



AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION
LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

July 2, 2026

Re: Immigration Actions Recommended in Response to Recent Earthquakes in Venezuela

Dear Secretary Mullin and Secretary Rubio:

On behalf of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), and its more than 18,000 attorneys and law professors who practice and teach immigration law, we write to urge the Administration to take immediate immigration-related actions to protect Venezuelan nationals affected by the devastating earthquakes that have recently struck Venezuela.

On June 24, 2026, two earthquakes of magnitude [7.2 and 7.5](#) struck Venezuela within seconds of each other. These twin strikes triggered widespread structural collapse and infrastructure failure, prompting a declaration of national emergency. In the following days, [aftershocks](#) have severely impacted rescue efforts. The human toll has been severe. Confirmed deaths have now risen to nearly [2,300](#) people, with thousands more injured and [tens of thousands](#) displaced or unaccounted for individuals. The massive destruction, layered atop Venezuela's already fragile public infrastructure and humanitarian baseline, further exacerbates the country's already dire humanitarian conditions. In response to this massive natural disaster, the President and your agencies have [moved swiftly](#) to pledge and provide assistance and to coordinate with local authorities and international partners. Given Venezuela's ongoing [political and economic](#) instability, it is also imperative that the United States take meaningful steps to ensure that Venezuelan nationals, both those currently in the United States and people seeking safety, are not forced to return to life-threatening conditions and receive access to humanitarian protections where appropriate.

AILA urges the Administration to implement the following measures, which are aligned with historically humanitarian goals of the United States:

Designate Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Extend Deferred Enforced Departure for Venezuelans Currently in the United States

The devastation caused by the June 24 earthquakes satisfies the statutory predicate for a TPS designation under INA § 244. Last year, former Secretary Noem [terminated](#) TPS designations for Venezuela; however, the dramatic decline in conditions in Venezuela merits a new designation. We urge DHS to act on that authority promptly. A designation would enable eligible Venezuelan nationals to temporarily remain in the United States and authorize them to work, providing stability for individuals who cannot safely return

while conditions on the ground remain acute, allowing them to contribute to their communities while conditions in their home country remain unsafe.

In addition to TPS, we recommend that the Administration consider Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) as a complementary or interim measure to ensure protection from removal for Venezuelan nationals already present in the United States.

Issue Special Student Relief

For Venezuelan students in the United States, DHS should issue a Federal Register notice granting Special Student Relief (SSR) to provide flexibility to Venezuelan students in maintaining F-1 status, including authorization for expanded employment and reduced course loads where necessary.

Implement a Temporary Moratorium on Removals

For the duration of the emergency, AILA urges DHS and ICE to implement a moratorium on removals to Venezuela. This would signal the government's understanding that returning individuals to an earthquake-affected region is not a sensible approach to their safety and well-being and that no legitimate enforcement interest outweighs the risk of return to an active disaster zone. This is particularly important given the tragic [deaths](#) of recent deportees that were returned by the U.S. on the day of the earthquake.

Provide Flexibilities in Immigration Processing

We further encourage DHS and DOS to provide broad procedural flexibilities for Venezuelan nationals, including:

- Extensions and accommodations for filing deadlines;
- Expedited adjudication of humanitarian-based requests, including parole;
- Expedited processing of nonimmigrant and immigrant visas of Venezuelan nationals, including at U.S. consulates in other countries;
- Flexibility for individuals unable to obtain documentation due to disrupted government services; and
- Leveraging flexible processes such as waiver of interviews, virtual interviews, or remote processing of travel documents to eliminate the need to travel to the embassy in person.

The United States has long demonstrated leadership in responding to humanitarian crises, and these circumstances call for that same commitment now. AILA and its members stand ready to assist the Administration in implementing these measures and ensuring that affected individuals have access to appropriate legal protections. Should you have any questions, please contact Shev Dalal-Dheini at sdalal-dheini@aila.org or Greg Chen at gchen@aila.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Joseph
President

Ben Johnson
Executive Director

CC:

Joe Edlow, Director of USCIS

David J. Venturella, Senior Official Performing the Duties of ICE Director

Rodney S. Scott, Commissioner of CBP