



A  
PROJECT  
OF



March 4, 2025

The Honorable Adriano Espaillat  
Chair, Congressional Hispanic Caucus  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2332 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Espaillat:

As Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) and the first Dominican American Member of Congress, your voice carries weight on issues concerning the Dominican Republic. Following up on our previous letter to you dated May 9, 2024, I am reaching out again to respectfully urge you to examine the ample evidence regarding the Dominican government's poor record on protecting basic human rights and the rule of law.

The [Associated Press recently](#) reported that *“Thousands of [inmates] are crammed into the country’s severely overcrowded prisons, some operating at seven times their capacity. A majority languish there without ever having been charged with a crime, and activists warn they face inhuman conditions and a lack of medical care.”*

This most recent report confirms widespread [findings](#) from human rights organizations that the Dominican government continues to violate domestic and international law by perpetuating a preventive detention system that has also ensnared U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents.

The Dominican National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH-DR) and the National Public Defense Office (ONDP) have extensively documented the following:

- [60% of the country’s prison population](#) is being held without charges, trials, or due process—a clear violation of both Dominican law and international human rights standards. Many of these detainees have been imprisoned for years [without ever seeing a courtroom](#).
- [98% of all coercive measures](#) requested by prosecutors in 2024 resulted in preventive detention—meaning that in nearly every case, individuals were jailed before charges were even filed. This mass incarceration policy directly violates the Dominican

Republic's own criminal procedural law, which states that preventive detention should be the exception, not the rule.

- Prison conditions are inhumane, with over [26,000 inmates crammed into facilities designed for just 12,000](#), Firsthand reports confirm that many detainees sleep on urine-soaked floors, suffer from untreated diseases, and endure rampant [physical abuse](#) from prison guards—I strongly encourage you to see it for yourself.
- U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents are among those unlawfully detained, yet the Dominican government refuses to account for them. In 2023, Representative Michael McCaul [wrote](#) to then Secretary Blinken demanding an accounting for U.S. citizens being held in detention. To this day, the Dominican government has not provided transparency on how many Americans are in their prison system.

President Biden's own State Department released a [report](#) confirming widespread human rights violations in the Dominican Republic, including mass expulsions, arbitrary detentions, life-threatening prison conditions, and government corruption. In other words, their government failed to take credible steps to hold human rights abusers accountable.

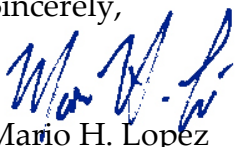
In addition, your colleague Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz has sounded the alarm. In a [letter](#) to Secretary Blinken last year, she directly raised concern about the *"rampant overcrowding, lack of medical care, and other public health crises"* in Dominican prisons—institutions that, as she noted, are *"ostensibly funded by the United States government."*

We appreciate that when similar injustices occur in other countries, the CHC does not hesitate to speak out—and rightfully so. When American citizens and legal permanent residents are detained abroad, Members of Congress tend to act swiftly to ensure their release. We submit that the government of the Dominican Republic should be held to the same standard.

As the Chair of the Caucus, you have spoken about a duty to represent the interests of *all* Latinos. Certainly, this should include those unjustly detained under a system that disregards basic legal protections. We strongly encourage you to leverage your power and influence to demand answers from the Dominican government.

Thank you for your service and your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Mario H. Lopez

Hispanic Leadership Fund / Dominican Justice Initiative