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Human rights situation in Nicaragua

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/18, contains an update on the human rights situation in Nicaragua. The report includes recommendations that complement those made in previous reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and those made by Human Rights Council mechanisms and the human rights treaty bodies.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction and methodology

1. In its resolution 58/18, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare comprehensive and gender-responsive reports on the situation of human rights in Nicaragua, building on previous reports of the High Commissioner and the reports and recommendations of Human Rights Council mechanisms and those of the treaty bodies. The present report provides an overview of the situation from 15 June 2024 to 15 June 2025.

2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) does not have access to the country and conducts its work remotely, in accordance with its established methodology. During the period under review, OHCHR conducted 236 interviews with victims, witnesses and other sources, in person and remotely. OHCHR held 193 meetings with representatives of civil society and the international community and analysed documents from governmental and non-governmental sources. The report's findings were documented in line with OHCHR human rights methodology, including source verification, informed consent, and confidentiality safeguards. The information was assessed against international human rights law and relevant domestic legislation. In May 2025, OHCHR submitted a questionnaire to the Government of Nicaragua on the topics to be addressed in the present report but did not receive a response.

3. OHCHR continued to observe a persistent erosion of the human rights situation and the rule of law, often marked by a fear of reprisals, including among victims and witnesses of human rights violations. This, driven by regressive legal reforms and the absence of accountability for human rights violations, had a chilling effect on civic space. During the reporting period, several individuals declined to cooperate with OHCHR due to concerns over potential retaliation against themselves or their families. These negative trends were compounded by the decision by Nicaragua to cease its participation in the activities of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, in a deeply concerning signal of increasing isolation and lack of cooperation with the United Nations human rights system.

II. Constitutional reform, erosion of the rule of law and separation of powers

4. On 30 January 2025, a major constitutional reform was adopted.¹ The reform amended or repealed most of the articles of the Constitution (185 out of 198 articles), fully reshaping the text. Despite these extensive changes, the reform was adopted using a partial reform procedure, even though a full constitutional reform required a call for elections for a National Constituent Assembly.² The wide-ranging impact of this reform on human rights is of concern.³ Several elements of the constitutional reform, alone and in conjunction with others, further deepened the serious erosion of the rule of law and the protection of human rights in Nicaragua.

5. While the amended Constitution nominally affirms judicial independence, provisions on the separation of powers were not included, reducing the legislative and judicial branches to entities coordinated by and subordinated to the presidency. The amended Constitution does not establish and guarantee political pluralism.

¹ See Official Gazette, No. 32, 18 February 2025.

² Reformed Constitution, arts. 177–179; and former Constitution, arts. 191 and 192.

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/09/human-rights-are-our-mainstay-against-unbridled-power>. See also <https://www.oacnudh.org/nicaragua-the-constitutional-reform-deepens-setbacks-in-civil-and-political-freedoms/>; [https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=%2Fen%2Fiachr%2Fmedia_center%2Fpresses%2F2025%2F073.asp&utm_content=country-nic&utm_term=class-mon&utm](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=%2Fen%2Fiachr%2Fmedia_center%2Fpresses%2F2025%2F073.asp&utm_content=country-nic&utm_term=class-mon&utm;); and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/nicaragua-turk-urges-lawmakers-reject-proposed-constitutional-changes>.

6. The constitutionally guaranteed independence of the Supreme Electoral Council was repealed.⁴ The reform also provided for an extension of the presidential term from five to six years. In the absence of a specific provision on the scope of the application of this new term and its interplay with previous constitutional provisions, under which Daniel Ortega Saavedra was elected, or otherwise of a final decision by an independent and impartial judiciary, the timing of the next presidential elections remains uncertain. The introduction of a co-presidency system – whereby the Co-Presidents were intended to be chosen through popular election – has been undermined by the de facto assumption of the position of Co-President by Rosario Murillo Zambrana, the former Vice-President, as of 21 February 2025,⁵ without an electoral process.

7. The Public Prosecution Service was placed under direct presidential control, and the presidency was empowered to appoint and dismiss both the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General, removing the Service's prior functional independence. This raises particular concerns regarding the upholding of the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations.⁶ The fact that the Attorney General also holds new power to exercise financial control over universities also raised concerns, as it may further undermine the autonomy of educational institutions.⁷ This has heightened the risk of enabling political interference with academic freedom, contravening international human rights standards.

8. It is of particular concern that the reform also eliminated core human rights protections, including the explicit prohibition of torture and essential due process rights such as the rights to be informed of charges, to have access to public trials and to legal defence. Freedom of expression, including media freedom, was unduly restricted and made subject to broad and vaguely worded grounds for limitations. The reform removed the constitutional prohibition on censorship and granted the State broad powers to oversee media content. These changes dismantled critical guarantees and safeguards for independent journalism, provided legal grounds to further unduly restrict civic space, and consolidated an institutional structure of social control. The presidency now has the authority to suspend constitutional rights without exception during states of emergency, in violation of international standards.⁸

9. Prior safeguards that limited military intervention to exceptional cases approved by the Council of Ministers were removed.⁹ The presidency can deploy the army domestically whenever “stability” is deemed at risk, which may entail the deployment of the army for the purpose of leading law enforcement operations, such as the policing of assemblies. The institutionalization of a voluntary auxiliary police force and patriotic reserve forces of civilian volunteers raised the risk of politically affiliated security forces and the formalization of paramilitary groups.

