

Statement of Hugo Rodriguez
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

TBC

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to Nicaragua.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their trust and confidence in me, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Nicaragua.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to thank my parents, Gail and Hugo Rodriguez Sr., my five brothers and sisters, my teachers and professors, and my State Department colleagues. I have learned from them all the value of hard work, especially in service to others, and the importance of listening deeply, before speaking. I want to thank my daughters, Alison and Annalia, for making our peripatetic life richer and more meaningful, hardly ever complaining about our many moves and long working hours. And most of all, I want to thank my wife, and fellow Foreign Service officer, Karen Rodriguez. This career has been a team effort, and I owe anything I have achieved to Karen's enthusiastic support, her wise counsel, and her enduring willingness to shoulder more than her share of the home burden in addition to her day job. She inspires me every day.

In 1952, my father left the Dominican Republic, fleeing a dictatorship that allowed average Dominicans no space for freedom and no hope of achieving their dreams. Unfortunately, Nicaraguans now face a similar situation since last November's election, when Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo deprived Nicaraguans of any real choice, and Nicaraguans' hopes for democracy and prosperity were dashed. More than 180 political prisoners on unfounded charges, including political opposition figures, human rights defenders, student leaders, journalists, and civil society representatives, remain deprived of their human rights. The Nicaraguan government also closed civic space at an alarming rate, shuttering more than 700 associations, universities, foundations, and other nonprofits in 2022 alone, and more than 800 since 2018. As a result of the escalating climate of repression, fear, and hopelessness, along with the Ortega-Murillo government's failure to address

people's basic needs, hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans are now refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants throughout the region.

The United States has spoken out against these abuses, and, if confirmed, I will continue to do so, not because we have any intention to determine Nicaragua's internal affairs, but because it is our commitment under the Inter-American Charter, which both the United States and Nicaragua signed in 2001. As President Biden has stated, "the Inter-American Democratic Charter obligates the hemisphere to stand up for the democratic rights of the Nicaraguan people." If confirmed, I commit to working with Congress, interagency colleagues, and international partners to press for a return to democracy, respect for human rights, and the freedom of political prisoners in Nicaragua.

While we fundamentally disagree with the actions of the Ortega-Murillo government, the relationship between our two countries goes much deeper than the political leadership. More than 400 thousand people of Nicaraguan descent live in the United States, around 6,000 Americans visit Nicaragua each year, and another 20,000 reside there. The United States has long supported economic development throughout Central America, and prosperous, stable, and democratic Central America is clearly in our interest. That is why, if confirmed, I will engage with voices across Nicaraguan society to share our vision of inclusive economic growth, as stated by the President at the recent Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. We will look to support civil society groups that provide essential services in the areas of healthcare, education, and poverty relief, including organizations the Nicaraguan government has targeted. We will do what we can to offer the Nicaraguan people a better future in their own country. We know that addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement – throughout Central America and including Nicaragua – involves ensuring respect for human rights, generating economic opportunity, and improving citizen security. These improvements require governments to uphold the rule of law, respect human rights, and combat corruption. If confirmed, I will advocate for a change of course so that the Nicaraguan people may work to recover their democracy, provide for their families, and regain hope for their future.

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