



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

March 16, 2023

RECEIVED
By ESEC at 1:58 pm, Mar 16, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Ms. Ur Mendoza Jaddou
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, Maryland 20588

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Jaddou,

I write to you today concerning the group of 222 political prisoners paroled into the United States on February 9, 2023, by the Department of Homeland Security. Many of these individuals have relatives in South Florida and Miami, where I represent. Members of this group span all sectors of civil society, including political opposition members, business figures, student activists, and journalists. Unfortunately, they all share the tragic characteristic of imprisonment and torture by the Nicaraguan regime.

In a letter dated February 16, 2023, the Office of Refugee Resettlement has predetermined the eligibility of these individuals for assistance from ORR-funded Survivors of Torture (SOT) grantees. That same letter acknowledges that these individuals are not currently eligible for the full range of services afforded to refugees and asylees until after their claims for asylum have been approved. Based upon this incredibly unique situation and their well-documented persecution and torture, I am hoping that you would consider expediting this process.

It is my understanding that many in this group fear for the safety of their loved ones remaining in Nicaragua. Should these individuals obtain asylum status, they would be eligible to file a Refugee/Asylee Family petition, affording life-saving protection and the benefits of family unity.

It is my understanding that the Department of Homeland Security has agreed to expedite the processing of applications for employment authorization for this group. I hope you would consider the same expeditious processing for their asylum applications. According to USCIS policy, requests to Expedite Applications or Petitions can be granted based on “emergencies and urgent humanitarian reasons.” This is stated in USCIS Policy Manual: Volume 1, Part A, Chapter 5. Further, the Affirmative Asylum Procedures specifically allows for the expedited processing of asylum applications:

An Asylum Office Director may determine that it is in the best interest of USCIS to process an asylum application more expeditiously than usual because the case contains sensitive issues or there is special interest in the case. Examples include, but are not limited to, applicants who are being placed in witness protection programs, applicants who are providing information of national security concern to other agencies within the Federal Government, and cases in which there is a family member in jeopardy (e.g., spouse or child of an asylum applicant is in danger of harm in the country of claimed persecution). Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual: Section III.B.7.

I believe the torture suffered by these individuals, the “special interest” shown by the Administration in securing their release and committing to assist the group upon arrival, and the tremendous peril faced by their family members more than satisfies these criteria. These cases are compelling and urgent. In many cases, pro bono attorneys have been identified to represent these individuals and will begin filing asylum applications soon. I believe your prompt reply is necessary to provide urgent and necessary care to those who arrived on February 9 and secure family reunification options for their vulnerable loved ones facing persecution in their home country.

I believe your immediate attention is sanctioned by policy, warranted by the compelling circumstances of the cases, and desperately needed by this vulnerable group and their families.

Sincerely,

María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Maria Elvira Salazar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Salazar:

Thank you for your March 16, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding expedited processing for asylum applications by 222 Nicaraguan nationals paroled into the United States on February 9, 2023. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

DHS appreciates the concern for access to Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) funded benefits which are contingent on a grant of asylum, and that, should these individuals obtain asylum, they would be eligible to file a Follow-to-Join Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition for loved ones remaining in Nicaragua.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) grants requests to expedite certain applications and petitions on a case-by-case basis in the event of an emergency or for urgent humanitarian reasons. Because granting an expedite request would place requestors ahead of others who filed earlier, USCIS must consider each request carefully based on the urgency and merit of the specific circumstances.

DHS will give serious consideration to your recommendation to expedite processing of asylum applications filed with USCIS. Please note that individuals may request expedited processing of their asylum filing. Additional guidance is available under "[How to Make an Expedite Request](https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-guidance/how-to-make-an-expedite-request)" on the USCIS website.¹

The Department continues to monitor the situation in Nicaragua and remains committed to promoting family unity. DHS also offers alternative paths for family reunification that eligible individuals may also consider. For example, they may seek urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit parole for individuals outside the United States so they may reunite with family here. Additional information is available under "Humanitarian or Significant Public Benefit Parole for Individuals Outside the United States" on the USCIS website.² In the

¹ <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-guidance/how-to-make-an-expedite-request>

² <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarianpublicbenefitparoleindividualsoutsideUS>

The Honorable Maria Elvira Salazar

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meantime, USCIS has granted fee exemptions and expedited processing of employment authorization documentation applications for these individuals pursuant to their parole facilitated by the U.S. government.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director