10. The constitutional amendments allow for deprivation of nationality as a constitutional sanction against individuals found responsible for acts of treason against the homeland, broadly framed as actions that threaten national independence, sovereignty, self-determination, security and peace.¹⁰ This vague and expansive definition, lacking legal safeguards, entrenches a practice already used arbitrarily in the past against political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders and others.

11. The new law on the judiciary adopted in March 2025 granted the presidency the power to nominate the head of the Supreme Court, replacing the previous system of internal election and seriously undermining judicial independence.¹¹ It also allows for restrictions on the publicity of criminal proceedings at the discretion of the judicial authority. This increases risks of abuse of the judicial system, further undermines the rule of law, and undermines transparency, accountability and the rights of the accused.

⁴ Reformed Constitution, art. 151. See also Act No. 1242, Official Gazette, No. 46, 10 March 2025.

⁵ See Official Gazette, No. 35, 21 February 2025.

⁶ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 32 (2007), para. 19.

⁷ See Official Gazette, No. 102, 9 June 2025.

⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 29 (2001), para. 7.

⁹ Former Constitution, art. 92.

¹⁰ A/HRC/57/20, paras. 54–57.

¹¹ Act No. 1244, art. 28.

III. Civic and democratic spaces

A. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly

12. The rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly continued to be unduly restricted, resulting in the near-total closure of the civic space. In August 2024, the National Assembly adopted reforms to Act No. 1115 requiring all civil society actors to operate exclusively under formal “partnership alliances” with State institutions, and to submit their programmes for prior approval by the Ministry of the Interior. This framework strengthened State control over the activities of organizations, undermining their independence.¹²

13. The legal status of at least 1,894 organizations was revoked, including a mass cancellation of 1,500 organizations by the Ministry of the Interior on 24 August 2024, and their assets were transferred to the Public Prosecution Service. This brings the total number of cancelled organizations to at least 5,535, or approximately 80 per cent of all organizations registered in Nicaragua prior to the outbreak of the human rights crisis in 2018.¹³

14. At least 41 institutions whose legal status was cancelled operated in the education sector, and they included universities. These actions further eroded academic freedom, as did the reported censorship of academic programmes, and new legislation making national higher education policy subject to the presidency’s approval.¹⁴

15. Measures identified in the present and previous reports have created an atmosphere in which individuals feel compelled to refrain from exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Against this background, no demonstrations unaffiliated with the ruling party were documented during the reporting period. OHCHR received reports of allegedly compelled participation in pro-government demonstrations, particularly affecting civil servants and students, who reportedly were required to provide photographic proof of attendance as a condition for maintaining employment and educational benefits.

B. Right to participation in public affairs

16. The National Assembly approved in March 2025 an electoral law that eliminated mechanisms for direct citizen participation, such as plebiscites and referendums. Together with the constitutional reforms, this law further restricted political participation and consolidated power within the executive branch. The Supreme Electoral Council has been granted expanded powers, including the authority to dissolve political parties and oversee elections with reduced transparency. The Council’s members are now appointed by the presidency and confirmed by the National Assembly, which is dominated by the ruling party. These changes undermined the Council’s independence and impartiality, which could compromise the right to participate in public affairs through free and genuine elections.

17. Especially concerning are the constitutional amendments that introduce stringent eligibility criteria for presidential candidates, including a six-year period of continuous residency and exclusive Nicaraguan nationality, among other criteria.¹⁵ These provisions give leeway to prevent exiled opposition figures and individuals stripped of their nationality from participating in elections, thereby restricting citizens’ ability to choose from a diverse range of political options.

C. Freedom of expression, including media freedom

18. The Government continued to unduly restrict freedom of expression in public and digital spaces, through systematic censorship of dissenting voices. The reformed cybercrime

¹² A/HRC/20/27, para. 64.

¹³ See Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, *Mutual Evaluation Report of the Republic of Nicaragua* (2017).

¹⁴ Act No. 89, art. 59, as amended by Act No. 1252.

¹⁵ Act No. 1242, arts. 6 and 7.

law criminalizes content that causes “alarm”, “panic” or “disturbance”, or that endangers public order, health or economic stability, using terms that are inconsistent with international human rights law and allow for arbitrary application.¹⁶ It also significantly broadened criminal liability, extending responsibility beyond the direct perpetrators to include alleged accomplices and facilitators.

19. OHCHR received reports of at least 17 cases in which individuals were prosecuted under the cybercrime law for social media posts critical of the Government. In some cases, the evidence used was reportedly fabricated by State agents to implicate the accused.

20. Nicaragua ranked 172nd out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, representing a fall of nine places since 2024, and reflecting a further deterioration of media freedom.¹⁷ The Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia (Foundation for Liberty of Expression and Democracy) documented at least 88 violations of press freedom, while the Periodistas y Comunicadores Independientes de Nicaragua (Independent Journalists and Communicators of Nicaragua) observatory recorded at least 45 acts of violence and intimidation against journalists during the reporting period.

21. Arbitrary and illegal detention continued to be used as a tool to intimidate journalists. On 22 November 2024, journalist Leo Cárcamo was detained by State agents in León. His whereabouts remain unknown, raising concerns of enforced disappearance. A foreign journalist was arbitrarily detained, held incommunicado for several days, and subjected to psychological pressure amounting to ill-treatment prior to his deportation from Nicaragua. OHCHR also received reports of journalists being subjected to arbitrary restrictions on their freedom of movement, and others being pressured by State agents to cooperate with intelligence services coercing them to provide information. This fosters a climate of fear and silences critical voices in the media.

