

OPEN LETTER TO THE PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE SAO PAULO FORUM

In relation to the meeting of the Forum in Brasilia, from June 29 to July 2, 2023

We, the signatories of this letter, participants of the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship and of an admired revolution, which awakened so much hope in the world; identified with the democratic ideals and social justice achieved by the democratic left, institutions and progressive forces, turn to the parties and organizations of the Sao Paulo Forum to denounce the regime of terror in Nicaragua, which on a daily basis violates all civil liberties, annihilates democracy and justice and subjects the people to worse oppression than that imposed by the previous dictatorship.

Daniel Ortega and what is left of the Sandinista Front present themselves as leftist and anti-imperialist, but, far from that proclaimed discourse, many years ago they began a process of abandoning their principles, through corruption, alliances with the worst right wing forces of the country, strengthening of a neoliberal model that increases the already enormous inequalities and misery of the population, and concentration of political and economic power in his family and close associates.

In April 2018, after riot squads assaulted elderly people protesting against social security reforms, groups of university students took to the streets and university campuses, being repressed with bullets by police, who in three days killed 56 people, crimes verified by human rights organizations that arrived in the country in May, the first ones to do so since Daniel Ortega returned to power in 2007. Protesters mobilized massively, demanding democracy, justice, electoral reforms and the departure from power of Daniel Ortega and his wife Vice President Rosario Murillo; they erected barricades and roadblocks, which were demolished weeks later by police and paramilitary forces in the so-called "Operation Cleanup". The IACHR documented that in these operations, the number of dead increased to 355, there were 2,000 wounded, 770 prisoners who faced judicial proceedings without guarantees and more than 200,000 refugees.

The government's narrative that the whole thing was a "failed coup d'état financed by US imperialism" is countered with forceful reports from international organizations, which documented and denounced the innumerable human rights violations and pointed out crimes against humanity committed by the Nicaraguan authorities, reports recently ratified by the Group of Experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. (See report)

Since then, Nicaragua has been living in a de facto state of siege, without freedom of mobilization, assembly, organization, expression, information or association. All opposition political parties, independent media, more than 4,300 civil organizations defending various rights (feminist, environmental, trade union, sexual diversity, children's, community and centers caring for the elderly and disabled) were closed down. Numerous centers were invaded, turned into government offices and their assets confiscated, including the building of La Prensa, a 96-year-old newspaper that resisted the former dictatorship. They went to the extreme of closing down the Nicaraguan Academy of Language, the Nicaraguan Academy of Sciences and even the Nicaraguan Red Cross.

In 2019, by means of an Amnesty Law (which left unpunished many crimes committed by the State), many political prisoners were released. This generated the expectation that, in 2021, an electoral year, agreements assumed in the 2019 dialogue would be complied with, that they would create an independent Electoral Council and elections would be held with guarantees.

In June 2021, the regime ordered the arrest of all opposition candidates and dozens of political and social leaders, commentators and journalists. To perpetuate himself in power, Ortega used Somocista tactics, eliminating the opposition and carrying out a farce with those who agreed to play along. Thus, in 2021 he proclaimed himself elected for the third consecutive time, claiming 75% of the votes and in 2022, he awarded himself 100% of the mayoralties. Specialized agencies estimated abstention at more than 80%.

In 2022, the police state continued to strengthen itself in the country and the more than 300 political prisoners remained subjected to torture and violation of their elementary rights: held incommunicado, without regular visits, without being able to read, write or engage in any form of distraction. Extreme conditions of isolation were applied to the heroine Dora María Téllez and the feminist Tamara Dávila. Priests and Bishop Rolando Alvarez were also imprisoned. Retired General Hugo Torres, hero of the Sandinista struggle, died as a political prisoner.

No political prisoner yielded to coercion and blackmail. The national and international pressure for the freedom of all was decisive so that on February 9, 2023, Ortega and Murillo released 222 people and sent them to the United States. The same day, in an unconstitutional and neo-fascist manner, they stripped them of their nationality. The following day, after refusing to be exiled, Bishop Alvarez was sentenced to 26 years and locked up in a cell for highly dangerous prisoners.

Six days later, 94 more Nicaraguans were stripped of their nationality and political rights, declared traitors to their country and fugitives from justice, and expropriated of their property and pensions, among them writers such as Sergio Ramírez and Gioconda Belli, journalists such as Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Bishop Silvio Báez, human rights defenders such as Vilma Núñez, ex-commanders such as Luis Carrión and Mónica Baltodano and feminists such as Sofía Montenegro.

The repression against the Catholic Church is insane and highlights the will to eliminate it from Nicaragua. This has resulted in the exile of dozens of priests, including 18 denationalized priests. They confiscated all their property and means of communication, annulled their social support organizations, expelled religious orders and occupied parochial schools. In addition to spying on them, they banned their celebrations and blocked the bank accounts of all the Dioceses.

Five years later, the lying "coup attempt" narrative used by Ortega and Murillo has been distorted. Ortega is the worst of the neoliberal dictators. With his policies and aggressions they try to strengthen themselves in power and inherit it to their children, as the Somozas did. Nothing justifies continuing to suffer their repression.

That is why we ask the parties and organizations that make up the São Paulo Forum to denounce and condemn the regime of terror in Nicaragua, which is incompatible with the principles of a left that claims to be an alternative to the injustices of the world in which we live. You cannot be anti-imperialist by annihilating all civil society and suppressing all freedoms. We only ask that you raise your voice in favor of human rights in Nicaragua and for the remaining 70 political prisoners, and that those in government also do so in the organizations where they have representatives, such as the United Nations, the OAS and ECLAC.

We, the undersigned, are part of the political prisoners who spent almost two years in prison, we are part of those who have been exiled, deprived of our nationality and repressed by the Ortega regime for denouncing its atrocities.

June 15, 2023. From exile we sign:

Sergio Ramírez Mercado	Former Vice President of the Republic- Writer – Denationalized
Gioconda Belli	Poet. Denationalized.
Dora María Téllez	Former Guerrilla Commander. Historian - Former prisoner and denationalized.
Luis Carrión Cruz	Former Commander of the Revolution. Economist – Denationalized
Mónica Baltodano	Former Guerrilla Commander. Social Scientist. Denationalized
Ernesto Medina	Former Rector of UNAN León - Denationalized.
Carlos Fernando Chamorro	Journalist. Director of Confidencial and Denationalized
Sofía Montenegro	Journalist and Feminist – Denationalized
Oscar René Vargas	Writer, Sociologist and Economist - Former Prisoner and Denationalized
Julio C. López Campos	Former Director of RRII FSLN, Political Scientist - Denationalized
Azahalea Solís	Constitutionalist and Feminist Lawyer – Denationalized
Irving Larios	Former Prisoner - Economist – Denationalized
Héctor Mairena	Lawyer - Denationalized
Patricia Orozco:	Journalist and Feminist – Denationalized
Haydeé Castillo:	Social Scientist. Denationalized

¹ 2023 REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN NICARAGUA https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/grhe-nicaragua/A_HRC_52_CRP5_Spanish.pdf