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CHAIRMAN  
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SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP



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July 26, 2021

President Daniel Ortega Saavedra  
Republic of Nicaragua  
Managua, Nicaragua

Mr. President,

I write as a Member of the United States Congress who has long followed developments in Nicaragua. I feel compelled to express my deep and utter dismay at the deterioration of the human rights situation in the country, evidenced most recently by the detention and imprisonment of at least 26 leading public figures. I call on you to free all political prisoners and act immediately to restore Nicaraguan democracy in keeping with the ideals of social justice and popular self-determination that inspired the 1979 revolution.

I remember the horrors of the corrupt and repressive Somoza dictatorship, and the disastrous record of poverty and inequality it left in its wake. Like many, I was profoundly moved by the bravery and determination of the Nicaraguan people in their struggle to chart a new course, a struggle you helped lead. I opposed the efforts of my own government to undermine the Sandinista victory during the Contra War. During those years the Sandinista movement attracted many international allies who shared the commitments to ending repression and pursuing democracy, justice and equality for all Nicaragua's people. Those commitments gave the movement its moral authority.

Today that moral authority lies not with you but with the campesinos and students who peacefully took to the streets in April 2018, only to be met with brutal force at every turn. More than 300 died and more than 100 remain jailed – the numbers before the most recent crackdown. Young people who some 45 years ago might have joined the Sandinista ranks instead are wasting away in your government's prisons – repeating the experience you lived through until you were freed by fellow guerrillas, including Hugo Torres who you have just imprisoned. With your turn to authoritarianism over the last decade and a half, the international community no longer sees you as representing the ideals you once fought for. Now we stand in solidarity with those you are repressing.

Mr. President, if you continue on your current path, your legacy may well be to join Somoza in the history books as a despised despot. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to

free all political prisoners and rescind the new electoral law, the Law for the Regulation of Foreign Agents, the Special Law against Cybercrime, the Law against Hate Crimes, the Law on the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty and Self-Determination for Peace, and the Law amending the Code of Criminal Procedure. All of these laws are deliberately drawn and enforced to restrict political participation and the freedoms of assembly and expression, and to deny due process and access to justice. As such they purposefully fail to advance the rule of law or good governance. Finally, it is essential that you ensure that conditions for the upcoming elections in November meet international standards and that you resume cooperation with international human rights bodies.

The autocratic effort to perpetuate your family in power will eventually fail, just as Somoza's did. The only question is how much more sacrifice will be demanded of the Nicaraguan people in the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James P. McGovern". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent "J" and "M".

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