22. According to civil society, persons from the media sector continued to be forced into exile.¹⁸ The independent media outlets operating from abroad continued to face ongoing risks of censorship and digital persecution. In March 2025, the National University of Engineering, which administers the domain registry of Nicaragua, arbitrarily blocked the “com.ni” domain names of five media outlets, thus affecting their online visibility and audience reach. The persecution of journalists, within Nicaragua and in exile, had a significant impact on their mental health.

D. Freedom of religion

23. Undue limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief against the Roman Catholic Church and other religious denominations continued. The Ministry of the Interior cancelled the legal status of at least 850 religious organizations, representing 45 per cent of all civil society organizations affected in the period under review, in a process that included property confiscations. It also revoked the legal status of the evangelical Moravian Church,¹⁹ which plays a vital role in the religious life of Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent in the autonomous Caribbean regions. According to civil society, 1,311 religious organizations have had their legal status revoked since 2018.

24. On 8 August 2024, seven Roman Catholic priests were expelled from Nicaragua to the Holy See. At least three Nicaraguan religious figures were arbitrarily denied entry to their own country, including after travelling to attend religious events abroad. On 10 August 2024, laywomen Lesbia del Socorro Gutiérrez Poveda and Carmen María Sáenz Martínez were arbitrarily detained. Their whereabouts remain unknown to date, which could mean that the cases amount to enforced disappearance. Both were affiliated with the Diocese of Matagalpa,

¹⁶ Act No. 1042, as amended by Act No. 1219.

¹⁷ See <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

¹⁸ See Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, *Exile of Journalists and Freedom of Expression* (2025).

¹⁹ See Official Gazette, No. 160, 29 August 2024.

led by Rolando José Álvarez Lagos, a Roman Catholic bishop who was expelled to the Holy See in January 2024 after being subjected to prolonged arbitrary and illegal detention.²⁰

25. OHCHR received reports indicating that the police allegedly exerted pressure on religious leaders and laypersons involved in church-based community work, coercing them to provide intelligence on clergy and parishioners. Methods reportedly included psychological pressure and threats against family members, surveillance, and threats of detention in cases of non-cooperation.

26. The de facto ban on religious processions and public celebrations remained in effect. This particularly affected Holy Week observances in 2025. Religious authorities are reportedly required to request authorization from the police for any procession outside church premises. However, these requests went unanswered, effectively restricting such events to church interiors. These restrictions, which contravene religious traditions in Nicaragua, underscore the absence of conditions necessary for the free exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

IV. Rights to liberty and personal integrity

A. Violations of the right to liberty

27. The practice of arbitrary arrest and detention of persons perceived to oppose the Government continued. According to civil society, the total number of persons held in arbitrary detention in connection with the 2018 human rights crisis peaked at 151 (126 men and 25 women) prior to the expulsion of 135 detainees to Guatemala on 5 September 2024. As at 15 June 2025, according to information gathered by OHCHR, at least 56 individuals (49 men and 7 women, of which 15 older persons) remain arbitrarily detained, including journalists, human rights defenders, and Indigenous leaders. This figure underrepresents the actual number, as many relatives refrain from reporting due to fear of reprisals.

28. OHCHR documented the use of house arrest and daily reporting requirements imposed by the police, often without judicial orders or oversight, thereby restricting the right to liberty without the control of a competent, independent and impartial authority. The authorities continued to apply criminal laws adopted between 2018 and 2025²¹ to justify wide-scale arbitrary and illegal arrests and detention and targeting of persons perceived as political opponents.²² The latest reforms increased police powers to gain access to personal data without prior judicial authorization and oversight, against nationals and foreigners, both inside and outside Nicaragua, and enabled the confiscation of property of accused individuals, their relatives and their associates.

B. Violations of due process and fair trial rights

29. OHCHR continued to document violations of due process and the right to a fair trial of individuals perceived as opponents of the Government. Arbitrary and illegal arrests were carried out without judicial warrants, with no information provided on the charges or the reasons for the arrest, and without informing individuals of their rights. In none of the 64 cases (49 men and 15 women, including 6 Indigenous persons) documented by OHCHR during the reporting period were the rights of the accused fully respected. Detainees were not told where they were being taken and were denied the possibility of contacting family members or a lawyer. Despite the efforts of family members, the authorities refused to provide information, and detainees' fate or whereabouts remained unknown, removing them from the protection of the law for periods ranging from hours to months, in at least 21 cases (16 men and 5 women) amounting to enforced disappearance.

²⁰ A/HRC/57/20, para. 22.

²¹ Acts No. 977, No. 1042, No. 1055, No. 1201, No. 1215 and No. 1219.

²² A/HRC/54/60, para. 21.

30. Since 15 June 2024, 14 persons (10 men and 4 women) remained allegedly forcibly disappeared. They include journalists, lay church personnel, Indigenous leaders and former military personnel. A person with a disability was arrested by State authorities and allegedly subjected to enforced disappearance, with family members unable to deliver medication and threatened by authorities if they continued enquiring.

31. OHCHR documented three cases of individuals who, despite having served their sentences, remained deprived of their liberty without legal justification, as in the case of Jaime Enrique Navarrete Blandón.²³ A fourth person was reported to still be detained, despite an order of liberation issued in 2023.

