

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Hearing
on
THE EVOLVING HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN NICARAGUA**

**September 27, 2018 – 9:30 a.m.
2200 Rayburn Building**

**Statement of George Henriquez Cayasso
Member
Platform for Social Movements and Civil Society Organizations**

Good morning to all congressmen and congresswomen.

My name is George Henriquez Cayasso a Kriol Afro descendant from the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. On behalf of my country, fellow members and communities, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all who have contributed to make this opportunity to happen.

When I got the privilege to address the congress of the United States of America, my first thought was, how I can express to you the pain that my country is suffering Nicaragua is not the same ever since April 19th, we do not have peace but turmoil because of the irresponsibility of the central government to respect the basic condition of the human rights of our society. The Nicaraguan constitution recognizes us the right to protest and speak out against a system that is not beneficial for our people and we decided to exercise this right.

I'm here to tell you distinguished congressmen and congress women that the situation in Nicaragua is a problem that is taking away the lives of our children and youth; at the same time it is a problem that is affecting migration to our neighbors in the central American area, which soon will be reflected on the United States border because of the over 23,000 people that had left the country since this turmoil started, so it is important to call your attention on the level and intensity of the atrocities committed by the police and paramilitary forces directed by the president of our country in the past five months. While writing these lines a Friend I have in Costa Rica in a refugee camp told me "*People are trying to leave Costa Rica and reach to the USA, because here there is no work, we got to depend on people to eat, I'm young and I can't live too long as a beggar*" and I believe the same is happening to other refugees in other countries in Central America, as you may see those 23,000 people that had emigrated are expecting to go back home to Nicaragua but if Not their destination would be the USA borders.

In Nicaragua our human rights as indigenous and afrodescendant people were also being violated even before April 19th 2018 and for this we ask all people and countries who are in favor of peace, democracy, justice and respect for basic human rights to take a close look at what is happening in our country and the fear people are in. Today we need of your influence for Ortega to comply with the respect of basic human rights which has been taken away from us because of his incapacity to govern and constant violation of our constitution.

Nicaraguans today demand changes in a peaceful nonviolent way, our parents and grand parents already lived two different moments of war during the 70's and 80' we believe in a non violent and non military revolution is possible for structural changes and fundamental changes in benefit of all Nicaraguans.

Ortega's violations of human rights in Nicaragua didn't begin in April, on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua- it began way before, between 2011 and 2018. There are over 3000 thousand Indigenous people displaced, over 100 documented cases of Indigenous and Afro-descendant people of the Caribbean coast that had been either kidnapped, Injured or killed because of a policy of colonization of the Ortega's government supporting land grabbers to establish themselves on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua in exchange for electoral votes; 12 communities of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua (*Francia Sirpi, Santa Clara, La Esperanza Rio Wawa, Wisconsin, San Jerónimo, Santa Fe, Esperanza Rio Coco, Klisnak, Polo Paiwas, Cocal, Naranja, Wiwinak*) had been benefited with precautionary protection measures by the international court of human rights. These are not being respected or supported by Ortega's regime and they are still suffering constants attacks from a program of colonization supported by Ortega government.

The actual repression that protestors are facing since April 2018 in different departments in Nicaragua is not new for some people on the Caribbean coast, they perfected this type of repression on the Caribbean coast, but when it was spoken about very few people decided to listen or help us to speak out about it, and many accused us as racists, radicals, separatists and other terms.

The Rapporteur for Indigenous Human rights, called on the Nicaraguan authorities to immediately establish a dialogue with the indigenous communities in order to agree on a long-term solution to the situation and to initiate the sanitation process to which they committed to do, prioritizing the territories in conflict; to proceed to the transfer of the settlers to their places of origin or to their relocation. However, the authorities ignored their calls making justice for people on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and access to land rights a difficult issue. Ortega Government is always in a constant negation of these incidents the same way he's is in denial of the deaths, tortured, injured and disappeared people since April of 2018

But I must speak also for the mestizo campesinos who led the nation in the first widespread protest against the regime and suffered unnumbered repression from the Ortega's regimen. This began in December of 2013 when a so called "Great inter oceanic

canal” law was approved in a matter of hours by the Ortega-controlled National Assembly. A coast to coast project in which a chunk of Nicaragua was literally handed to a Hong Kong financial tycoon in return for a now legally binding concession that would physically alter the geography and ethnography of the country and whole Central America. There was no consultation with the Indigenous, Afro-descendant, campesinos, civil society or any sector in Nicaragua notwithstanding the consultation requirements upheld in the Constitution, the convention 169 of the International labour organization, the autonomy Law of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and the law for the demarcation and land titling of indigenous and afro descendant people of Nicaragua basing on customary rights.

