

Nicaragua must end 'witch-hunt' against dissenting voices – UN human rights experts

Following weeks of civil unrest in Nicaragua, a group of 11 UN independent human rights experts urged the Government on Thursday to stop the violent repression of protestors, which has left at least 317 people dead and 1,830 injured, stressing that “no one should be detained for the exercise of their human rights”.

“We are appalled that many human rights defenders, journalists and other opposition voices are being criminalised and accused of unfounded and overly punitive charges such as ‘terrorism’,” the UN experts said, warning that this is “creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among different communities and among civil society representatives in the country.”

Street protests against social security reforms began in April and were immediately [violently suppressed](#) by security forces and groups affiliated with the governing party. One hundred days later, the protests have “decreased in number and intensity following the removal of roadblocks by the Government” according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), but the UN experts said that dissident voices – ranging from rural community leaders and students, to journalists and Catholic Church leaders – are still being subjected to intimidation, threats, collective detention.

“We deplore what appears to be a smear campaign aimed at discrediting or vilifying human rights defenders as ‘terrorists’ and ‘coup-mongers’, and apparent attempts to undermine the opposition,” the human rights experts’ [statement](#) read.

“We are also deeply concerned that new legislation adopted earlier in July by the Nicaraguan Congress to target money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, could provide the authorities with increased leeway for arrests and criminal proceedings against protesters, and be misused,” the UN experts stressed.

“Impunity, violence and repression have never been a breeding ground for peace and stability and will certainly, on the contrary, plunge the country into deeper social and political unrest,” the experts warned.

They reminded the Government of the importance of keeping a clear and up-to-date record of the names and locations of people who have been deprived of their liberties and stressed that those who face legal proceedings must be guaranteed their right to a fair trial, with all the guarantees of due process.

"We exhort the Government of Nicaragua to immediately demobilise paramilitary groups and to investigate the extrajudicial executions, killings and reports of enforced disappearances with due diligence, without delay and through the use of effective, impartial and independent procedures," the statement read.

"We also urge the Government to refrain from engaging in practices of criminalisation against human rights defenders and other activists, including through the inappropriate use of national security and counter-terrorism legislation," said the independent experts, requesting that full access into detention centres and other locations be granted to human rights groups so they can continue assessing the situation in the country.