



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

June 27, 2016

The Honorable Bob Duff
State Senator
State of Connecticut
State Capitol
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Duff:

Thank you for your June 2, 2016 letter. Secretary Johnson asked that I respond on his behalf.

We are deeply saddened by the effects of the severe earthquake that recently struck Ecuador and share your concern for all those affected. The discretionary authority to designate a country for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is based upon specific statutory criteria and is vested in the Secretary of Homeland Security. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the Department of Homeland Security Component principally responsible for advising the Secretary on TPS issues and implementing the program.

To designate a country for TPS, the Secretary must find, after consultation with appropriate U.S. Government agencies, 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).

The Department is monitoring the evolving conditions and the recovery process in Ecuador to determine whether a discretionary TPS designation under the statute might be warranted. Please be aware that USCIS offers other immigration relief measures to eligible Ecuadorian nationals who have been affected by the earthquake. The USCIS website provides the following advice regarding such measures that may be available upon request:

- Change or extension of nonimmigrant status if you are currently in the United States, even if the request is filed after your authorized period of admission has expired;
- Re-parole, if you were previously granted parole by USCIS;
- 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;
- Consideration of fee waivers due to an inability to pay;
- Assistance if you received a Request for Evidence or a Notice of Intent to Deny, but were unable to appear for an interview, submit evidence, or respond in a timely manner because of the natural disaster; and
- Replacement of lost or damaged immigration or travel documents issued by USCIS, such as a Permanent Resident Card (Green Card).

USCIS issued a news alert on April 26, 2016, highlighting the immigration relief measures listed above for individuals affected by the severe earthquake in Ecuador. The full news alert is available at www.uscis.gov/news/alerts/immigration-relief-those-affected-severe-earthquakes.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Representative Juan Candelaria and Representative Bruce Morris, cosignatories of your letter, will receive a separate, identical response. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "León Rodríguez", with a stylized, cursive script.

León Rodríguez
Director