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Physicians for
Human Rights

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July 11, 2021

His Excellency Daniel Ortega Saavedra
Presidencia de la República
Frente a Palacio Nacional, calle 4
Noroeste
Managua, Nicaragua 11001

Dear President Ortega,

I am addressing you today on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an international non-governmental organization that uses the expertise of scientists, medical professionals, and public health experts to protect and promote human rights globally. During the past 35 years, we have conducted human rights investigations on virtually every continent, and in 1997, we shared in the Nobel Prize for Peace for our role as leaders of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Over all these decades, we have defended the rights of individuals and communities to the highest attainable standard of health and are deeply committed, through the voices of thousands of committed clinicians who are aligned with us, to the understanding that freedom of expression, assembly, and association are essential elements of guaranteeing human rights for all people, including the right to health.

It is therefore with grave concern and dismay that we write to you today to protest the detention and ill-treatment last month of many Nicaraguans simply for expressing their peaceful opinions, to which they have an internationally recognized right.

Among those was the former minister of health of your country, Dora Maria Tellez, who was reportedly detained and beaten by Nicaraguan police on June 13 simply due to her peaceful expression of her right to speech and her open critique of repressive acts by your government. Ms. Tellez has an internationally protected right, along with so many others, to call peacefully for free and fair elections in Nicaragua.

As the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and highly respected human rights organizations have reported, these latest arrests have occurred in the context of hundreds of extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, and disappearances inflicted on Nicaraguans under your rule. In recent years, human rights organizations have also documented widespread governmental interference with the provision of medical care to wounded protestors who have peacefully called for the respect of human rights in Nicaragua. We note, also, that during the past year's pandemic, medical colleagues have been persecuted after expressing concern about your government's response to COVID-19. According to highly credible reports, members of the medical and public health professions have been intimidated, harassed, or have had their jobs terminated.



Physicians for Human Rights calls on your government to release all those arbitrarily detained for exercising their fundamental right to peacefully express their opinions and to cease harassment, intimidation, dismissal, and detention of health care workers, whose work is vital to human life and well-being.

In addition, we urge you to repeal recently imposed legislation that effectively bars freedom of expression, the so-called Law for the Defense of People's Rights to Independence, Sovereignty, and Self-determination for Peace (Law N° 1055), enacted in December 2020, which labels as "traitors" people who act in a vaguely defined way to undermine "independence, sovereignty and self-determination." This legislation appears to give the government broad license to persecute human rights defenders and those who dissent peacefully.

Finally, we call on your government to allow international human rights mechanisms access to investigate the conditions of those who remain arbitrarily detained, who have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, and whose fundamental human rights have been threatened.

Sincerely,

Michele Heisler, MD, MPH
Medical Director
Physicians for Human Rights