



PRESS RELEASE

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Nicaragua: Under Attack - Freedom of Expression of Women's Rights Activists

The General Prosecutor's Office has launched a criminal investigation into 9 prominent leaders of the women's rights movement in Nicaragua, following a formal complaint filed by the so called National Association for Human Rights, a civil organisation with a confessional profile. The defendants have advocated on women's rights issues for many years, such as in the case of Zoilaamérica Narváez whose testimony on the sexual abuse committed by her former stepfather and current president of Nicaragua, Mr. Daniel Ortega.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that paves the way for the full realisation of all other human rights and the enabling of democracy. The Vienna Declaration and Programme Action (1993) recognises that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In this context the full exercise of freedom of expression has proven to be essential to the progressive realisation of all human rights, including women's rights.

The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999, recognises the right of every person to "know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms", and also "To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters".¹

ARTICLE 19 expresses its concern for the harassment of and threats against the nine human rights defenders due to their work against gender-based violence and in favour of the full realisation of reproductive rights in Nicaragua.

¹ General Assembly, A/RES/53/144, March 8th de 1999, ART. 6.

We respectfully point out that the Nicaraguan State is internationally obligated not only to refrain from interfering in the free flow of ideas and opinions, but to promote and guarantee their flow. It is clear that the silencing of the nine women's (Ana Maria Pizarro, Juana Jiménez, Lorna Norori, Luisa Molina, Martha María Blandón, Martha Murguía, Mayra Sirias, Violeta Delgado and Yamileth Mejía) voices through censorship is fuelling the criminal accusations against them.

In response to what clearly constitutes an attack on freedom of expression, ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Nicaraguan State to adopt all the necessary measures to guarantee the legal and physical security to each and every human rights defender that has been subject to illegitimated harassment. As stated by the Interamerican Human Rights Court “an illegal act which violates human rights and which is initially not directly imputable to a State (for example, because it is the act of a private person or because the person responsible has not been identified) can lead to international responsibility of the State, not because of the act itself, but because of the lack of due diligence to prevent the violation or to respond to it as required by the Convention”.²

“The use of legal means to harass human rights defenders is unacceptable”, said Darío Ramírez, Director of ARTICLE 19’s Office for Mexico and Central America. “President Ortega must translate into actions the unrestricted commitment to freedom of expression guaranteed in international law that he pledged to defend when he became President”.

ARTICLE 19 respectfully calls upon President Daniel Ortega to adopt, in accordance with human rights international law, all the necessary measures to guarantee, respect and promote the free flow of ideas and opinions.

ARTICLE 19 calls upon the international community to express its solidarity with the nine human rights defenders illegitimately accused, as well as with the victims and victims’ families they defend.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For more information, please contact Ricardo Gonzalez, Ricardo@article19.org +52 (55) 1054-6500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.

² Velásquez Rodríguez Case, Judgment of July 29, 1988, Inter-Am Ct. H.R. (Ser. C) No. 4 (1988). Pr. 172