

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Nicaragua: Authorities must listen to those expressing concern over the Grand Interoceanic Canal.

As part of activities to express opposition to Law 840, the legal framework for the Grand Interoceanic Canal in Nicaragua, on 31 August hundreds of residents from 21 communities from across the country are planning to carry out demonstrations to express their concern over the possible effects that the canal will have upon their rights and livelihoods, and to urge authorities to ensure that the human rights of affected communities will be protected and respected.

On 7 April 2016, a group of citizens brought a citizens' initiative to repeal the Grand Canal's legal framework (Law 840), along with supporting documentation, before the First Secretary of the National Assembly. The proposal was accompanied by 6,933 supporting signatures. That same month, both the First Secretary and the Executive Committee of the National Assembly rejected the proposal, arguing that it was inadmissible as it is not within their jurisdiction.

In the proposal presented, the petitioners state that the construction and implementation of the Grand Canal will affect entire communities, including campesinos (peasant farmers), Indigenous and Afro-descendant people and communities historically settled on the land in question who could be displaced during the process of expropriation. This would, according to the petitioners, have a definite impact on the economic and cultural lives of communities, families and individuals. Furthermore, it would bring about changes to their livelihood and break up family and community networks, lead to the impoverishment of the affected population and have an impact on natural resources, including conservation areas.

The demonstrations will be carried out in the context of a legal recourse (Amparo) filed in May 2016 by members of the National Council for the Defense of our Land, Lake and National Sovereignty. The legal recourse denounces the damages caused by the Executive Committee's decision not to process the citizens' initiative. Due to the fact that judicial authorities have yet to rule on the Amparo, the Council has stated that it will file a written statement regarding the delay with the Supreme Court of Justice.

Amnesty International is concerned about the lack of detailed information on the project and the measures which the government intends to take to ensure that the rights of affected communities will be duly respected and protected.

In addition, Amnesty International urges the Nicaraguan government to adequately safeguard the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly of all people and guarantee that all communities which could be affected by the construction of the Grand Canal are duly consulted, including the right of Indigenous Peoples to free, prior and informed consent.