32. Court hearings continued to be widely held virtually from detention centres, without safeguards being adopted to ensure compliance with the right to fair trial and due process, including the right to adequate legal defence. During trials, at least 10 accused persons were not permitted to speak to their lawyer or to intervene in their own defence, and judgments were not formally notified to them, effectively depriving them of the right to appeal. In at least seven online hearings, the connection was poor, prohibiting the accused from hearing the verdict.

33. OHCHR documented that a 17-year-old boy had been detained by police officers, without being informed of the charges or shown a warrant, and despite repeated protests about his age. Authorities allegedly falsified the arrest record, shifting the date and the place of detention. In court, a police officer reportedly presented a false birth certificate to claim that the detainee had been an adult at the time of his arrest. OHCHR documented another case in which a 17-year-old girl had been interrogated by two male police officers without the presence of a family member or lawyer, after witnessing the violent arrest of her father.

C. Torture, inhuman treatment and conditions of detention

34. OHCHR documented patterns of violence and threats during arrest and detention by national police. At least 16 detainees reported sexual violence,²⁴ physical torture or ill-treatment. A detainee arbitrarily arrested in January 2025 described being stripped naked, forced to perform squats, and verbally humiliated. He was also forced to perform oral sex on a guard and was later subjected to anal penetration, while two guards held and assaulted him, under threat that his mother would be killed if he resisted.

35. Detainees reported being thrown on the ground, being kicked in the ribs, having their head struck against vehicles, having their hands injured by tight restraints, being punched in the chest or the head, and being hit in the neck and legs. At least 17 detainees reported having been forced to perform squats naked under threat of further violence. A detainee reported that plastic restraints were forced into his mouth and pulled so violently that the tissue at the corner of his mouth was torn. Another reported being shackled at the wrists and ankles and hung from metal bars, left suspended by chains. He described being stripped down to his underwear, doused with water, and subjected to electric shocks using cattle prods. Many detainees reported ongoing pain and injuries resulting from mistreatment.

36. During interrogations, at least 13 detainees (9 men and 4 women) reported ill-treatment by way of facing intense psychological pressure, and were questioned every two hours, day and night. They reported deliberate sleep deprivation, as guards disrupted their rest by shouting, banging on bars, and ringing bells throughout the night, contributing to constant psychological ill-treatment.

37. At least 11 detainees (7 men and 4 women) reported threats of torture, sexual violence or death. Several of them reported having been detained incommunicado for more than three months and having been pepper-sprayed in the face and subjected to degrading searches.

38. Authorities reportedly made explicit threats against detainees' family members, including threats of sexual violence against spouses or children, using this as a method of

²³ The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention qualified the case as arbitrary detention in its opinion No. 48/2024 (A/HRC/WGAD/2024/48).

²⁴ See also para. 76 below.

psychological torture. In one case, the victim reported that, during interrogation, police had threatened to bring in his children and point a gun at their heads or to place them in an orphanage.

39. OHCHR documented at least 10 cases in which children directly witnessed the violent arrest of their parents, with reports of psychological impact among children resulting from the violent separation from their parents.

40. OHCHR continued to document a lack of adequate medical care in detention. The 135 detainees expelled to Guatemala reported denial of medical care in detention. Conditions reported as having gone untreated included gynaecological problems, ear infections, dental problems, asthma, high blood pressure, hypertension, diabetes, intestinal issues, prostate disease, ulcers, lipomas and even cancer.

41. When medications were provided, these were allegedly expired. OHCHR documented two cases in which the authorities denied reasonable accommodation measures to persons with disabilities in detention, including a person with autism.

42. At least 11 detainees reported suffering from severe depression, schizophrenia, insomnia and suicidal thoughts. Despite their requests, none of them received adequate psychological treatment. Despite the efforts of family members to provide them with medicine, the authorities reportedly often refused to deliver the medication.

43. OHCHR continued to document detention conditions incompatible with international human rights standards,²⁵ particularly in the Jorge Navarro (“La Modelo”), “La Esperanza” and “El Chipote” prisons, and the District 3 police station in Managua. These conditions are of particular concern for the 15 older persons currently detained.

44. Detainees reported deprivation of basic needs, such as sanitary pads, toilet paper, toothbrushes and soap, as well as access to natural light, with some held under continuous artificial lighting. They were systematically refused reading materials and received poor, insufficient and unhygienic food, consisting mainly of rice and beans sometimes containing stones that caused dental injuries. Drinking water allegedly came from contaminated taps, sometimes running black with mud or filled with insect larvae.

45. OHCHR documented that detainees perceived as dissidents by the Government were systematically subjected to harsher restrictions compared with common prisoners. While ordinary inmates had access to bottled water, regular phone calls, and extended family and conjugal visits, political detainees were denied these rights. Their visits were limited to 20 minutes, under police surveillance. Authorities threatened to suspend visits if detainees or their families spoke out or denounced the conditions of detention. This practice created a climate of fear, silencing detainees and their relatives. Family members reported being subjected to humiliation during visits, including being searched in a degrading manner during security checks and intimidated with dogs.

V. Rights to liberty of movement and nationality

46. OHCHR documented 52 cases of Nicaraguans (27 women and 25 men, of which 7 are Indigenous persons) arbitrarily denied re-entry to their own country when attempting to return by land or air. Most individuals received no official decision and were provided with no means of challenging it. Many chose not to report these incidents for fear of reprisals, suggesting that the actual figure may be higher. Private transport companies conveyed these decisions by the authorities, often by email, and prevented boarding.²⁶

²⁵ Including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).

