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Nicaragua: Violence spiralling out of control

Urgent action is needed by Nicaragua's political parties to stop their supporters from engaging in acts of violence like those that have swept the country over the past two weeks, Amnesty International said today. The clashes have been fuelled by a dispute over the results of this month's municipal elections which the losing parties are contesting.

"Political parties need to be more outspoken in condemning any acts of violence by their supporters, and seek a negotiated solution to disputes around the elections," said Kerrie Howard, Deputy Director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International. "The government party has a particular responsibility to call for calm, in particular by its own supporters, given its duty to protect its citizens."

In the days leading up to the 9 November elections, sporadic acts of violence involving supporters of the two main political factions swept the capital Managua and other cities.

On 18 November, hundreds of supporters from the Sandinista National Liberation Front Party (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional - FSLN) and the opposition Liberal Constitutional Party (Partido Liberal Constitucionalista - PLC) clashed in Managua using sticks, stones, home-made mortars, guns and machetes. Many people were wounded but no official figures are available.

The clashes have continued since the elections, amid accusations of fraud and vote rigging. Journalists have also been targeted as a result of their reports on events and, according to news reports, at least 20 journalists have been assaulted, while five independent radio stations have also been attacked.

"The press should be allowed to report on the elections without fear of reprisals. The press must not be targeted in the quagmire of political violence," Kerrie Howard said, further adding:

"The credibility of the government is at stake: those in office and their supporters must be mindful of their obligation to uphold the principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights by ensuring violence does not escalate."

Background:

Tension prior to the elections was already high, partly due to the government's refusal to allow international and local observer groups to monitor the elections. The opposition party, the PLC, has refused to accept the results published so far, which attribute the majority of the municipal government positions to the FSLN, including the position of Mayor of Managua.