

Introduction

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) and Impulso18 are human rights organisations specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). This submission seeks to draw attention to the ongoing human rights violations in Nicaragua, between the period of 2019 and 2024, ahead of the state's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
2. During the reporting period, CSW began to monitor the human rights situation in Nicaragua, and published reports on the country in 2022¹ and 2024² respectively.
3. Many of the cases of human rights violations include individuals who criticise the government and are subjected to censorship, intimidation, exile and degrading treatment in detention.

Legal Framework and Challenges

4. The Constitution of Nicaragua guarantees that all people, individually or collectively, have the right to express their religious beliefs in private or in public, through worship, practices and teaching. No one is permitted to fail to observe the laws or prevent others from exercising their rights and fulfilling their duties, by invoking religious beliefs or provisions.
5. Nicaragua is party to all international human rights treaties except the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), which it has not signed or ratified.
6. In 2018, protests took place across the country in reaction to government modifications to the pension system for the elderly. Roman Catholic Church leaders attempted to mediate between the government and protesters, but, after church leaders refused to deny aid to demonstrators in need and because some clergy had expressed support for the protesters, these efforts broke down. Around this time, the government initiated a media campaign against the Roman Catholic Church and its leadership, attacking churches and other places of worship, including the main cathedral in Managua, the country's capital. Hundreds of protesters were killed by state forces. Many more were wounded or imprisoned. Protestant leaders who voiced messages the authorities considered to be critical also experienced retaliation at the hands of the

government.

7. In November 2021 Daniel Ortega was elected to a fourth consecutive term as president in an election process marred by government repression and the arrest of political opponents. Members of the opposition were barred from participating in the political process, and many were threatened, arbitrarily detained and forced into exile.
8. On 19 November 2021, the government announced its withdrawal from the Organisation of American States (OAS) in response to the body's adoption of a resolution stating that the presidential elections had 'no democratic legitimacy.'
9. In October 2023, the government reformed Article 165 of the constitution, removing powers held by the Supreme Court of Justice to supervise the administrative functioning of the Public Registries of Real Estate and Commercial Property, to appoint Public Registrars, as well as to sanction them for disciplinary offenses. The law now mandates that all public records held by the National Registry System be transferred to the Attorney General's Office. These reforms and the new law streamlined the ability of the government to confiscate property.

Freedoms of opinion and expression, and assembly and association

10. In the third UPR cycle, Nicaragua supported five out of 24 recommendations regarding protecting freedom of assembly, and 16 out of 49 recommendations pertaining to freedom of expression³, including to 'Guarantee freedoms of expression, assembly, association and movement, particularly for human rights defenders and journalists'⁴, and to 'Ensure that members of the political opposition and civil society organizations, as well as journalists, are free to express their opinions and that their right to freedom of assembly is guaranteed.'⁵
11. Despite this, a 2020 Special Cybercrime Law introduced penalties of up to ten years' imprisonment for anyone posting news online deemed by the government to be 'false'. This followed measures taken against the independent media including a customs limit on ink and paper in 2018, which led to the 2019 closure of the 40-year-old "El Nuevo Diario," one of the newspapers

1 CSW, 'Civil Society Under Siege', 13 December 2022. <https://www.csw.org.uk/2022/12/13/report/5885/article.htm>

2 CSW, 'Hostile takeover: Tightening reins on freedom of religion or belief in Nicaragua', 13 February 2024. <https://www.csw.org.uk/2024/02/13/report/6164/article.htm>

3 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Nicaragua, A/HRC/42/16, 5 July 2019, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/206/16/pdf/g1920616.pdf?token=JTdv242Esl5CS5gQq5&fe=true>; United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Nicaragua Addendum, A/HRC/42/16/Add.1, 13 September 2019, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/272/70/pdf/g1927270.pdf?token=TcdhdXO3gQeFNTLCmM&fe=true>

4 Ibid, 125.167 (Argentina)

5 Ibid, 125.145 (Germany)

most critical of the government.