²⁶ Special procedures expressed concerns on this matter. See communications OTH 108/2024, OTH 138/2024 and OTH 139/2024, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

47. OHCHR also documented 156 expulsions from Nicaragua (79 men and 77 women, of which 8 are Indigenous persons). Most of those expelled were subsequently barred from returning to Nicaragua under threat of arbitrary arrest and detention. None was provided with a written decision or access to oversight mechanisms. Many, including journalists, artists, religious figures and former civil servants, were perceived as political opponents. Journalist Henry Briceño (75 years old) and his partner and two children were violently apprehended, denied access to personal belongings and forcibly taken to the border, where they were handed over to the military and ordered to enter Costa Rica through a blind spot.

48. Denial of entry led to family separations, constituting arbitrary interference in family life. At least 10 children were separated from parents or grandparents. In three instances, older persons were left without care following the denial of entry of family members.

49. OHCHR continued to receive reports of individuals obliged to request authorization from State agents, including civil servants, to travel abroad. In some cases, they were specifically prohibited from leaving Nicaragua, including through passport confiscation.

50. The newly reformed General Act on Migration introduced loss of nationality for acts of treason to the homeland and expanded the grounds for revoking nationality acquired by naturalization.²⁷ The use of vague and broad criteria, combined with unclear procedures for accessing effective remedies to challenge such decisions, increases the risk of arbitrary deprivation of nationality, in violation of international standards.

51. On 9 September 2024, the Supreme Court of Justice²⁸ notified the nationality revocation of the 135 detainees expelled to Guatemala and confiscated their property. Affected individuals were denied access to the decision and given no means of appeal.

52. On 20 May 2025, the Constitution was amended to provide that Nicaraguan nationality is lost upon acquisition of another nationality.²⁹ This provision could affect thousands of Nicaraguans with a second nationality.

53. OHCHR received reports that consular services were denied to individuals perceived as political opponents, particularly those who were denied entry to Nicaragua, were expelled or had to leave to avoid political persecution. No official explanation was provided to justify the denials. This restricted access to birth and education certificates and passport renewals.

54. A significant number of such individuals were at serious risk or in a condition of statelessness. Individuals also faced serious challenges in establishing their Nicaraguan nationality due to authorities' refusal to issue personal documentation. OHCHR documented 29 cases since 2021, but the actual number is estimated to be much higher. In one instance, an individual requested the issuance of a university certificate, the renewal of an identity card, and a copy of a birth certificate. Authorities responded that the person did not appear in any official registry, effectively denying this person access to essential documentation related to legal identity and professional qualifications, and any link to Nicaraguan nationality. The absence of official written decisions on deprivation of nationality has further impeded the ability of affected individuals to seek alternative protection mechanisms from other States.

VI. Economic, social and cultural rights

55. Although the National Development Information Institute regularly provides updated statistics on employment and the basic food basket, many critical indicators relating to education, health, housing and poverty reduction remained outdated. These were not disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age, disability and region, which hindered independent assessment of the State's progress. The most recent census dates from 2005.

56. The monthly minimum wage established for 2025 ranges from 5,950.02 córdobas (C\$) (approximately US\$ 148) to C\$ 13,315.61 (approximately US\$ 333), depending on the sector. These figures remain significantly below the subsistence level, with the national basic food

²⁷ See Act No. 761, as amended by Act. No. 1228, arts. 47 and 64.

²⁸ See https://www.poderjudicial.gob.ni/prensa/notas_prensa_detalle.asp?id_noticia=12812 (in Spanish).

²⁹ Reformed Constitution, art. 25.

basket reported at C\$ 20,394.28 (approximately US\$ 555) in January 2025, demonstrating the inability of the population to meet basic living costs.³⁰

57. The Nicaraguan labour market shows persistently high levels of informality.³¹ Therefore, underemployment rates reported by the National Development Information Institute remain high,³² exposing workers to precarious working conditions, including with regard to working hours, low wages, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, and minimal access to social security benefits.³³

58. OHCHR received allegations of dismissals of individuals perceived as critics of the Government, and their relatives, in the public and private sectors. In the three cases documented by OHCHR, individuals were reportedly dismissed following direct instructions from the presidency. Public and private employers were allegedly required to conduct background checks that included specific enquiries about participation in the 2018 protests, with affirmative responses effectively disqualifying applicants from employment.

59. Applications for public sector posts commonly require submission of a membership card proving affiliation with the ruling party. Similar discriminatory criteria are allegedly applied in respect of access to services related to health and education, including scholarships.

60. OHCHR documented judicial confiscations of assets, businesses, properties, bank accounts, and social security payments from individuals perceived as political opponents. This includes at least nine victims of confiscation, involving the seizure of 21 properties in the absence of due process and through the misuse of criminal legislation. In this regard, it is of concern that amendments to the Criminal Code expanded the scope of crimes that can trigger confiscation to include crimes such as money-laundering, terrorism, treason and cybercrime.

