



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Witness Biographies

Political Prisoners in Nicaragua

Panel I



Bianca Jagger has committed her life to defending human rights, civil liberties, peace, social justice and environmental protection throughout the world. She campaigns to end violence against women and girls, to abolish capital punishment and advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples and future generations.

She is Founder, President and Chief Executive of the [Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation](#) (BJHRF), which she established in 2005 to be a force for change and a voice for the most vulnerable.

Born in Managua, Nicaragua in 1950 Bianca Jagger left her native country to study political science in Paris with a scholarship from the French Government. She is [Council of Europe Goodwill Ambassador](#), a Member of the Executive Director's Leadership Council for [Amnesty International USA](#), [IUCN Bonn Challenge Ambassador](#).

Bianca Jagger is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, including [The Right Livelihood Award](#) (2004) also known as the 'alternative Nobel prize.'

Her other awards for human rights, humanitarian and environmental work include:

- **The United Nations Earth Day International Award** (1994)
- **Abolitionist of the Year Award** by the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (1996)
- **The Amnesty International USA Media Spotlight Award for Leadership** (1997)
- **The Green Globe Award** from the Rainbow Alliance (1997)
- **American Civil Liberties Union Award** (1998)
- **National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyer Champion of Justice Award** (2000)
- **The World Achievement Award** (2004)

- **The World Citizenship Award from The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation** (2006)
- **Lifetime Achievement Award** at the Latin-UK Awards (LUKAS) (2015)
- **The Nuestra Madre Award** from Americas for Conservation and the Arts (2015)
- **The Mayahuel Award** at the Guadalajara International Film Festival and the **Iguana del Oro Award** at the Puerto Vallarta International Film Festival (2016)



Berta Valle is a well-known Nicaraguan communicator and the wife of Félix Maradiaga, presidential candidate and defender of human rights. Since 2018, she, her daughter, and mother-in-law have been living in exile abroad due to the political persecution faced by Félix and his family. Having fled the country, she lost all her assets, work, and social connections, and she has not been able to return to Nicaragua. In her 15 years of experience as an activist, she has emphasized issues of children's rights, social issues, and human rights. During her exile, she has promoted and created spaces for dialogue on social

networks and the media to denounce what is happening in Nicaragua. As a result of the enforced disappearance of her husband, she coordinates defense teams that support Félix Maradiaga inside and outside of Nicaragua.



Victoria Cárdenas is the wife of the presidential candidate and political prisoner Juan Sebastián Chamorro. She and her family have faced oppression by the Ortega regime for her husband's activities since 2018. For example, Mrs. Cárdenas and her family have been the subject of politically motivated court proceedings and repression, including being targeted with an active arrest warrant. Mrs. Cárdenas has an 18-year-old daughter and is now dedicated to denouncing the human rights violations suffered by her family.



Rafael Estrada is a Nicaraguan American and President of the Free and Fair Foundation / *Nicaraguans for Security and Prosperity Foundation*. Having fled his country at the age of 12, Estrada is committed to fight for democracy, free and fair elections and to articulate human rights abuses throughout his native country. After the sociopolitical crisis began in 2018, he increased his commitment and advocacy for human rights, and regularly meets with several members of the US Congress and government officials regarding the human rights abuses in Nicaragua. Estrada's foundation has provided aid to Nicaraguan refugees in several countries including Costa Rica, Panama and Spain and it also sponsors medical attention and medicine for former political prisoners who had suffered torture while in custody. In addition, the foundation has provided assistance to independent journalists who have fled Nicaragua due to persecution, and to other

exiles in need of assistance. He serves as Auxiliary Lieutenant in the Knox County Sheriff Department, and is a businessman and a philanthropist providing aid to schools and churches in Nicaragua.



Boanerge Fornos is Coordinator of Acción Penal, an organization that works to ensure that human and constitutional rights of political prisoners are protected through access to free and quality legal defense and documents violations of due process and human rights by the government of Nicaragua. He is a lawyer and Public Notary with 18 years of experience, specializing in criminal law and criminal procedural law. Former public prosecutor with more than ten years of experience in the Nicaraguan criminal justice system, Mr. Fornos currently serves as the Coordinator of Acción Penal, working to provide legal defense for political prisoners and legal representation for victims of the repression of the sociopolitical crisis in Nicaragua. He holds degrees in Legal Strategy and Policy from the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, National Defense University.