12. In a post⁶ on X on 16 October 2023, the Centre for Inter-American Legal Assistance in Human Rights (CALIDH) alleged that individuals were being harassed by the National Police (PN), with agents identifying themselves as part of the 'intelligence'. Those affected, who were likely targeted because they had been deemed by the government to be critical and therefore dangerous, told CALIDH that they were offered prison or exile.
13. The infiltration and use of informants in congregations of all types to monitor and report on the content of sermons, prayers and other activities is reported frequently by both Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.
14. Since 2020, Jehovah's Witnesses have not been permitted to set up stands with religious literature on the streets. In November 2022, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (SCCAR) were informed that they would no longer be allowed to hold Bible studies in their homes or hand out religious pamphlets on the streets (a similar order was issued in Managua the previous year), or to carry out any type of activity without prior authorisation. Officials warned that their place of meeting would be forcibly closed if they continued to distribute religious literature in bus stations or other locations. On 16 May 2023, the group was given verbal notification that their place of meeting was closed until further notice. Since then, the group has been forced to meet virtually.
15. In January 2022, police ordered a Protestant pastor to immediately suspend a worship service taking place on a basketball court, claiming that religious worship in public areas is prohibited. The pastor had not been informed of this prohibition and noted that there had been no problem with such activities taking place outside the church building in the past.
16. Security forces, in some cases wearing riot gear, have forcibly prevented religious processions and parades, some of which have been celebrated for over a century across the country.
17. On 14 August 2022 the PN blocked all entrances to a Roman Catholic church in the SCCAR after priests and hundreds of parishioners had gathered for a procession in honour of the Virgin of Fatima. The PN officers informed a priest that the church did not have permission to carry out public events and warned him to cancel the event or face imprisonment. Members of the church were also threatened with imprisonment and subsequently dispersed. The PN stood guard around the church throughout the rest of the day, preventing the priest from leaving the building and anyone else from entering.
18. On 24 December 2022, the PN refused to allow an Assemblies of God (AOG) church located in a rural area to hold a Christmas celebration, including a Bible study followed by games and food for a group of approximately 20 children. The church has since been prohibited from holding any religious activities involving children.
19. The government significantly increased the arbitrary cancellation of religious events, activities or services in 2023. The PN issued orders directly to religious leaders across the country that no processions outside their respective physical buildings were permitted. This included a moratorium on traditional public marches by Roman Catholics and Protestants in celebration of the Spanish Bible Translation Day in September.
20. In March and July 2023, an AOG church in the SCCAR was denied permission to hold special religious events. Where the church once held services three times a week, now it is only permitted one 45-minute meeting on Sundays.⁷ The pastor noted that many church members have withdrawn due to fear of becoming a target of the authorities.
21. In September 2023 a woman in the SCCAR was fired from her low-level government job because she had attended a religious activity at her Pentecostal church rather than participate in a political activity.⁸
22. On 4 October 2023 the PN prevented members of the San Pedro Roman Catholic Church in Diriá Municipality, Granada Department, from distributing atol de ánimas, a traditional corn drink associated with a traditional festival.⁹ Instead, the mayor, Catalina Maltés, together with Sandinista supporters, distributed more than 3,000 atol de ánimas servings in the park square. The activity was monitored by members of the special forces of the PN and government workers. During the distribution, Mayor Maltés publicly thanked President Ortega for 'supporting the traditions of the people'.
23. On 2 November 2023 a thanksgiving mass organised by Roman Catholic Priests at a municipal cemetery in the SCCAR was arbitrarily cancelled by the municipal PN. The municipal mayor's office, including the mayor, deputy mayor, and the municipal chief of police, along with other local authority leaders then addressed the

6 Twitter, Centre for Inter-American Legal Assistance in Human Rights, 16 October 2023, <https://twitter.com/Calidhorg/status/1714021008263270545>

7 45-minute limits on religious services were reported by various Protestant and Roman Catholic churches across the country.