61. Nicaragua was ranked 172nd out of 180 countries in the 2024 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, meaning that the country was ranked as the most corrupt in Central America.³⁴ According to a 2024 civil society report, 58 per cent of survey respondents reported experiencing corruption when interacting with public institutions. These practices reportedly include demands for irregular payments in exchange for public services.³⁵

62. Denouncing corruption entails a risk of criminalization. An opposition municipal councillor who publicly questioned the use of public funds by government officials was arrested days later and charged with undermining national integrity and cybercrime. OHCHR also received reports alleging corrupt practices in immigration procedures, where State agents reportedly solicited bribes from individuals facing arbitrary bans on re-entry to Nicaragua in exchange for lifting the ban.

VII. Rights of Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent

63. Legal reforms³⁶ have had a negative impact on the administration of protected areas and the approval of environmental permits for natural resource use. Over 47.9 per cent of protected areas in Nicaragua, including two United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) biosphere reserves, overlap with territories titled to

³⁰ See Ministry of Labour, Ministerial Agreement No. ALTB-01-02-2025. See also National Development Information Institute, data on the basic monthly basket for January 2025, available at <https://www.inide.gob.ni/Home/canasta> (in Spanish).

³¹ See Sandra Marcelino and Mariana Sans, “How to mitigate the impact of economic downturns on labor markets? Evidence from Nicaragua”, IMF Working Paper, No. WP/23/23 (February 2023).

³² See <https://www.inide.gob.ni/Home/eem> (in Spanish).

³³ Puentes para el Desarrollo, “Informe sobre los derechos económicos y sociales en Nicaragua”, June 2023, p. 14.

³⁴ See <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/nic>.

³⁵ Urnas Abiertas, *El costo de la corrupción en Nicaragua* (2024), p. 31.

³⁶ See Act No. 1228; and Presidential Decree No. 06-2025.

Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent.³⁷ Legislative amendments have allowed expanded economic activities, including mining and hydrocarbon exploitation in protected areas.³⁸

64. Reforms to the electoral law omitted the recognition of traditional forms of organization and participation of Indigenous Peoples, weakening their effective political participation in electoral processes.³⁹ There is no indication that prior consultation with Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent was carried out in relation to these reforms, including the constitutional ones, in contravention of international human rights standards.

65. Mining concessions continue to be granted in Indigenous territories without due respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples to consultation and to free, prior and informed consent. During the reporting period, five concessions were granted to foreign-owned companies within Indigenous territories titled to the Miskito and Mayangna peoples, allegedly without consulting with their traditional authorities.⁴⁰ The Inter-American Court of Human Rights found that the right to free, prior and informed consent of the Black Creole Indigenous community of Bluefields and the Rama and Kriol peoples had been violated and that undue interference in the appointment of traditional governance authorities had been exercised.⁴¹

66. According to civil society research covering the period up to 2024, three illegal gold mining sites have been operating within the Indigenous Rama and Kriol territory since 2019, in the UNESCO San Juan River biosphere reserve.⁴² State authorities have allegedly allowed these sites to continue operating. The expansion of extractive activities, including mining, logging, pine resin extraction and livestock farming, has reportedly been conducted without proper consent from communities, despite affecting them. These activities have also resulted in deforestation.⁴³

67. Civil society actors continue to document illegal land sales involving Indigenous Miskito and Mayangna territories.⁴⁴ OHCHR documented the forced eviction of a Miskito family after its land was illegally sold to non-Indigenous settlers by government-imposed leaders. The family filed a complaint with the Office of the Attorney General but received no response. According to civil society, at least 30 people were displaced as a result of the invasion of communal land.

68. At least four men, including a communal judge, were killed in separate incidents, allegedly in relation to defending territorial rights; and two others were seriously injured. OHCHR has not received information regarding investigations being undertaken into these cases.

69. OHCHR documented the arbitrary detention of five Indigenous leaders. On 14 September 2024, one of them, Steadman Fagoth (73 years old), a Miskito leader and presidential adviser, was arbitrarily detained after denouncing the military's complicity in illegal land sales and territory destruction. Brooklyn Rivera (73 years old) continues to be

³⁷ See <https://www.marena.gob.ni/Enderedd/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Evaluaci%C3%B3n-Tenencia-de-la-Tierra-ERPD.pdf> (in Spanish).

³⁸ Act No. 1248, art. 21 (4).

³⁹ Act No. 1242, art. 58.

⁴⁰ For example, Ministry of Energy and Mines, Ministerial Agreements No. 016-EMC-M-007-2024, Official Gazette, No. 108, 17 June 2024; and No. 002-SBT-M-001-2025, Official Gazette, No. 91, 22 May 2025.

⁴¹ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Rama and Kriol peoples, the Black Creole Indigenous community of Bluefields and others v. Nicaragua*, Judgment, 1 April 2024, para. 530 (3).

⁴² See <https://x.com/fundaciondelrio/status/1907205185715184116?s=46&t=GXw71w-howInLroRWhMM6A> (in Spanish).

⁴³ See <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/NIC/?map=eyJjYW5Cb3VuZCI6dHJ1ZX0%3D>.

⁴⁴ See <https://x.com/fundaciondelrio/status/1914331609572036821> (in Spanish); and <https://www.divergentes.com/red-abogados-fabricantes-escrituras-ilegales-tierras-indigenas-caribe-nicaragua/> (in Spanish).

subjected to enforced disappearance.⁴⁵ This, coupled with the revocation of the legal status of Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Aslatakanka (YATAMA) in 2023, led to the loss of Indigenous representation in the National Assembly.

