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By ESEC at 3:19 pm, Aug 28, 2020

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 28, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear President Trump and Acting Secretary Wolf,

I am writing to express my grave concern for the people of Lebanon following the massive explosion in its capital of Beirut on August 4, 2020. In response to this disaster, I urge you to provide additional humanitarian assistance and support for Beirut, and to designate Lebanon for Temporary Protected Status to enable people affected by this disaster to find safe haven in our country.

I have close to 3,000 Lebanese descended people in my district and I have heard from my constituents with familial and cultural ties to Lebanon about the extent of the destruction in Beirut. Now is the time to extend the hand of American friendship and to provide humanitarian support as Lebanon works to rebuild in the months and years ahead.

Beirut experienced one of the most powerful explosions to ever affect an urban center and it has devastated a historically vibrant city. The blast, which was linked to 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate that was stored for years in a warehouse, killed more than 200 people, wounded an estimated 5,000 people, left an estimated 300,000 people homeless, and caused estimated damages between \$10 and \$15 billion.¹ This disaster occurred during what was an extremely difficult time for the Lebanese people, who were already experiencing an economic crisis and dealing with the effects of COVID-19 on their country.

Before this explosion, because of the economic and health crises in Lebanon, an estimated 75 percent of the Lebanese population were in need of aid, 33 percent were unemployed, and one million people were living below the poverty line.² Now, in the aftermath of the explosion, officials from the United Nations are warning of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in

¹ *Beirut Explosion Left 300,000 Homeless, Caused up to \$15 Billion in Damage*, USA Today (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/08/06/aid-lebanon-beirutexplosion-force-corruption-reforms/3307109001/>; *Beirut explosion: Lebanon's government 'to resign' as death toll rises*, BBC News (Aug. 10, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53720383>.

² *Beirut Explosion: U.N. Warns of Lebanon Humanitarian Crisis*, BBC News (Aug. 7, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53698564>.

Lebanon.³ The country is facing a potential widespread food and medical shortage, as well as political and social unrest that has arisen following the devastation to the capital city of Beirut. Further exacerbating this destruction and hindering the city's efforts to rebuild is that the blast struck in the center of Beirut's port, destroying critical infrastructure and the nation's centers of commerce.

In the aftermath of the explosion in Beirut, I urge you to increase the United States' commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to Lebanon, including increasing our support for food and medical supplies. Lebanon is in need of America's generosity, and I urge you to support Lebanon's efforts to meet the health and safety needs of its people and to rebuild in the wake of this crisis.

In addition, as a result of the myriad needs Lebanon is experiencing, I implore you to designate Lebanon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and to permit those affected by the catastrophe to find safe haven in the United States. As reports of the scope and consequences of the explosion in Beirut continue to come to light, it does not seem that Lebanon is able to safely accept the return of its citizens at this time. Section 244(b)(1)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act provides executive authority to grant TPS to individuals who are nationals of a country that has been designated as unsafe for return due to "extraordinary and temporary conditions."⁴

Given the multiple, interconnected crises the country is facing— including the consequences of the explosion, economic deterioration, an ongoing public health crisis, and protests and political strife which have shaken the government— the need for additional United States assistance to Lebanon is clear. I urge the Administration to take action to better support Lebanon and its people as they recover from this disaster.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and I look forward to working with you to assist the people of Lebanon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Wild", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Susan Wild
Member of Congress

³ *Id.*

⁴ 8 U.S.C. 1254a(b)(1)(C)



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

October 22, 2020

The Honorable Susan Wild
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Wild:

Thank you for your August 28, 2020 letter requesting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for Lebanon following the recent explosion in Beirut. Acting Secretary Wolf asked that I respond on his behalf.

The Department of Homeland Security mourns the loss of life from this horrible tragedy that caused such tremendous destruction. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides a number of humanitarian programs and protections to assist those who have been affected by disasters, emergency medical issues, and other urgent circumstances.

TPS is a temporary status that may be granted to eligible nationals, or eligible aliens without nationality, who last habitually resided in the designated country and who are present and residing in the United States from certain dates that the Secretary establishes at the time of the TPS designation. The Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due to conditions in the country that temporarily prevent the country's nationals from returning safely or, in certain circumstances, when the country is unable to adequately handle the return of its nationals. The Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a country for TPS if the conditions in the foreign country fall into one or more of three statutory categories: (1) ongoing armed conflict, (2) environmental disaster resulting in a substantial, but temporary, disruption of the living conditions in the affected country and the country's government has officially requested TPS, or (3) extraordinary and temporary conditions. *See* Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) § 244(b)(1).

The decision to initially designate a country for TPS lies within the sole discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1). USCIS understands your concern for the situation in Lebanon and is continuing to monitor the current conditions in the country.

USCIS offers other immigration relief measures that may be available to Lebanese nationals affected by the current conditions in Lebanon. Information on these options can be found at www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/special-situations. We trust your staff and constituents will find the USCIS website helpful in understanding the humanitarian options the flexibilities that USCIS is able to provide for special situations, as well as methods for reaching out to the USCIS Contact Center for any case specific questions.

The Honorable Susan Wild
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Thank you again for your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J Edlow', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy