

United States Senate

June 08, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen:

We write to encourage the administration to amplify its response to Nicaragua's deteriorating democracy under the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo due to their increasingly violation of human rights and the brutal treatment of political dissidents and candidates. We ask that the U.S. Departments of State and of the Treasury utilize the authority granted by Congress through the Nicaraguan Human Rights and Anticorruption (NICA) Act of 2018 and the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform (RENACER) Act of 2021 to punish the Ortega-Murillo regime diplomatically and economically.

In April 2018, Nicaraguans peacefully took to the streets to protest the lack of democracy and rule of law under the rule of the Ortega-Murillo regime. Since then, this autocratic duo has responded with a systematic and violent crackdown that killed, wounded, or forced into exile hundreds of Nicaraguans. The Ortega-Murillo regime extends control over most, if not all, levers of power and, as such, imprisons political opponents with impunity domestically, regionally, and internationally. In June 2021, the Nicaraguan regime arrested every single opposition leader that declared their intention to oppose Daniel Ortega in Presidential elections, to include Juan Sebastian Chamorro and Felix Maradiaga. Their families, who live here in the United States, have had little communication with them while they are in prison at the infamous El Chipote prison, but have reason to believe that Felix's, Juan's, and other jailed dissidents' conditions are very rapidly deteriorating.

The U.S. Department of State has taken action to implement visa restrictions to more than 150 individuals who have enabled the regime in its assault on democracy, including National Assembly members, judges, prosecutors, election officials, officers of political parties, and some of their family members. More visa restrictions must be implemented on others in President Ortega's network to prevent them from traveling to the United States, including Yadira Leets, the former daughter-in-law of Daniel Ortega, who was visiting the U.S. just in May.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury already has sanctioned 31 Nicaraguan individuals and 8 entities including the Rosario Murillo, the first couple's children, close advisors to Daniel Ortega, and leaders in the Nicaraguan National Police, the National Assembly, the judiciary, and the ruling Sandinista party. It is time to expand these economic sanctions to Ortega himself and judicial officials responsible for Messrs. Chamorro and Maradiaga's arrest to include Judge Felix

Ernesto Salmeron Moreno, Assistant Prosecutor Heydi Estela Ramirez, Attorney General Ana Julia Guido Ochoa, and the pension fund for the Nicaraguan military, the Instituto de Prevision Social Militar, which is also complicit in the arrest and torture of political dissidents.

The regime's record of undermining democratic structures and norms within their homeland is incompatible with the principles of the Organization of America States and the United Nations. Furthermore, Nicaragua's membership in the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR FTA) should be reconsidered so that Ortega, Murillo, and their network cannot reap the benefits of trade benefits with the United States and the other member states. We urge the administration to enforce all diplomatic tools to deny the Ortega regime access to the U.S. market. We encourage you to take these actions swiftly in order to exert maximum pressure on a near-totalitarian regime that represents the very antithesis of the American spirit, contradicts basic universal and inalienable human rights, and disrupts the other nations of the Western Hemisphere.

Sincerely,

U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA)

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL)

Bill Cassidy, M.D.

M. R.