

**Syrian Letter**

**Request for 18-Month Extension and  
Redesignation of Temporary Protected  
Status (TPS) for Syria**



July 25, 2025

Ambassador Thomas J. Barrack  
U.S. Special Envoy for Syria  
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**RE: Request for 18-Month Extension and Redesignation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria**

Dear Ambassador Barrack:

The undersigned 37 Syrian, faith-based, and human rights organizations, write to respectfully urge the Administration to extend and redesignate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syria for 18 months. **There are approximately 3,865 Syrian TPS holders in the United States of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds.** Syria's TPS program is relatively recent compared to other programs, having been first designated in March 29, 2012 based on ongoing conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions. It has been redesignated and extended eight times since then, including by President Trump in April 2018 and October 2019. Despite a significant political transition in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime seven months ago, **the conditions upon which Syria's TPS designation was based still persist.**

While we share President Trump's vision to see a prosperous Syria at peace with itself and its neighbors, **the reality is that Syria is emerging from 54 years of totalitarian dictatorship and 14 years of bloody civil war, and is currently neither prosperous nor entirely at peace with itself and its neighbors.**

Syrians continue to face **serious threats to their individual safety from systematic and scattered armed violence** across the country as well as from **landmines and explosive remnants** of the war. The Syrian transitional government (STG) does not have full control over the entire country and **armed non-state groups have an overt presence in several areas.**

Syria remains in a state of **economic and financial crisis**, with **subpar living conditions and destroyed critical infrastructure** contributing to significant energy and water shortages. **The country has not substantially healed from the humanitarian tolls of the 2023 7.8-magnitude earthquake, and recent environmental disasters have also exacerbated suffering.** The scale of Syria's multiple crises and the state's resource and capacity constraints impede the STG's ability to adequately handle the return of all of its nationals.

**Consistent with President Trump's policy towards Syria, the STG needs to be given additional time to improve security and economic conditions, counter the threat of ISIS, ensure accountability, secure the rights of all religious and ethnic minorities, and start substantially rebuilding destroyed houses, schools, hospitals, and energy infrastructure.**

Therefore, an additional 18-month extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria is **warranted under 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(A) and (b)(1)(C)**. Syria is one of the few cases where the humanitarian purpose of TPS has not been abused and where the program enjoys broad bipartisan support. Conditions in Syria have always clearly warranted TPS designation—and they remain far from meeting the prerequisites for the safe return of all Syrian nationals. Moreover, **the number of Syrian TPS holders is *de minimis* and they have the highest per capita economic contribution among all other TPS nationalities**, imposing no burden on the United States government. Allowing them to remain temporarily in the country would not contradict U.S. national interest.

## **I. ARMED CONFLICT AND SECURITY THREATS**

### ***A. Ongoing and Persistent Violence***

Section 1254a(b)(1)(A) authorizes the Administration to designate a foreign country for TPS if there is “an ongoing armed conflict within the state and, due to such conflict, requiring the return of . . . nationals of that state to that state (or to the part of the state) would pose a serious threat to their personal safety.”

As confirmed in the U.S. State Department’s April 2025 Level 4 travel advisory, “**no part of Syria is safe from violence**.” The advisory highlights the ongoing threats from terrorism, kidnapping, armed conflict, and civil unrest. The U.S. Embassy in Damascus has also not reopened due to security concerns. **Over 3,000 civilians have been killed in Syria** in the first half of 2025. Conditions on the ground evolve every day, with **near-daily reports of violence or casualties**. For example, on July 24, a massive explosion in Idlib, allegedly at an ammunitions depot belonging to the designated Turkestan Islamic Party, resulted in shrapnel that killed at least 6 and injured over 100 civilians.

**Active ISIS cells** continue to threaten population centers and civilian facilities in Syria, with **around 124 ISIS attacks reported** across Syria between February and July 2025. The **June 22 suicide bombing at St. Elias Church in Damascus**, the February 3 terror attack in Manbij, as well as the continued, often sectarian-motivated spate of **kidnappings and extrajudicial assassinations** highlight the persistent risk to civilians in Syria. On average, 24 vigilante killings have occurred *each week* in Syria since May 1, 2025.

