



## Open Letter to the Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council Working Group on Nicaragua regarding the Permanent Council meeting on 24 June 2020.

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Amnesty International has closely monitored the human rights situation in Nicaragua, especially the human rights crisis that has developed since April 2018 and the efforts of the international community, regional and international protection mechanisms and human rights organizations to ensure that effective measures are taken to address serious human rights violations and to look for solutions to the crisis.

In response to OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro's recent call for a Permanent Council meeting to [analyze the situation in Nicaragua](#), Amnesty International calls on OAS member States and especially the Permanent Council Working Group on Nicaragua to continue to take all necessary diplomatic steps to ensure that the Nicaraguan State guarantee truth, justice, and reparations for its crimes against international law and the serious human rights violations committed in the country.

Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nicaraguan State's lack of fulfillment to international standards of epidemiological prevention and control is alarming. The Nicaraguan State is jeopardizing the lives and health of its population and leaving certain especially vulnerable groups defenseless. Such groups include health workers and those incarcerated for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Amnesty International is especially concerned not only that the Nicaraguan State is not implementing the recommendations of international organizations with respect to the pandemic, but also that State authorities are promoting mass gatherings that could put thousands of people at risk. Amnesty International has received [reports](#) that State authorities have promoted mass gatherings like parades and tourism activities during the pandemic, including during March and April.

Furthermore, the situation of those detained in police stations and the Nicaraguan prison system is especially concerning in the context of COVID-19. Hundreds of people have been incarcerated since April 2018 for the free exercise of their rights. On 4 May 2020, local organizations reported that almost [90 of these people remain in prison](#) despite previous government commitments to end this.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) cited the precarious conditions in Nicaraguan prisons in its 2019 annual report. In the [report](#), the IACHR "notes that the conditions of detention of persons held at the 'Jorge Navarro' National Penitentiary (known as 'La Modelo') and at the Comprehensive Women's Penitentiary Center, known as 'La Esperanza,' have not improved, inasmuch as they continue to be overcrowded, unsanitary, lacking medical care, and personal belongings are stolen from inmates, inmates are mistreated and punished in maximum security cells without any objective criteria governing the practice."

Additionally, local organizations have reported that some detention centers have prevented visitors from delivering hygiene and cleaning products in the weekly packages they prepare for their incarcerated family members. The local organizations have also reported a lack of information about security measures and protocols adopted by the prison system to respond to COVID-19. Likewise, local organizations and relatives of incarcerated individuals have stated that some detainees suffer from serious pre-existing health problems that render them especially vulnerable to the virus. In this context, [local groups report](#) that over a dozen incarcerated people have presented symptoms of COVID-19 and remain in detention in precarious and overcrowded conditions without adequate medical care.

It is unacceptable to Amnesty International that the Nicaraguan State is not meeting its obligation to guarantee these individuals' right to health. The international community must remain vigilant on this issue. All those who are still detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly must be freed immediately.



Amnesty International is also concerned that since 4 June, the Ministry of Health (MINSa) has fired at least 16 health workers in Estelí, Granada, Managua and Rivas, according to the Citizen COVID-19 Observatory. These fired health workers signed a public letter on 17 May that calls on the Nicaraguan government to take more effective measures to confront the COVID-19 pandemic and the Nicaraguan population to remain in their homes and take precautionary measures.

The letters that the health workers received when they were fired do not contain a reason for their termination. Moreover, some of the firings were effected abruptly and without any previous meetings to convey information or give those being fired an opportunity to defend themselves. In this context, Amnesty International interviewed a doctor who stated that her hospital's director said simply that her firing on 9 June was due to "higher orders."

The fired health workers have not been able to return to their workplaces and still have not received compensation for their termination. These firings are the latest incident in a series of reprisals against health workers in their workplaces since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. These incidents have included prohibitions on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on several occasions as well as harassment and intimidation of health workers who raised their voices about unsafe working conditions and inadequate treatment environments.

The recent layoffs of health personnel have occurred against a backdrop of state repression that began in Nicaragua in April 2018 and continues to date. In this context, Amnesty International condemns the repeated reprisals against and continuing intimidation of human rights defenders during the last two years, including health workers, who have suffered intimidation and firings. Amnesty International, together with other international human rights organizations, has sent an [open letter](#) to President Ortega in which it makes an urgent call to the Nicaraguan government to immediately cease acts of intimidation against health workers, including the arbitrary firings of those who raise their voices to demand greater health protection and transparency in the context of COVID-19.

So far, 72 health workers have died of COVID-19 in Nicaragua, and a total of 614 have presented symptoms of the virus, [according to data from 17 June from the Citizen COVID-19 Observatory](#). This organization, a multidisciplinary team that conducts community epidemiological monitoring, reports 1,688 pneumonia deaths and suspected COVID-19 cases. This number differs substantially from the data published by the Ministry of Health, which claims that only 64 people have died from COVID-19 through 17 June.

With Central America's regional migration flows in mind, Amnesty International deems that the Nicaraguan State's refusal to effectively apply the COVID-19 recommendations of international organizations not only puts the population in Nicaragua at risk, but may also jeopardize the containment measures that neighboring countries have implemented to confront COVID-19.

Therefore, due to the circumstances described above, Amnesty International urgently calls on the Permanent Council Working Group on Nicaragua to continue to use all diplomatic measures at its disposal to support the search for solutions that guarantee justice, truth, and reparations. Likewise, Amnesty International requests that the Working Group demand that the Nicaraguan State adhere to the Permanent Council Resolution "OAS Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," especially regarding respect for human rights in its response to the pandemic.