

## Open Letter to the Nicaraguan government from U.S. solidarity workers (1979-1990)

June 2021

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We, the undersigned, are progressive activists who have been part of the U.S. anti-intervention and solidarity movements that supported the Sandinista revolution starting in the 1970s. Many of us lived and worked in Nicaragua or visited as members of international solidarity delegations and work brigades between 1979 and 1990.

We believed then, and we continue to believe now, in the Nicaraguan people's right to self-determination. The overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and the building of a new society were acts of a sovereign people determining their own destiny.

We went to Nicaragua to support the heroic and noble efforts of the Nicaraguan people to rebuild their country into one of justice, equality and democracy.

We also went to witness and oppose the illegal and immoral actions of our own government that violated the Nicaraguan people's right to self-determination. The U.S. government organized, financed, directed and protected a *contra* army that killed thousands of civilians, burned schools, health clinics and farms, and targeted assassinations of teachers, doctors, and agronomists. One of the U.S.-backed *contra's* victims was our colleague, engineer Benjamin Linder, who was murdered in April 1987 along with his Nicaraguan coworkers Sergio Hernandez and Pablo Rosales while they were building a hydroelectric dam in northern Nicaragua.

We are well aware of – and detest – the long, shameful history of U.S. government intervention in Nicaragua and many other countries in Latin America.

However, the crimes of the U.S. government – past and present – are not the cause of, nor do they justify or excuse, the crimes against humanity committed by the current regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

Over the last decade and a half, we have been increasingly disheartened to see how Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo have consolidated an autocratic family dynasty bent on staying in power above all else. We have been appalled by the targeting of women's organizations, independent journalists, and environmentalists and indigenous communities opposing construction of the proposed canal. Controlling all branches of government, we have seen how the regime has totally politicized public institutions and undermined the rule of law.

In 2018, we watched the massive “autoconvocado” social protests that erupted. We saw hundreds of thousands Nicaraguans take to the streets. This massive outpouring was not – and could not be – the result of U.S. intervention. It was a demonstration of self-determination, of Nicaraguans thinking for themselves and taking action on their own behalf.

We were shocked and horrified by the Ortega-Murillo regime's deadly response to those protests, and to the ever-escalating political repression of civil society and violation of the Nicaraguan people's basic human and constitutional rights.

And now, during these last few weeks and days, we are outraged by the latest maneuvers to shut down all dissent. We are outraged by the arrest and detention of five prominent potential opposition candidates in the scheduled November 2021 elections, even if we do not agree with their political positions. We are outraged by the arrest and detention of civil society and opposition activists and leaders. And we are outraged by the arrest and detention of historic revolutionaries Dora María Téllez, Hugo Torres and Victor Hugo Tinoco.

Even at the height of the U.S.-directed *contra* war against Nicaragua, the revolutionary government respected and protected the right of opposition candidates to run in free and fair elections. In 1990, we were surprised and saddened by the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, but we were also impressed by the peaceful transition of power, a sign of democracy in action.

The Ortega-Murillo government in no way represents the values, principles and goals of the Sandinista revolution we once admired, and it betrays the memory of tens of thousands of Nicaraguans who died for a democratic Nicaragua where its people freely and fairly choose who should lead them.

For these reasons, and as anti-intervention, progressive solidarity workers, we call on the Ortega-Murillo regime to:

- Release the more than 130 political prisoners currently being held, including the pre-candidates, members of the opposition, and historic leaders of the Sandinista revolution;
- Rescind and make null and void the draconian national security law under which these individuals were arrested; and
- Negotiate electoral reforms that will ensure free and fair elections that allow the currently detained pre-candidates to run, and that are internationally observed.

Signed:

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