

UN rights office calls for action to end 'repression and retaliation' in crisis-torn Nicaragua

The United Nations on Wednesday called for urgent action to address the human rights crisis in Nicaragua, where "repression and retaliation against demonstrators continue ... as the world looks away."

A new [report](#) from the UN human rights office has detailed what it describes as numerous violations carried out by the Nicaraguan Government after mass protests erupted in mid-April over planned social security reforms.

"The violence and impunity of these past four months have exposed the fragility of the country's institutions and the rule of law, and created a climate of fear and mistrust," said UN [High Commissioner](#) for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

The report covers the period from when protests against planned social security reforms began on 18 April, up to 18 August.

The disproportionate use of force by police, sometimes resulting in extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; widespread arbitrary detentions; torture and ill-treatment; and rights violations to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly have all been documented in the report.

The report notes that in the initial stage, the police and pro-Government armed elements responded harshly to protests. During the "clean-up" stage, from mid-June to mid-July, they forcibly dismantled roadblocks and barricades – according to information obtained, armed elements often acted in coordination with high-level State authorities and the National Police.

"The Government no longer denies the existence of pro-Government armed elements, [and] it condones their actions and allows them to operate with impunity," the report says.

Most of the violence took place from mid-April to mid-July and has reportedly left some 300 people dead and 2,000 others injured – mostly men under 30, including university students and young professionals.

The report also noted that 22 police officers were killed.

In the current stage, demonstrators and so-called Government opponents are being persecuted and criminalized. As of 18 August, information indicates that at least 300 protesters are being prosecuted, including on charges of terrorism and organized crime. These trials have serious flaws and do not observe due process, including the impartiality of the courts, the report says.

Civil servants, including teachers and doctors, have been sacked, and the authorities have been increasingly stigmatizing and discrediting protesters and human rights defenders as “terrorists” or “coup-mongers.”

“Rather than recognizing responsibility for any wrongdoing during the crisis, the Government has placed the blame on social and opposition leaders for what they have termed ‘coup-related violence,’” the report notes.

The report calls on the Government to immediately end the harassment, intimidation and criminalization; and to disarm pro-government elements, halt all unlawful arrests, and release all those arbitrarily detained.

Mr. Zeid urged the UN Human Rights Council and the international community “to take concrete action to prevent the current crisis from descending into deeper social and political turmoil.”

“Any such action should aim to ensure full accountability for human rights violations and abuses, enable victims to have effective access to justice and appropriate remedies, including reparations and the right to know the truth,” concluded the High Commissioner.