

June 26, 2018

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

The Honorable Secretary Mike Pompeo
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Nielsen and Secretary Pompeo:

We, the undersigned national security experts, many of whom are former United States officials, have watched Yemen's ongoing civil war and humanitarian crisis with grave concern. We write to affirm that the country's ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions, which justified the extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to people from Yemen living in the United States in March 2017, persist.¹ These conditions demand both the extension of TPS for an estimated 1,200 individuals in the United States and its re-designation for Yemeni immigrants who seek to reside here without fear of deportation and separation from their families. We urge you to take these steps as a small but vital protective measure that neither they nor the United States can do without.

Yemen's ongoing armed conflict risks the life and freedom of Yemenis should they be forced to return to the country. The conflict has deepened significantly since the previous TPS extension, making life impossible for many living within Yemen. All parties are indiscriminately targeting civilians in a war that, according to both the United Nations Security Council and successive U.S. administrations, does not have a military solution. Civilian casualties stem from mortar and sniper fire into civilian areas, use of landmines, and recruitment of child soldiers, in addition to ongoing airstrikes, which have repeatedly struck residences, marketplaces, hospitals, and electrical and water infrastructure.²

The on-the-ground fighting and the air campaign, combined with the access restrictions on Yemen's major air, sea and land ports and war profiteering by parties to the conflict, has contributed to what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, an extraordinary condition.³ 22.2 million Yemenis--roughly 75 percent of the population--need some form of humanitarian assistance. Yemen suffers from major food insecurity with an increasing threat of famine, where 8.4 million people do not know when or how they will get their next meal. Preventable diseases are rampant, with over one million

¹ Extension and Redesignation of the Republic of Yemen for Temporary Protected Status; USCIS Notice, 82 Fed. Reg. 859 (January 4, 2017).

² United Nations Security Council (UNSC). (2018). Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen (S/2018/68).

³ Human Rights Watch (2018). Yemen: All Sides Fuel Humanitarian Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/18/yemen-all-sides-fuel-humanitarian-crisis>.

suspected cases of cholera recorded since the start of the conflict.⁴ As long as the war continues, external powers restrict access to the country's ports, and militias profit from an expanding war economy, the humanitarian crisis will worsen, making the involuntary return of Yemenis inconceivable.

The United States has increasingly been involved in the ongoing war in Yemen since March 2015. The U.S. government has provided material assistance to a major intervening coalition of regional actors, led by Saudi Arabia, in the form of air refueling, targeting support, and weapons transfers, and thus bears, at the very least, what current U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Matthew Tueller has called a "moral responsibility" toward the conflict.⁵ At the same time, the current administration has repeatedly stated both its support for the conflict's political settlement and its commitment to alleviating the worst aspects of the humanitarian crisis.⁶

The sudden return of over one thousand individuals, however, will undermine the developmental and diplomatic tools available to the United States for a strong, principled foreign policy and national security strategy towards Yemen. If forced to return, these Yemenis are likely to be targeted by militias, join the swelling numbers of internal refugees, or otherwise find themselves in acute need of humanitarian relief. Such a return could also bolster the propaganda efforts of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the self-described Islamic State, whose defeat in Yemen is an ongoing U.S. national security objective. Finally, ending TPS for Yemen would harm U.S. standing among the international community, as our allies look to us for leadership in addressing the world's extraordinary humanitarian crises.

It is in the United States national security interest to redesignate and extend TPS for Yemen. The administration must consider and understand the full weight of its security and moral responsibility toward Yemen in making this decision. We strongly encourage you to grant TPS status for Yemen, so that those who have escaped the civil war are not forcibly returned.

Sincerely,

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⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018). Yemen: Humanitarian Dashboard (January - February 2018). Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/humanitarian_dashboard_Jan%20to%20feb%202018.pdf.

⁵ Inskeep, Steve (2018, March 23). Ambassador Defends U.S. Backing of Saudi War in Yemen. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/23/596356991/ambassador-defends-u-s-backing-of-saudi-war-in-yemen>.

⁶ U.S. Policy in Yemen: Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senate, 115th Cong. (2018) (Testimony of David Satterfield). Retrieved from https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/041718_Satterfield_Testimony.pdf.

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