8 Contrary to supported Recommendation 125.161 (Egypt)

9 The "atol de ánimas" is a local tradition in Diriá Municipality. From 1 October to 2 November, it is believed that the souls in purgatory visit their relatives. Prayers are held in Dirialeño homes, where a corn drink is distributed to the people, accompanied by a tamale (a traditional Mesoamerican dish made from maize). The tradition involves praying for the eternal rest of the deceased. Through these prayers it is believed they find the light that leads them to enjoy paradise.

few people who remained at the cemetery.

24. In April 2023 the Totogalpa Municipality PN arrested Father Alfonso Zamora in his home, apparently after a pro-government schoolteacher recorded the priest praying for the then imprisoned Bishop Rolando José Álvarez Lagos and accused the priest of criticizing the government. Father Zamora was held for two days, during which time he was interrogated. He was released on 21 April 2023 and warned to stop praying for Bishop Álvarez Lagos.
25. A retired PN commissioner was stationed outside an AOG church over a period of several months in 2023. On 8 September 2023, the former officer entered the church and recorded the content of the sermon and conversations between the congregants with a mobile phone. On his way out, he threatened the leader of women's ministry with the closure of the church and confiscation of the property '... if she continued to lead a coup d'état, inciting the other members of the church.' The church leader, who has been a target of the government since 2022 when her husband was forced into exile, has since stopped attending the church.
26. In one SCCAR municipality, the PN has posted officers at a local Roman Catholic church daily since 12 October 2023. Each day the police monitor the movements of the two priests who work there, as well as with whom they meet and speak. Their Sunday services, including the content of sermons and prayers, are also heavily monitored, and the church has been prohibited from holding activities on weekdays or Saturdays.

Freedom of movement

27. The government repeatedly prevented both foreigners residing in Nicaragua and Nicaraguan nationals from entering Nicaragua during the reporting period. The denial of entry was typically ordered by the General Directorate of Migration and Immigration (DGME) and the Ministry of Interior (MIGOB).
28. On 27 March 2023, Father Néstor Mendoza, parish priest of María Reina de Palacagüina Church in Palacagüina Municipality, Madriz, which is part of the Estelí Diocese, was denied entry to the country. Father Mendoza, a native of Uruguay, had been working in Nicaragua for three years, and the Congregation of the Divine Word to which he belongs has been working in the María Reina de Palacagüina Parish for more than 25 years. The government did not give a reason for blocking his entry, which left his parish without a priest.
29. On 9 July 2023 Father Juan Carlos Sánchez, vicar of the San Francisco de Asís Parish in Managua, and a Nicaraguan national, was preparing to return

to Nicaragua following a trip to Bolivia where he participated in a priestly ordination and a trip to the United States to visit relatives when he was informed by the airline that his entry had been denied by the DGME.

30. On 11 August 2023, Father Tomás Sergio Zamora Calderón, parish priest of the Nuestro Señor de los Milagros Church of the León and Chinandega Diocese in León Department, and Father William Mora Vega, parish priest of the Cristo Rey Church in the Siuna Diocese in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (NCCAR), and both Nicaraguan nationals, were denied entry to Nicaragua following a meeting with Pope Francis at the World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal. Father Zamora Calderón was in charge of Cáritas León which was forced to close earlier in 2023, as well as treasurer of the León and Chinandega Diocese. Father Mora Vega was in charge of the youth ministry for the fSiuna Diocese. Five days later, another priest, Father Eladio Sanchez, was blocked from returning to Nicaragua to attend his brother's funeral.

