When Colombian President Andreas Pastrana met with President Bush in February, he made a personal appeal for TPS for his fellow citizens. Colombians appear to be in precisely the situation that Congress envisioned when it passed TPS as a humanitarian response to circumstances where people would be at risk if returned to their home countries.

Please help honor our country's historic role as a safe haven for people at risk by signing onto the "TPS for Colombians" letter as part of a just and humane response to the crisis Colombia faces. To join this effort, please call Jessie Torres in the office of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen at 225-3931.

Thank you for your help with this effort.

Sincerely,