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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0925

May 21, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

I write to express my profound concern regarding human rights abuses and danger posed to the Nicaraguan people by the Ortega regime's appalling lack of transparency. For this reason, I respectfully request, within all applicable rules and regulations, that you consider increasing efforts to promote democracy and human rights within Nicaragua, while working with independent human rights groups to gather accurate information.

Tragically, the spread of COVID-19 through Central America may be exacerbating what had been an already dire situation in Nicaragua. Several human rights organizations have expressed alarm at increases in human rights abuses perpetrated by the Ortega regime during the pandemic. By some human rights groups' estimates, there have been nearly 100 potentially politically motivated arrests between March 27, 2020 and May 4, 2020. Furthermore, reports indicate that imprisoned activists suffer from poor prison conditions including overcrowding and lack of basic hygiene and medical care. Human rights groups have documented cases of torture and other maltreatment in Nicaraguan prisons, and have reported that human rights activists showing symptoms of COVID-19 do not receive tests or other medical care.

Additionally, international organizations have doubted the Ortega regime's apparent obscuring of accurate data in regard to the rate of COVID-19 infection throughout Nicaragua, which has posed a new threat to Nicaraguans who fail to tout the regime's propaganda. As Amnesty International noted in its May 19, 2020 report on COVID-19 in the Americas, "Workers in Nicaragua are at particular risk because the government has repeatedly understated the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has criticized the regime's reprisals, including dismissals, against healthcare workers who have demanded personal protective equipment or criticized the regime. Meanwhile, press reports have documented a relatively new practice of "express burials" in Nicaragua, where those who die of respiratory infections are buried immediately after death, often without family present and some even interred in their hospital gowns. Recently, the Ortega regime closed two of its border crossings with Costa Rica after, on May 8, 2020, Costa Rica began testing truckers crossing

through its borders. As a result of Costa Rica's border tests, sixty-one truckers have tested positive, casting further doubt on Nicaragua's reported COVID-19 cases.

While the world combats the deadly pandemic, we have witnessed the dangers posed by brutal dictatorships that lack transparency and attempt to silence those who dare to speak the truth. I am gravely concerned for the welfare of the Nicaraguan people, particularly human rights, pro-democracy activists, and medical workers who have spoken out against the Ortega regime. The repression that escalated with the protests that began in April 2018 appears to have worsened under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ortega regime's lack of transparency and attempts to hide the truth are dangerous. For these reasons, I respectfully request that you consider coordinating with our allies and international organizations to raise awareness of the human rights abuses in Nicaragua, and that you increase efforts to hear from independent sources in the country that may convey reliable information on increased repression during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and lines, positioned above the printed name.

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress