



The End of TPS

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On Monday January 8, the decision to end the Temporary Permit Status or TPS which, since 2001, protected over 200,000 Salvadorans from deportation, was made official by the US government. Although anticipated and predicted by experts in migration and by US government officials, this was news that El Salvador was not eager to receive under any circumstances. Despite the fact that it was inevitable, many refused to accept it. The official news release of the end of the TPS for Salvadorans had created concern in El Salvador, among Salvadorans residing in the US, as well as in immigrant advocate groups.

Neither the efforts of the Salvadoran government, nor the opinion of the US ambassador to El Salvador, nor pressure from the many construction companies hiring thousands of Salvadorans protected by the TPS have managed to change Donald Trump's decision.

The intense lobbying from the Salvadoran government, led by Foreign Minister Hugo Martinez, did not manage to extend the protection status; but it may have helped attain a delay of 18 months in order for Salvadorans to seek another migration status or, in a worst case scenario, to depart by the expiration date. This is the longest delay granted by the laws of the United States, a delay was not granted to Nicaraguans when they were notified of the termination of the TPS that protected them. Now all Salvadorans can hope for is to find a legal loophole that would allow them to process a permanent residence or wait for Congress to pass a law that would allow them to obtain legal residency; otherwise they would have to return to El Salvador by September 9, 2019.

The decision to end the TPS, be that for Salvadorans or any other group, is not in any way related to the behavior of the governments of those countries of origin, but solely to Donald Trump's anti-immigrant policies, clearly announced throughout his presidential campaign and confirmed since his arrival in the White House.

Trump has taken anti-immigrant measures without distinction among nationalities. The phasing out of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program which allowed the permanent residence of children that were brought up and raised in the United States, together with his eagerness to put an end to the Visa Lottery and the migration chain that facilitated family reunification, are clear examples of his visceral and opportunist antipathy towards migrants.

The news of his willingness to negotiate the future of the dreamers under the protection of DACA in exchange for Congress's approval of the funds for the construction of the wall along the US-Mexico border is clear proof of the value Trump places on migrants: zero, unless it is to use them as exchange currency for achieving internal policies.

Along the same lines, the manipulation of this issue in order to attack the FMLN government, a strategy instigated by members of the opposition who seek to take over public office, including the Presidency, is perverse and contrary to the truth. The TPS is a humanitarian program which was created in order to protect undocumented migrants coming from countries affected by war, natural disasters or other conditions that make it impossible for them to return to their countries of origin. Thus, in 2001, it was not due to friendship with the government of El Salvador that the United States decided to grant TPS to those Salvadorans already residing in the country, but, rather, because of the crisis brought about by the earthquakes that occurred that year. Moreover, the decision to put an end to TPS has nothing to do with the degree of agreement or disagreement of Salvadoran politicians with the US administration.

Beyond opportunism, we must continue to lobby in the US for a law that grants our migrants a permanent legal status. But it is more important to carry on the work here in El Salvador. Our country has, for decades, expelled its population due to the inability to provide opportunities of development for all. Our country has also benefitted from migration through remittances, which currently support the national economy. Now, it is up to us to find a path, not only to welcome the migrants who return, but also to build an economic model that is inclusive, fair, and in solidarity with all. To aim at something else would be simple hypocritical politicking and yet another insult for the thousands who fled the country in pursuit of work and security.