



January 24, 2018

The Honorable Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

The Honorable Secretary Rex Tillerson
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretaries Nielsen and Tillerson:

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees respectfully urges that you extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 5,800 Syrians for another 18 months. Additionally, we request that you redesignate TPS for Syrians to permit those with expiring visas to apply for TPS. None of these individuals can safely return to the state of war in Syria.

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (MFA), a project of the Tides Center, is a coalition of 90 faith-based and secular organizations. MFA's mission is to mobilize the interfaith response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis; raise funds to alleviate suffering; cultivate partnerships to advance future stability in the region; advocate for sensible and humane refugee policies; and create awareness of the facts, the needs, and the opportunities for positive action.

In March 2012, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) first designated Syria for TPS on the basis of unsafe conditions in that war-torn country. Since then, DHS has three times extended and redesignated TPS for those Syrians in the United States as of August 2016. Across the past sixteen months, MFA has coordinated the delivery of more than \$87 million in humanitarian relief into Syria. We know from our partners on the ground that the hostile and life-threatening conditions continue unabated. The catastrophe in Syria has only escalated, creating the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.

TPS Syrians have made homes here, and many contribute to the American economy. Failure to extend and re-designate TPS when it expires in March will expose those forced to return to shelling, aerial bombardments (and barrel bombs), warfare, maiming and death. Staggering additional challenges include kidnap, torture, and lack of basic human necessities (food, water, medical care, electricity, housing). UN Reports now predict another massive exodus of Syrians, which will only exacerbate this humanitarian disaster. Indeed, our own Department of State has recently issued its highest-level warning to American travelers. Its January 10, 2018 advisory confirms: "No part of Syria is safe from violence...." These are obviously the very same conditions that would confront returning Syrians.

In the spirit of the *nonrefoulement* requirement of Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which is part of the U.S. Refugee Act, we cannot require Syrians here under TPS, and those with other expiring visas, to return to such a dangerous, chaotic country. The United States cannot maintain its foreign policy prerogatives, its global leadership – or its crucial negotiating power to end this war -- if it disregards the clear fact of continually deteriorating conditions in Syria. It is clear that from a statutory perspective



that the desperate situation to which Syrians would be forced to return continues to warrant the extension and redesignation of their status.

In addition to the legal and policy grounds cited above, we also urge that you consider the moral imperatives of all great faiths, and assuredly those of MFA's participating organizations: caring for the stranger undergirds the values on which America was founded.

Please extend and redesignate TPS for Syrians.

Thank you.

Georgette F. Bennett, PhD
Founder