

LETTER

## “Dear Pope, Help Nicaragua: Ortega Oppresses the People and the Church.”

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**Marinellys  
Tremamunno**



*“They are sowers of weeds!” This is how President Daniel Ortega characterized his critics – including the Bishops – on Wednesday, September 9, during his speech at the celebration of the 41st anniversary of the National Police Foundation in Revolution Square in Managua. “Where we are sowing peace, those who sow weeds have come, and it is there that we say, and we repeat it to all Nicaraguans, “Lord, make us an instrument of your peace.”*

*In the meantime, the Direction of Special Operations of the Police (DOEP) made an illegal raid on the “La Premio” Farm. 18 policemen dressed in black kidnapped the farm’s owner Pablo Emilio Téllez (48 years old). He is an anti-communist and a former fighter in the Nicaraguan resistance, the organization known as “La Contra.” Téllez was taken out by force by Ortega’s men, along with his son and two other youths who were present.*

*The incident was denounced by the lawyer Álvaro Leiva, the executive secretary of the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (ANPDH), in a video published on Facebook. “The ANPDH asks for the immediate liberation of these four Nicaraguan citizens,” he said. The ANPDH has counted 728 deaths, 842 missing, 514 political prisoners, and 5,109 wounded as a result of the violence carried out by the Daniel Ortega regime, whose hand does not hesitate to attack even the Catholic Church.*

*Faced with this situation, Álvaro Leiva has written a letter to Pope Francis, asking for help in defending the Church and the Nicaraguan people. And The Daily Compass has been given exclusive access to the text of the letter sent on September 1, that has yet to receive a reply. What follows is the text of the entire letter. (M.T.)*

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San José, Costa Rica, 1 September 2020

Your Holiness:

[...]

**I permit myself to ask you to turn your gaze** to the serious crisis of the violation of human rights that my people are living through under the dictatorial political regime of Daniel Ortega Saavedra and Rosario Murillo Zambrana, who in an unconstitutional and illegitimate manner are the heads of state of Nicaragua.

**One of the most recent situations** was the one verified on July 31 against the sacred image of the Blood of Christ in the Managua cathedral, which the Nicaraguan Bishops’

Conference called (in its delcaration of August 8, 2020) a “violent and extremist act, a typical terrorist attack, that was premeditated and planned in order to gravely offend our faith in Jesus Christ the Redeemer as well as the history and identity of Nicaragua. Other profanations and sacrileges committed in the last few weeks have been added to this, in a series of events that we believe may not be isolated.”

**Holy Father, since you surely have a great deal of information** about this matter, the attacks against the Catholic Church are not new and have grave antecedents that reach back to the 1980s, including physical violence against priests and laity, harassment of liturgical activities, defamation, imprisonment and exile, as in the case of Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega (may he rest in peace).

**There has been a rupture of the constitutional order** and the democratic order in Nicaragua, which has generated a state that has failed in the exercise of political power, since it cannot guarantee, as a state, the effective protection of the human rights of Nicaraguans; as a result, what a void of political power and governability has been created in Nicaragua.

**The regime continues to completely lack the political will** to fully respect the human rights of Nicaraguans without exception. All of Nicaragua is militarized, with a significant presence of police and paramilitary forces that impede free expression, and the freedom of assembly, organization and movement as a universal human right. The people are repressed by intimidation, persecutions, threats, kidnappings, arrests, and extra-judicial executions.

**There is no possibility of an immediate democratic opening** nor of the restitution of confiscated assets, along with economic compensation for the damages caused by all of the closed and censored means of communication, with the purpose of guaranteeing the full right of individuals to be objectively informed as a constitutional and human right. There are not the right conditions for this because of the centralization of all powers in the Nicaraguan state, including the electoral power for an objective and transparent electoral process in the short-term or in the near future that can fully guarantee Nicaraguans the right to freely elect their governing officials. The intimidation and harassment of the faithful and religious leaders continues, as well as the violent attacks on Catholic churches.

**President Daniel Ortega has exacerbated the tensions,** accusing the Church of being part of a “coup,” “terrorist” and “pedophile,” accusing priests of piling up weapons in their churches on behalf of the protesters. Many religious leaders of the country say

that the government is politicizing religion in the midst of a political crisis. The government has used religious language and sought to infiltrate the parishes, according to a report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

**In addition to all this, we should add the evil intention** with which the Ortega-Murillo regime addressed the Covid-19 emergency, in which all of the acts and declarations of its functionaries are aimed at promoting the massive infection of the undefended population, which constitutes one more act of viral genocide, since there is community contamination in Nicaragua. The alarming situation of the Nicaraguan people's lack of protection in the face of this emergency has led to a mortality rate of incalculable proportions and to the lack of national assistance plan for this humanitarian emergency. This dire situation of neglect includes more than 100 political prisoners whose lives are in danger because of the lack of timely medical care, torture, overcrowding, and the poor nutrition that they receive.

**Thousands of Nicaraguans who fled Nicaragua** after the repression unleashed after the April 2018 protests have today been forced to return to their homeland, despite the grave danger that threatens them, because their opportunities for work in other Central American countries have been taken away by the pandemic, and they do not have a way to pay rent for their homes or for the food they need for themselves and their families. Despite such a dramatic situation, the Ortega-Murillo regime sets up obstacles and conditions for them to return to their own country, thus violating our political Constitution and the most elementary human rights that are present in conventions and treaties signed and ratified by the State of Nicaragua.

**For all of these reasons and many others** which would make this letter a very long document, we believe that, as long as the Ortega-Murillo regime with all of its repressive structures against the human rights of Nicaraguans remains in power, it is not possible to carry out any free, transparent, and democratic electoral process.

**Dear and appreciated Holy Father,** in these lines I have tried to formulate a synthetic description of the situation that our Holy Mother Church is enduring, including our worthy Shepherds and this flock that suffers – especially in its youngest children – death, prison, persecution, and exile.

**With all the respect that Your Holiness merits,** I conclude my letter with a contrite heart, asking for the grace of an audience, even if only for a few minutes, on Tuesday, November 24, at the time that is most convenient for you, in order to receive your

blessing and perhaps to be able to further discuss some of the concerns raised in this letter – but above all so as to feel through your presence the renewing force of the Gospel of Christ, in order to renew my strength, so that this heart may be filled once more with faith, this heart that at times feels empty from despair and sadness in the face of so much sorrow, injustice and impunity which, like a heavy cross, oppresses my Nicaraguan brothers.

**I thank you in advance, Your Holiness,** for the time you dedicate to my letter, and I salute you respectfully, assuring you of my best wishes for you as the head and guide of our Holy Mother Church.

Cordially,

Dr. Alvaro Leiva Sánchez