

**Questions for the Record submitted to
Ambassador Carlos Trujillo by
Representative Paul Cook
House Foreign Affairs Committee
July 20, 2018**

Question:

Early Elections / State of Opposition: There have been calls from Nicaraguans and the Secretary General of the OAS for early elections, but President Ortega has reputed the idea of holding early elections. There are also legitimate concerns about the limited capacity of Nicaraguan institutions and political parties to participate and ensure that elections are free and fair. Does the State Department and USAID have the resources it needs to immediately assist the Nicaraguans in implementing needed reforms if the opportunity presents itself?

Answer:

The State Department and USAID are coordinating closely to respond to local partners' immediate needs during the crisis, and to prepare for an eventual democratic transition when Nicaraguan citizens' calls for early, free, and fair elections succeed. We have called for early, free, and fair elections, and I have actively worked within the Organization of American States (OAS) to hold the Nicaraguan government accountable for its ongoing violence and intimidation campaign. Our message is simple: allow the Nicaraguan people to solve this crisis through democratic means. When early elections are determined, the State Department and USAID will communicate to Congress if additional funding could potentially be identified to address this issue.

Question:

Democracy and Governance Programming: What is the stated objective of all ongoing USAID-funded Nicaragua democracy and governance programs? How does the USG ensure that all programs are coordinated and working towards the same objective?

Answer:

USAID-funded democracy programs are designed to increase Nicaraguan citizens' ability to engage in democratic governance by strengthening the capacity of civil society, human rights defenders, independent media, and youth to promote democracy and transparent and accountable governance. Cross-cutting themes for Nicaragua assistance programs focus on youth, digital security, and human rights.

The State Department and USAID communicate closely to ensure coordination and avoid program duplication. We convene periodic stakeholder meetings with implementing partners to facilitate coordination among implementers and identify potential areas for collaboration. USAID also participates in State Department proposal review panels to avoid program duplication and to ensure impactful support for local civic groups.

Question:

Potential of Increased Transnational Crime: To what extent are you concerned that instability could lead to the increased presence of transnational criminal organizations in Nicaragua who may seek to exploit the lawlessness and violence to their benefit?

Answer:

The continued instability the Ortega/Murillo regime has inflicted upon Nicaragua could lead to a number of negative outcomes, including an increase of transnational criminal organizations operating in the country. This is another reason why free, fair, early elections must take place to resolve the crisis and put Nicaragua on the path to building a stable, prosperous, and democratic future.