

February 10, 2023

The Honorable President Joe Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Re: Extend and Redesignate Nicaragua for Temporary Protected Status

Dear President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Secretary Mayorkas:

The Florida Immigrant Coalition and the undersigned 271 immigration, human rights, faith-based, and civil rights organizations write to request that your Administration redesignate Nicaragua for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in light of Nicaragua's deteriorating social, political, and human rights crises. The consolidation of judicial, electoral, and presidential power under the Ortega-Murillo regime, and the brutal repression of any perceived dissenters makes any type of democratic governance impossible. The structural and economic impacts of Category 4 Hurricanes Eta and Iota are still felt to this current moment, and an increasingly contracting economy is cause for concern.

As President Biden stated back in September 2022, "What's on my watch now is Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, and the ability to send them [immigrants] back to those states is not rational."¹ In October, when Secretary Blinken met with human rights leaders from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, he stated " And the United States stands in strong solidarity with all of those who are seeking to uphold their basic rights – the rights that are enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and rights unfortunately that continue to be denied by those governments or regimes."² Since 2019, the Organization of American States (OAS) has decried the situation in Nicaragua, passing a resolution that denounced the government noting "the Government's arbitrary arrests and detentions, imprisonment of political figures, forced closure of civil society organizations and universities, seizure of municipal offices, repression of journalists and raids on media organizations, and intimidation of community leaders, including women social leaders, resulting in a climate of oppression and fear."³

¹ C-SPAN, 2022, SEPTEMBER 20, 2022 | CLIP OF PRESIDENT BIDEN REMARKS ON THE DISCLOSE ACT President Biden Says Sending Migrants Back to Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua "Is Not Rational"

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5031859/president-biden-sending-migrants-back-cuba-venezuela-nicaragua-is-ratio>
[nal](#)

² Honorable Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, Chief of Mission Residence, Lima Peru
<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-before-the-meeting-with-cuban-venezuelan-and-nicaraguan-human-rights-defenders/>

³ United States Mission to Organization of American States, OASGA Resolution on Nicaragua, 2022,
<https://usoas.usmission.gov/oasga-resolution-on-nicaragua/>

Since his rise to power in 2007, Daniel Ortega has stripped away any vestiges of democracy. His determination to create an authoritarian government is apparent in the manipulations of the Nicaraguan constitution, allowing his wife, Rosario Murillo, to run as his Vice-President. As the OAS reports, all branches of governance are aligned with the Ortega-Murillo regime.⁴

In April 2018, the masses rose against the Ortega-Murillo regime and were violently repressed.⁵ The lack of confidence in the Nicaraguan government, overnight changes to the social security system that affected the elderly, and lack of response to the 2018 Indio Maiz fire ignited the people.

The Indio Maiz Biological Preserve is a natural treasure in Nicaragua, and home to endangered species like the great green macaw. It was vested to nine Indigenous Rama and Afro-descendant Kriol communities. The Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities were abandoned by the government and forced to depend on rain to quell the fire; over 5,500 hectares of land was burned. As NACLA, who has been reporting on Latin America since 1967 notes “The Ortega administration represents a spectrum of approaches to Indigenous and Afro-descendant issues, from outright racism and dismissal on one extreme to cooptation on the other.”⁶

Once the fire burned out, Indigenous and Afro-descendants had suffered the brunt of the catastrophe. Students rose up in protest at the handling of the Indio Maiz fire and the changes to the social security system. The youth, along with the elderly, found themselves at the mercy of a tyrant.⁷

Apart from the murders of civilians, political opponents were targeted. The youth and elderly were primary victims of paramilitary groups, and even those who did not participate in the protests but were perceived to be dissenters faced fake terrorism charges in the courts.⁸ Civilians reported being under state surveillance, women were raped while in police custody, men were sodomized, and more.⁹

The judicial branch is aligned with the executive branch, and thus the kangaroo courts have sentenced political opponents to jail under false terrorism charges. The civil unrest led to contractions of the economy, and poverty has risen between 2-5%. In 2021, sham elections were held. As this administration noted “the arbitrary imprisonment of nearly 40 opposition figures since May, including seven potential presidential candidates, and the blocking of political parties from participation rigged the outcome well before election day. They shuttered independent media, locked up journalists and members of the private sector, and bullied civil society organizations into closing their doors.”¹⁰ In November 2022, The Sandinista National Liberation Front successfully took over all political arms. There was no democracy because the Ortega-Murillo regime jailed or made any other opposing political party illegitimate.¹¹ The extraordinarily cruel conditions that political prisoners are kept in played a huge part in the Inter-American Human Rights Court finding Nicaragua in contempt of their

⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Commission, Nicaragua: Concentration of Power and the Undermining of the Rule of Law 2021, https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2021_Nicaragua-EN.pdf

⁵ United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nicaragua/>

⁶ Josh Mayer, 2018, Behind the Fire that Propelled Nicaragua’s Uprising, <https://nacla.org/news/2018/12/12/behind-fire-propelled-nicaragua%E2%80%99s-uprising>
⁷https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/the-people-lost-their-fear-how-nicaraguas-new-revolution-to-ok-shape/2018/04/26/5e48b40c-48e8-11e8-8082-105a446d19b8_story.html

⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-08-11/nicaragua-ortega-exiled-journalists>

⁹ Associated Press, 2020, Nicaraguans testify of abuses in crackdown on protests <https://apnews.com/article/costa-rica-managua-pandemics-daniel-ortega-virus-outbreak-d04542a8f25ede99e282effa779b5cb1>

¹⁰ Statement by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on Nicaragua’s Sham Elections, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/07/statement-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-on-nicaraguas-sham-elections/>

¹¹ Associated Press, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/08/nicaragua-sandinistas-ortega-repression-00065603>

rulings.¹²

Apart from everyday citizens, the Ortega-Murillo regime began targeting the religious sector.¹³ A prime example is that of Monsignor Silvio Baez, who was recalled by Pope Francis to the Vatican, for Monsignor Baez's own protection.¹⁴ The regime has corralled the Catholic community by imprisoning priests, shutting down Catholic radio stations, and banning pilgrimages. Many priests are under house arrest. This has led Pope Francis to consider conversations with the Regime in order to keep his community safe.¹⁵ The outcry of Bishops of the treatment of Catholic leaders ranges from Brazil to Guatemala, Costa Rica, and other Latin American countries.

When Hurricanes Eta and Iota ravaged Nicaragua, it left the country with over \$740 million in economic losses.¹⁶ The destruction of infrastructure, still felt to this day. 232,000 individuals were displaced because of the storm.¹⁷

Over 200,000 Nicaraguans have been displaced, many fleeing to Costa Rica and other neighboring countries. According to Axios, the number of Nicaraguans applying for asylum in Mexico has increased by 300%.¹⁸

When Nicaragua was originally designated TPS in 1999, Hurricane Mitch had devastated the region. The environmental disaster was enough for the Department of State and Justice, and Attorney General to designate these protections for Nicaraguans. The extraordinary combination of socio-political circumstance and environmental disaster of the Indio Maiz fire and Hurricanes Eta and Iota make it so that it is not safe for nationals to return to Nicaragua. In response to these catastrophic events, we ask the Administration urgently consider the following actions:

Redesignate TPS for Nicaragua

Given the extraordinary human rights crises as described herein and by reports by the OAS, the United Nations, and other agencies that present temporary conditions that make a safe return to Nicaragua impossible, the Administration should redesignate TPS for Nicaragua. This will allow protection against removal and eligibility for work authorization to all eligible Nicaraguans currently in the United States. Since 2018, over 250,000 Nicaraguans have fled the country seeking stability and

¹² Inter-American Human Rights Court says Nicaragua in contempt,
<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/inter-american-human-rights-court-nicaragua-contempt-94172106>

¹³ Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega goes after the Catholic Church in his latest effort to stop criticism of the government, 2022,
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/nicaraguan-president-daniel-ortega-goes-catholic-church-latest-effort-rcna44618>

¹⁴ Nicaraguan bishop, a vocal Ortega critic, says he was target of assassination plot
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nicaragua-bishop/nicaraguan-bishop-a-vocal-ortega-critic-says-he-was-target-of-assassination-plot-idUSKCN1RM314>

¹⁵ Pope: Vatican seeks talks on Nicaragua's Catholic crackdown,
<https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-religion-nicaragua-mother-teresa-government-and-politics-f3d6d772d505ae06e0efd44fe4c8f100>

¹⁶ Reuters,
<https://www.reuters.com/article/storms-centralamerica/hurricanes-eta-iota-hit-nicaragua-with-743-million-in-economic-losses-idUSKBN28509M>

¹⁷ International Federation of the Red Cross,
<https://www.ifrc.org/press-release/communities-affected-hurricanes-eta-and-iota-are-threatened-food-insecurity>

¹⁸ Marina Franco, More Nicaraguans facing political upheaval at home flee to U.S.
<https://www.axios.com/2022/03/31/nicaragua-migrants-flee-political-upheaval-exile>

refuge.

