

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Nicaragua: The State must guarantee the security and integrity of communities peacefully demonstrating their concerns over construction of the Canal

In observation of International Mother Earth Day on April 22, thousands of Nicaraguan farmers are preparing the fourth national demonstration to express concerns over the possible impact that the construction of the Great Canal would have upon their rights and livelihoods, part of more than 60 demonstrations of its kind that have been held throughout the country. Amnesty International urges the Nicaraguan authorities to ensure the effective protection of demonstrators and guarantee their right to peaceful protest.

According to Francisca Ramirez, Coordinator of the National Council for Defense of the Land, Lake and National Sovereignty, people have made the decision to protest because “we love the land and because the Canal project endangers the natural resources and heritage of all Nicaraguans. We demand that all of the human rights threatened by construction of the Canal be respected”.

The National Council for Defense of the Land, the organizers of the protest, informed authorities in early April of their intention to carry out a peaceful, public demonstration, exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. The Council requested police presence and protection in order to prevent any possible aggression and in order that they can exercise their right to peaceful protest. To date, police have not responded to this request.

According to the Council, in the past demonstrators have been prevented from exercising their right to peaceful protest, suffering aggression, threats and arbitrary detention by both state and non-state actors during previous mobilizations. During the third national march, held in October 2015, police established checkpoints with the intention of obstructing continuation of the march which was heading towards the National Assembly, located in Managua.

Rural communities affected by construction of the Interoceanic Canal have repeatedly expressed to authorities the risks that it will have upon their rights and livelihoods.

Previously, members of the Council presented a citizen-supported bill with the support of nearly seven thousand signatories, in order to repeal the law regulating the canal. On April 11, the Council received notification that the bill had been rejected on the pretext of lack of jurisdiction. This decision was later supported by the governing body of the National Assembly, which also rejected an appeal on the issue.

Amnesty International urges the Nicaraguan State to listen to and take into account the voices and concerns of the population, particularly those of affected communities. The organization repeats its concern over the risk of displacement of tens of thousands of people due to construction of the canal, in addition to the impact upon their livelihoods.

“All we ask is that any project of this nature respect the human rights of the Nicaraguan population and environmental sustainability”, said Monica Lopez Baltodano, advisor to the Council.