

November 9, 2023

**RECEIVED**

By ESEC at 1:06 pm, Nov 09, 2023

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

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

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

**RE: 131 NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS CALL FOR DESIGNATION OF TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Secretary Blinken,

The undersigned 131 faith-based organizations write to urge Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Mayorkas to **designate the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for Temporary Protected Status (TPS)**. Escalating armed conflicts have further aggravated a dire humanitarian crisis, endangering millions nationwide. The United Nations estimates that over 6.9 million people in the DRC are internally displaced and has called the emergency in the country “one of the largest internal displacement and humanitarian crises in the world.”<sup>1</sup> The United States must act without delay to ensure that our Congolese neighbors, friends, and family members can safely remain in their communities where they belong.

The DHS Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State and others, may designate a country for TPS if conditions in a country (as a whole or in part) meet statutory requirements for such designation,<sup>2</sup> including ongoing armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions that temporarily prevent safe return. TPS is a life-saving protection that allows people from a designated country to remain in the United States while conditions in their home country make safe return impossible.

Through advocacy, many faith-based organizations emphasize the gospel teaching, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” identifying the needs, embracing humanity, and protecting the rights of immigrants. This important legal and moral tool provides eligible individuals protection from deportation and work authorization. Our faith-based organizations and leaders strongly believe that the DRC clearly meets the statutory requirements for a TPS designation—which would extend

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<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Record High Displacement in DRC at Nearly 7 Million* (Oct. 30, 2023), <https://www.iom.int/news/record-high-displacement-drc-nearly-7-million>.

<sup>2</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1); *see also* Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135 (Congress delegating authority for TPS designation from U.S. Attorney General to DHS Secretary).

much needed grace to nationals from the DRC currently living in our communities and worshipping in our congregations.

**I. The DRC has faced alarming levels of armed conflict for decades, with disturbing levels of violence leading to killings, sexual violence, and mass displacement over the past year.**

Within the past year, the DRC has seen a dramatic increase of violence and armed conflict that has resulted in widespread sexual violence, displacement and killings. As recently as August 2023, more than 40 civilians were gunned down in Goma, North Kivu, as the persistent violence continues to escalate<sup>3</sup>. For nearly three decades, conflict and its resulting humanitarian crisis have claimed over 5.4 million lives, making it one of the deadliest conflicts in world history.<sup>4</sup> Multiple active armed forces, funded by foreign nations have battled one another in this mineral-rich nation, causing devastating harm and instability among civilian populations.<sup>5</sup> To date, more than 100 non-state armed groups are active in the DRC, and are subjecting civilians to widespread human rights violations.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2022, armed conflict in the eastern DRC has brought horrific levels of violence and “carnage,” as the resurgence of the armed group March 23 Movement (“M23”), which the UN confirms that the government of Rwanda strongly supports, has invaded the North Kivu province.<sup>7</sup> The M23 group has massacred civilians with impunity, and captured large parts of the DRC’s eastern province.<sup>8</sup> In the North Kivu capital Goma, Doctors without Borders/Médecins sans frontières (MSF) has been treating nearly 50 new sexual violence survivors each day.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andres Schipani, *UN ‘alarmed’ by deaths during protest against its DRC peacekeeping force*, Financial Times (Sep. 1, 2023), <https://www.ft.com/content/16690c3a-1e36-46c2-8af0-4dbe53fd5a8b>

<sup>4</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC), *IRC study shows Congo’s neglected crisis leaves 5.4 million dead* (Jan 22, 2008), <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/irc-study-shows-congos-neglected-crisis-leaves-54-million-dead>.

<sup>5</sup> The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement* (April 11, 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/actor-profile-march-23-movement> (“Amidst the myriad conflicts across DRC, the M23 became the second most active non-state armed group in 2022, behind the Allied Democratic Forces, and the most active non-state armed group in Nord Kivu province.”); Amnesty International, *DRC: M23 armed group must stop killing civilians and respect international law* (Dec. 2, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/m23/> (explaining Rwanda’s support for M23 forces); Eromo Egbejule, *What is the Allied Democratic Forces armed group?*, Al Jazeera (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/30/what-lies-behind-the-allied-democratic-forces-armed-group> (explaining Ugandan support for Allied Democratic Forces)

<sup>6</sup> FWD.us, *Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)* (last accessed Aug. 28, 2023), <https://www.fwd.us/news/tps-drc/>.

