

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

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Via Rosalia Miller,
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Coalition

Washington DC

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission his concern for the humanitarian, political, and economic crises in Nicaragua, my country. I would like to share my testimony for the record.

I am a Nicaraguan citizen, of legal age, student of the law school of the UNAN León, activist defender of human rights, environmental rights of women. For 15 years, I have been fighting against the injustices of my country. I am a member of Project Mary Barreda and Women in Action, I began to participate in marches and sit-ins against the injustices of my country for the indiscriminate destruction of our natural resources used for their personal benefits and against impunity for crimes against women or people less privileged in society as peasant women or people with limited resources.

In 2018, I became fully involved when one of our reserves in the country such as La Reserva de Indio Maíz was burned, we held marches, sit-ins and protests to demand the Ortega government give the necessary attention to put out the fire that we knew it had been caused by the issues of land positioning and other interests that the government had over the territory. On April 12 around 4pm we were in front of the León

Cathedral. We were a group of about 15 people composed of students and autocomvocado (self-appointed) people. Suddenly a mob (gang of thugs) of motorized vehicles arrived. They got off their motorcycles and went to attack us with helmets and other blunt objects, four of them beat me. They stole my purse and my cell phone.

The crisis of the La Reserva de Indio Maíz fire had not finished passing when the approval of the law against the retired elderly emerged and again we saw ourselves in the streets protesting for the rights of our elderly adults to be respected. That same day a group of activists were attacked, persecuted and cornered through the streets of León until we reached the church for. There a couple of policemen cornered me and threatened me, telling me not to go against the government of Commander Ortega. To escape from them, I got under the horses' legs and took refuge with other people who were protesting. We were there for hours until we managed to get out of the back of the houses and over the roofs until we were out of danger. At 6 o'clock in the afternoon of that same day, a group of more than 50 men arrived to surround my house to shout in one voice: Not a step back! Traitor of the country! Long live the Sandinista front! They will not pass! Long live Commander Ortega! That day I made a terrified video and uploaded it to the networks because in my house there was only me and my little son at that time, 6 years old, who was terrified, a special child, Asperger syndrome.

The next day we continued organizing protests, it was April 20, we were planted in one of the main streets of León, the street of HEODRA Hospital, we spent more than 4 hours in that sit-in, the citizens overflowed into the streets and it was a large crowd, shouting at the government: We want peace! At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of that April 20, the Sandinista police arrived along with other criminals and began to shoot us bullets, tear gas, pellets and other repressive elements to dilute the protest, that day we lived one of the most persecutions of the year 2018, there were fires and disappearances, I could not get to my house because I was

already threatened that they had me located and that they would deprive me of my freedom if they caught me.

The struggle continued, protests continued and increasingly large and crowded marches, the town overflowed, there were thousands of people in the streets shouting for Justice and freedom, given that murders such as that of Alvarito Conrado had occurred in Managua. In this transition, somehow I came to assumed leadership of my group. I organized a press conference to announce that a commercial STOP would soon be seen. The purpose was to pressure the Government to end the repression and to clarify the murders, the fires with the faith that they would free the people who were being kidnapped in those days. As a result, a 3-day strike was declared. The repression was increasing every day and likewise the increase of disappeared and kidnapped. Nothing stopped, but rather intensified.

On May 30, Mother's Day in Nicaragua, I collaborated with the organizing of the Great March of Flowers in honor of the people who had been murdered. The Ortega and the Sandinista police bloodied the march by shooting bullets and killing some of the participants of the march who were marching with the purpose to show solidarity with the mothers who lost their children on April 18. Those three days in León, the repression was very strong and there were bullet wounds, and again more prisoners to be tried for false crimes.

In the month of June, more protests and more marches increased, the citizens of the town were overwhelmed. They made roadblocks and erected barricades (small walls made of cobblestones) to protect themselves from bullets and attacks by the police, the army and paramilitary and para-police forces. That's how the people were fighting to protect themselves from being killed, until in July when the Ortega regime implemented "Operation Cleaning." We were hunted like animals, ready to kill us. In that operation I was captured.

This is how that happened. On July 6, I was moving from one place to another, fleeing from the persecution when leaving my city, a few kilometers away, I was captured by a vehicle that I could not identify nor could I

identify my kidnappers because they put a very dark and thick hood on me and in a violent manner, beat and punched me. After fighting them, I had no more strength as they shoved me inside the vehicle. That's where my hell began.

They took me to a place where I suppose and I understood was a clandestine house or clandestine prison and from that moment I saw the greatest horrors of my life. I was tied to a pole made of wood, like Jesus Christ. They stripped and humiliated me, placing me lying on a table, como si yo fuera la comida principal de un banquete. They beat me and interrogated with these questions: Who was financing me? Who were the leaders above me? What were their weapons? And they yelled loudly in my ear until I was stunned and lost my hearing. More questions ensued. Where were the others? Because I did not answer they began to put needles or something very fine and sharp in my toenails. They violated me and raped me over and over and over again, they took turns and laughed at me, there were more or less 5 men, I recognized 5 different voices; they said to one of them: Black horse! They told me that this was happening to me because I had gotten against the government and that they had warned me about it.

I don't know how long after that, maybe 24 hours when my big toenails were pulled out. Hours passed and I asked for water, I asked for food and they never provided it. In that place that smelled like mold, like blood, like death there was also another person, it was the voice of a boy asking for mercy, asking them to stop, we were both their prey. I never knew who he was, nor did I know if he survived.