70. Eight Mayangna forest guards remain arbitrarily detained, while others face threats of arrest, preventing them from continuing their traditional role in territorial protection against invasions and in environmental monitoring. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the imprisonment of four of them to be arbitrary.⁴⁶

VIII. Gender equality

71. In 2025, Nicaragua ranked first in the world for the percentage of women heading ministerial portfolios, with 64.3 per cent of cabinet positions held by women. It also ranked third worldwide for women's representation in parliament, with women occupying 55 per cent of seats.⁴⁷ Although this is a positive development, OHCHR continued to document cases of women, including journalists, political party members and Indigenous leaders, arbitrarily detained or denied entry to the country, allegedly due to their critical opinions of the Government.

72. There are no updated official data on femicides, and neither the Public Prosecution Service nor the Institute of Forensic Medicine has published figures for 2024. Civil society recorded 68 femicides in 2024, representing a 21 per cent increase from 2023, and 38 cases in 2025. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights found that the State had failed to uphold reinforced due diligence and non-discrimination obligations in the investigation of femicides.⁴⁸

73. In the autonomous Caribbean regions, civil society reported that at least 18 Indigenous girls and women had been victims of sexual violence perpetrated by non-Indigenous settlers, as well as forced marriage. Faced with threats from the perpetrators, families refrained from filing complaints. In one case, the victim was forced to marry the perpetrator. The persistence of such violence, coupled with impunity, exacerbates the intersecting gender and ethnic discrimination faced by Indigenous women.

74. Between 1 January and 14 May 2025, the women's police stations registered 715 cases of sexual violence against women, amounting to an average of more than five per day. Records indicate that 40 per cent of these were referred to the Public Prosecution Service.⁴⁹

75. The Gender Secretariat, which was previously responsible for mainstreaming gender in the judiciary, was removed from the organizational structure of the Supreme Judicial Council without public explanation or clarity as to the continuation of its functions by that or any other entity.

76. OHCHR documented a case involving a woman in custody who was reportedly sedated, forcibly administered contraceptives, and repeatedly subjected to sexual violence. Another woman was allegedly forced to undress and perform squats before the police officers as a condition for visiting a relative in prison and was compelled to remain undressed throughout the visit.

77. The Human Rights Committee found Nicaragua responsible for violating the rights to life, to be free from torture, and to an effective remedy of two girls who had been raped and forced to continue their pregnancies. It requested Nicaragua to review its legal framework, including the absolute criminalization of abortion.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ A/HRC/57/20, para. 7.

⁴⁶ A/HRC/WGAD/2024/30, paras. 131–134.

⁴⁷ See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/women-in-politics-map-2025>.

⁴⁸ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Carrión Gonzalez and others v. Nicaragua*, Judgment, 25 November 2024, para. 200 (1).

⁴⁹ See <https://www.policia.gob.ni/?p=136536> (in Spanish).

⁵⁰ Human Rights Committee, *Lucía v. Nicaragua* (CCPR/C/142/D/3627/2019); and *Susana v. Nicaragua* (CCPR/C/142/D/3626/2019).

IX. Conclusions

78. Since the adoption of the legislative reforms in 2024 and 2025, culminating in the reform of the Constitution, Nicaragua has entered a new, worrisome phase of erosion of the rule of law, further deepening prior trends of concentrated executive powers and weakened human rights guarantees. These reforms have allowed for systematic undue restrictions of fundamental freedoms, which continue to be used to suppress dissent, in contravention of international human rights law and standards.

79. OHCHR remains concerned about the *de jure* and *de facto* consolidation of control of mechanisms by the executive branch that enables persecution of political opponents and dissidents. This includes the constitutional recognition of paramilitary forces, the institutionalized use of informant networks and surveillance, and the misapplication of criminal offences, which are broad and vague, to individuals for merely exercising their human rights or carrying out their legitimate work, such as human rights defenders and journalists. Such frameworks have created a context in which any person perceived as opposing the authorities may be subjected to retaliation.

80. The adoption of the new electoral law and accompanying constitutional amendments has further eroded political pluralism and weakened guarantees for free and genuine elections in accordance with international standards. The imposition of restrictive eligibility criteria for the presidency, effectively disqualifying opposition and exiled candidates, is concerning in the context of the upcoming elections. It is of concern that the timing of the next presidential elections remains uncertain. Also of concern is the *de facto* assumption of the post of Co-President by Rosario Murillo Zambrana, formerly Vice-President, without a prior electoral process.

81. The application of recent legal reforms has led to an arbitrary use of nationality revocation and undue restrictions on leaving or re-entering the country, applied in a punitive fashion, against individuals perceived as political opponents and their relatives. These actions have resulted in a range of human rights violations. Measures resulting in deprivation of nationality should fully comply with international law.

82. Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent continue to face obstacles in exercising their rights related to their territories and self-governance. Against this background, they are exposed to further violence, and illegal exploitation and usurpation of lands and resources, severely threatening their cultural and physical existence.

83. The authorities continue to fail to prevent, investigate and sanction femicides, sexual violence, forced pregnancies and forced marriage, perpetuating impunity and leaving victims without protection or redress.

84. Political opponents, real and perceived, within Nicaragua and in exile, have reportedly been subjected to arbitrary measures of property confiscation, social security benefits suspensions, and discriminatory barriers to education, employment and healthcare. Allegations of corruption further underscore the need to promote good governance and transparency, including of public data.