<sup>7</sup> Nellie Peyton and Hereward Holland, *U.N. experts: Rwanda has intervened militarily in eastern Congo*, Reuters (Aug. 4, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-experts-say-rwanda-has-intervened-militarily-eastern-congo-2022-08-04/>; Erin Cunningham, *Rebels killed hundreds in Democratic Republic of Congo, officials say*, Washington Post (Dec. 5, 2022); International Crisis Group, *Regional Powers Should Drive Diplomacy in DR Congo as M23 Surrounds Goma* (Nov. 30, 2022), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/regional-powers-should-drive-diplomacy-dr-congo-m23>.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, *DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-backed M23 Rebels* (June 13, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/13/dr-congo-killings-rapes-rwanda-backed-m23-rebels>.

<sup>9</sup> James Rizzo, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Unheard Humanitarian Crisis*, Just Security (Aug. 16, 2023), <https://www.justsecurity.org/87532/the-democratic-republic-of-the-congos-unheard-humanitarian-crisis/>

North Kivu is not alone in the recent rise of armed conflict. Kwamouth, a territory in the Mai-Ndombe province, has also seen a series of deadly attacks killing hundreds of people and leading to over 50,000 displaced people.<sup>10</sup> The eastern Ituri province has seen armed violence against civilians at the hands of multiple armed groups as these forces fight over gold mining sites.<sup>11</sup> Predictably, these widespread atrocities have led to record levels of displacements and as of October 2023 the total number of displaced people in the DRC had surpassed 6.9 million.<sup>12</sup> A majority of these displacements are due to attacks and armed conflict.<sup>13</sup> No human being should have to face such dangerous and deadly circumstances and the Biden Administration has a moral obligation to protect people from being returned to these devastating conditions through a designation of TPS for the DRC.

Armed and sexual violence of such magnitude have already caught the attention of the United States. Secretary Blinken has contacted the DRC's President Tshisekedi regarding those "killed, injured, displaced, or left vulnerable by the ongoing violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo."<sup>14</sup> The United States has issued sanctions on senior members of the armed groups, stating that "[a]ll sides in the conflict are responsible for serious human rights abuses including, but not limited to, intentional targeting of civilian populations through sexual violence."<sup>15</sup> The Department of State has further issued its highest level of warning against travel in the eastern provinces, citing ongoing "crime, civil unrest, terrorism, armed conflict, and kidnapping."<sup>16</sup> We are calling on this administration to provide TPS protections without delay to ensure the safety of our Congolese neighbors, friends and family members in the U.S.

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, *DR Congo: Rampant Intercommunal Violence in West* (March. 30, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/30/dr-congo-rampant-intercommunal-violence-west>.

<sup>11</sup> UN Security Council, *Options for adapting the configuration of MONUSCO and the future United Nations configuration in the country beyond the current mandate of the Mission - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/574)* [EN/AR/RU/ZH] (Aug. 13, 2023), [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4017644/files/S\\_2023\\_574-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4017644/files/S_2023_574-EN.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR, *DR Congo emergency* (last accessed Aug. 28, 2023), <https://www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/dr-congo-emergency>; UNHCR, *Refugees in the DRC* (last accessed on Sep. 1, 2023), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/cod?idp>

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Nord Kivu, Sud Kivu et Ituri: Internally displaced persons and returnees, July 2023* (Aug. 22, 2023), <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/democratic-republic-congo/democratic-republic-congo-nord-kivu-sud-kivu-et-ituri-internally-displaced-persons-and-returnees-july-2023>.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken (@SecBlinken), Twitter (May 24, 2023, 4:21 PM), <https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1661467353849249794>.

<sup>15</sup> Reuters, *US sanctions six for alleged role in Congo's eastern conflict* (Aug. 24, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-sanctions-six-alleged-role-congos-eastern-conflict-2023-08-24/>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, *Democratic Republic of the Congo Travel Advisory* (last accessed Aug. 28, 2023), <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-travel-advisory.html>.



## the top five countries of origin for the U.S. refugee program that has yet to receive TPS designation.<sup>27</sup>

A TPS designation would not only shield important members of our communities and congregations from deportation to unsafe or dangerous conditions, it would also boost their unique contributions to our society. As we write, 2,000 DRC nationals, who live with 6,000 U.S. citizens, would benefit from a TPS designation. Those same individuals contribute \$30 million to the economy annually, and have a workforce participation rate of 93%, providing essential services at a time of worker shortages and high inflation.<sup>28</sup> Designating TPS for the DRC would ensure that their contributions to our economy and communities continue, as well as keep thousands of American families safe and together.

