U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Crackdown on Religious Freedom in Nicaragua

November 15, 2022
2:00 PM to 3:30 PM ET
Virtual

Opening Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Frederick Davie, USCIRF Commissioner

Thank you very much, Chair Turkel.

I would like to join in welcoming everyone to today's hearing and add my thanks

to our witnesses for taking the time to be here today.

Several important areas of interest we would like to discuss today include an

explanation of how President Ortega and Vice President Murillo transformed

Nicaragua into a corrupt, illiberal democracy; a detailed summary of current

religious freedom conditions; and the response from the Roman Catholic hierarchy

to the threats their clergy and worshippers are facing. Witnesses will give an

overview of current U.S. strategy in deterring the Ortega dictatorship's persecution of religious communities, such as through targeted sanctions, promoting human rights and religious freedom, and working with allies in the region. We also intend to explore additional options for U.S. policy, considering some of the ways that the U.S. government and international community can better work to protect the religious freedom of all Nicaraguans.

I would like to add that this hearing is particularly timely. Last month, the Biden Administration announced a slate of new sanctions against individuals and entities in Nicaragua "to hold the Ortega-Murillo regime accountable for its escalating human rights violations, continued dismantling of democratic institutions, attacks on civil society, and increasing security cooperation with Russia." These measures put pressure on Nicaragua's gold sector, allow for future trade restrictions, and impose visa restrictions on more than 500 individuals "who work for the Nicaraguan Government or formulate, implement, or benefit from policies or actions that undermine or injure democratic institutions."

Thank you all for being here, and I will now turn the floor back to Chair Turkel.