85. The High Commissioner regrets that Nicaragua decided to disengage from the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, following the trend of disengagement from other international human rights mechanisms. The human rights ecosystem is founded on the recognition that human rights are a matter of shared concern and on the international assessment of positive developments and challenges faced by States. At the present juncture, at which humankind faces unprecedented challenges, the role of these mechanisms and the active participation of States, in a spirit of respectful and constructive dialogue and cooperation, are essential to overcome issues such as poverty and inequality, climate change, and armed conflicts.

X. Recommendations

86. The High Commissioner urges the Government to uphold its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all individuals and to fully implement the recommendations issued by OHCHR and international human rights mechanisms, in particular:

- (a) To take measures, in accordance with applicable domestic provisions, to ensure that the legal framework of Nicaragua, including at the constitutional level, explicitly prohibits torture, and that the rights to due process and fair trial and the protection of freedom of association, the press and expression are enshrined in the Constitution of Nicaragua;
- (b) To immediately release all persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty;
- (c) To ensure that persons under criminal investigation or charged with offences fully enjoy their right to a fair trial and due process, including the rights to be tried in their presence, to legal assistance and to communicate with a lawyer of their own choice without delay, interception or censorship and in full confidentiality;
- (d) To take immediate and effective measures to end and prevent acts of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence and prolonged solitary confinement, in all places of deprivation of liberty, and ensure effective and prompt investigation into allegations of torture and ill-treatment in compliance with the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol); and to ensure that the treatment of all detainees fully complies with international human rights standards, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules);
- (e) To ensure that individuals are not subjected to enforced disappearance. With this aim, family members and legal representatives should be provided with timely information about the detained relative's fate and whereabouts from the beginning of the deprivation of liberty, including transfers;
- (f) To cease all arbitrary deprivation of nationality and ensure that any decision related to nationality complies with international law, including by providing procedural safeguards, and the right to an effective remedy; and to restore the nationality of all individuals arbitrarily deprived of it;
- (g) To ensure that all Nicaraguans are able to enter, reside in and leave their own country in accordance with international law, and to issue essential documentation related to their legal identity, such as birth certificates and passport renewals, in accordance with international human rights standards;
- (h) To take the steps necessary to ensure the rights of Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent, with a gender-sensitive approach, to consultation and to free, prior and informed consent in relation to the adoption of legislation or measures that may affect them;
- (i) To fully restore the territories belonging to Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent, including the return of lands currently unlawfully occupied by settlers;
- (j) To ensure public access to accurate and up-to-date data on femicides and all forms of gender-based violence, disaggregated by age, ethnicity and region;
- (k) To remove legal provisions that criminalize abortion and adopt effective measures to prevent unwanted or forced pregnancies; and to ensure full access to the whole array of sexual and reproductive health services;

(l) To take all steps necessary to restore civic and democratic space, including by:

(i) Ensuring full respect for the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression and association, and freedom of religion or belief, and taking prompt gender-responsive action to prevent and sanction acts of persecution against human rights defenders, including women, religious and community leaders, journalists and critics of the Government;

(ii) Reinstating the legal status of civil society organizations, religious entities and universities whose registration was revoked, and immediately returning all confiscated property, documents and equipment;

(iii) Creating and maintaining a safe and enabling environment for civil society working on the promotion of human rights issues, including through international cooperation;

(iv) Ensuring full respect for press freedom; and restoring the accreditation and operational capacities of media outlets whose activities have been arbitrarily curtailed;

(v) Guaranteeing access to public information in line with the principles of maximum disclosure and transparency, particularly with regard to matters of public interest and alleged human rights violations;

(m) In view of the upcoming elections, to take immediate steps to restore political pluralism, including by reinstating the legal status of arbitrarily cancelled political parties and re-establishing safeguards for the full exercise of political rights. This should include guarantees for the safe return of perceived political opponents to Nicaragua;

(n) To take all steps necessary to protect economic, social and cultural rights, including by:

(i) Strengthening access to information relevant to economic, social and cultural rights, namely, data on housing, employment, healthcare, education and social security, and ensuring that data are disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age, disability and region;

(ii) Ensuring the restitution of property and social security rights for individuals affected by the arbitrary confiscation of assets, including bank accounts and retirement or pension funds;

(iii) Aligning national transparency and anti-corruption policies with international standards, including those set forth in the United Nations Convention against Corruption;

(o) To conduct prompt, impartial and thorough investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice and victims are granted full reparation.

87. The High Commissioner calls upon Nicaragua to consider resuming its participation in and cooperation with the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review and other United Nations human rights mechanisms.

88. The High Commissioner reiterates his call to Nicaragua to re-establish cooperation with his Office, including by allowing access to the country, for the purpose of receiving technical assistance, particularly in view of the upcoming electoral cycle and the need to strengthen democratic institutions. OHCHR remains open to a constructive and forward-looking dialogue with the Nicaraguan authorities.

89. The High Commissioner urges the international community:

(a) To provide sustained support, including financial assistance, to strengthen the capacity of Nicaraguan civil society, in particular human rights defenders and journalists, in the country and in exile;

(b) To provide support to Nicaraguans stripped of their nationality, those at risk or in a situation of statelessness and those prohibited from entering the country;

(c) To ensure international protection to all Nicaraguans fleeing persecution, and to strictly uphold the principle of non-refoulement;

(d) To ensure a human rights-based approach for all international assistance and investments provided to Nicaragua, including through international financial institutions and businesses, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, including the responsibility to conduct human rights due diligence processes to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for the impact on human rights of all assistance and investments.
