

## **Latinos Hope For a Reprieve; After Mitch, Immigrants Want Protected Status**

The Washington Post

November 15, 1998, Sunday, Final Edition

Copyright 1998 The Washington Post

**Section:** METRO; Pg. B01

**Length:** 1011 words

**Byline:** Ruben Castaneda; Peter Slevin, Washington Post Staff Writers

### **Body**

---

At 10 o'clock this morning, Honduran **immigrant** Christino Castro will make a telephone call from his Northwest Washington apartment to a Tegucigalpa number in **hopes** of hearing his oldest daughter's voice, confirming that his family is still alive.

Castro has not spoken with his wife and three children for more than three weeks, since Hurricane **Mitch** tore gaping wounds in his country. Telephone lines are out. The postal service is crippled. News is painfully scarce.

U.S. immigration rules make it risky for the 37-year-old carpenter to trek to Honduras and return to the United States, but he **hopes** the Clinton administration will grant special **status** to Central Americans **after** the catastrophe.

As President Clinton announced a halt yesterday to deportations to Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala until **after** the Christmas holiday season, thousands of area residents were calculating how the U.S. policy may benefit them and their relatives in Central America.

"This is the biggest news for **Latinos** in the Washington area," said Arnoldo Ramos, executive director of the Council of Latino Agencies, a group of 33 organizations. It's definitely the talk, he said, of community leaders.

No decision has yet been made to grant more significant relief to illegal **immigrants**, including temporary **protected status**, which would include permission to work in the United States, a senior White House official said. Nor has it been decided whether illegal **immigrants** from all four countries would be treated the same way.

"The administration is still reviewing what is the appropriate response to the situation in those four countries," said Maria Echaveste, deputy White House chief of staff. "Certainly temporary **protected status** is an option . . . but there needs to be a very clear understanding that this is not a decision that is made lightly.

"All the analysis we are receiving from folks on the ground," she continued, "indicates that there is a difference in the extent and depth of damage between the four countries."

Storm damage in Honduras and Nicaragua is far greater than the damage in Guatemala and El Salvador. On the other hand, one administration official said, "if you grant temporary **protected status** to just two countries, the other two countries -- El Salvador and Guatemala -- will be quite incensed."

Clinton also announced yesterday that the United States is expanding its military rescue efforts by \$ 45 million in defense goods and services, bringing the total U.S. contribution to \$ 125 million.

With any amnesty plans as yet unclear and the news still fresh, **Latinos** interviewed in Columbia Heights, Logan Circle and Shaw said they had not heard that the administration is considering offering temporary **reprieves**.

## Latinos Hope For a Reprieve; After Mitch, Immigrants Want Protected Status

Over lunch in a 14th Street NW carryout, Salvadoran immigrant Jose Angel, 35, said Central America's storm-wounded nations would benefit from a decision to grant temporary status to natives of all four countries.

"People would work and send money home," Angel said when told the news by a reporter. "I've worked here for eight years, and I send about \$ 200 a month home."

More than 30,000 legal immigrants from the four countries live in the Washington area, most of them Salvadorans. Thousands more live here illegally.

Worry about the trauma caused by the hurricane dominates talk among the area's Hondurans and Nicaraguans because most have families and friends in the ravaged areas. They trade messages and news, and search for compatriots heading home who may be persuaded to look up otherwise unreachable relatives.

Illegal residents and many who are legal know that if they go home to check on relatives, they may never get back into the United States.

Temporary protected status was created in 1990, allowing the attorney general to permit foreign nationals to remain in the United States as refugees from armed conflicts or environmental disasters at home. The temporary period can range from six to 18 months.

Extended at times to Salvadorans, Liberians and onetime Yugoslavs, the policy grants new privileges to undocumented immigrants. They are permitted to work. They may apply to visit their homelands and return to the United States.

"Getting work authorization means they can get better jobs, which will allow them to send more money home to help their countries rebuild," said Luis Salgado, a District immigration lawyer. Without such status, immigrants risk their chances at permanent residency by traveling abroad.

"They often have to make gut-wrenching decisions," Salgado said. "They might have a dying relative they want to go visit, but if they do so, they would risk the investment they've made in becoming legalized."

Walter Tejada, a Latino activist in Northern Virginia, called Clinton's moratorium on deportations "a step in the right direction."

"But drastic situations call for drastic actions," said Tejada, Virginia state director of the League of United Latin American Citizens. "It would be appropriate to grant temporary protected status. It doesn't make sense to send people back who wouldn't have much means to fend for themselves."

Critics argue that special breaks, even temporary ones, too often lead to permanent residency for illegal immigrants who should be sent home. Dan Stein, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said last year, "If we don't enforce the temporariness of amnesties, then no one ever leaves."

Castro, anxious for news of his family, would like to visit Honduras but is improvising in the meantime. He asked a friend who flew to Honduras yesterday to track down his family in the town of Alianza Valle and instruct his 14-year-old daughter, Belez, to go to her godmother's house in the capital, where the phones still work.

"I can't wait to hear her voice," Castro, who makes \$ 300 a week, said as he hung out with friends at 11th and M streets NW. "Everything I worked for, my home, is probably finished. What is lost is lost. I just hope my family's okay."

## Classification

---

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); US FEDERAL

Latinos Hope For a Reprieve; After Mitch, Immigrants Want Protected Status

GOVERNMENT (77%); SEVERE WEATHER (76%); WEATHER (76%); EXECUTIVES (74%); PUBLIC POLICY (74%); DEPORTATION (73%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (72%); HURRICANES (71%); WOUNDS & INJURIES (71%); HOLIDAYS & OBSERVANCES (68%); CHRISTMAS (54%)

**Person:** BILL CLINTON (76%)

**Geographic:** TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS (79%); UNITED STATES (96%); HONDURAS (94%); EL SALVADOR (93%); GUATEMALA (93%); NICARAGUA (92%); CENTRAL AMERICA (90%)

**Load-Date:** November 15, 1998

---

End of Document