



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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High Commissioner's Oral Update on Nicaragua

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ORAL UPDATE (PRESENTATION ONLY)

Ms. Maarit KOHONEN SHERIFF, Director, Global Operations Division, OHCHR

In opening OHCHR's oral update on the human rights situation in Nicaragua in line with UNHRC Resolution 58/18, Ms. Maarit KOHONEN SHERIFF explains that **persecution of those perceived to be in the political opposition** in Nicaragua, to include human rights defenders, journalists, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, religious and lay leaders, not only persists, but it has also become a reoccurring practise, and it can also go beyond the borders. It exposes people in exile to the imperilling of their life and personal safety.

Further, the situation is exacerbated by legislative changes that **further shrink civic space**, increasing undue restrictions on political participation. Since the last update to the UNHRC in March, the government has removed the **legal status of 18 non-profit organisations**. This brings them to a total of 5,535 total organisations that have arbitrarily had this cancelled since 2018. This represents more than 80% of the organisations registered at the end of 2017. This is a devastating dismantling of civic space in Nicaragua.



The **press sector** is also in critical condition. According to civil society information, at least 178 journalists have had to seek exile since 2018. Those who remain in the country face surveillance, threats, and censorship. For example, the whereabouts of journalist Leo Carcamo, arbitrarily detained in November 2024, continues to be unknown. That could make it an enforced disappearance.

There are still serious restrictions on the enjoyment of **religious freedom**. The clergy and lay leaders continue to be facing threats, interrogations, and forced exile. During Holy Week past, the authorities maintained the prohibition on processions in public spaces, so religious celebrations could only be held inside temples or places of worship.

In March, the National Assembly adopted a new federal electoral law that **deepened the concentration of power** in the presidency. It further weakened the guarantees for democratic participation. The law eliminates the mechanisms for referendum and plebiscite, and it authorises proselytism in public offices. It also limits the constitution and forming of political parties exclusively to Nicaraguans. This excludes, arbitrarily, those that have lost their citizenship or that are exiled, including leadership in the opposition in exile. These, read together with the constitutional reform of January 2025, bring serious doubts regarding the existence and operations, independent that is, of political parties. Further, there is uncertainty regarding the dates for the next presidential elections.

The new organic law on the judiciary **severely affects judicial independence** and rule of law. The reform grants the presidency of the republic the power and authority to make proposals or nominations for the presidency of the Supreme Court of Justice, substituting the previous internal election mechanism. It further restricts the dissemination of political or criminal processes to the discretion of the judicial authority.

Recently, legislation enacted has greater limited objections of **Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants** and their territories and their forms of government. These reforms have been adopted without due guarantees for consultation and free prior to form consent. These developments, added to ongoing attacks against the communities, which includes killings, sexual violence, and arbitrary detention of leaders, represent a serious threat to the survival of Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant peoples in Nicaragua.

Arbitrary detentions continue to be used as a tool for political repression. This consolidates a climate of fear to silence all critical voices. According to information gathered by OHCHR, at least 54 individuals, 47 men and 7 women, of which 10 are Indigenous, remain arbitrarily detained. The true number could be greater, due to the fact that many families fear reporting as much for fear of reprisals. OHCHR has documented 13 cases of possible **enforced disappearance**, 8 for adults, 2 for elderly, and 2 for Indigenous persons. One example is that of Evelyn Carolina Matuz Hernandez. She was arbitrarily detained on June 25, 2025. She was separated from her children of 5 and 10 years of age. The whereabouts remain unknown.

Detention conditions continue to be worrisome. There are **reports of torture** and insufficient food documented by OHCHR. 15 of the 54 people detained are elderly with urgent medical needs and are not being provided appropriate attention. Of particular concern is the case of Annabelle Martine Ribas-Reed, 62 years of age, suffering from degenerative arthritis and clinical depression.



His whereabouts are unknown since his detention last May. OHCHR reiterates its call upon authorities in Nicaragua to **immediately release** all those who are arbitrarily detained and to put an end to enforced disappearances and torture. It further calls upon the authorities to guarantee a respect for international standards regarding dignified treatment in places of detention.

In 2025, OHCHR documented 29 cases, 17 for women and 12 for men, individuals that were **arbitrarily denied entrance** into their own country for political reasons. This practise, which OHCHR has been documenting since 2023, has resulted in the forced separation of families. This includes boys and girls. This greatly affects the right to family life and the rights of the child. Other individuals have been **deprived of consular services**. This undermines their right to free circulation and education, among other rights. This also exposes them to the risk of statelessness.

Despite the urgent need to address the human rights crisis, Nicaragua continues to isolate itself from cooperation from international organisations. The country notified its **withdrawal from UNESCO** in May and UNHCR in June. The role of the international community, including states, civil society, and the private sector active in the country, is essential when it comes to continuing to encourage Nicaragua to meet its human rights obligations.

OHCHR reiterates its call on the Nicaraguan authorities to return to dialogue in order to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in their country, including the conclusion of its UPR cycle. OHCHR reiterates its willingness to provide technical assistance with this objective.

VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE CONCERNED COUNTRY

The delegation of the **Nicaragua** was not present in the room.