

Urgent Nicaragua: Government Attack on Human Rights Groups, NGOs, Media

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The following statement is from the Articulación de Movimientos Sociales, the coalition of social movements in Nicaragua.

Alert and Request for International Condemnation: Nicaraguan Government Raids the offices of the principal human rights, non-governmental and media organizations.

URGENT COMUNIQUE December 14, 2018. 2PM (CST) Alert and Request for International Condemnation: Nicaraguan Government Raids the offices of the principal human rights, non-governmental and media organizations.

Acting as virtual armed bandits and stealing anything valuable insight, Nicaraguan police this morning raided the office of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), the country's most emblematic human rights organization, along with the offices of seven other civil society organizations: Popol Na, the Segovias Leadership Institute (ILS), Fundación del Rio, the Communication Research Center (CINCO), the Institute for the Promotion of Democracy (IPADE), the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP) and the Center for Health Information and Services (CISAS), where they seized assets including vehicles, cash, personal property and registries. They also sacked the office of one of the country's main independent news outlets, Confidencial, as well as the offices of Esta Semana, Esta Noche and Onda Local, stealing all computers and television editing equipment, and raided the offices of two other businesses on Confidencial's premises.

During the raids, paramilitary and uniformed officers, who arrived without warrants or other legal justification, also beat and kidnapped the mothers of political prisoners who were staying at the Popol Na premises. At least three guards at the different facilities were attacked and kidnapped according to the organizations. Confidencial editor Carlos Fernando Chamorro qualified the raid as an attack on freedom of expression, part of the growing harassment that independent media has suffered from the government in recent months. Chamorro also heads CINCO, but the groups offices are in a separate location. Inspecting the premises, Jose Adan Aguerri, of the Private Enterprise Council (COSEP), called the raid an assault on private sector entities. The targeted organizations — including CINCO, but not Confidencial — were among those whose legal standing was removed in the last few days.

Yesterday, the National Assembly cancelled the legal recognition of five groups, bringing the total to nine civil society organizations shut down within two weeks. The cancellations mean that the groups cannot have bank accounts, receive funding, or carry out projects, and that their property is subject to confiscation. Authorities allege the organizations, which include some of the country's most respected human rights groups, were working to destabilize the government. But local and international human rights groups denounced that the move is aimed at silencing organizations that have reported on widespread and ongoing human rights violations.

These latest acts are part of the systematic violence and intimidation against Nicaraguan civil society which reached a critical level on April 18th of this year. The social, political and economic crisis over the last 8 months includes over 300 people killed, over 2,000 wounded and with over 600 political prisoners. These latest acts also aggravate the “state of exception” in Nicaragua (a country devoid of rule of law, as declared by the head of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission on the situation in Nicaragua) where arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders and people critical of the government continues constantly.

In this moment of extreme attacks and intimidation, the Nicaraguan Platform for Social Movements and Civil Society Organizations calls for solidarity from social movements and political and human rights groups worldwide. The Platform also calls upon governments and organizations to denounce such actions and demand that the government account, nationally and internationally, for its criminal behavior.

We make a particularly strong call to organizations and governments that have remained silent until now, choosing instead to not pressure the regime in case it may have a “change of heart”. This strategy has been naïve and harmful. During their silence, the repression has gotten worse by the day and the regime’s legitimacy has been completely lost, with levels of repression that have led civil society to legitimately demand the resignation of the President and Vice-President that are responsible for the attacks.

The voice of those organizations matter, and they must use them to protect human rights. Nicaraguan civil society groups are working tirelessly to stand firm and demand respect for the basic human rights of all Nicaraguans. Yet, the larger international community to which we belong, made up of institutions and people that work against violence and abuse of power, and in favor people’s capacity to live in peace and with basic rights, must speak up now, when we most need them.

We call on these individuals and institutions to show solidarity by denouncing the state’s repression publicly and formally; to protest directly at Nicaraguan consulates and embassies worldwide through calls and visits; to pressure their own governments to formally demand an end to the attacks; and to demand that all international organizations that work in Nicaragua speak out against these abuses, including those members of the UN system with offices in Nicaragua that have remained silent on these issues.

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