

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 24, 2018

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We appreciate your continued commitment to implementing the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (“the Global Magnitsky Act”). As violence and unrest continue to escalate in Nicaragua, we ask you to determine whether Nicaraguan nationals **Sonia Castro, Laureano Ortega Murillo, Juan Carlos Ortega Murillo** and **Gustavo Porras** meet the criteria to be held accountable under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.

Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, have doubled down on his intention to remain in power and increased the violent oppression against the Nicaraguan people. Since protests began in mid-April, nearly 400 people have been murdered and over 2,000 people have been injured at the hands of the Nicaraguan Government, the Nicaraguan National Police, or militias controlled by Ortega. On June 5, 2018, many of the undersigned Members of Congress sent you a letter urging immediate action to determine whether Francisco Lopez and Francisco Diaz met the criteria to be sanctioned in accordance with the Global Magnitsky Act, and we appreciate your Administration’s designation of both individuals on July 5, 2018. However, there are additional individuals who must be held responsible for human rights violations and corruption in Nicaragua.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has received extensive information regarding the denial of medical care and obstruction of humanitarian aid to protestors. Recent reports indicate that protestors have been denied needed life-saving medical care in public hospitals, at the direction of **Sonia Castro**, Nicaragua’s Minister of Health. According to *Confidencial*, Alvaro Conrado, a 15-year-old was shot delivering water to student protestors, and denied medical care at *Cruz-Azul*, a hospital owned by the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social (INSS)*. Alvaro was taken to *Hospital Bautista*, where he passed away. His parents believe he would still be alive had he been treated at *Cruz-Azul*.

On July 27, 2018, eight public hospital doctors at *Oscar Danilo Rosales Arguello* said they had been fired after rejecting orders to refuse treatment to wounded protestors.

Some reports state that when medical students from the same hospital were conducting a peaceful sit-in, Castro let in armed mobs and threatened the students. Videos show Castro expelling the students from the hospital to be beaten by the police and the pro-Sandinista youth groups. Additionally, civilians and journalists recount that public ambulances have been used to carry weapons and members of paramilitaries.

Among Ortega’s staunch supporters is **Laureano Ortega Murillo**, his son and possible successor. He has continuously blamed protestors for the violence and unrest, going as far as

calling them terrorists. On his Twitter account, he has made light of the attacks against students and universities and has repeatedly stated, “Even if it hurts you [...] Ortega is staying.” He has also called Nicaraguan news outlet *La Prensa* a “traitorous pamphlet.” In addition to his ongoing criticism of independent media, Laureano Ortega Murillo only allowed pro-government media to be in attendance during his meetings with Wang Jing, the Chinese billionaire and President of HKND, the corporation behind the widely corrupt and failed project to develop the proposed inter-oceanic canal in Nicaragua.

Laureano Ortega Murillo’s lavish lifestyle belies his claims of working pro bono. On May 21, 2017, *La Prensa* published an article about a party thrown by the Latin American Biotechnology Institute, *Mechnikov S.A.*, a cooperation formed by the Russian and Nicaraguan governments with \$24.5 million in funds from *INSS* and the Russian government. This party, thrown in honor of Laureano Ortega Murillo, cost over \$50,000. When asked why they chose Laureano, staff explained that the Director of *Mechnikov S.A.* had a personal relationship with Laureano after spending time together in Russia. This month, the Ortega-controlled National Assembly passed a budget reform that will benefit several organizations tied to the Ortega-Murillo family. One benefactor is PRONicaragua, the country’s official investment promotion agency led by Laureano Ortega Murillo. According to *La Prensa*, in addition to being the representative of the government’s financial investments, Laureano Ortega Murillo has used public funds for his personal benefit.

Similarly, another one of Ortega’s sons, **Juan Carlos Ortega Murillo**, has been scrutinized for his expedient rise to power and consolidation of ownership over the majority of Nicaragua’s media and severely limiting the existence of independent media. In 2010, when *Canal 8* was struggling financially, the Ortega Murillo family purchased the channel with money allegedly donated to Nicaragua from Venezuela. According to reports from *La Prensa*, Juan Carlos took control as director of the channel as well as other channels and radio stations, all of which serve to disseminate the party line of the government and promote a false image of stability and peace in Nicaragua. According to investigative journalists, the entire media budget of Nicaragua is centralized in its media outlets, and subsidized by the Nicaraguan people.

