

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to commend you on your early actions to address the climate change crisis and to urge you to discuss climate change migration during the 2021 Summit on Climate. We strongly believe the Summit presents a unique opportunity to begin a conversation on how countries can best work together to create international standards to address the growing needs of climate displaced persons around the world.

As you know, climate change is the defining crisis of our time. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned in its 2018 special report that the world only has twelve years to limit the worst impacts of climate change. This is why we applaud your decision to rejoin the Paris climate agreement on your first day in office and to issue Executive Orders on tackling the climate crisis and addressing climate change migration. We agree that a comprehensive and whole of government approach to climate change and migration is necessary and an important first step to tackle this crisis.

At the same time, we encourage you to take robust action to address the plights of some of the most affected by climate change: climate displaced persons. Every day, thousands of people are forcibly displaced from their homes and forced to migrate across and within borders. In 2020, our neighbors in Central America and southern Mexico had an estimated three million people affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota. In 2017 and 2019, Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Dorian devastated islands across the Caribbean. Central America and the Caribbean are regions that are highly vulnerable to extreme weather events, where many countries consistently rank high in global climate risk indices. In addition to ongoing violence, poverty, and corruption, it has been reported that many migrants reaching the United States-Mexico border have been forced to leave their homes due to severe weather events. Many of these have led to livelihood loss and deep food insecurity from prolonged drought, generated in part by slow onset climate effects in Central America's agricultural Dry Corridor region.

A recent study of Honduras migration to the United States revealed a link between drought in the Dry Corridor and increased migration to the United States, which leads to higher rates of violence

as well. Among findings, the researchers concluded that a family may leave their land due to climate change impacts but leave their country because safe places for internal migration are lacking. Thus, policies must account for the intertwined nature of climate change and violence. Beyond Central America and the Caribbean, climate-related displacement risks are felt worldwide. While the United States may not receive migrants from all these regions, climate change risks and fragility will lead to increased U.S. assistance towards peacekeeping and foreign assistance programs across the globe.

Protecting the environmental and land rights activists who are working to defend their communities from the impact of environmentally damaging development projects and climate change needs to be a central part of U.S. climate change strategy. Environmental and land rights activists are threatened, driven into exile, and killed in many parts of the world, including Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and the Philippines. Urging governments and businesses to respect the rights and perspectives of environmental activists, as well as, demanding investigations and prosecutions of the intellectual and material authors of crimes against them is essential. The U.S. government should also ensure our own aid and lending programs and multilateral bank lending have provisions to ensure free, prior, and informed consent on development projects and nonretaliation safeguards for community leaders and other environmental stakeholders.

Migration from extreme weather-affected communities will only grow as climate change worsens and our country must assess its readiness of rising to this challenge. The World Bank estimates that three regions — Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia — will generate 143 million more climate migrants by 2050. As recent hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean showed, it is the most vulnerable, poorest, and most oppressed communities, such as women, children, Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations that are affected the most by climate change and climate migration. Many lose their right and access to basic resources such as water and food, and their livelihoods, which are dependent on subsistence farming or agriculture. Geographic climate risk, socio-economic factors, historical marginalization and fragility, create compounding pressures that increasingly force migrants to seek protection in other countries. Our response must address how climate change exacerbates lack of opportunity and inequality. In disaster response, we must go beyond traditional assistance by prioritizing local hires and organizations and engaging in job creation. We must help uplift communities by providing them with the right tools to rebuilt for climate resiliency.

Our ask is simple. Currently, the world does not have an agreed upon definition of ‘climate refugees.’ As a result, climate displaced persons are often stuck in legal limbo because they are not protected under international refugee law. This needs to change, and we believe the 2021 Climate Summit is the perfect occasion to work with world leaders to create international standards and legal pathways to address climate migration.

Climate change will continue to present serious challenges that our nation and the global community must face head on. While we applaud your early actions to address climate change, we strongly encourage you to advance the conversation on climate induced migration and to pursue bold international policies to address the urgent needs of climate displaced persons around the world.

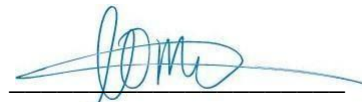
Sincerely,



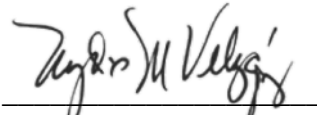
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



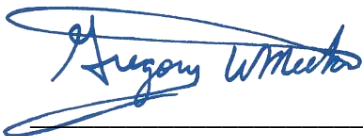
Norma Torres
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



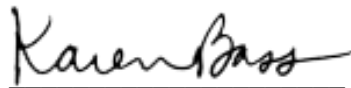
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Gregory Meeks
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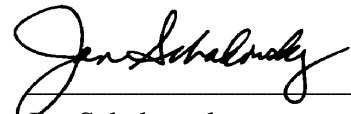
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



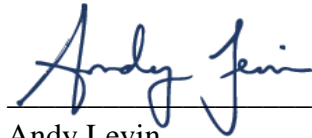
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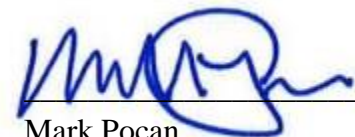
Grace Napolitano
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Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



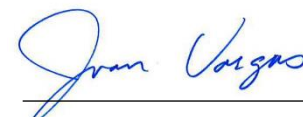
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