Forced Expulsion

31. During the reporting period, the government stepped up its drive to forcibly expel those deemed critical of government, stripping them of their Nicaraguan citizenship. Many were political prisoners who were given the choice of remaining in prison or going into immediate forced exile.
32. On 9 February 2023, following a resolution of the Court of Appeals issued on 8 February, 222 political prisoners were deported to the United States. All 222 were serving sentences for after having been convicted of acts undermining 'the independence, sovereignty, and self-determination of the people, for inciting violence, terrorism and economic destabilization'.
33. Included in the group of 222 were seven men detained in August 2022 after Nicaraguan security forces stormed the Matagalpa Diocese Curia where they had been forcibly confined along with the Bishop of Matagalpa, Rolando José Álvarez Lagos, and four others for 15 days.¹⁰ The men were found guilty of conspiracy against the state in January 2023 and were awaiting sentencing at the time of their expulsion.
34. Two additional priests, Father Oscar Danilo Benavidez Dávila and Father Enrique Martínez Gamboa, were also among the group. On 16 January 2023 Father Benavidez Dávila was sentenced to a cumulative eight years in prison for the alleged crimes of conspiracy, undermining national integrity, and the propagation of fake news. Father Martínez Gamboa was violently detained on 13 October 2022 and accused of damaging the integrity of the nation and propagation of fake

¹⁰ Sergio José Cárdenas Flores, Melkin Antonio Centeno Sequeira, José Luis Díaz Cruz, Sadiel Antonio Eugarríos, Darwin Esteylin Leiva Mendoza, Ramiro Reynaldo Tijerino Chávez and Raúl Antonio Vega González

news. He was held in El Chipote Prison, which has been described by Nicaraguan human rights activists as ‘a torture centre’.¹¹

35. The same day, Bishop Álvarez Lagos was transferred from house arrest to La Modelo Tipitapa prison. The following day, on 10 February 2023, he was sentenced to 26 years and four months in prison and stripped of his citizenship.
36. Twelve Roman Catholic priests, arbitrarily detained on various charges and held as political prisoners for varying lengths of time, were released into forced exile in Italy in October 2023. On 18 October, the government issued a statement naming the 12 priests¹² who had been released, claiming that it showed ‘the permanent will and commitment [of the Nicaraguan government] to find solutions.’
37. In January 2024 the government released into exile two bishops, 15 Roman Catholic priests and two seminarians.¹³ Among the group was Bishop Álvarez Lagos, and Bishop Isidoro del Carmen Mora Ortega, who was arrested on 20 December 2023 after he told his congregation that Nicaragua’s bishops were ‘united in prayer’ for Bishop Álvarez Lagos.
38. While the majority of cases of forced expulsion involved men, some women were also targeted. At midnight on Sunday, 2 July 2023, the PN broke into the property of the Fellowship of the Poor of Jesus Christ Foundation, based in León, where four Brazilian missionary nuns resided. The nuns had confirmed their plan to leave Nicaragua the following week after the MIGOB arbitrarily refused to renew their residence visas. The four missionaries were reportedly taken to an unknown destination and expelled the following day.
39. On 7 October 2023 at around 7am, Salvador Paguaga and María Asunción Salgado Duarte were arbitrarily detained in Ocotál, Nueva Segovia by two PN patrols led by Nueva Segovia Chief of Police José Balvino Huete. The pair managed the Nuestra Señora de La Asunción Church’s social media accounts and Mr Paguaga formerly ran the parish radio station which was shut down in August 2022. They were held at the Judicial Assistance Offices of the Ocotál Police Delegation until early in the morning of 8 October 2023, when they were transferred to Police Station #3 of Managua, outside the jurisdiction of their department, where, legally, they should have

been tried for any alleged crimes. Mr Paguaga and Ms Salgado Duarte were accused of ‘undermining the sovereignty of Nicaragua’ and violating Cybercrime Law 1055. According to CSW sources, Ms Salgado Duarte was stripped of her citizenship and sent to the United States ten days after her arrest via a flight for which the government forced her family to pay. Mr Paguaga remains imprisoned in La Modelo, awaiting trial.

