

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2023

His Excellency
President Nayib Bukele
Casa Presidencial
San Salvador, El Salvador

Dear President Bukele:

We write to respectfully request your government use its voice and vote at the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) to increase the transparency and scrutiny of the bank's lending to the Government of Nicaragua. Given the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Ortega-Murillo regime, we urge your country to leverage its leadership as a founding member of CABEI to ensure that the bank's lending does not perpetuate the consolidation of Nicaragua's dictatorship.

Since its inception, CABEI has helped strengthen Central American economic competitiveness and integration, and advance projects aimed at reducing poverty and supporting environmental sustainability. Despite its track record of supporting economic development across Central America, in recent years, CABEI has also approved nearly \$3.5 billion in funding for initiatives to be implemented under the auspices of the Ortega-Murillo regime.¹ Such funding provides a lifeline to the Ortega-Murillo regime at a time of growing global condemnation of human rights violations in Nicaragua.

On March 2, a United Nations investigative team concluded that the Ortega-Murillo regime was committing widespread abuses against the Nicaraguan people that amounted to crimes against humanity.² Moreover, in describing the atrocities occurring in Nicaragua, one UN investigator equated Daniel Ortega's systematic campaign of extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and political persecution to crimes committed by the Nazi regime in Germany.³ On March 10, Pope Francis similarly likened the brutality of the Ortega-Murillo regime to that of Hitler's dictatorship.⁴ These shocking characterizations of the situation in Nicaragua underscore the urgency of ending a 'business as usual' approach with the Ortega-Murillo regime.

In recent years, the United States has taken steps to increase the scrutiny of and curtail funding from multilateral institutions that would directly benefit the Ortega-Murillo regime. Under the

¹ United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, "Nicaragua: Crimes Against Humanity Being Committed Against Civilians for Political Reasons, Investigation Says," March 2, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/nicaragua-crimes-against-humanity-being-committed-against-civilians>.

² United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, "Nicaragua: Crimes Against Humanity Being Committed Against Civilians for Political Reasons, Investigation Says," March 2, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/nicaragua-crimes-against-humanity-being-committed-against-civilians>.

³ Frances Robles, "Nicaragua's 'Nazis': Stunned Investigators Cite Hitler's Germany," *New York Times*, March 2, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/02/world/americas/nicaragua-human-rights-nazi-germany-un.html>.

⁴ Courtney Mares, "Pope Francis says imprisonment of Nicaraguan bishop reminds him of Hitler's dictatorship," *Catholic News Agency*, March 10, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253835/pope-francis-says-imprisonment-of-nicaraguan-bishop-reminds-him-of-hitler-s-dictatorship>.

RENACER Act (*Public Law 117-54*)—which the U.S. Congress approved in November 2021—the U.S. Government has taken steps to ensure that any such multilateral funding only passes through entities with “full technical, administrative, and financial independence from the Government of Nicaragua.”⁵ While the United States has ensured that funding remain available for initiatives that benefit the basic human needs of the Nicaraguan people, this increased scrutiny has ensured that funding does not flow to the Ortega-Murillo regime. We urge your government to pursue similar policies with regard to CABI lending.

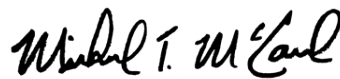
Last month, with the release of 222 political prisoners, there was a fleeting hope that the Ortega regime would permit a political opening that could lead to the eventual restoration of democratic principles and human rights in Nicaragua. However, such aspirations were dispelled by the regime’s cruel decisions to strip over 300 Nicaraguans of their citizenship and sentence Catholic Bishop Rolando Álvarez to a 26-year prison sentence for refusing to leave the country with the other political prisoners.⁶

Until Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo are willing to engage in negotiations that restore democratic governance, respect for human rights, and a timeline for free and fair elections, we urge your government to take steps to increase the transparency and scrutiny of CABI’s lending to the Government of Nicaragua. In the event that Ortega and Murillo are unwilling to permit a political opening, it will be imperative that your government use its voice and vote to suspend funding for their criminal regime. Failing to take such steps to address lending to a government accused by the United Nations of crimes against humanity detracts from CABI’s important development work in your countries and risks undermining the bank’s international standing. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Robert Menéndez
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee

⁵ Congress.gov, “S.1064 - RENACER Act,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1064?s=1&r=5#:~:text=Public%20Law%20No%3A%20117-54%20%2811%2F10%2F2021%29%20Reinforcing%20Nicaragua%27s%20Adherence,address%20corruption%20and%20human%20rights%20abuses%20in%20Nicaragua>.

⁶ PBS, “Catholic bishop’s 26-year prison sentence in Nicaragua draws concern from Pope,” February 12, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/catholic-bishops-26-year-prison-sentence-in-nicaragua-draws-concern-from-pope>.