I already had been many days in captivity, my body could no longer bear it, I wished for death when one of them approached me and burned my hand with a cigarette. I kept asking for water, I kept asking for them to stop and already at that time I began to suffer episodes where I lost the knowledge of the pain that they caused me when they put objects in my vagina and other practices with which they tried to denigrate my humanity. The boy who also shared that hell with me at times spoke to me and said: "Girl, hold on, everything will be fine, did you hear?" I never had the strength and the you to answer him. I also heard his cries of pain, I also heard him beg them to stop, I also heard him beg for his life.

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Several days had already passed, I did not know if it was day or night, my fingers shurt, the boy could no longer be heard and it was that day when those heartless people brutally rapped me until I was unconscious. Then, I completely lost track of time. I don't know how long it had been, I didn't know what day it was. I remember that I just wanted to sleep and rest. At one point, I began to hear the voice of a woman saying: "She's alive!" And it was like this when I began to see the sunlight, the lady (whom I later called: "La Señora" was there, this lady I had never met, was putting my head on her lap, as if cradle an infant. That's when I realized that I was no longer in the place of torture, and I began to feel cold in my body, and the light of the day stunned me, I did not have the strength to stand up, I only remember that they put me on a horse cart and took me down a path with my head on the lady's lap. At that moment I closed my eyes and felt peace.

There was dried blood on my body, there was mud, my head was bruised, the wounds on my head were scabbed over, my vagina wouldn't stop bleeding and my toes were infected and in very bad shape, my burns were also infected. That Lady who I will never know her name and her husband were the ones who cured me, who fed me, who saved me, as the days went by they asked me: Chiquita, who do we call? Where do we take you? And the lady cried and exclaimed: "What a ditch they made you a girl." For my part, I did not feel safe, I did not know who they were and if they were actually helping me, my mind was very confused, until at one point I gained strength and I thought: "while we were walking in the protests, the activists made some security codes and one of them was to learn 3 phone numbers in case we didn't have to call or for any emergency" that's how I learned the number of my mother and the number of my boyfriend who was also an activist and was being persecuted.

I made the decision to risk calling because I also heard the husband tell her that I could not stay longer in their house because it put them in danger, that was when I understood that I had to go. In the end I ended up giving her my boyfriend's number and she called him and they agreed. Hours later they took me, now it was a

very old red truck and they left on a dirt road, we were deep inside the mountain, we got to the road and they took me covered, at that moment I realized that I was wearing clothes that were not mine We arrived at the apartment where they agreed to leave me and it was there, next to a gas station at the entrance of that city that they handed me over to my boyfriend. He picked me up in his arms and I got into a vehicle and took me to an aunt's house that was under construction.

He could not take me to a hospital because the hospitals were controlled by the government, in fact there was an order that no one could be treated unless they approved it. Nor could he call anyone because at that time he did not trust anyone and it was there that I began to live in hiding until I regained my health. Almost a month had passed when I was in better health and I decided to go find my children and my mother to say goodbye to them because the danger of death was imminent. During the first week of September, strangers roamed the safe house where we were (the house of his aunt) and strangers began to appear on motorcycles or on foot to guard the house, when we saw those movements one dawn on the 9 In September we decided to flee to another country and that is how we left Nicaragua for Costa Rica and went into exile on September 9, 2018.

It seemed that things could happen and that we were out of danger, but it was not like that, I started as a form of resilience and to feel vindicated with my recovery I reappeared on social networks to tell them that: I survived! After that, in February 2019 now in Costa Rica, I suffered an attempted kidnapping in the city of San José, in the center of the city and in a commercial area (a complaint registered by the OIJ of Costa Rica) and it was there that I understood that I wasn't safe in San Jose because the Sandinista were roaming this country. This is how I have lived this exile, with fear every day of my life, with fear that I will be kidnapped again and that this time I will not come out alive.

In 2019, some unknown subjects wanted to enter the place where I live with force and violence (I keep photos of the event) and that is where the attacks have started again here in Costa Rica, a country that I take in and where I am currently under the condition refugee applicant.

In the quest to survive and guarantee myself a roof and food and even better, if I could have a decent life in this country while I can return to mine with the freedom to live in it, to travel there, to be with my family. All of that was stolen from me. To sustain myself, I started a small flower business where little by little and in the middle of a pandemic it was growing. It seems that they located me again and I suffered an attack on the property leaving a clear message that they are in my footsteps. On March 4 of this year at 6:40 in the afternoon, I suffered a controlled attack with weapons now inside the place where I have my business and I also live where my boyfriend. They shot me with intent to kill me and and threatened to come back. Once again, I also suffered a sexual attack, they were going to kill us. Something happened when they suddenly got scared and decided to run away and that's how we stayed alive. I filed a complaint with the OIJ where they are conducting the investigation, there is a video of evidence. That has been a long while and I have not heard back from them.

It has been almost 3 years since I lived that hell; Since 2018 I have been receiving psychological attention for the recovery of this hell that I lived; I have been assisted by: Ret International, Doctors Without Borders and currently CENDEFEROS where they have ruled on me "Post traumatic Stress Disorder" and other consequences due to the torture and denigration I suffered by the Nicaraguan government, whom I hold responsible for everything they did to me. Today I suffer from insomnia, tremors in my body, susceptibility to loud noise, loud voices of others. I have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, depression and it is difficult for me to lead a normal life, although I do not give up because my eyes want to see justice. I will feel vindicated when the Ortega Murillos pay for all their crimes against humanity. Perhaps I will never know who it was tried to kill my spirit, perhaps I will never know their names, perhaps I will never know if the other person who was with me survived, perhaps I will never be the same again because they killed me in life but that is how I will feel. I live wit this every day of my life. Justice is not only for me, but for the thousands who are still silent for fear of being silenced.

I continue my life here in Costa Rica where, my life is in danger. I hope of one day to return to my homeland, where I had a life and where my family is living.

Thank you very kind attention.

Rayza Hope