

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 18, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.
20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to extend for two years Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Liberians residing legally in the United States. In addition, we ask you to take early action on this matter to avoid anxiety and uncertainty in our country's Liberian communities.

As you know, in 1989, Liberia became engulfed in a devastating seven-year civil war. More than half the population fled the country or became internally displaced, and an estimated 150,000 individuals lost their lives. During the conflict, food production was halted, and the country's infrastructure and economy were destroyed. A second civil war, which began in 1999, ended four years later with the departure from power of former President Charles Taylor, who is currently serving a 50-year prison sentence after being convicted of war crimes by the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

Thousands of Liberians who were forced from their homes sought refuge in the United States. In 1991, Attorney General Barr granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Liberians present in the United States. Since that time, the status of many Liberian refugees in the United States has been extended through renewals of both TPS and DED. The current DED extension is set to expire on September 30, 2014.

Liberia has made great strides in recent years, and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has won much praise in her efforts to overcome the wartime destruction of her country. However, as United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reported in early 2014, security conditions remain fragile, and, as noted by the U.N. Security Council, the U.N. Mission in Liberia remains necessary in order to guarantee peace and security in Liberia. Socioeconomic conditions also remain extremely challenging, despite some progress, and severe poverty remains widespread. According to recent estimates, 64% of Liberians live below the national poverty line, 83% are without access to proper sanitation, and only 2% have access to electrical power. Liberia's health system also remains fragile, and in addition to endemic malaria and other serious diseases, Liberia has recently been facing a new threat: an unusually long-lived regional outbreak of the highly contagious and deadly ebola virus.

The United States must continue to do all that is necessary to assist in the reemergence of Liberia, to ensure regional stability, help foster Liberia's continuing post-war recovery, and protect the substantial foreign policy assistance and peacekeeping investments that the United

States has made in Liberia. We strongly believe, as you stated in March 2013, that it continues to be in our foreign policy interest to extend DED to those Liberians presently residing in the United States. A flood of Liberians from the United States could overburden the country's limited infrastructure and reverse the advances the nation of Liberia has made. It would also stem the crucial socio-economic investment and assistance that Liberians in our country provide through remittances to their relatives in Liberia. As such, we believe it is beneficial for both countries if this small but critical population is allowed to remain in the United States.

Liberians, many of whom have lived here for decades, should not be forced to return to a country that is still in the process of rebuilding. These individuals are lawful and tax-paying members of our communities, many of whose sons and daughters are American-born citizens serving in the military. We, therefore, request that you grant eligible Liberians a reprieve from imminent deportation by once again extending DED status to all eligible Liberians, including those who arrived after October 2002.

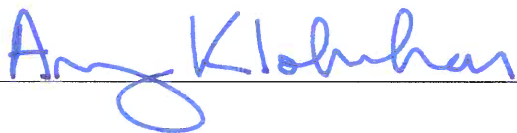
Furthermore, the current system of short-term DED renewals leaves Liberians and their families with perennial uncertainty about whether they will be able to remain members of the communities they have come to call home. For this reason, while we urge you to grant a lengthy extension of at least two years and to make this announcement well in advance of the current DED expiration, we continue to call for comprehensive immigration reform that includes an adjustment to permanent resident status for qualifying Liberians and their families.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,













Robert M. Mering

Ben Cardin

Dick Durbin

Shirrod Brown

Chris Coons

J. A. B.

Jeffrey A. Mankley

Richard Blumenthal

Kirsten Gillibrand

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