

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 14, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

The situation in Nicaragua is deteriorating at an alarming rate, and requires continued action from the Biden administration. The Ortega regime is carrying out a widespread crackdown aimed at demolishing hopes for free and fair elections in November and consolidating a third dictatorship in the Americas. This authoritarian power grab poses direct challenges to U.S. national security, regional stability, and raises deep concern among Nicaraguan-Americans in the United States. The situation must be met with a coordinated response from the international community.

Last week, the Ortega regime has indiscriminately jailed leaders of the political opposition, business sector, and civil society at an accelerating pace. The regime arbitrarily jailed presidential candidates Arturo Cruz, Félix Maradiaga, and Juan Sebastián Chamorro and placed candidate Cristiana Chamorro under house arrest on spurious charges. Using language recycled from the 1980s to justify a growing campaign of repression, the Ortega regime is systematically silencing the democratic voices that are critical of its authoritarian actions. Opposition, civil society, and private sectors leaders must be released immediately.

In 2018, the U.S. Congress approved the Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act, which provided the executive branch with the authority and responsibility to impose targeted sanctions on Nicaraguan officials that are undermining democracy in that country. The Biden administration's announcement of new targeted sanctions against Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo's daughter and three of the regime's financial and political operators mark an important response, but additional steps are needed.

In March, we introduced the bipartisan Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform (RENACER) Act, which lays out clear steps for U.S. policy—and provides a road map for actions that the Biden administration can take today to address the Ortega regime's crackdown. First, we need to align U.S. diplomacy and our targeted sanctions to hold accountable the regime officials that have dismantled prospects for democratic elections in Nicaragua. This approach must be coordinated with our closest partners in Canada and the European Union; our sanctions are most effective when aligned with actions by our allies.

Second, the United States must strengthen its approach to dealing with the corruption and kleptocracy perpetrated by members of the Ortega regime's inner circle and their enablers—

including the president's and vice-president's family. The State Department has tools to ensure that individuals facilitating the regime's financial malfeasance are no longer welcome in the United States. Finally, we must expand aggressive oversight of multilateral lending to Nicaragua to make certain that the Ortega regime and its enablers do not benefit from multilateral lending, while safeguarding support for the humanitarian needs of the Nicaraguan people.

As the countries of the Americas prepare to recognize the twentieth anniversary of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in September, we must expand U.S. efforts to address the fraying of democratic consensus in our hemisphere. Utilizing the principles outlined in Articles 20 and 21 of the Charter, I urge you to work with the Organization of American States and Secretary General Luis Almagro to send a clear signal that OAS member states reject the Ortega regime's assault on democracy and call for the immediate release of opposition, civil society, and private sector leaders in Nicaragua.

Thank you for attention to this urgent matter and for using all available diplomatic tools to send a strong message of U.S. support for democracy in our hemisphere.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman



Marco Rubio
United States Senator