We request that the Biden administration redesignate Nicaragua for TPS and provide a minimum 180-day registration period for new beneficiaries under redesignations.

Swift release of the Federal Register Notice and timely adjudication of TPS applications

We urge for a swift publication of a Federal Register Notice (FRN) extending TPS for Nicaraguans.

The delays in publishing the FRN have grave consequences for beneficiaries and their families since their TPS-related documents are only valid for a limited duration through certain expiration dates. Further, any delay in processing and approving TPS applications after the issuance of the FRN leaves thousands at risk of deportation and without authorization to work. These delays, which can last more than the period for which TPS is granted, can make the TPS designations meaningless.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering these urgent requests to protect Nicaraguan individuals, thousands of whom are contributing to U.S. society. We strongly urge the Biden administration to redesignate Nicaragua for TPS, (2) swiftly release the Federal Register Notice, and (3) provide a minimum 180-day registration period for both new beneficiaries under redesignation. We look forward to working with you on this issue over the coming days and weeks.

32BJ SEIU

Access Living / Cambiando Vidas

ACER, Inc.

Advokato

African Communities Together

Al Otro Lado

Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice

Alabama Latino AIDS Coalition

Aldea - The People's Justice Center

Alianza Americas

Alianza Cívica por la Justicia y Democracia de
Nicaragua

Alliance San Diego

America's Voice

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)

Americans for Immigrant Justice

AMEXCAN, Inc.

Arab American Association of New York

Arkansas United

Armadillos Ni un Migrante Menos

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asociación de Guatemaltecos Sin Fronteras

Association of Mexicans in North Carolina, Inc.
(AMEXCAN)

Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)

Ayuda

AZUL Y BLANCO FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS

Bilbao Law

BLAC

Mesa de Trabajo NY-NJ Nicaraguan Diaspora

Border Workers United

Bridges Faith Initiative

Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC, Inc.
CARECEN
Casa Mary Johanna
Casa Yurumein
Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Catholic Charities of SW Kansas
Catholic Labor Network
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Catholic Legal Services, Archdiocese of Miami
Center for Immigrant ProgresS
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Popular Democracy
Central American Black Organization
Central American Resource Center
Central American Resource Center of Northern CA
-CARECEN SF
Central American Resource Center-Los Angeles
Central Washington Justice For Our Neighbors
Centro Comunitario CEUS
Centro Presente
Centro Romero
Chacon Center for Immigrant Justice at Maryland
Carey Law
Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN)
CHIP: Community Hotline for Incarcerate People
Church Council of Greater Seattle
Church Women United in New York State
Church World Service
Churches United For Fair Housing
CIELO- Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo
(CIELO)
CISAS
Ciudadanía en Oregon
Climate Refugees
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Colectivo de Desarrollo Transnacional de Michoacán

Colectivo de Mujeres Transnacionales

Colorado Jobs with Justice

Commission on Justice for Immigrants, Refugees,
Indigenous Peoples, Immaculate Heart Community

Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and
Socialism

Communities Organizing Latinx Power and Action
-COPAL Minnesota

Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good
Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Texas

Council of Holistic Christian Churches and Ministries
(C.H.C.C.M.)

CRECEN Houston

Diáspora Hondureña Internacional

DIFO LAW FIRM PLLC

Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel

Disciples Peace Fellowship

Dominican Development Center

Dominican Sisters of Sparkill

Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House, Washington DC

DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving

Durango Unido

Elmahaba Center

Essex County Community Organization

Faith in New Jersey

Familias Unidas en Acción

Families for Freedom

Fellowship Southwest

Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project

Florida Poor People's Campaign

Franciscan Action Network

Franciscans for Justice

Franciscans for Justice

FRENTE UNIDO NICARAGÜENSE POR LA
DEMOCRACIA-FUND

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense FDN.

