

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

March 14, 2024

The Honorable Joe Biden
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you today with deep concern regarding repeated violations of religious freedom in Nicaragua. These oppressive actions targeting religious groups, especially those associated with the Catholic Church, were demonstrated again by the recent actions taken by regime leader President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, against Mountain Gateway, a U.S.-based Christian organization which has maintained a missionary presence in Latin America for more than a decade. While your administration has employed some targeted sanctions, there is much more that must be done to hold the Ortega-Murillo regime accountable for these disturbing violations of religious freedom and decades of abuse and corruption. These actions are the latest chilling representation of the oppression of human rights in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela under their evil regimes, and a call to action for the United States to show strength in defense of human rights, democracy and freedom in our Hemisphere.

In December 2023, the Ortega-Murillo regime arrested 13 pastors and members associated with Mountain Gateway, which held multiple evangelistic events all around the country. The Mountain Gateway members and pastors were targeted despite having the approval, support and assistance of the Nicaraguan government. The regime also issued arrest warrants for three American citizens associated with the organization, preventing them from returning to the communities they have served for years. The unjust imprisonment of these religious leaders further confirms the Ortega-Murillo regime's corruption and coordination with the regimes in Venezuela and Cuba in an oppressive campaign of destabilization in the Western Hemisphere.

We have seen an exponential increase in human rights abuses in Nicaragua, focused on eliminating any opposition since the pro-democracy protests in 2018. In a move taken from the playbook of dangerous regimes in Cuba and Venezuela, the Ortega-Murillo regime has repressed all dissent by way of jailing, murdering and even exiling many political prisoner opposition leaders to the United States. The regime's efforts to dismantle civil society institutions have resulted in the shuttering of more

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than 3,500 NGOs in Nicaragua, including the Nicaraguan Red Cross. The Ortega-Murillo regime has also seized the assets of Mountain Gateway and these other institutions.

A recent report by the United Nations (UN) Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) concluded that widespread human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity are being committed against civilians by Nicaragua's Government for political reasons.¹ In presenting the report, UN GHREN Chair Jan Simon stated, "President Ortega, Vice-President Murillo and the high-level State officials identified in the investigation should be held accountable by the international community, as should Nicaragua as a State that goes after its own people, targeting university students, Indigenous people, people of African descent, *campesinos*, and members of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations."²

The persecution by the Ortega-Murillo regime on the Catholic Church began in 2018 and has only escalated, as they have expelled several Catholic and Christian missions and charities.³ Mountain Gateway is the latest victim of the regime's religious tyranny, and I urge you to use additional targeted sanctions and all available authorities to hold this repressive regime accountable. This administration must stand strong against the thugs who are oppressing the people of Nicaragua, as well as Venezuela and Cuba, and we must stand with the Nicaraguan people and pressure the Ortega-Murillo regime until religious freedom and human rights is restored, democracy upheld and the release of all political prisoners is secured.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator



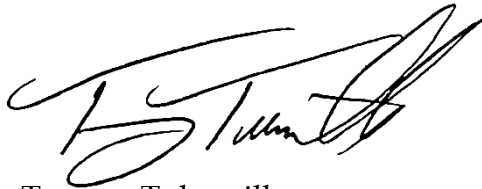
Ted Cruz
United States Senator

¹ [A/HRC/55/27 \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/docs/A_HRC_55_27.pdf)

² [Nicaragua's grim reality: Investigation by UN experts reveals crimes against humanity targeting civilians, including children and students, for political ends - Nicaragua | ReliefWeb](https://www.reliefweb.int/report/nicaragua/nicaragua-grim-reality-investigation-by-un-experts-reveals-crimes-against-humanity-targeting-civilians-including-children-and-students-for-political-ends-nicaragua)

³ [World Report 2024: Nicaragua | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/nicaragua)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Tuberville', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Katie Boyd Britt', written in a cursive style.

Katie Boyd Britt
United States Senator

Cc:
The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary, U.S. Department of State
The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury