

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2022

The Honorable Rashad Hussain
U.S. Ambassador At Large
Office of International Religious Freedom
U.S. State Department
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Hussain,

We write to express profound concerns regarding the alarming escalation of suppression of religious freedom in Nicaragua and to request, within all applicable rules and regulations, information on what the Office of International Religious Freedom is doing to counter religious persecution in Nicaragua.

Human rights groups and press reports show that there has been an escalation of suppression of religious freedom in Nicaragua. For example, in March, the Ortega regime expelled the Apostolic Nuncio from Nicaragua, a measure that the Vatican condemned as an “unjustified unilateral measure.” In July, Missionaries of Charity, an organization founded by Mother Theresa that had been working in Nicaragua since 1988, was stripped of its legal status and all eighteen nuns of the order were forced to leave the country. These nuns ran a nursery, a center for abused girls, and a nursing home.

Additionally, Bishop Rolando Álvarez was arrested on August 19, 2022, and has since been placed on house arrest. Eight of his associates were imprisoned and remain in prison despite none of them having been convicted. At least seven other priests have been arrested since June of this year. Priest Uriel Vallejos, who managed a Catholic radio station, was forced into hiding when state security surrounded his home and raided the radio station. His station was among the approximately ten radio stations or television channels shut down by the Ortega regime this year. The regime has continued its crackdown against clergymen and religious freedom by curtailing church-led demonstrations, prohibiting priests from administering mass, and conducting surveillance outside churches and clergy residences.

Religious organizations, such as the Catholic Church, had been one of the last places where Nicaraguans could practice their faith and enjoy a small measure of religious expression. However, the authoritarian Ortega dictatorship has revealed that it will not tolerate even this most fundamental right, and will continue to suppress religious belief and practice for the Nicaraguan people. These escalating and disturbing attacks on the fundamental right of the Nicaraguan people to practice their faith and express their religious beliefs must end. For these reasons, we would appreciate information on the actions of the Office of International Religious Freedom to support religious freedom for the people of Nicaragua.

Thank you for your attention to this matter of utmost importance.

Sincerely,



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress