

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

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

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

**Statement of Maria Claudia Pulido  
Assistant Executive Secretary for Monitoring, Promotion and Technical Cooperation  
Inter-American Human Rights Commission**

Good morning. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights wishes to thank Congressman James P. McGovern and Congressman Randy Hultgren, co-chairmen of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the United States Congress, for the invitation to be here today.

The Commission also welcomes the presence of Guillermo Fernández-Maldonado, Senior Human Rights Officer of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has been conducting a special follow-up to the situation of human rights in Nicaragua since April 2018 in the face of the serious acts of violence that have been taking place in the country.

From May 17 to 21, the IACHR undertook a working visit to Nicaragua in which it traveled to different parts of the country, interviewed dozens of people, and received hundreds of testimonies from victims, relatives of victims and witnesses of serious human rights violations. The IACHR prepared the report “Gross Human Rights Violations in the Context of Social Protests in Nicaragua” which was presented to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States on June 21, 2018, with 15 recommendations to the State of Nicaragua. Following up on these recommendations, on June 24, the Special Monitoring Mechanism for Nicaragua (MESENI) was installed in Managua; and on July 3, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) for the investigation of the acts of violence that took place from April 18 to May 30, 2018, date on which the agreement for its creation was signed between the IACHR, the OAS General Secretariat, and the State of Nicaragua.

To date, the IACHR has documented 325 people killed in the context of the human rights crisis, of which 21 were police officers, and 24 children and adolescents. Also, there have

allegedly been more than 300 people arrested, 300 health professionals have allegedly been dismissed for caring for wounded people and 40 professionals from universities have allegedly been dismissed.

According to the information received on-site by the IACHR's team, 4 phases with different patterns of human rights violations have been clearly identified:

The **first phase** begins with the strong repression of the peaceful protests initiated in the country and the consequent violations of human rights that began on April 18, 2018. These include the violation of the right to life and personal integrity due to arbitrary or disproportionate use of force by parapolice agents, using lethal and non-lethal weapons; selective executions of people; and violations of freedom of expression, including attacks against journalists and the media. Also, irregularities and denial of medical attention, and the obstruction of humanitarian work to assist persons injured in the context of acts of violence and repression; and arbitrary detentions, with excessive use of force, ill-treatment, including torture, and incommunicado detention; lack of judicial control and violations of access to justice. A process of stigmatization of people who participated in and/or supported public demonstrations is also initiated.

As of July, the IACHR identifies a **second phase** of violations that begins with the so-called "clean-up" operation of the government and the demobilization of the barricades and roadblocks by parapolice and police groups. The situation becomes more aggravated. Specifically, repressions and selective and arbitrary detentions and raids are reported in search of the names of people who participated in the protests and in the barricades. Likewise, degrading treatment is observed against the families of detainees and their visits are obstructed. Repression is extended to the relatives and neighbors of persons identified with the active participation of the Councils of Citizen Power (CPC). Hatred and attacks are incited against the Catholic Church. The number of people fleeing their homes in search of safe houses or asylum increases. According to the information received, as of July 2018, at least 23,000 Nicaraguans had allegedly requested asylum in Costa Rica, and requests to countries such as Panama, Mexico and the United States increased.

The **third phase**, characterized by retaliation, highlights a selective persecution of protesters, particularly human rights defenders, students, social leaders and government opponents, which includes threats, stigmatization, and criminalization through hundreds of judicial processes brought under unfounded and disproportionate charges such as terrorism or organized crime, without due process guarantees. At least 300 people have allegedly been arrested. Likewise, dismissals of health and education professionals are documented. The effects on freedom of expression have worsened.

During this phase, there were also incidents of violence against police officers and supporters of the government party that, due to their nature, were condemned by the

IACHR. The State has sent to the IACHR more than 400 communications providing accounts of these facts.

To date, the Commission notes with concern that this strategy of criminalization and stigmatization continues to create an adverse context for social protest. The situation has been creating a climate of terror and despair among the population. Human rights defenders, women, LGBT persons and children find themselves at greater risk.

While in the beginning dialogue with the government and the exchange of information was fluid, since the beginning of July, the IACHR has requested from the State, without success, information in order to be able to collate data on the victims; access to detention centers to observe the situation of persons deprived of their liberty; and access to the files so that the GIEI can provide technical assistance in the investigations.

Nevertheless, based on the requests and testimonies received, as of September 17, the Commission has issued 23 precautionary measures to directly protect 114 people who are at serious risk. It has also issued 28 press releases publicizing the serious situation of human rights in Nicaragua. More information can be found on a special section of the IACHR's website.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reaffirms the importance of Nicaragua finding a democratic solution to the crisis; as well as its commitment to continue monitoring the situation in order to ensure the protection of life and physical integrity of the people, defense of the victims and the freedom of expression of the Nicaraguan people.