Arbitrary Detention

40. The Nicaraguan government has significantly increased the rate at which it arbitrarily detains religious leaders in recent years.
41. On 15 December 2020, Protestant Pastor Wilber Alberto Pérez was arbitrarily detained for promoting a ‘Christmas without Political Prisoners’ campaign and falsely convicted of selling illegal drugs. In March 2021, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison and, according to CSW sources, was placed in isolation in a ‘punishment cell’ with no natural light, despite Nicaragua having ratified the Convention Against Torture (CAT). He was among the 222 political prisoners exiled to the United States of America in February 2023.
42. According to the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), on 22 November 2021, Edgard Francisco Parrales Castillo, a former priest, was detained outside his home in Los Robles neighbourhood in the capital city of Managua, by two men dressed in civilian clothing, following criticism he made about Nicaragua’s decision to withdraw from the OAS. He was sent into exile on 9 February 2023.
43. On 1 June 2022 Father Manuel Salvador García was harassed and arbitrarily detained following accusations of an alleged assault.
44. From 1-4 August 2022 Father Uriel Vallejos was forcibly confined to a parish house in the city of Sébaco after police, accompanied by paramilitaries, stormed the Infant Jesus of Prague Chapel, part of the Jesus of Divine Mercy Parish in Sébaco, in order to confiscate radio and television equipment inside the church. Worshippers inside the church attempted to stop the police from entering and at least two were injured. Father Vallejos and a number of worshippers took refuge inside the parish house adjacent to the chapel and were then blockaded inside by security forces until late morning

11 El País, ‘El Chipote: the dungeon for Nicaraguan political prisoners’, 14 January 2022. <https://english.elpais.com/usa/2022-01-14/el-chipote-the-dungeon-for-nicaraguas-political-prisoners.html>

12 The 12 priests who were sent into forced exile in October 2023 were: Osman José Amador Guillén, Ramón Esteban Angulo Reyes, José Iván Centeno Tercero, Cristóbal Reynaldo Gadea Velásquez, Manuel Salvador García Rodríguez, Yessner Cipriano Pineda Meneses, Jaime Iván Montesinos Saucedá, Julio Ricardo Norori Jiménez, Pastor Eugenio Rodríguez Benavides, Álvaro José Toledo Amador, José Leonardo Urbina Rodríguez and Fernando Israel Zamora Silva.

13 Among the group of leaders forced into exile were: Rolando José Álvarez Lagos, Isidoro del Carmen Mora Ortega, Carlos José Avilés Cantón, Silvio José Fonseca Martínez, Marcos Francisco Díaz Prado, Fernando Isaías Calero Rodríguez, Pablo Antonio Villafranca Martínez, Héctor del Carmen Treminio Vega, Mikel Salvador Monterrey Arias, Raúl Antonio Zamora Guerra, Gerardo José Rodríguez Pérez, Miguel Agustín Mantica Cuadra, Jhader Antonio Hernández Urbina, Alester de Jesús Sáenz Centeno, Tonny Daniel Palacio Sequeira, Jader Danilo Guido Acosta, Óscar José Escoto Salgado, Ismael Reineiro Serrano Gudiel and José Gustavo Sandino Ochoa.

on 4 August when the security forces withdrew and the priest escaped to an undisclosed location. Father Vallejos is diabetic and was forced to subsist on bread and water during the blockade.

