

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken:

We write to strongly urge you to exercise your discretion to provide an initial 18-month designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Lebanon. Lebanon is suffering from a multifaceted crisis involving significant economic, financial, and political challenges, further hobbled by a stalled government, that has resulted in one of the largest global humanitarian crises facing the world today.

Social instability and persistent internal and external shocks continue to challenge the country and contribute to worsening conditions in Lebanon. The 2019 freedom protests, 2020 Beirut port explosion, 2021 fuel crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, Russian invasion of Ukraine, hyperinflation with dwindling foreign reserve accounts, and increased regional tensions heightening chances of armed conflict have afflicted significant pain on Lebanon, preventing the safe return of Lebanese nationals.

The country's economy is suffering a major collapse and has been described by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as "at a dangerous crossroads," and in desperate need of rapid reform. The World Bank currently ranks Lebanon's crisis among the top 10 most severe global episodes since the mid-19th century – with 82 percent of the Lebanese population living in multidimensional poverty and 75 percent living in income poverty.¹

As the country hosting the highest per-capita refugee population, Lebanon is also struggling to support the more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians in its borders, of which 9 out of 10 live in extreme poverty.² 46 percent of Lebanon's population is food insecure, of which, 1.46 million Lebanese and 0.8 million Syrians suffer from acute hunger according to the World Food Program, with 67 percent of Lebanese nationals relying on foreign aid for survival.³

Lebanon's crisis features a near-collapse of the banking sector and a drastic GDP contraction, decreasing from \$55 billion in 2018 to a projected \$14.8 billion in 2023,⁴ the largest contraction of 193 countries, according to the Institute of International Finance (IIF). Since 2019, Lebanon's currency has lost more than 99 percent of its value. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased

1 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/12/lebanon-rising-poverty-hunger-amid-economic-crisis#:~:text=Seventy%2Dfour%20percent%20of%20the,less%20than%20%2414%20per%20day.>

2 <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/14025-nine-out-of-ten-syrian-refugee-families-in-lebanon-are-now-living-in-extreme-poverty-un-study-says.html>

3 <https://www.wfpusa.org/countries/lebanon/>

4 <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1331320/iif-expects-lebanese-gdp-will-continue-to-shrink-in-2023.html>

by 1,066 percent between October 2019 and June 2022, with a 158.46 percent rise in October 2022 compared to October 2021. Additionally, the Food Price Index soared by nearly 4,696 percent during the same period. In November 2022, the cost of the food Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) per person was about 20 times higher than in October 2019, marking an almost 2,000 percent increase.

In addition to Lebanon's nearly collapsed economy, the country is also facing severe political instability which began in 2005 following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Since October, the country has been in a double executive vacuum without a President and a fully empowered Cabinet. This has left the country in political paralysis at their State institutions, including at the local and municipal level which has translated into an increase of security incidents and restrictions on freedom of movement in Lebanon. In an effort to revive Lebanon's deteriorated economy, the International Monetary Fund offered a \$3 billion bailout package to Lebanon, conditional on a host of structural and financial reforms but no progress has been made because of the lack of proper government representation.

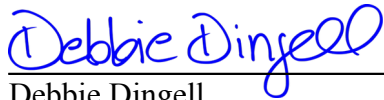
In October 2022, Lebanon also experienced a cholera outbreak which compounded the challenges facing the country. As a result, water systems currently operate for only a few hours per day, and most wastewater treatment plants have ceased functioning due to power outages and the unaffordability of fuel for backup generators. Almost 2.8 million individuals in Lebanon struggle to access adequate amounts of safe drinking water to meet their domestic needs, as well as maintain proper sanitation. To date, cholera has infected more than 6,500 Lebanese citizens, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Given the extraordinary, overlapping challenges in the country, Lebanon clearly qualifies for TPS designation. The myriad issues facing Lebanon render the safe return of Lebanese nationals currently residing in the United States impossible and largely mirror the interrelated crises facing other countries, such as Haiti and Venezuela, that have received this designation. Approximately 12,000 Lebanese nationals in the United States would be eligible for TPS if the country is designated – of which almost 64% of this population is already in the U.S. labor force, have been in the United States on average for 7 years, and contribute roughly \$420 million annually to the U.S. economy.

We urge you to designate TPS for Lebanon, to publish a timely Federal Register Notice, and to launch a public information campaign to notify the impacted community of the decision and any actions they must take by the designated deadline. We call for a minimum 180-day registration period for those who would benefit under designation.

The United States has long offered refuge to those seeking shelter from catastrophe. The crisis in Lebanon provides an opportunity to honor this commitment by supporting Lebanese nationals in their time of need. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



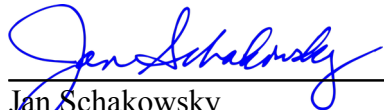
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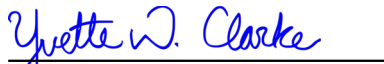
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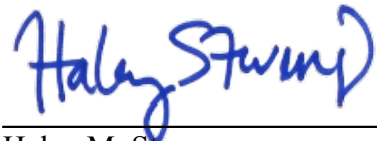
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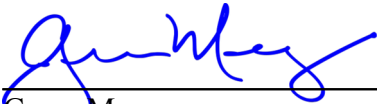
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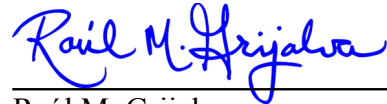
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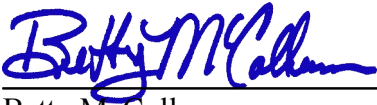
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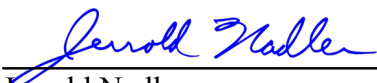
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