

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Rupert Colville **Location:** Geneva

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Subject: Nicaragua

Nicaragua

We are very concerned by the situation of 13 people who as a form of protest entered a church in Nicaragua, which was subsequently encircled and sealed off by police. We are equally troubled that another group of opposition members was detained after bringing purely humanitarian aid to them, and who have been accused of serious criminal charges as a result.

On 14 November, eight relatives of jailed political opponents and another woman started a hunger strike inside the San Miguel church in Masaya, calling for the release of 130 individuals allegedly detained in the context of the protests. The same day, they found themselves surrounded by the police inside the church, together with the priest and three other people. The police cut water and electrical services off and prevented anyone from entering the church and delivering humanitarian supplies, including insulin for the priest, who has diabetes.

The same night, a group of at least 13 members of the opposition were detained after delivering some water to the people surrounded by the police. Their lawyers claim that their due process guarantees have not been respected. Prominent human rights defenders, such as Amaya Coppens and Olga Valle, are among the 13 persons detained. Coppens is a Belgian-Nicaraguan medical student leader who had been detained in the context of the protests for eight months and who was released on 11 June 2019 under the Amnesty Law. Her detention could be considered an act of reprisal for speaking up about the human rights situation in Nicaragua and reaching out to UN officials and mechanisms. She had recently met with the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva.

On Monday, the 13 members of the opposition and three other political opponents were charged with trafficking of weapons. We are very concerned that these apparently trumped-up charges may constitute a renewed attempt to stifle dissent.

We were also informed on Monday that other eight people started a hunger strike inside the cathedral of Managua, demanding the release of all individuals detained in the context of the protests. A doctor and an 11-year old child were accompanying them. Dozens of pro-government elements entered the cathedral hours later and reportedly intimidated and attacked them with stones, as well as the priest and a nun seemingly, with the acquiescence of police officers, who had surrounded the premises.

We urge the authorities to ensure the rights of those inside the church, in particular by refraining from interfering with the provision of food, water and medical assistance. Everyone should be allowed to exercise the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without fear of being attacked. We also call for the release of all those who may be arbitrarily detained and ensure that their fundamental legal safeguards are respected.

The Government must end the persistent repression of dissent and the ongoing pattern of arbitrary arrests and refrain from criminalizing and attacking human rights defenders, political opponents and any other dissenting voices. We reiterate our readiness to support the Nicaraguan State to fulfil its international human rights obligations and go back to the country if access is granted.

ENDS

*For more information and media requests, please contact: **Rupert Colville** - + 41 22 917 9767 / rcolville@ohchr.org or **Marta Hurtado** - + 41 22 917 9466 / mhurtado@ohchr.org*

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