

14 May 2026

Your Excellency,

I write to you on behalf over 1,000 signatories to a petition requesting the immediate and unconditional release of Protestant Pastor Efrén Antonio Vílchez López on the fourth anniversary of his detention and in the context of the deteriorating situation of freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) in Nicaragua.

Pastor Efrén Antonio Vílchez López is a Protestant Christian pastor affiliated with the Chapel of the Spirit Ministries Association (MECE) at the International Missionary Centre Chapel of the Spirit. He is an influential religious leader, well known for working cross denominationally. He has also been publicly critical of your government and was beaten and detained in May 2022.

He was not informed of any charges against him upon his detention and his family were kept unaware of his whereabouts for three days.

On 21 September 2022 Pastor Vílchez López was sentenced by a court in Managua to 23 years in prison for a crime involving the sexual assault of a vulnerable person. The decision was confirmed by the court of appeals on 21 April 2023. The courts refused to consider evidence supporting the pastor's innocence, including CCTV footage proving his whereabouts at the time of the supposed violation.

He was transferred in July 2024 to a maximum-security cell in 'Gallery 300' wing of La Modelo Prison which is exclusively used to imprison the worst of criminals, and those considered particularly dangerous, in a de facto recognition of his status as a political prisoner. He is being held in inhumane conditions and there are serious concerns for his health.

While we welcome the recent partial release of a number of political prisoners, including religious leaders, into house arrest or under other restrictions, Pastor Efrén Antonio Vílchez López appears to have been forgotten. We are deeply concerned for his wellbeing, he is confined in an unventilated punishment cell and is only provided with one small container of water daily. He has been deprived of natural light and fresh air as he is rarely permitted to go outside. Prison officials have refused to pass on packages of food and basic supplies, including soap, and medicine for diabetes, hypertension, blood circulation and other health issues that his relatives bring to the prison.

In light of the severity of the false charges against him, as well as the inhumane conditions in which he is being held and the serious concerns for his health, we are calling on your government to:

- Release Pastor Efrén Antonio Vílchez López immediately without condition;
- Drop all charges against him;

- End the harassment and targeting of all religious leaders and those you consider critical of the government;
- Uphold freedom of religion or belief and linked rights, including freedom of expression, for all.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Scot Bower', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Scot Bower,
CEO