

Nicaragua: UN rights chief 'deeply concerned' over increasing criminalization of dissenters

Over the last six months, a diverse section of several hundred people has been arrested and held in pre-trial detention for long periods for their alleged roles during protests that took place last year between April and July.

Amid rising concerns over the judiciary's independence, since December, various criminal courts in Managua have handed down guilty verdicts and extremely heavy sentences to prominent opposition and community leaders.

Students, journalists, and a Supreme Court judge, among other dissenting voices, have fled the country.

The proceedings in many of the cases have been marred by a lack of transparency; witnesses independence and credibility; undue restrictions on evidence and witnesses for the defense; and defendants' insufficient access to their lawyers.

Recent convictions/sentencings in controversial circumstances:

- Student leader Jonathan López, sentenced to five years and three months in prison.
- Peasant leaders Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena sentenced to 216 and 210 years in prison respectively.
- Former army officers Carlos Brenes and Tomas Maldonado, who face sentencing for 32 and 34 years, respectively.