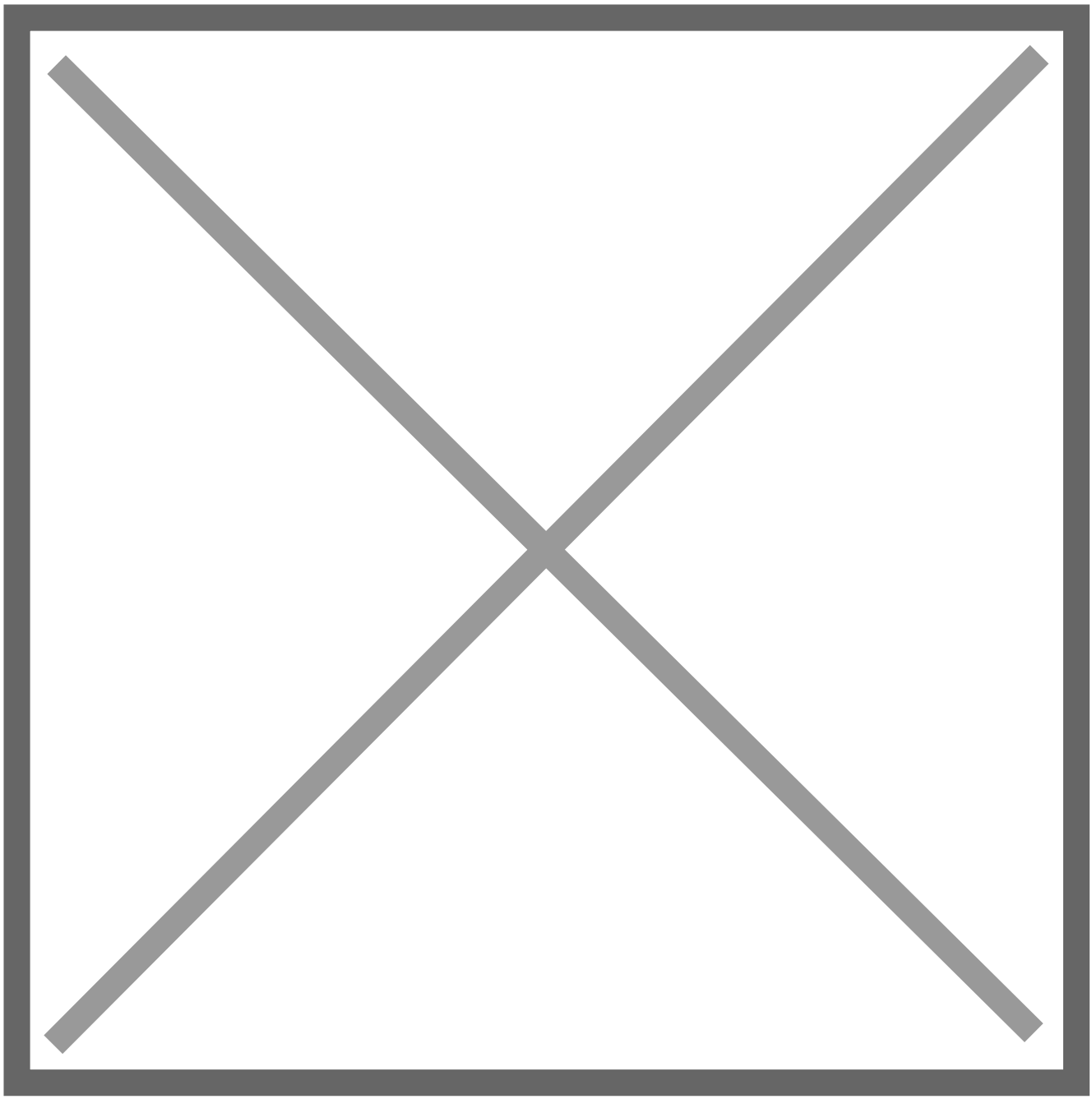
News



A woman wearing a protective mask walks past damaged cars in San Salvador, El Salvador, May 31, 2020, after Tropical Storm Amanda swept through the area. (CNS/Reuters/Jose Cabezas)



by Catholic News Service

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Two U.S. bishops' committee chairmen and the head of Catholics Relief Services asked the Biden administration Feb. 10 to grant Temporary Protected Status for 18 months to people from Central America in the United States and to provide aid to their hurricane-ravaged countries.

In November, Category 4 hurricanes Eta and Iota "devastated communities" in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, the three Catholic leaders said. "In addition to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to populations in need, the U.S. has a moral responsibility to provide foreign nationals from these countries currently present in the U.S. temporary humanitarian protection," known as TPS.

The remarks came in a joint letter from Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration; Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, chairman of the bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace; and Sean Callahan, president and CEO of CRS, the U.S. bishops' overseas relief and development agency.

The letter was addressed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas.

"Undoubtedly, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are facing the aftermath of an environmental disaster. Therefore, we strongly urge [the Biden administration] to designate TPS for these countries for a period of 18 months," wrote Dorsonville, Malloy and Callahan.

"Current conditions prevent foreign nationals from returning safely and managing their return would only add to existing challenges," they said. "This is compounded with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which further strains limited resources on the

ground and imposes an added layer of complication for return."

Under U.S. law, TPS is a temporary and renewable immigration protection that allows individuals to remain and work lawfully in the U.S. during a period in which it is deemed unsafe for them to return to their home country due to certain conditions, including environmental disaster.

"As Americans, we know such a response to be supported by the values, laws and ideals that this country holds dear; and as Christians, we are called in a special way to make this plea," they said. "We therefore join with people of faith all across the U.S. in praying for a swift recovery from these devastating storms and a humane response to those impacted by them."

Both storms brought heavy winds and rain across Central America, causing landslides and flooding as well as severe damage to roads, homes and other infrastructure. The United Nations estimates that over 9 million people have been affected by the storm.

"Over 300,000 people in both official and unofficial emergency shelters in Guatemala and Honduras and hundreds of thousands of other individuals isolated from any humanitarian assistance," the Catholic leaders told Blinken and Mayorkas. "While immediate efforts to respond to life-saving needs are underway, long-term recovery efforts will be required."

The damage and economic losses in Nicaragua alone are expected to exceed $700 million, they said. Throughout the region, thousands of homes were destroyed and many people are without potable water. In addition, tens of thousands of acres of crops were destroyed.

Their letter noted that CRS and its local Catholic partners "are providing humanitarian aid in the form of food, hygiene products, and basic elements for shelter" and are committed to helping people restore their houses and their livelihoods. "However, these efforts will take time," they said.

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