45. The police actions followed an order for the immediate halt of transmissions by six Roman Catholic radio stations in the Department of Matagalpa on 1 August, issued by Nahima Díaz, executive president of The Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Post Office (TELCOR). The forced closure was based on a claim that the stations have not held valid authorisations dating back to 2003. These claims were refuted by Roman Catholic officials who pointed out that Monsignor Álvarez had provided the required documentation to TELCOR in June 2016, but that his requests for official acknowledgement went unanswered.
46. On 4 August 2022 heavily armed security forces surrounded the curia of the Matagalpa Diocese, blocking Bishop Álvarez Lagos inside and preventing anyone outside from entering. In response, the bishop approached the security forces, singing and praying for the officers and asking them to reconsider their actions. Bishop Álvarez Lagos was forcibly confined in the curia along with 11 others for 15 days. On 19 August the bishop was placed under house arrest; four priests, two seminarians and a cameraman were imprisoned on the same day, and later charged with ‘conspiracy against the state’ on 26 January 2023. As mentioned above, the seven men and Bishop Álvarez Lagos were released into forced exile in February 2023 and January 2024 respectively.
47. In February 2023 three men were detained for a number of hours in the SCCAR after they questioned why the PN were stopping anyone from entering the local Roman Catholic church for an Ash Wednesday service. The PN claimed that the early morning activity would not be permitted to take place due to a presidential order.
48. In April 2023, two men, Emmanuel Gutiérrez and his nephew, Jimmy Antonio Bonilla Gutiérrez, were arrested in Nandaime, Granada after they performed The Passion of Christ with a street theatre group during Holy Week. Both men were reportedly sentenced to eight years in prison, as was a third man, Victor Tikay, a journalist who was arrested around the same time, after he posted footage of a prohibited Easter celebration online.

49. On 17 April 2023 Father Saúl Antonio Robleto Jiménez was detained by the PN while on his way to the Las Coreas community, San Miguelito Municipality, Rio San Juan to celebrate eucharist. The priest was taken to the San Miguelito Municipality police station and held for around three hours. He was interrogated and accused of criticising the government. He was released following complaints from residents of Las Coreas.
50. During the first nine days of October 2023, six Roman Catholic priests¹⁴ were arbitrarily detained. On 11 October, the Permanent Council of the OAS unanimously approved a resolution condemning the arrest of the six priests and urging the Nicaraguan government ‘to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners... to refrain from repressing and arbitrarily detaining leaders of the Roman Catholic Church... (and to) annul the norms that allow citizens to be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality.’¹⁵ The six men were later released into forced exile along with six others who had been arbitrarily detained on various charges (see the section on forced expulsion).
51. On 21 December 2023 Father Óscar José Escoto Salgado was arbitrarily detained in Matagalpa. He was released on 24 December.
52. Father Jader Danilo Guido Acosta, the vice-dean of Matagalpa Diocese, prayed for Bishop Álvarez Lagos during morning mass on 24 December. He was then arbitrarily detained for 12 hours the same day.
53. A further 16 Roman Catholic leaders were imprisoned in December 2023, including the Bishop of Siuna, 13 priests and two seminarians.¹⁶

Crackdown on Civil Society Organisations, Places of Worship and Educational Institutions

54. In the third cycle, Nicaragua supported two recommendations regarding the protection and safeguarding of (civil society organisations (CSOs)).¹⁷ Despite this, the Nicaraguan government has launched a widespread campaign to eliminate independent civil society in the country.
55. According to figures released in a report¹⁸ by the Nicaragua Human Rights Collection Never Again (Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Nicaragua Nunca Más), 3,138 international CSOs (iCSOs) saw their legal

14 Ramón Esteban Angulo Reyes, José Iván Centeno, Cristóbal Gadea, Julio Ricardo Norori, Yessner Cipriano Pineda Meneses, Álvaro Toledo

15 Organization of American States, “Permanent Council adopts the resolution “Rejection of repressive measures by the Nicaragua government against educational institutions and the Catholic church in Nicaragua”, 11 October 2023. https://twitter.com/OAS_official/status/1712172285962985673

16 Carlos José Avilés Cantón, Fernando Isaías Calero Rodríguez, Marcos Francisco Díaz Prado, Jhader Antonio Hernández Urbina, Silvio José Fonseca Martínez, Miguel Agustín Mantica Cuadra, Mikel Salvador Monterrey Arias, Isidoro del Carmen Mora Ortega, Tonny Daniel Palacio Sequeira, Gerardo José Rodríguez Pérez, Héctor del Carmen Treminio Vega, Alester de Jesús Sáenz Centeno, Pablo Antonio Villafranca Martínez and Raúl Antonio Zamora Guerra.

