



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing  
on  
The Ortega Regime and the Human Cost: Political Prisoners

July 21, 2021- 2:00 p.m.  
Virtual, via WebEx

Statement of Rafael A. Estrada  
President  
Free and Fair Foundation  
Nicaraguans for Security and Prosperity

Mr. Chairman Smith, Mr. Chairman McGovern and all the members of this honorable commission.

My name is Rafael Estrada and I am honored to speak to your committee today. I am a Nicaraguan American, who fled Nicaragua 42 years ago due to its fall to communism. My family came to the United States seeking shelter and freedom. I am the founder of Nicaraguans for Security and Prosperity and I currently serve as the foundation's president.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you our concerns regarding the gross human rights violations in Nicaragua. It is essential and necessary to hold these hearings and for you to continue to provide a venue for our voices to stand against oppression, corruption and tyranny for those who don't have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Thank you.



The sociopolitical situation in Nicaragua continues to decay. The economy has plummeted, the judicial system has been politicized in an unprecedented manner, and transgressions by the national police occur daily. The current state of society in Nicaragua continues to get worse for its citizens as democracy slides further from reach, and the roots of corruption and tyranny continue to take hold, threatening future generations.

Our foundation has reached out to Nicaraguan refugees in several countries, including Spain, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama, as well as some who reside in the United States. Through this platform, we have provided much needed aid to those Nicaraguans who were persecuted and were forced to leave their homeland, and we continue to do as much as we can with little resources amid a very challenging time in history.

We have assisted independent journalists, and continue to assist those who were political exiles in Costa Rica, to come to this great nation, the United States. However, we cannot do this alone, and we cannot do this without the assistance of friends and allies such as yourselves. We specifically need your help in putting pressure on the current government to release all political prisoners, fight the brutality and corruption of the Ortega regime, and rightfully return democracy to the majority of Nicaraguans who yearn for freedom, support democratic values and who want to install a credible and effective leadership, that represents and works for, the good of all Nicaraguans through free and fair elections.

At this time, I would like to take this opportunity to mention the name of an American veteran who was killed in October of 2018. He was shot to death while in custody in the “Modelo” jail in Nicaragua. His name was Eddy Montes, a U.S. citizen and a veteran of the United States Navy. Regrettably, to this day, no one has been held accountable for his death, and I am afraid little will be done.

The situation in Nicaragua is reaching a flashpoint, which is more than likely to lead to more violence and destabilization in the country. The constant persecution of political opponents and independent journalists is unprecedented. Some of the political prisoners who have been released have now been captured again and imprisoned without any form of due process, such as the case of Jaime Enrique



Navarrete Blandon and Jose Santos Sanchez Rodriguez. They were both released from prison and given house arrest. Regrettably they were both later captured again and jailed, where they were tortured.

If a peaceful resolution to the current crisis is to be achieved, it must be done through honest negotiations, which must be based on the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, not just political figures, or former business associates of President Ortega. All prisoners must be released. Those prisoners who come from humble means and were motivated by the pursuit of justice, and not the pursuit of power, must also be released.

I truly hope that Nicaragua will once again be a peaceful and just member of the international community, a place where peace and justice reign for all citizens. A stable and democratic Nicaragua is important to the stability of the region and also to the United States. A stable and democratic Nicaragua will minimize the necessity for its citizens to flee their homeland and immigrate to other nations, including the United States. However, this can only happen if free and fair elections are held; elections that truly reflect the will of the Nicaraguan citizens. These elections must be predicated on the transparency of the process by which they are held. The engagement of national and international observers, such as the UN, OAS, IRI, NDI and the Carter Center, is imperative in order to guarantee a peaceful and democratic Nicaragua and a peaceful transition of government.

As the leader of the free world, the United States has an elemental role in finding a resolution to the crisis in Nicaragua. However, the Ortega government is betting on the current U.S. administration to be complacent with the current situation in Nicaragua. We are confident that President Biden's administration will prove this theory of complacency to be wrong.

The critical situation in Nicaragua is not a product exclusively created by the Ortega government, perhaps more accurately, the Ortega government is a product of the persistent corruption in the political class. Previous administrations, not just president Ortega's administration, have changed election laws and tailored them to limit the participation of other citizens and to benefit their political allies. Though it is a blatant reality that there are gross human rights violations under this



government, unless there is a sincere cultural change in the political theater, this pattern will continue to repeat itself again and again. However, it is unquestionable that President Ortega is fully responsible for his actions that have resulted in the current crisis in Nicaragua.

Mr. Chairman and Members of this committee, I urge you to continue your efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the chaotic situation in Nicaragua. Hearings such as this one, are essential in this process. We also urge the Committee, Congress, and the Biden Administration to apply all pressures available to them, in order to persuade President Ortega to reconsider this path of violence, and show good faith to the international community, and most importantly, to his fellow citizens and release all political prisoners. This includes those citizens who were exercising their constitutional right to participate in the political arena, such as: Mr. Arturo Cruz, Medardo Mairena, Juan Sebastian Chamorro, Felix Maradiaga, Miguel Mora, and all the other citizens who are held captive without justice.

Respectfully,

Rafael A. Estrada M.B.A.  
President  
Free and Fair  
Nicaraguan for Security and Prosperity