The **ongoing violence in Suweida province in southern Syria** further underscores the volatility and fragility of post-Assad Syria. Southern Syria remains destabilized by recurrent clashes between Druze and Bedouin armed groups and Israeli and Syrian transitional government (STG) forces. **Recent intensified fighting has killed over 426 people—including one U.S. citizen executed in cold blood—injured nearly 2,000, and displaced more than 128,000 Syrians**. The clashes have dangerously enflamed sectarian tensions. A worsening humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the province, and hundreds of civilians have been evacuated, including one American family that was visiting relatives in the area.

Other violent clashes have occurred across the country over the last six months. In May, skirmishes erupted in Suweida and Damascus countryside, and armed groups shelled Druze-majority towns. **Iranian proxy elements, Hezbollah operatives, illicit drug and weapons smugglers, and armed loyalists** from the former Assad regime’s military-intelligence apparatus continue to remain a threat to Syria’s stability, as evidenced by ongoing clashes along the Syrian-Lebanese border. In March, **deadly attacks by Assad regime loyalists** on STG forces triggered **bloody massacres** of around 1,500 predominantly Alawite civilians in the coastal region and mass displacement to Lebanon.

Risks to individual safety and ongoing displacement are compounded by serious fragmentation and **the Syrian government’s lack of full territorial and security control** over all of Syria. Armed groups and foreign forces continue to have a presence. **Unresolved territorial and ethnic disputes are the leading cause of violence in Syria currently, in addition to unexploded ordnance.** Skirmishes and sporadic clashes occur far too frequently along the tense frontlines between Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-controlled territory and government-controlled territory, often resulting in civilian casualties. No solution for the SDF’s disarmament and reintegration appears likely in the near future.

Israel and Syria are also technically and legally at war, and U.S. mediation efforts to reach a non-belligerency agreement are underway. Israel unilaterally annulled the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and expanded its occupation of Syrian territory beyond the Golan Heights almost immediately after the Assad regime fell, despite Syria not threatening or attacking it. **Recurrent Israeli land incursions and airstrikes**—more than 700 since December 8, 2024—have created “a state of fear and unrest among the local population,” according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR). Dozens of Syrian civilians have been killed as a result. On July 16, Israel bombed the Syrian military headquarters and areas near the presidential palace in central Damascus, killing three civilians and escalating tensions between the countries.

### *B. Additional Security Threats*

The risk of accidental death due to landmines and unexploded ordnance in Syria remains unacceptably high and an obstacle to the safe return of displaced persons. **“Syria is now the most dangerous country in the world for civilian accidents caused by explosives,”** according to HALO, the world’s largest landmine clearance charity. **Over 1,000 civilian casualties have been reported from landmines and unexploded bombs since December 8, 2024,** according to UNICEF and the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). One in three of those victims are children

Moreover, **torture and ill-treatment** are still a significant risk in all parts of Syria, and arbitrary security practices continue to unfortunately occur. According to SNHR, seventeen individuals were killed as a result of torture in the first half of 2025. No national framework for security or rule of law has yet emerged.

Accordingly, while we understand that some American citizens of Syrian origin have welcomed the opportunity to return to visit their homeland, **many Syrian nationals, including TPS holders, remain understandably cautious and afraid to go back, due to serious threats to their**

**individual safety emanating from the risks of kidnapping, unpredictable explosions and armed violence, and uncertainty surrounding the new STG and forces affiliated with it.** An extension and redesignation of TPS for Syria is warranted under 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(A).

## II. EXTRAORDINARY AND TEMPORARY CONDITIONS

### A. *Continuing Humanitarian and Economic Crisis*

Syria's ongoing conflict remains among the largest displacement crises in the world. More than 85,000 Syrians fled to Lebanon after the fall of the Assad regime and to escape the coastal violence in March 2025. Most of these refugees remain in Lebanon today. Around 7.4 million Syrians are still internally displaced inside the country—the second highest figure on record for the country and surpassed only by Sudan—and upwards of 6 million Syrians are refugees outside the country. According to Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR), **refugees and IDPs “lack clear prospects for return due to the absence of the necessary conditions for a safe and dignified return.”**

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Syria's “notable political shift did not immediately resolve IDPs' plight.” Protracted conflict has “**left more people in need of humanitarian assistance than ever before** in 2024, and the widespread damage and destruction wrought by years of war will continue to be a major obstacle to millions of IDPs' efforts to re-establish their lives and livelihoods.” Many refugees have also not returned to Syria yet. For example, the fall of the Assad regime “has not occasioned the type of huge return movement that many in Lebanon hoped for,” primarily because **living conditions in Syria remain dire**. There are no homes, schools, or jobs for many refugees to return to. Basic services remain out of reach for millions, the education system is fractured, medical facilities are scarce, water wells are damaged or dried up, and malnutrition is a persistent problem among children.

In addition to the acute security threats, Syria faces a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. **Over 90% of the population lives in poverty**, and unemployment is widespread. Syria's war has devastated its economy and critical infrastructure—including housing, healthcare, electricity, and education. The country has not recovered yet. According to the World Bank, **Syria's GDP has declined by more than half since 2010, and shrunk by 1.5% in 2024**. Outlooks for economic growth this year are “subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty.”

**Despite sanctions relief, Syria's economic crisis continues**, marked by a volatile currency value and rising food prices. Ongoing turbulence, in addition to the legacy of sanctions, have deterred investments in the county, impeding Syrians' ability to recover. A **severe liquidity crisis and bank withdrawal limits** have also **significantly reduced local purchasing power** and hampered economic recovery. Syria's economic decline exacerbates humanitarian needs, with **over half of the Syrian population now facing food insecurity and 16.7 million needing humanitarian assistance**.

### B. *The Substantial Impacts of Recent Environmental Disasters*

Recent natural and environmental disasters have substantially disrupted living conditions in Syria. They have added additional stress to vital infrastructure and contributed to the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians.

On February 6, 2023, a **catastrophic 7.8 magnitude earthquake** struck northern Syria and southern Türkiye, followed by more than 11,000 aftershocks. The series of quakes “created a disaster of colossal proportion” across many parts of Syria, directly affecting at least 8.8 million people, including “almost every person living in north-west Syria.” The earthquakes totally destroyed 1,869 buildings and partially destroyed 8,731 buildings. According to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 5,670 lives were lost and 11,774 individuals were injured. Following the earthquake, a dam collapsed in northwestern Syria, causing the overflow of the Orontes River and leading to 1,000 houses flooding and 7,000 people evacuating.

**Residential and civilian facilities destroyed by the earthquake have not been substantially rebuilt.** Reconstruction was hindered by the Assad regime and its notorious corruption and economic mismanagement. Donor states and organizations have also been hesitant to support the rebuilding of housing or longer-term shelter interventions. **Reconstruction continues to be stalled** by the STG’s scarce resources, ongoing turbulence, limited international aid, and the legacy of sanctions and the lack of FDI.

Since the devastating 2023 earthquakes, Syria has continued to experience subsequent regional environmental disasters that have compounded its extraordinary and temporary crises. The country is in the midst of one of **its worst droughts in decades**, receiving its lowest winter rainfall since 1956—about 40% below average, per UN estimates. The drought has **severely impacted agricultural production and led to the failure of the 2024-2025 wheat harvest** in Syria, which is further exacerbating food insecurity.

**Record-low rainfall this year has also triggered “an unprecedented water crisis,”** particularly in Damascus, where some residents are receiving less than 2 hours of running water a day. A prolonged water crisis has also intensified in provinces such as Suweida and Al-Hasakeh. Approximately 80% of wells have become non-operational. **Chronic electricity cuts and fuel shortages** worsen the problem, especially when households lack power to pump water to rooftop tanks. The Syrian government is struggling to address both water and energy crises, as much of the critical infrastructure damaged by war remains unrepaired.

