

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

FILED

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

JUL 20 2026

FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT

MOLLY C. DWYER, CLERK
U.S. COURT OF APPEALS

MARIA RITA SOSA; I.A.M.S.,

Petitioners,

v.

TODD BLANCHE, Acting Attorney
General,

Respondent.

No. 25-6030

Agency Nos.
A245-899-263
A245-899-281

MEMORANDUM*

On Petition for Review of an Order of the
Board of Immigration Appeals

Submitted July 15, 2026**

Before: BERZON, NGUYEN, and OWENS, Circuit Judges.

Petitioner Maria Rita Sosa and her daughter I.A.M.S. (together, “Sosa”), natives and citizens of El Salvador, seek review of the Board of Immigration Appeals’ (“BIA”) dismissal of their appeal. Sosa sought asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under the Convention Against Torture (“CAT”) in removal

* This disposition is not appropriate for publication and is not precedent except as provided by Ninth Circuit Rule 36-3.

** The panel unanimously concludes this case is suitable for decision without oral argument. *See* Fed. R. App. P. 34(a)(2).

proceedings. An immigration judge (“IJ”) denied relief. The BIA affirmed the IJ’s decision and dismissed Sosa’s appeal. Sosa challenges the BIA’s dismissal.

The BIA dismissed Sosa’s asylum and withholding claims because Sosa did not meaningfully challenge several of the IJ’s determinations, each independently dispositive of her claims for asylum and withholding relief. The BIA also affirmed the IJ’s denial of Sosa’s CAT claim, stating that the IJ did not err in his conclusion that Sosa failed to establish that torture with the acquiescence of a public official was more likely than not. “Where, as here, the BIA agrees with and incorporates specific findings of the IJ while adding its own reasoning, we review both decisions.” *Bhattarai v. Lynch*, 835 F.3d 1037, 1042 (9th Cir. 2016).

1. The BIA correctly concluded that Sosa did not meaningfully challenge several independently dispositive reasons for the IJ’s denial of asylum and withholding. “Exhaustion requires a non-constitutional legal claim to the court on appeal to have first been raised in the administrative proceedings below” *Bare v. Barr*, 975 F.3d 952, 960 (9th Cir. 2020). Although we “construe liberally claims raised by pro se petitioners,” *Nolasco-Amaya v. Garland*, 14 F.4th 1007, 1013 (9th Cir. 2021), the petition must “put the BIA on notice” of the challenge and provide the agency the “opportunity to pass on th[e] issue,” *Zhang v. Ashcroft*, 388 F.3d 713, 721 (9th Cir. 2004) (per curiam). It is thus insufficient to make “a general challenge to the IJ’s decision,” *Arsdi v. Holder*, 659 F.3d 925, 928–29 (9th Cir.

2011) (citation omitted), or to argue that the IJ “erred in not considering the entirety and totality of [the] testimony,” *Gonzalez-Castillo v. Garland*, 47 F.4th 971, 981 (9th Cir. 2022).

The IJ denied Sosa’s request for asylum after concluding that Sosa had not suffered harm rising to the level of past persecution; that there was no nexus between the harm suffered and a protected ground for asylum; that Sosa could reasonably internally relocate to avoid harm; and that Sosa’s fear of return was not objectively reasonable. The IJ denied withholding of removal on the same grounds.

On appeal to the BIA, Sosa raised several challenges, none of which challenged the IJ’s dispositive holdings. Sosa argued that the IJ erred in finding no cognizable particular social group (a finding the IJ did not make), and in concluding that the government was able and willing to protect her. But Sosa did not challenge the IJ’s conclusions that the level of harm did not meet the standard for past persecution and that there was no nexus linking any persecution to any asserted protected group. Nor did Sosa challenge before the BIA the IJ’s conclusion that her fear of future persecution was not objectively reasonable. As Sosa did not exhaust on issues determinative of the denial of her asylum and withholding claims, we deny the petition as to these claims.

2. The IJ denied Sosa’s CAT claim because Sosa had not demonstrated that future torture was likely to occur with the consent or acquiescence of a government

official. “We review for substantial evidence factual findings underlying the BIA’s determination that a petitioner is not eligible for . . . CAT relief.” *Plancarte Saucedo v. Garland*, 23 F.4th 824, 831 (9th Cir. 2022). The BIA’s denial of CAT relief is supported by substantial evidence. The evidence did not establish that Sosa’s ex-partner was likely to torture her should she return, and Sosa testified that authorities would likely protect her from domestic violence.

Petition DENIED.¹

¹ The motion to stay removal, Dkt. No. 3, is denied as moot, and the temporary stay of removal is dissolved.