



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 19, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

As you know, on August 4th, 2020, one of the most powerful explosions ever to impact an urban population ripped through the Lebanese capital of Beirut. The blast—linked to 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse—has killed at least 154 people, wounded approximately 5,000, and has left an estimated 300,000 people homeless.¹ Given the magnitude of this event, we urge you to exercise your executive discretion to provide protection to Lebanese nationals who are currently in the United States, by designating Lebanon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), and to permit those affected by the catastrophe to find safe haven in our country.

This disaster has struck at an incredibly difficult time for the Lebanese people, who are fighting COVID-19 during a crippling economic crisis. Two weeks ago, as a result of a recent breakdown of the country's banking system and skyrocketing inflation, Moody's Analytics dropped Lebanon's credit rating to its lowest rank—on par with Venezuela.² Already overwhelmed by the pandemic, reports indicate that Lebanon's hospitals are teeming with patients and that 500 beds have been lost as a result of the explosion.³ As a result of these crises, an estimated 75% of the Lebanese population were in need of aid, 33% were unemployed, and one million people were living below the poverty line prior to the blast.⁴ Today, in the aftermath of the explosion, U.N. officials are warning of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in

¹ Liz Sly, Sarah Dadouch, Erin Cunningham and Louisa Loveluck, *Beirut Death Toll Tops 150; Hezbollah Leader Warns Against Blaming Shiite Militia Amid Political Fallout*, WASH. POST (Aug. 7, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/beirut-explosions-rescue-victims/2020/08/07/5c78297e-d819-11ea-a788-2ce86ce81129_story.html; *Beirut Explosion Left 300,000 Homeless, Caused up to \$15 Billion in Damage*, USA TODAY (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/08/06/aid-lebanon-beirut-explosion-force-corruption-reforms/3307109001/>.

² *Lebanon's economy was already in crisis. Then the blast hit Beirut*, CNN (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/06/economy/lebanon-economy-beirut-blast-imf/index.html>.

³ *Beirut Explosion: U.N. Warns of Lebanon Humanitarian Crisis*, BBC NEWS (Aug. 7, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53698564>.

⁴ *Id.*

Lebanon.⁵ The blast struck in the heart of Beirut’s port, destroying critical infrastructure, goods, and most devastatingly, the vast majority of Lebanon’s grain stores. Thus, on top of COVID-19 and the economic crisis, the people of Lebanon are now facing a potential widespread food shortage as well as political and social instability arising from the extensive devastation to the capital.

Section 244(b)(1)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) provides executive authority to grant TPS to individuals who are nationals of a country that has been designated as unsafe for return due to “extraordinary and temporary conditions” unless it would be contrary to the national interest.⁶ Similarly, nationals of a country may be designated for a temporary administrative stay of removal in the form of DED, by Executive Order or a Presidential Memorandum.⁷ As news reports of the impact of the Beirut explosion continue to unfold, it is clear that Lebanon is not in a position to safely accept the return of its citizens at this time. Given the sheer scale of the crisis, it is imperative that the Administration take immediate steps to exercise its discretion—as a matter of national interest—to allow Lebanese nationals to remain in the United States at this time, by designating Lebanon for TPS or DED.

Additionally, given the extent of the destruction in Beirut, the imminent homelessness of hundreds of thousands of people, and the impending humanitarian crisis in Lebanon, we urge you to welcome to our country individuals and families permanently displaced by this disaster through any and all means at your disposal, including humanitarian parole. The United States has long offered shelter to those seeking refuge from catastrophe. To turn away families in desperate need of refuge goes against everything we as Americans stand for.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

RASHIDA TLAIB
Member of Congress

ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress

JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress

MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 8 U.S.C. 1254a(b)(1)(C).

⁷ Ben Harrington, *An Overview of Discretionary Reprieves from Removal: Deferred Action, DACA, TPS, and Others*, CONG. RES. SERVICE (Apr. 10, 2018) (“DED resembles TPS in that it protects nationals of certain designated countries from removal, except that DED is rooted in inherent executive power rather than in statutory authority.”).

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cc: Chad F. Wolf, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security