

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to extend and expand Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians residing legally in the United States.

As you know, in December 1989, Liberia was engulfed in a devastating civil war that lasted for seven years. Over 150,000 people died and more than one-half of the population fled the country or became internally displaced. During the conflict food production was halted and the country's infrastructure was destroyed.

Several thousand Liberians who were forced from their homes because of the civil war sought refuge in the United States. In 1991, Attorney General Barr granted Liberians present in the United States Temporary Protected Status (TPS). As the conflict in Liberia continued to rage, successive Attorneys Generals extended TPS each year for the next six years. In 1999, TPS was terminated, but President Clinton approved Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) and that status was extended for two years. In 2002, Attorney General Ashcroft once again designated TPS and this status was extended through 2007. At that time, President Bush extended DED for Liberians who had arrived in the United States by October 2002 and registered for TPS at that time. This DED status will expire on March 31, 2009.

Liberia has made great strides in the past few years. Charles Taylor is presently being tried in The Hague, and freely-elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is working to rebuild her country. The rebuilding of Liberia, however, will be a long process and must be managed carefully. Only 15% of Liberians are formally employed. As of 2006, 76.2% of Liberians lived below the poverty line. Liberia's illiteracy rate is over 60% and only about 41% of the population have access to health care. Thousands of refugees returning from neighboring countries have taxed the country's fragile infrastructure and 80,000 Liberian refugees still need to return. In addition, a caterpillar infestation which has destroyed crops and contaminated water supplies forced President Johnson Sirleaf to declare on January 26, 2009 a nationwide state of emergency and request international assistance.

Liberians who have lived in the United States almost two decades should not be forced to return to a country which is still struggling to provide basic services to its citizens. A flood of thousands of Liberians from the United States could easily overwhelm and reverse the advances the nation of Liberia has made. Furthermore, Liberians in the United States are providing invaluable financial support to Liberia through remittances to families.

Liberia is on its way to once again becoming a stable country with a thriving economy. But this progress must be protected. We believe the United States needs to do all that is necessary to assist in the reemergence of Liberia. We believe it would be very beneficial for both countries if the Liberians living in the United States are allowed to remain. We therefore request that the Attorney General grant Liberians a reprieve from imminent deportation and that the class granted DED cover all eligible Liberians, including those who arrived after October 2002.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed

John F. Kerry

Mary Gandy

Shirley

Edward M. Kennedy

Robert A. Mikulski

Amy Klobuchar