

Statement of Kevin K. Sullivan
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 22, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua. I am deeply grateful to President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for the support and confidence they have placed in me, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you and other Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States.

With your permission, I would like to begin by thanking my family, including my wife Mariangeles and my daughter Sophie, for their unwavering love and support. Like many Foreign Service family members, they have made enormous sacrifices so that I can continue to serve our country, a privilege for which I will always be grateful. Today I would especially like to salute the personal sacrifices that our Embassy families evacuated from Managua are making in support of our vital mission there.

Mr. Chairman, I have spent much of my 30-year State Department career in the Western Hemisphere. I have worked overseas with dedicated colleagues building strong bilateral relationships with Chile and Argentina, in the latter case as Chargé d'Affaires for 18 months. In positions here in Washington, I have focused on our regional priorities, like promoting inclusive economic growth, and advancing democracy and human rights. In my most recent position as Deputy Permanent Representative of the U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, where I also served as Chargé for over a year and a half, I was proud to work with other member state representatives to pass groundbreaking resolutions in defense of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those in Venezuela and Nicaragua. If confirmed I believe this experience, as well as my familiarity with the region's enduring challenges, would enable me to lead the U.S. Mission in Managua effectively.

I am convinced that strong, mutually beneficial relationships with our Western Hemisphere neighbors are essential to our national security as well as to our future prosperity. As you know, the United States' Strategy for Central America is a multiyear plan focused on promoting prosperity, enhancing security, and improving governance in the region. The plan advances U.S. national security by addressing

the drivers of illegal immigration and illicit trafficking, and also reflects the aspirations and commitments of the regions' governments. Greater regional integration is an essential element for this joint strategy to succeed, and so the current crisis in Nicaragua not only jeopardizes the well-being of Nicaraguans, but also negatively affects the prospects of its Central American neighbors.

Mr. Chairman, we have all witnessed the deeply troubling developments in Nicaragua over recent months, as peaceful protests over changes to pensions quickly transformed into a much broader public repudiation of the Ortega Government. Nation-wide demonstrations were fueled by anger over violent repression that had taken the lives of dozens of demonstrators, as well as by deep resentment over the steady erosion of Nicaragua's democratic institutions.

President Ortega rejected a proposal from the opposition Civic Alliance, put forward by the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference, for electoral reforms and early presidential elections in 2019. At the same time, the government's ongoing violence and intimidation campaign against its own people intensified. Over 300 Nicaraguans have been killed, including many students, hundreds have been detained and remain missing, and tens of thousands have fled the country in the face of this brutal repression. That repression has even included physical and reputational attacks on representatives of the Catholic Church, as well as the arrests of several other prominent civil society leaders involved in the talks. While violent clashes in the streets have diminished in recent weeks, the Ortega government, and armed groups loyal to it, continue to intimidate and arbitrarily detain hundreds of individuals.

Mr. Chairman, since protests and repression began in April, the United States has been outspoken in denouncing the government-instigated violence and intimidation campaign. Vice President Pence said at the Organization of American States on May 7, and Secretary of State Pompeo reiterated on June 6, "We join with nations around the world in demanding that the Ortega government [respond] to the Nicaraguan people's demands for democratic reform and hold accountable those responsible for violence."

Governments throughout the Americas and around the world have added their voices to the chorus calling for an end to the killing in Nicaragua. The Administration will continue working with its diplomatic partners in the region and international organizations, including the OAS, to seek an end to state-sponsored violence and restore Nicaragua's degraded democratic institutions.

The Administration has also taken a number of concrete steps to sanction individuals in Nicaragua involved in serious human rights abuses and large-scale corruption. If confirmed, I will work to expose those responsible for the Nicaraguan government's ongoing violence and intimidation campaign against its people and promote accountability for their misdeeds.

If confirmed, I will urge the Nicaraguan government to cease all government-sponsored violence and intimidation, and release those who have been arbitrarily detained. We applaud the courageous work of the IACHR, the UN Human Rights Commission, and Nicaraguan human rights organizations investigating these tragic events; those responsible for these abuses and violations must be held accountable. I strongly support the leading role of the Catholic Church and its brave efforts to mediate a peaceful resolution. I will ensure the U.S. government maintains regular contact with and support for a wide range of Nicaraguan civil society groups and human rights advocates. I will also convey this Administration's view that every Nicaraguan deserves a government that upholds and protects his or her human rights and fundamental freedoms, and respects the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, the violence and repression of the last several months have transformed Nicaragua's political reality. The people of Nicaragua, and the international community, will not simply forget the systematic human rights abuses perpetrated by government forces and their agents since mid-April. The United States, other members of the international community, and most importantly the people of Nicaragua have expressed their support for dialogue mediated by Church leaders. Sustainable solutions can only be found through early, genuinely free and fair, and transparent elections with international observation, through which the Nicaraguan people can freely decide their nation's destiny.

Despite a decade of economic growth that outperformed the region, Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in Western Hemisphere. The current social unrest has added major uncertainty to what had been a promising economic trajectory. Transformative economic growth to lift Nicaragua out of poverty will require fundamental changes to the country's institutions and better strategic planning. Nicaragua's promising university students are not "terrorists," but rather represent the engine capable of leading their country towards a more prosperous future. They can only do so if they are able to safely and freely develop their talents and dreams in their own country.

If confirmed, I will look for new ways for the United States to support the Nicaraguan people on their road to freedom and prosperity. I will also pursue

cooperation on issues of U.S. national security, such as counter-narcotics, as appropriate, bearing in mind the evolution of the current crisis. And I will ensure, as a matter of the highest priority, the protection of U.S. citizens and Mission personnel in Nicaragua.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, I thank you again for your consideration of my nomination, and I welcome your questions.