17 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Nicaragua Addendum, A/HRC/42/16/Add.1, 13 September 2019, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/272/70/pdf/g1927270.pdf?token=TcdhdXO3gQeFNTLCmM&fe=true>, 125.118 (Luxembourg); 125.145 (Germany)

18 Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Nicaragua Nunca Mas, “Closure of Civic Space: Criminalization of the Exercise of Citizenship”, December 2023; <https://colectivodhnicaragua.org/informes/#2023>

status cancelled in 2022, and a further 293 up until 6 November 2023, the closing date of their report. Of the 293 iCSOs affected in 2023, at least 55 were religiously affiliated and included internationally known and respected organisations such as Caritas and the Society of Jesus (also known as the Jesuit Order)

56. Several domestic organisations have also been stripped of their legal status and forced to close. These included the Daughters in the Holy Spirit of Santa Luisa Marillac Association, Fellowship of the Poor of Jesus Christ Foundation, the Martin Luther King Jr. Nicaraguan Evangelical University (UENIC-MLK), the Jesus My Reason for Living Evangelical Foundation and the Anointing and Fire Pentecostal Ministry Foundation.
57. On 28 June 2022, the Nicaraguan parliament stripped the Missionaries of Charity Association of its legal status, an act the government justified by claiming that the association was not accredited to act as nursing home or child development centre. Subsequently, the Managua headquarters of the order were taken over by the police. Eighteen Missionaries of Charity nuns who worked in different parts of the country were escorted by the DGME to the border with Costa Rica and expelled.
58. On 24 October 2023, the government cancelled the legal status and confiscated assets of 16 NGOs, most of them Christian. Among those affected was the Franciscan Order which had a 58-year presence in the country. The government claimed that the groups had not reported the origin of their financing and failed to comply with other paperwork-related requirements. Independent media reported that the same day, the Ministry of Education and the PN took over and occupied the San Francis of Assisi Institute located in Matagalpa.
59. The arbitrary cancellation of legal status extended to institutions of higher learning. Several universities and technical institutes linked to both Roman Catholic and Protestant religious groups were stripped of their legal status, had their property confiscated, or were forced to close due to the government freezing their bank accounts.
60. On 7 March 2023, the government cancelled the legal status of the Autonomous Christian University of Nicaragua and the John Paul II Roman Catholic University, claiming that the institutions had failed to comply with the regulatory laws. The authorities cited the Law on Non-Profit Legal Entities (Law 147), the Organic Law of the Legislative Power of the Republic

of Nicaragua (Law 606), and the Law against Money Laundering, Financing of Terrorism and Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Law 977).

61. In justifying the 24 April 2023 cancellation of the legal status of the Adventist University of Nicaragua (UNADENIC), the government accused the institution of failing to meet enrolment requirements, offering unauthorized courses, and allegedly filing false information with the National Council of Universities (CNU) and the National Council of Evaluation and Accreditation. The government again cited Law 147, Law 606, and Law 977. The CNU claimed that UNADENIC did not have 'adequate study plans', used unapproved 'curricular designs', and did not possess 'technological support to attend to the online and remote offering'.
62. On 3 May 2023, the MIGOB cancelled the legal status of the ENLACE Christian Television Foundation, which brought together Enlace Canal 21 and Radio Nexo, Protestant-Evangelical media outlets run by Reverend Guillermo Antonio Osorno Molina. Reverend Osorno Molina was prevented from leaving the country and his passport was retained the same day.¹⁹
63. The Martin Luther King Jr Evangelical University of Nicaragua, founded in November 1994 in conjunction with 22 Protestant denominations and institutions with the purpose of providing higher education to young people from the religious community and society in general, saw its legal status cancelled on 25 July 2023. The MIGOB claimed that the university had failed to provide information regarding its board of directors and account statements since 2017.
64. On 15 August 2023, the government cancelled the legal status of the Jesuit-run Central American University (UCA). It went on to confiscate the physical property and seize control of the university's bank accounts. The government described the UCA as a 'centre of terrorism', and claimed it had 'betrayed the trust of the Nicaraguan people.' One day later, the Central American Province of the Society of Jesus issued a response²⁰, stating that the accusations against the UCA were 'false and unfounded'.
65. On 22 August 2023 the government went on to cancel the legal status of the Society of Jesus in Nicaragua. In a statement published in The Gazette²¹, the government accused the order of failing to submit its 'financial statements' for the fiscal years 2020, 2021 and 2022,