An unprecedented string of **more than 3,500 wildfires have also scorched Syria this year**, fueled by the drought, strong winds, and climate change. Emergency response efforts have been hampered by landmines, unexploded ordnance, and the **government’s extremely limited resources**. Thousands of people have been directly affected and displaced by wildfires in July alone. The IFRC also reported that wildfires in Syria in October 2024 had destroyed over 12 million square meters of land and caused “considerable material and environmental damage,” including the loss of crops critical to local livelihoods.

### *C. TPS Extension and Redesignation Not Contrary to U.S. National Interest*

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Section 1254a(b)(1)(C) authorizes the Administration to designate a foreign country for TPS if it finds that “extraordinary and temporary conditions” exist in the foreign state that prevent its nationals “from returning to the state in safety,” unless permitting Syrian nationals to remain temporarily in the United States is “contrary to the national interest . . . .”

Syria’s political transition is still very “fresh,” and the transitional government faces multiple challenges and remains very fragile. While we recognize and appreciate President Trump’s decision to lift broad sanctions on Syria, we emphasize that stabilization will take time and sanctions relief alone cannot repair the damage wrought by over a decade of ongoing conflict. Additionally, **despite the recent lifting of most sanctions, economic and living conditions on the ground have not changed drastically to reflect this new reality.** The STG has acknowledged to us that it is currently unable to adequately handle the return of its nationals or provide adequate reintegration support for them. **The humanitarian infrastructure, including housing, social services, and public utilities, is simply not in place, and general safety cannot be guaranteed.**

In particular, given current conditions, **many Syrian TPS holders from religious or ethnic minorities may not feel safe returning to Syria at this time.** Allowing TPS for Syria to expire in September 2025 and forcing around 3,800 Syrian nationals lawfully present in the United States to return to a volatile, violent, and uncertain Syria would be premature and dangerous. **It could endanger the lives of these Syrian TPS holders, add further strain on the Syrian government, and potentially undermine U.S. policy.**

Moreover, Syrian TPS holders add value—and are not a burden—to our country. Many of them are white-collar professionals such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, and consultants. Despite there being less than 4,000 of them, **Syrian TPS holders generate an estimated \$165 million in economic activity each year**—the highest per capita economic contribution among all the other nationalities with TPS in the United States. TPS allows these Syrian nationals to work legally in our country, pay taxes, and contribute to their local communities. TPS does not give them access to federal financial assistance, welfare, or a direct pathway to permanent residency. Further, Syrian TPS holders live with or have family ties to over 5,000 U.S. citizens of Syrian origin. Many arrived after the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011 and have lived in the U.S. for only an average of eight years. **Ending their temporary protected status now would not only expose them to unacceptable safety risks but also weaken American communities that benefit from the economic and social value they contribute.**

The Administration should extend Syrian TPS holders an additional 18 months before they may be required to return to their country, and give the Syrian government more time and guidance to improve security, economic, and living conditions on the ground. **This would be consistent with President Trump’s plan to “support the country’s path to stability and peace” and “give Syrians a chance to rebuild and thrive.”** Allowing Syrian nationals to remain temporarily in the United States is therefore not contrary to U.S. national interests.

**In conclusion, TPS for Syria is also warranted under 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(C).** Given that Syria’s TPS designation is set to expire on September 30, 2025, the Administration must make a decision on whether to extend and redesignate it 60 days in advance. We thus respectfully urge the Administration to redesignate Syria for TPS and grant an 18-month extension **by July 31, 2025.**

Sincerely,

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)

American Coalition for Syria (ACS)

Americans for a Free Syria

Association of Victims of Chemical Weapons (AVCW)

Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO)

Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (CCSDS)

Citizens for a Safe and Secure America (C4SSA)

Emgage

Family Action Network Movement

Immigrants Act Now

In Defense of Christians (IDC)

Jumpstart Refugee Talent

Karam Foundation

MedGlobal

Mercy Without Limits

Nobel Women's Initiative

Pro-Justice

Rahma Worldwide

Scholars for Syria

Swaida American Society

Syria Faith Initiative

Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC)

Syrian American Alliance for Peace and Prosperity (SAAPP)

Syrian American Council (SAC)