

August x, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas,

We write to urge you to exercise your discretion to protect Lebanese nationals who are currently in the United States and permit those affected by the ongoing crises in Lebanon to find safe haven in our country by designating Lebanon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or at a minimum, by allowing Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Lebanese nationals.

Section 244(b)(1) 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 “ongoing armed conflict,” “environmental disaster,” or “extraordinary and temporary conditions in the foreign state that prevent aliens who are nationals of the state from returning to the state in safety,” unless it would be contrary to the national interest.¹ Similarly, nationals of a country may receive a temporary administrative stay of removal in the form of DED, by Executive Order or a Presidential Memorandum.² As the current crises in Lebanon clearly meet these criteria, immediate action to protect Lebanese nationals is warranted.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Beirut Port explosion, economic meltdown and ongoing political crisis have combined to create one of the worst humanitarian crises globally, resulting in a widespread lack of access to medical care, potable water, food, electricity, and fuel. According to the United Nations, up to 78 percent of the Lebanese population (3 million people) were living in poverty as of March 2021, with an estimated 36 percent (1.38 million people) experiencing extreme poverty.³ Since October 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its value,

¹ 8 U.S.C. 1254a(b)(1).

² 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.”).

³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Lebanon Emergency Response Plan 2021 - 2022* (August 2021), United Nations, (Aug. 5, 2021), <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-emergency-response-plan-2021-2022-august-2021>.

resulting in a year-on-year inflation rate of more than 120% from May 2020 to May 2021. At the same time, food prices have skyrocketed, increasing 400 percent in 2020 alone.⁴ Fuel shortages are so dire that hospitals are struggling to keep the lights on, leading the American University of Beirut Medical Center, Beirut's top hospital and one of the leading medical centers in the region, to issue a warning that hundreds of patients will die if they fail to secure enough fuel to keep their generators running.⁵ On top of all this, Lebanon has not had a fully formed government in over a year, hobbling the ability of authorities to address these crises.

Speaking to the Conference to Support the Lebanese People on the anniversary of the Beirut Port explosion, you, Mr. President, spoke of the United States' "longstanding support for the Lebanese people" and recognized "that the people of Lebanon have suffered more over the past year because of avoidable political and economic crises."⁶ While we commend your decision to send an additional \$98 million in humanitarian aid to Lebanon, given the scale of the crises, it is clear that the country is not in a position to safely accept the return of its citizens at this time. Standing with the Lebanese people in their time of need is both morally right and in line with our national interests. As such, it is imperative that your Administration take immediate steps to designate Lebanon for TPS, or at a minimum, defer removal for Lebanese nationals through DED.

The United States has long offered shelter to those seeking refuge from catastrophe. Now is the time to continue this tradition and stand beside the Lebanese people in their time of need. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ [American](#) University of Beirut Medical Center, Office of Communications Announcement, dated August 14, 2021.

⁶ Morgan Chalfant, Biden pledges \$100 million in aid to Lebanon on anniversary of Beirut blast, The Hill, (Aug. 4, 2021), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/566329-biden-pledges-100-million-in-aid-to-lebanon-on-anniversary-of-beirut>.