We see then that the use of thugs and paramilitary repression that protestors faced in Nicaragua since April 2018 were tried out and perfected years earlier on the Caribbean coast and rural Nicaragua. 98 marches were held by campesinos and environmental groups accompanied by different sectors of Nicaragua in protest of this canal project. Often they were met with brutal violent forces from the government thugs and police provoking a number of injuries as a clear statement that in the country there is no freedom of speech and mobilisation. But the campesinos kept on marching through violent repression lifting up the moral of our people through a civil and non violent protest as they march in the major cities peacefully and non violently.

If we protested we were accused of being racist, radicals, separatist and now because of a recently enacted national security law, protestors are now called terrorists subject to 20 year sentences for protesting, these people Ortega is calling a terrorist, had never left the country, don't most people don't own a passport port or have wi-fi access at home, the key campesinos leaders tree of them, Medardo Mairena, Pedro Mena and Victor Diaz is in jail charged with homicide and others and leader Francisca Ramirez, was forced to flee to Costa Rica as a clear way of persecution of leaders in the country.

This Commission, Mr. Chairman, should speak out on the behalf of those mentioned today.

Now a question in matter is, Why have all these international treaties of protection for human rights and minority rights for people, if they are not to being respected?

Our struggle for people on the Caribbean coast has historically been directed at the Nicaraguan State but today we join everyone in the country against Ortega and his wife regime, today people of Nicaragua from all different scopes of life are united asking for basic human rights respect such as, the right to live, freedom of speech, access to justice, liberty, freedom of mobilization and organization. We are demanding the resignation of the President and Vice President, Ortega and his wife due to basic human rights violation.

In the United States at least two presidents barely escaped impeachment for acts that were far less serious than those committed by Ortega. I ask all of you: how can one ethically demand anything less than the resignation of a sitting commander in chief that gives orders to shoot to kill his own people?

Our protest in April were not party politically led, these protest were led by grass root organizations, feminist organizations, LGBTTTIQ collectiveness, civil society and students, based on 11 years of constitutional an human rights violation, our protests are civic and none violent, 18 kids under the age of 18 had being shot dead by paramilitaries including a 2 year old baby and a entire family burned up in their house because the denied paramilitary to enter they house to shoot at protesters, a journalist from Bluefields Angel Gahona shot in his head and killed while transmitting live and two Kriol Boys Glenn Slate and Brandon Lovo 20 and 18 years old wrongfully accused of Angels death, 25 deaths in a protest in Carazo, at least 18 deaths on mother's day protest.

Nicaragua had in the last 40 years 2-armed revolution the Revolution to overthrow Somoza in the 70s and the contra-revolution which overthrew the Sandinistas in late 80's, both revolutions left the country a dead toll of over 50,000 thousand deaths experience which is not desired by my generation.

The Nicaragua protest is not a fight about lefties against righties or righties against lefties, this is a fight for survival and respect of basic human rights for woman, children, indigenous and afro-descendant people, students and everyone, this a fight of Nicaragua people against Ortega's and his wife regimen who is persecuting all upcoming leadership an old leadership including the frente sandinistas revolutionary leaders the regime criminalize protestors as terrorist, torturing and depriving of basic human rights of people who are being locked up in el Chipote, today we ask you to request the unto the Nicaraguan government the closing of El Chipote jail house where there is infra human conditions for prisoners and now political prisoners.

All genocides and war conflicts in human history are started with basic human rights violation. War Is not an option for us. No one wins with a war, our economy and country are too poor and fragile and we had learned that there is no winner in a war our fight Is going to continue being a none violent fight, avoiding a genocide in Nicaragua maybe In the hands an effectiveness of complying the respect of international human rights treaty.

I'm closing with a statement of Martin Luther King Junior, that says, "Justice too long denied is a threat to justice anywhere"

Thank you very much, thinki pali, Seremei.