19 Reverend Guillermo Osorno Molina was a presidential candidate for the Camino Cristiano party of Nicaragua (CCN) in the 2021 national elections. He publicly raised irregularities in the electoral process. In retaliation the government suspended Enlace Canal 21 and Radio Nexo in November 2021, and the telecommunications service provider, Telcor, cancelled the licenses on 3 May 2023, when the decree was officially published in the MIGOB's official publication "The Gazette." Enlace 21 and Radio Nexo continue to broadcast via digital media but are no longer available on national or cable television.

20 Jesuitas Centroamerica, 'En defensa de la verdad, la justicia, la libertad y el derecho a la educación u en apoyo a la uca de Nicaragua', 16 Agosto 2023, <https://uca.edu.sv/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Comunicado-UCA-Nicaragua-Provincia-Centroamericana-Compania-de-Jesus.pdf>

21 The Nicaraguan government publishes laws, decrees, resolutions, agreements, and other actions of general interest ordered by the State in The Gazette.

and of having an ‘expired’ board of directors since 2020, violating laws related to the regulation and control of non-profit organisations. The statement ordered the transfer of the order’s bank accounts and movable and immovable property to the government.

66. In an interview²² given in October 2023, Martha Patricia Molina Montenegro, a lawyer, researcher and HRD, said that she had received evidence that the properties of hundreds of Protestant-Evangelical churches had been confiscated or forced to close by the government.²³
67. On 12 December 2023, Mountain Gateway, a Protestant-Evangelical organisation based in Texas and which operates in Nicaragua under the name Puerta de la Montana, saw 11 Nicaraguan pastors arrested.²⁴ The organisation, registered in Nicaragua in 2015, was stripped of its legal status and its assets; 47 vehicles and four properties including a 122-acre farm, were confiscated.²⁵ In January the government announced that it was pursuing criminal charges against all those arrested, as well as three US citizens in absentia,²⁶ for alleged money laundering and organised crime. In a statement on its website,²⁷ the organisation stated that it held ‘eight mass evangelistic gospel campaigns in the country, with the support and assistance of the Nicaraguan government’ in 2023 and that it has ‘documentation demonstrating that the Nicaraguan government viewed and approved all funds that entered the country, and the organization operated under the government’s oversight to ensure that all funds were used and managed appropriately.’

Recommendations:

68. **Comply with the human rights treaties to which it is a party and uphold its international obligations through the implementation of recommendations given to it by the human rights treaty bodies;**
69. **Ratify the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.**

70. **Release without condition imprisoned religious leaders and all political prisoners unjustly detained in the country;**
71. **Restore Nicaraguan citizenship to all those, in and outside the country, from whom it has been arbitrarily removed;**
72. **Reinstate the legal status of all civil society organizations which have been arbitrarily made illegal; and unfreeze the bank accounts of universities, non-governmental organizations and religious groups throughout the country;**
73. **Cease the illegal collection of taxes from religious institutions exempt under Article 5 of Executive Decree 3-95 on Real Estate Tax;**
74. **Allow international human rights bodies, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Group of Experts and relevant Special Procedures unhindered access to Nicaragua.**
75. **Uphold, in law and in practice, guarantees to fundamental human rights, including FoRB for all, in line with the constitution and the ICCPR to which the State is party.**

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