This is hardly the first time that Juan Carlos Ortega Murillo has misused government funds for his personal benefits. In 2015, he reportedly spent around \$400,000 to convince filmmakers to make the failed movie “Drunk Wedding” in Nicaragua. These funds allegedly paid for seventy plane tickets, rooms at a resort, and other perks. Film producers also agreed to find a job for the aspiring Juan Carlos in the production. This is another clear example of the Ortega Murillo family’s disregard for the suffering of the Nicaraguan people and continued exploitation of the country’s resources for their own benefit.

Finally, we would like to bring to your attention another of Ortega’s devotees, President of the National Assembly **Gustavo Porras**. Porras served as the private doctor for the Ortega Murillo family and has held many government positions. According to reports, Porras helped set up Ortega’s cabinet, including the selection of the president of the *INSS*, which has been running on a deficit due to corruption and mismanagement. Porras has also mobilized the *Frente Nacional de los Trabajadores*, which he controls, to a pro-government march on Mother’s Day to counter the peaceful march in support of the mothers of the victims from the earlier protests. Protesters

encountered violence from “the repressive police and shock forces,” leaving 15 dead and nearly 200 injured in the cities of Managua, Estelí and Masaya. Porras has also set up a sham commission to investigate the deaths of protesters. Human rights organizations have expressed concerns over this commission’s obvious inability to conduct a credible investigation as Porras is known as a steadfast apologist of the Ortega government.

As the people of Nicaragua continue to face unspeakable abuses, the U.S. must continue to support their fight for freedom, democracy and human rights by holding human rights abusers and corrupt officials accountable through all available and lawful means. Additional Global Magnitsky designations would send a powerful message to the Nicaraguan people that the U.S. stands with them as they demand democracy and basic rights. It also demonstrates that we oppose Ortega’s continued tyranny, and that we remain firmly committed to protecting U.S. interests in ensuring regional security and preventing another regional and humanitarian migration crisis.

Therefore, we ask that you consider directing the Department of State and the Department of the Treasury, working with other relevant Executive Branch agencies, to promptly investigate Sonia Castro, Laureano Ortega Murillo, Juan Carlos Ortega Murillo, and Gustavo Porras and, if merited, impose sanctions against them as authorized under the Global Magnitsky Act. We believe Global Magnitsky sanctions complement critical democracy and government efforts and play an important role in U.S. policy toward Nicaragua and stand ready to work with you to support the robust implementation of this important U.S. foreign policy tool.

Sincerely,



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN  
Chairman Emeritus  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



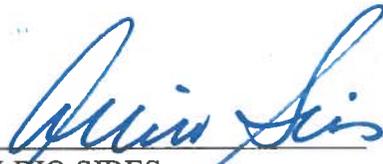
MARCO RUBIO  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,  
Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy,  
Human Rights and Global Women’s Issues  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations



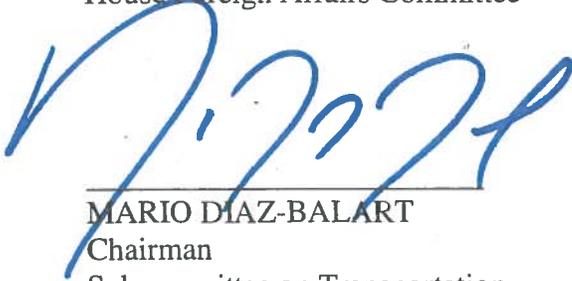
BILL NELSON  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science and Transportation



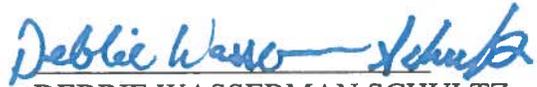
COL. PAUL COOK, RET.  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Western  
Hemisphere  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



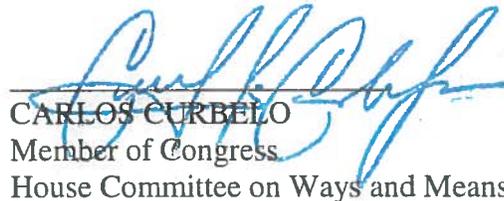
ALBIO SIRES  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on the Western  
Hemisphere  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



MARIO DIAZ-BALART  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Housing and Urban Development  
House Committee on Appropriations



DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Military  
Construction, Veterans Affairs  
and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations



CARLOS CURBELO  
Member of Congress  
House Committee on Ways and Means



ROBIN L. KELLY  
Member of Congress  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



ANN WAGNER  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
House Financial Services Committee



K. MICHAEL CONAWAY  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture



STEVE CHABOT  
Member of Congress  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



TED BUDD  
Member of Congress  
House Financial Services Committee

CC: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary, U.S. Department of State  
The Honorable Steven Mnuchin, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury