

Center for Constitutional Rights

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2017/06/07/how-mobilization-won-partial-victory-haiti-tps>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The CCR blog

Secretary John Kelly's May 22 [announcement](#) that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will extend Haiti's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for only six months rather than the usual 18, and may not extend it again, ignored the facts. But that he didn't kill it altogether, as anti-immigrant [zealots](#) around him were [urging](#), is testament to a continuing advocacy campaign.

Haiti is a textbook case for TPS, which was granted in 18-month increments after the massive 2010 earthquake, which killed 250,000. Quake recovery remains incomplete: [tens of thousands remain homeless](#). An [unchecked cholera epidemic](#) introduced by U.N. peacekeepers in October, 2010 has killed [9,700 Haitians and sickened over 800,000](#) to date. [Hurricane Matthew](#) last October killed 1,000 Haitians and affected two million more, [caused Haiti nearly \\$2 billion in damage](#), destroyed crops and animals and inundated broad regions, left hundreds of thousands without safe water, exacerbated the cholera epidemic, and has caused a widespread [food insecurity crisis](#).^[1]

DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) concluded in a detailed [December assessment](#) that conditions persist warranting Haiti TPS's extension beyond its scheduled July 22, 2017 expiration date, and then-Secretary of State Kerry [recommended](#) its extension.

Donald Trump's victory upended such expectations, galvanizing into action by early March an ad hoc coalition of Haiti activists and others worried about the imminent threat to [Central Americans and others with TPS](#). DHS's Haiti decision would be a first test; it was due by May 23, 60 days before the July 22 expiration date.

Consisting of religious, humanitarian, labor, immigration, and rights groups including SEIU, the Center for American Progress, and the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, to unjustly name only a few, the coalition contacted editorial writers and congressional staffers and drafted [resolutions](#) and national action [alerts](#), amid a range of activities coordinated by weekly conference calls and daily email exchanges. Coalition members hosted telephonic media briefings with Haiti experts, organized advocacy letters, fed journalists compelling [human interest stories](#), gave [TV and radio](#) interviews, wrote [op-eds](#) and press releases, shared reports on the [dire economic consequences](#) of ending TPS, [organized rallies](#), and encouraged outreach to U.S. officials by [Haiti's government](#).

The array of powerful support materials they proactively solicited, generated, and publicized included ten [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [BostonGlobe](#), [Miami Herald](#), [New York Daily News](#), [Sun Sentinel](#), [Palm Beach Post](#) and [Orlando Sentinel](#) editorials and support expressed in letters, op-eds, and one-on-one meetings. Urging Secretary Kelly to extend Haiti's TPS designation were Republican Governors [Rick Scott](#) of Florida and [Charlie Baker of Massachusetts](#); 100 members of Congress [including 18 senators](#), e.g. [10 members of Florida's congressional delegation](#) including both senators and four Republicans; [the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation](#) and at least [14 members of New York's](#), including House Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee Chairperson [Dan Donovan](#); [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#) leaders and the [Congressional Black Caucus](#); as well as [14 big city mayors](#), [550 U.S. physicians](#), [416 faith leaders](#), [national Catholic leaders](#), [35 humanitarian organizations](#) working in Haiti, and [330 organizations, leaders, and activists](#).

When it was leaked that Trump's USCIS, in an abrupt policy reversal, had [recommended ending](#) Haiti's TPS designation, the coalition publicized the same agency's thorough [December assessment](#) urging its extension.

When it was leaked that USCIS's new policy chief had urged staff to [dig up dirt](#) on Haitians to support termination, the coalition [reacted](#) swiftly to this attempt to demonize an entire ethnic community, stressing that TPS is a humanitarian program and that anyone with a felony or more than one misdemeanor is statutorily ineligible.

The editorials, letters, reports, op-eds, and interviews^[2] generated by coalition members appeared in an ever-increasing crescendo from early March until DHS's May 22 [announcement](#), which ignored and mischaracterized the facts.

The [announcement](#) didn't mention Hurricane Matthew or the cholera epidemic, [misrepresented the Haitian government's repeated requests for an extension of at least 18 months](#), and [gave misleading statistics on the state of earthquake recovery](#). But Secretary Kelly didn't terminate the program either, as those around him had been recommending.

The coalition's advocacy kept Haiti TPS alive, and it [continues](#), as a May 30 letter exemplifies. Anticipating Secretary Kelly's quick four-hour [May 31 visit](#) to see Haiti's President without leaving the National Palace, 38 humanitarian and development organizations wrote him a [letter](#) delivered on the eve of his trip and reported in that day's [Miami Herald](#). DHS had only announced Kelly's trip on May 30; the 38 endorsements were secured in under four hours.

DHSs grudging six-month reprieve will require urgent advocacy in support of an 18-month extension, not termination, before Secretary Kelly must again decide the issue by November 22. It means continued worry and uncertainty in the community, and financial cost to TPS re-registrants, who must pay the usual \$495 in fees, but for a status and work permits good for only six months, not 18.

But they and their allies will have a chance to fight again and are doing so.

As the immigrant community gears up for tough fights to come, it is not alone. Among progressives nationwide, there is solidarity. And as challenging as the months ahead will be, the continuing Haiti TPS campaign and its successes are worth noting.

[1] See for example, President Trumps Misguided Withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, by Church World Service President and CEO John McCullough, [Huffington Post](#), June 5, 2017: In October, Hurricane Matthew decimated one of [Haitis] most productive agricultural areas, even after a three-year drought had already wiped out up to 80 percent of crops and livestock. One-third of the population is now food insecure; up to 280,000 people are selling land and homes to survive. Many still depend on the remittances provided by almost 60,000 Haitians, who after the January 2010 earthquake were granted Temporary Protected Status by the Obama administration.

[2] They are all are gathered [here](#), including additional editorials, articles, interviews, and political letters, for example from Senators [Schumer and Gillibrand](#) and Bill [Nelson](#) among others. This web page was itself a useful tool in advocacy outreach.

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[View the discussion thread.](#)

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