

ZIMBABWEANS IN THE DIASPORA

TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR ZIMBABWE

What is Temporary Protected Status (TPS)?

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a temporary immigration status granted to people already in the United States from a country where civil unrest, violence, or natural disasters have made forced return impossible or unsafe. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may grant TPS under the following conditions:

1. An on-going armed conflict poses a serious threat to the safety of returned aliens, or
2. An environmental disaster results in the substantial, but temporary, disruption of living conditions, or
3. Extraordinary and temporary conditions in a foreign state prevent aliens from safely returning.

TPS beneficiaries may remain in the United States, and may obtain work authorization for the duration of the status. Terrorists, persecutors, and serious criminals are not eligible for TPS. TPS may be extended if conditions in the designated country do not change.

How does Zimbabwe meet the conditions for TPS?

Zimbabwe merits TPS designation due to the extraordinary and temporary nature of the current political and economic crisis. This crisis has reached catastrophic proportions since May 2005 as a result of an “urban renewal” scheme that has **displaced 700,000 and is affecting 2.4 million Zimbabweans**, thereby affecting more than one in five Zimbabweans. Due to the massive scale of the crisis, Zimbabwe is not able to receive returnees from abroad at this time.

Why is Asylum not enough?

Relief for Zimbabweans currently residing in the United States through asylum status does not suffice as an alternate form of protection because the crisis in Zimbabwe extends beyond the threat of individualized persecution on the grounds enumerated within asylum law. The multidimensional crisis affects every Zimbabwean currently living in the United States, and therefore the only appropriate relief from such a threat is through blanket protection under Temporary Protected Status.

Scale of the Crisis in Zimbabwe

Annual inflation rates have risen to over 300 percent, unemployment has skyrocketed to more than 70 percent and widespread shortages of food, fuel and other basic necessities are rampant. In Harare, the once booming capital of Zimbabwe, it is common for electricity to go off for hours at a time. The water system is rundown and frequent pipe bursts often go un-repaired. Roads have deteriorated and most streetlight and traffic lights in the city are broken. The infrastructure in Zimbabwe has been dismantled in just a few short years.

Operation Murambastvina displaces 700,000 and affects 2.4 million in Zimbabwe

On the 19th of May 2005, without warning, the government of Zimbabwe embarked on an operation to “clean up” its cities. It was a crash operation known as Operation Murambastvina, literally translated in Shona as “clean out the filth”. Popularly referred to as “Operation Tsunami” because of its speed and ferocity it resulted in the displacement of 700,000 people in the cities across the country. The United Nations report indicates that a further **2.4 million people have been affected** in varying degrees. Hundreds of thousands of women, men and children are homeless, without access to food, water and sanitation, or health care. Education for thousands of school age children has been disrupted. Many of the sick, including those with HIV and AIDS, no longer have access to care of any kind.

The United Nations Special envoy noted that “the humanitarian consequences of Operation Murambastvina are enormous” and that it was “*carried out in an indiscriminate and unjustified manner, with indifference to human suffering*”. It will take several years before the people and society as a whole can recover. In the same report she notes that a virtual state of emergency exists in Zimbabwe. Further the report asserts that any humanitarian response should contribute to the long term recovery and reconstruction efforts of the government and its people.

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Extraordinary and Temporary Conditions in Zimbabwe

There is clear and undeniable evidence that “extraordinary and temporary conditions” exist in Zimbabwe that prevent Zimbabweans living in the United States from returning safely.

President George Bush used these very words in an executive order: “actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Zimbabwe and other” constitute an *“unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States and I hereby declare a national emergency to deal with that threat.”* The Bush administration clearly sees the situation in Zimbabwe as one that requires tangible action. The granting of TPS enables the United States government to go beyond economic sanctions in supporting the democratic movement in Zimbabwe.

With the mounting international pressure from the United Nations, the United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union – the United States has an opportunity to empower Zimbabweans in the United States to be another voice for democracy in Zimbabwe. These voices in concert can ensure the crisis is temporary, and protection for these voices can be guaranteed through the granting of TPS for Zimbabwe.

Precedence for Granting TPS for Zimbabwe

Placing a temporary halt to all deportations of Zimbabwean is in line with the history of United States policy towards Zimbabwe. It embodies a practical action reflecting the current administration’s outspoken critical stance on Zimbabwe. Also importantly, such an action would align the United States with its allies of the United Kingdom, the European Union and Canada who have all responded to the outcries of the Zimbabwean and international community in freezing deportations of Zimbabweans from their countries.

The Zimbabwean Community in the United States

Over the past ten years a number of middle class Zimbabweans have migrated to the United States of America. But TPS does more than protect these nationals now living in the United States. It lays the foundation for the redevelopment of the affected country. Supporting the growth of democracy in Zimbabwe and the restoration of law and order requires the international community to take a strong stance against the deprivation and violation of human rights in Zimbabwe. The first step is to ensure that Zimbabwean nationals living outside the country are able to lead the global movement that seeks to hold the Zimbabwean government accountable for its actions. Zimbabweans need protection in this country in order to effectively lead the movement in support of change in Zimbabwe, without fear of detainment or deportation. TPS will provide such protection on a temporary basis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT US AT: +1 (877)-375-5778 / getinvolved@zimbabweans.org