

## Organisations call for Nicaraguan government to immediately free detained journalists

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We, the undersigned organisations, express our condemnation of the Nicaraguan government's many attempts to threaten and silence the country's independent press. The aggressive actions against independent media have been escalating for years (particularly from 2018 to 2021) as the authorities fail to act or, in many cases, as a direct consequence of their actions.

In terms of press freedom and freedom of expression and information, 2021 was a disastrous year in Nicaragua. Journalists and media directors were jailed, media outlets were appropriated and dozens of journalists were forced into exile due to lawsuits and the application of laws that curtail freedom of expression. Migration was restricted, passports were confiscated and defamation campaigns intensified against independent commentators. These campaigns, launched by various state agencies, were widely circulated on social media by governing party supporters. All these actions constitute a portion of the many rights violations and assaults that have taken place against independent media outlets and journalists.

The [government's approval and subsequent application of a series of punitive laws](#)—moves widely questioned by international human rights bodies—has allowed for ongoing arbitrary detention of the following individuals: sports journalist Miguel Mendoza; political commentator Jaime Arellano; three directors of the La Prensa daily, Cristiana Chamorro, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and Juan Lorenzo Holmann; journalist, presidential candidate and owner of 100%Noticias Miguel Mora; and three former workers for the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation, Walter Gómez, Marcos Fletes and Pedro Vásquez.

Threats of criminalization have also affected the journalistic sources that media outlets and journalists rely upon for analysis and opinions. In addition, several lawyers who have defended journalists have also been forced into exile. This has led to a growing climate of self-censorship in the country.

Ignoring its obligations to protect and ensure unrestricted circulation of information of interest to the public, the Nicaraguan government has instead paved the way for actions that include attacks, threats, abuse of government powers and stigmatisation of those who report on or denounce human rights violations in the country.

We underscore the courage and commitment shown by the independent press, which despite traversing extremely difficult times continues to provide information to the public. We recognise in the work of journalists the unwavering commitment to the principles, values and legacy of public freedoms martyr Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal. During his lifetime, Chamorro proclaimed and applied teachings that today more than ever provide guidance for conducting quality journalism and resisting the attacks to which the press is being subjected.

The following signatory organisations call on the Nicaraguan government to:

- Immediately release the arbitrarily detained journalists, who have simply exercised their rights to seek, receive and disseminate information, along with their right to express opinions. We also call for the release of all arbitrarily detained political prisoners. This must be done in order to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to the work of all journalists and commentators.

- Reinststate the two media outlets that have been appropriated, Confidencial and 100% Noticias, and bring the takeover of the La Prensa daily's facilities to an end.
- Respect journalism work, provide guarantees for the safety of journalists and take all possible steps in the government's power to remove the obstacles that journalists currently face in carrying out their work. Comply with the precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in support of independent journalists and their families, especially given that in most cases aggressive actions and attacks against the beneficiaries of the IACHR's measures have been on the rise.
- Stop criminalising the actions of independent journalists; repeal and refrain from applying the cyber-crimes law and other regulations that violate public freedoms; and revoke court orders against journalists, commentators and journalistic sources while also refraining from issuing new orders of this nature.
- Halt the abusive confiscation of the passports of journalists and commentators, as well as migration restrictions that hinder free movement out of the country.

We remind the Nicaraguan government that respect for the right to freedom of expression and information is crucial for the functioning of democratic societies. Access to information of interest to the public is a right of all citizens. In addition, uninhibited circulation of information, free from censorship, is essential for exercising other fundamental rights that are protected under various international human rights covenants.

**Signatories:**

IFEX-ALC

International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights

PEN International

Voces del Sur