Gainesville Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice

HAITIAN BRIDGE ALLIANCE

Heartland Workers Center

Hermandad por Nicaragua de RI

Hispanic Federation

Hondurans Against AIDS

Hope Border Institute

HOPE CC

Houston America For All

Human Rights First

HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE OF NORTH TEXAS

IAJE

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Illinois Venezuelan Alliance

Illinois Workers Action

Immigrant Action Alliance

Immigrant Defenders Law Center

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

Immigration Hub

Iniciativa por el Cambio

InReach

Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio

International Human Rights Clinic, Boston University
School of Law

International Institute of New England

International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)

InterReligious Task Force on Central America
Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice
Jewish Voice for Peace, Atlanta chapter
Just Neighbors
Justice Action Center
Justice for Our Neighbors El Paso
Justice For Our Neighbors North Central Texas
Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Khmer Maine
Kino Border Initiative
La Raza Community Resource Center
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Latinas en Poder
Latino Commission on AIDS
Latino Pastoral Action Center, Inc.
Latino Policy Forum
Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
Legal Aid Justice Center
Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates
Lila LGBTQ, Inc.
Living Hope Wheelchair Association
Long Island Immigration Clinic/Sisters of St. Joseph
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Miami Workers Center
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance
Migrant Center for Human Rights
Mission Graduates
Mission Guatemala USA
Motivation Motivates
Movimiento Campesino de Nicaragua
Mundo Maya Foundation

NAHRA, the Nicaraguan American Human Rights Alliance

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Jewish Women

National Domestic Workers Alliance

National Employment Law Project

National Immigration Law Center

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

National Partnership for New Americans

National TPS Alliance

NE Iowa Peace and Justice Center

Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

New York Justice for Our Neighbors, Inc.

Nicaragua Nueva Generación

Nicaragüenses en el Exilio

Nicaragüenses en el mundo

Nicaragüenses en el Mundo Texas

Nicas en Boston

Nicas in Wisconsin

Northeast Ohio Friends of Immigrants

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center

Oasis Legal Services

Oficina de defensa de derechos de la mujer CIFEM
Nicaragua

Opening Doors International Services, Inc.

Organización de Víctimas de Abril

Path With Heart

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pennsylvania Immigration & Citizenship Coalition
(PICC)

Proyecto Santo Nino de Atocha

Pulso

RCMA - Redlands Christian Migrant Association

Red de Pueblos Transnacionales

Red Mexicana de Lideres y Organizaciones de
Migrantes
Refugee Congress
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Rural Women's Health Project, Inc.
Salvadoran Association of Los Angeles (ASOSAL)
Seattle Immigrant Rights Action Group
Seeds of Resistance
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network
(SIREN)
Sisters of Charity Federation
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province
Leadership
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia,
PA
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia
Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God
Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa
Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA
Social Justice Coalition, Central Lutheran Church
Society of the Flora, Fauna & Friend
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network (SEIRN)
St. James Cathedral Immigrant Assistance
STRANGERS NO LONGER (Michigan)
Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice
Telpochacalli Community Education Project
Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition
The Farmworker Association of Florida
The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
TRUE ALLIANCE CENTER INC
TRUE ALLIANCE CENTER INC/ GBNCC

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
(USCRI)

U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph

UndocuBlack Network

Unidad Juvenil y Estudiantil

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

United for a Fair Economy

United We Dream

UUFHCT

Venezuelan American Caucus

Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid, Inc. (VIA)

Wallingford Indivisible

Ware

Wayne Action for Racial Equality

WeCount!

WESPAC Foundation, Inc.

WHEATON FRANCISCANS JPIC Office

White and blue support for Nicaragua

Wilco Justice Alliance (Williamson County, TX)

William E. Morris Institute for Justice

WIN! The Welcome Immigrant Network

Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

Witness at the Border

Women Working Together U.S.A

Women's Alliance For Theology, Ethics, and Ritual
(WATER)

Yemeni American Merchants Association

Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice

Immigrant Defenders Law Center

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Human Rights Campaign
Director of National Policy
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational
Leadership
Community Change Action
FIRM Action
Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
Washington Defender Association
Nicaraguans in Wisconsin
Abuenica, Inc.
Unión Nicaragüense Autoconvocada
Comite TPS Massachusetts
Family Action Network Movement