Last but not least, we firmly believe that a TPS designation brings our moral values in alignment with our laws. Across our diverse faith traditions, we are called by our sacred texts to the practices of welcoming the sojourner and acting in solidarity with the vulnerable. Not deporting people to harm at this juncture should be a moral imperative. The conditions described in this letter are the latest manifestation of unsafe and dangerous conditions the DRC has suffered, as it continues to reel from decades of instability and cascading harms—where external influence frequently often undermined, rather than reinforced, its quest to become a stable, democratic, and peaceful nation.<sup>29</sup> With this TPS designation, the United States would finally recognize and protect vulnerable DRC nationals.

We thus urge you, President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Secretary Blinken, to review country conditions and immediately designate TPS for the DRC. We request that an initial designation of 18 months is granted, along with a prompt publication of the Federal Register Notice, a minimum 180-day registration period for eligible applicants to submit their applications, and a community-driven outreach campaign for awareness about the relief. As people of faith, we know such a response is supported by the values, laws, and ideals that this country holds dear.

Sincerely,

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<sup>27</sup> Nils Kinuani, *Temporary protected status could save Congolese lives*, Afro News (July 27, 2023),

<https://afro.com/temporary-protected-status-could-save-congolese-lives/> (“Of the five countries with the highest number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2022, the DRC is the only country without a TPS designation.”).

<sup>28</sup> FWD.us, *supra* n. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Kasper Hoffmann, *How DRC’s colonial legacy forged a nexus between ethnicity, territory and conflict*, The Conversation (Feb. 1, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/how-drcs-colonial-legacy-forged-a-nexus-between-ethnicity-territory-and-conflict-153469> (explaining that ethnic character of DRC conflict finds its roots in decades of Belgian colonialism); Lily Meyer, *CIA Role In Africa Expanded As U.S. Cold War Worries Grew, ‘White Malice’ Details*, NPR (Aug. 21, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/12/1027183677/cia-role-in-africa-expanded-as-u-s-cold-war-worries-grew-white-malice-details> (outlining U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s role in undermining democratic leader Patrice Lumumba prior to his assassination); Nik Stoop, Marijke Verpoorten & Peter van der Windt, *More legislation, more violence? The impact of Dodd-Frank in the DRC*, PLoS ONE 13(8): e0201783 (Aug. 9, 2018), <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0201783> (highlighting adverse, unintended impact of section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which “increased the incidence of battles with 44%; looting with 51% and violence against civilians with 28%” while intending to ensure that minerals sourced from the DRC were conflict-free).

## *National*

Adrian Dominican Sisters Immigration Assistance  
Adrian Dominican Sisters  
Adrian Dominican Sisters  
Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN)  
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)  
Asian American Christian Collaborative  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace  
Catholic Charities USA  
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.  
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office, Wash DC  
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy  
Church World Service  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Disciples Home Missions  
Dominican Sisters of Sparkill  
Dominicans of the Roman Congregation  
Felician Sisters of North America  
Franciscan Action Network  
God is Good Assembly  
Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart  
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC  
Immigrant Connection at City Life  
Immigrant Connection- Blue Ridge  
Internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist (National Catholic Reporter)  
Justice & Advocacy Ministries at Disciples Home Missions  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Medical Mission Sisters, Justice Office  
Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart of Mary  
Muslim Institute for Education & Religion  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Jerusalem Dream Center Church of God

New Wineskins Missionary Network  
Parity  
Pax Christi USA  
Prayer Pioneers  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator  
Redemption Rehoboth Tabernacle  
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Milwaukee, WI  
School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Sisters of Charity  
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team  
Sisters of Mercy  
Sisters of St Joseph of Peace  
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia  
Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God  
Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa  
Sojourners  
Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg, Indiana  
Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam  
Union For Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
UNITED SIKHS  
World Relief

### *State*

Capuchin Province of St. Joseph  
Catholic Charities of SW Kansas  
Catholic Coalition for Migrant Justice  
Catholic Coalition for Migrant Justice  
Catholic Social Services  
Church Women United in New York State  
Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose

East Bay Sanctuary Covenant  
Franciscan Peace Center, Clinton, Iowa  
Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice-Immigration Justice Caucus  
Jesus for All Evangelistic Ministry  
Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Committee, Springfield Dominicans  
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)  
Missionary Center Salvation Ark  
Nazareth Church Not Ethnic Ministries Inc.  
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada  
Sanctuary Working Group UCC  
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati

### *Local*

Archdiocese of Miami  
Archdiocese of Seattle  
Ascension Lutheran Church  
Carmelite Sisters, Vedruna  
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri  
Catholic Charities of North Louisiana  
Catholic Charities of Southern Colorado  
Catholic Coalition for Migrant Justice  
CIJPIC Carmelite Sisters, Vedruna  
Community of the Holy Spirit  
Compass Immigration Legal Services  
Dominican Sisters of Houston  
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House  
Faith & Justice committee, St. Joseph Parish  
Friends of St. Francis  
Haitian Christian United Church  
HIAS Pennsylvania  
Immigrant Connection at Sent Church  
Immigrant Hope Gainesville  
Immigrant Hope-Wyoming/Idaho  
Interfaith Initiative for Social Justice

Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio  
Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW  
Long Island Immigration Clinic  
Multicultural Family Center  
New Hope Office of Immigration services  
Northeast Ohio Friends of Immigrants  
Outreach Coordinator, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami  
Pedro Arrupe Jesuit Institute  
Rehoboth Tabernacle  
Restoration Community Church  
San Bernardino Diocese  
Sanctuary Working Group  
Sayuni Pentecostal Church  
Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church  
Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants, Inc.  
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York  
Sisters of St. Dominic  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas  
Sisters of St. Joseph  
SOLACE  
St. Aloysius Parish Charity and Social Justice Commission Committee  
St. Cronan Catholic Church  
St. Elizabeth Catholic Church  
St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church  
St. Pius V Parish  
Uncage & Reunite Families Coalition  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hidalgo County Texas  
United Church in University Place  
University Mennonite Church  
Wesley United Methodist Church  
West Hills Friends Church



**U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services**

March 13, 2024

Elnora Bassey  
Policy Advocate  
Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc.  
8455 Colesville Road, Suite 960  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Bassey:

Thank you for your November 9, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in support of a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I am responding on behalf of the Department.

I appreciate the concerns you have outlined regarding the situation in the DRC and your interest in its designation for TPS. DHS is committed to administering its programs, including TPS, in an equitable manner and makes decisions regarding TPS designations after consultation with interagency partners and careful consideration of the circumstances of the country, pursuant to statutory criteria.<sup>1</sup>

In order to designate a country for TPS, the Secretary must find one or more of the following: (1) there is an ongoing armed conflict within the country that would pose a serious threat to the personal safety of the country's nationals if they were returned; (2) there has been an environmental disaster resulting in a substantial, but temporary, disruption of the living conditions in the area affected, the country is temporarily unable to handle adequately the return of its nationals, and the country has officially requested TPS designation; or (3) there exist extraordinary and temporary conditions in the country that prevent nationals from returning in safety, and the Secretary does not find that permitting the country's nationals to remain temporarily in the United States would be contrary to the national interest of the United States. See Immigration and Nationality Act § 244(b)(1), 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1).

Please be assured that DHS is monitoring conditions in the DRC. In addition to TPS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) may, upon request, apply certain extraordinary measures to eligible noncitizens affected by emergencies or unforeseen circumstances. Such measures may include:

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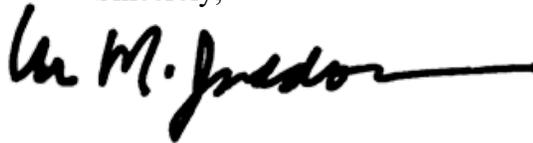
<sup>1</sup> See Immigration and Nationality Act § 244(b)(1).

- Change or extension of nonimmigrant status if eligible nationals are currently in the United States, even if the request is filed after the authorized period of admission has expired;
- Expedited processing of requests for advance parole documents;
- Expedited adjudication of requests for off-campus employment authorization for F-1 students experiencing severe economic hardship;
- Expedited adjudication of employment authorization applications, where appropriate;
- Assistance if applicants received a Request for Evidence or a Notice of Intent to Deny and were unable to appear for an interview, submit evidence, or respond in a timely manner due to the circumstances; and
- Replacement of lost or damaged immigration or travel documents issued by USCIS, such as a Permanent Resident Card (Green Card).

More information is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/immigration-relief-in-emergencies-or-unforeseen-circumstances>.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this response with the other organizations that cosigned your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the USCIS Office of Citizenship, Partnership, and Engagement at [public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou  
Director