

PUBLIC

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UA 320/08 Fear for safety
NICARAGUA Dr Vilma Nuñez (f), President of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Centre (Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos - CENIDH)
 Other members of CENIDH

Dr Vilma Nuñez, president of the prominent Nicaraguan human rights organization, the Nicaraguan Human Rights Centre (*Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos* - CENIDH) and her colleagues are the target of a campaign designed to discredit them and disrupt their work for CENIDH. Their safety may be at risk.

On 9 November, when municipal elections were held across the country, Dr Nuñez and other CENIDH members were verbally attacked by members of the public as they carried out election monitoring. The insults used against them included the same words used about CENIDH in pro-government media.

The weekly government newspaper *El 19* featured articles about Dr Nuñez on 29 October and 20 November, implying that she was a sympathiser of the 1936-1979 Somoza dictatorship which committed widespread human rights violations. The article alleged that Dr Nuñez and CENIDH do not work on behalf of poorer sectors of society but only on behalf of social elites.

On 16 October, Dr Nuñez and other members of CENIDH accompanied members of a Nicaraguan non-governmental organization (NGO) to the Public Prosecutor's Office. The NGO had been called to the Public Prosecutor's Office as part of an investigation into alleged illegal activities. As members of CENIDH and the NGO exited the building, they were met by a crowd of around 150 people, who shouted insults and abuse such as "Oligarchs! Corrupt! Thieves!" (*Oligarcas! Corruptos! Ladrones!*). As Dr Nuñez and the other CENIDH members walked to their pick-up truck, they were followed by the crowd, which surrounded them and began to beat the doors and windows of the truck. One of the members of the crowd grabbed the camera from a CENIDH journalist who was sitting in the back of the pick-up truck and ran off with it. When the CENIDH journalist gave chase, he was followed by around 50 people who pushed him to the ground and kicked him. Another member of CENIDH tried to intervene and was also pushed to the ground and kicked.

In the early hours of 26 September, in the city of León, around 75km north-west of Managua, Dr Nuñez's house was vandalised by individuals who threw paint bombs at the external walls. The colours used were the red and black which are the same as those of the ruling government party flag.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There have been a number of articles published in the Nicaraguan government's own weekly newspaper *El 19*, which have sought to portray notable human rights defenders as extreme right-wing sympathisers interested only in financial gain.

The 9 November municipal elections intensified political polarization across the country, which culminated in violent outbreaks in the streets of Managua and some other cities. According to local sources, on 11 November well-known figures from the government party used a television interview to describe CENIDH as "defenders of the oligarchs and the rich" (*defensores de oligarcas y personas de apellido*).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHRC) granted precautionary protection measures on behalf of Dr Nuñez and other members of CENIDH on 11 November. The IAHRC requested that the Nicaraguan authorities should reach agreement with CENIDH members regarding the protection measures to

be offered and implement them in order to protect the life and physical integrity of Dr Nuñez and other CENIDH members. Although some police protection has been assigned to the CENIDH office and Dr Nuñez's house, the authorities have not contacted CENIDH to discuss the type of measures offered or other details.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Dr Vilma Nuñez and her colleagues at CENIDH;
- urging the President and the Head of the National Police to ensure that effective protection is provided and maintained to guarantee the safety of Dr Nuñez and her colleagues, in strict accordance with her wishes;
- calling on the Attorney General to order an immediate, thorough and swift investigation into the incidents of 26 September and 16 October;
- calling on the authorities to stop using language in official publications which stigmatizes human rights defenders and their work and which could therefore put them at risk of attack;
- asking the authorities to respect the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Daniel Ortega Saavedra

Presidente de la República

Reparto El Carmen

Costado oeste del Parque El Carmen

Managua, NICARAGUA

Fax: +505 266 3102

Salutation: Dear President/Estimado Sr. Presidente

Head of the National Police

Primera Comisionada Aminta Granera Sacasa

Directora de la Policía Nacional

Edificio Faustino Ruiz

Managua, NICARAGUA

Fax: +505 277 1871

Salutation: Dear Commissioner/Estimada Comisionada

Attorney General

Dr. Julio Centeno Gómez

Fiscal General de la República

Ministerio Público

Km 4½, carretera a Masaya, contiguo a Bancentro

Managua, NICARAGUA

Fax: +505 255 6832

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Fiscal General

COPIES TO:

Local human rights organization

CENIDH

Texaco de Montoyaa 1½ cuadra al sur

Managua, NICARAGUA

and to diplomatic representatives of Nicaragua accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 January 2009.