



Caribbean Research Center

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FACT SHEET ON MONTSERRAT

H.R. 603 ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS FOR MONTSERRATIANS WITH TPS & TERMINATION OF TPS EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 27, 2005

The small island of Montserrat has been undergoing **volcanic activity** from 1995 to the present time – its 10th year. These volcanic activities have resulted in the destruction of property, infrastructure, loss of life and virtually little economic activity. About *2/3 of the 40 square mile* island was **rendered uninhabitable** by the **continuous activities** which are confined to the central, southern and eastern portions of the island. Plymouth, the capital of the island was the place where all businesses, including the hospital, government headquarters, the port, etc were located. The airport in the east was totally destroyed. *In fact the volcano chose the most lucrative spots on the island, hence, to put it mildly it raped Montserrat of its economic existence.*

The population of Montserrat before the volcanic activity was about 12,000 inhabitants. Eight thousand [8,000] have had to flee to several regions of the world due to the volcano and the limited habitable space and economic inactivity. Presently there are about 292 persons in the United States of America who were granted Temporary Protected Status [TPS] beginning August 27, 1997, renewable on an annual basis.

Sadly, in a Notice dated July 6, 2004, from Mr Tom Ridge, Secretary of Homeland Security, he terminated the TPS program for Montserratians effective February 27, 2005. He stated that after that date, Montserratians on TPS who could not adjust their status will be subjected to deportation. Mr Ridge in his Notice cited the Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary definition of the word temporary: ... "THE PLAIN MEANING OF "TEMPORARY" IS LASTING FOR A TIME ONLY; EXISTING OR CONTINUING FOR A LIMITED TIME; NOT PERMANENT." ... IN MAKING THE DETERMINATION, THE SECRETARY OF THE DHS CONSIDERED COUNTRY CONDITION INFORMATION PROVIDED BY DOS AND THE BCIS RESOURCE INFORMATION CENTER (RIC).

... Although the conditions in Montserrat continue to warrant concern, the Secretary has determined that the volcanic eruptions can no longer be considered "temporary in nature". Scientist say that eruptions of the type that have occurred at Soufriere Hills generally last 20 years, but the volcano could continue to erupt sporadically for decades, RIC Report (May 2004). ... IN ADDITION TO THE PROSPECT OF VOLCANIC DESTRUCTION, RETURNING RESIDENTS POSSIBLY WOULD BE SUBJECT TO CONTRACTING THE LUNG DISEASE SILICOSIS AND OTHER HEALTH RISKS CAUSED BY ASH THAT PERIODICALLY COVERS MUCH OF THE ISLAND.

... Based upon this review, the Secretary of DHS, after consultation with appropriate government agencies, finds that Montserrat no longer continues to meet the conditions for designation under the TPS program. BECAUSE THE VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS ARE UNLIKELY TO CEASE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THEY CAN NO LONGER BE

CONSIDERED “TEMPORARY” AS REQUIRED BY CONGRESS WHEN IT ENACTED THE TPS STATUTE. THEREFORE, THE SECRETARY OF DHS IS TERMINATING THE TPS DESIGNATION FOR MONTSERRAT EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 27, 2005. ... These persons are urged to use the time before termination of the TPS to prepare for and arrange for their departure from the US.

[Ref : <http://uscis.gov/graphics/publicaffairs/questsans/MontserratQATPS>]

To force these persons to leave the US now after so many years here would have a disastrous effect on their livelihood, economically and psychologically. Indeed this would be a real tragedy. The first devastation experienced by these folks was the volcano, an Act of God, followed by them having to flee their homeland and try to eke a living elsewhere. *Montserradians have suffered tremendously, both economically and emotionally.* They have now settled socially, economically, educationally and otherwise in the USA. Some are raising their families, some of whom are in schools and colleges pursuing the American Dream. These folks have been successful at their jobs and educationally, some are homeowners, all of which they have achieved by dint of hard work and industriousness, since they were not entitled to any monetary or other assistance from the United States Government. America gave them the opportunity to pursue their hopes and dreams of a future and better life. To force them to leave now will only add to the trauma that they experienced before settling here in the USA and will cause them unnecessary stress, hardships and uncertainty about their future livelihood.

Needless to say, we find the decision inhumane, cruel, unwarranted and lacks compassion for human dignity. The only option that these Montserradians may pursue to enable them to stay in the USA is that they be granted permanent residence immediately. There is a Bill in Congress to do just that, that is to adjust their status - Bill HR 603 introduced into the House by Congressman Major Owens of the 11th Congressional District, Brooklyn, New York on February 5, 2003, languishing in the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims since that time. **THE ONLY HUMANE ACT NOW WOULD BE FOR THE BILL TO BE IMMEDIATELY PASSED INTO LAW WHICH WOULD ALLEVIATE ALL THIS TURMOIL AND AVOID THEIR UNNECESSARY EXIT/DEPORTATION FROM THE USA.**

We urgently appeal to Congress, the Senators, the President and all Legislative officials to use your good office, your compassion for human dignity and your pledge to uphold the rights of people regardless of color, race or creed by supporting this appeal for the IMMEDIATE successful passage of Bill HR 603. In addition we urge you to please contact Mr Tom Ridge, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security requesting that he rescinds his decision to terminate TPS for Montserradians.

We appeal to all citizens of the United States to support the Montserradians by contacting your Representatives and urge them to support the successful passage of Bill HR 603 as a matter of urgency and priority. The Bill is also supported by major unions such as the Professional Staff Congress (PSC)/CUNY, New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

For further information please contact Vera E Weekes, Assistant Director and Outreach Coordinator at Medgar Evers College, Caribbean Research Center, telephone (718) 270 6082/6083, fax (178) 270 6916, cell phone (917) 549 6635.

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