



Covering events from January - December 2000

## NICARAGUA

### Republic of Nicaragua

**Head of state and government:** Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo

Alemán Lacayo

**Capital:** Managua

**Population:** 5 million

**Official language:** Spanish

**Death penalty:** abolitionist for all crimes



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**Human rights defenders were threatened. Police officers injured demonstrators and detainees.**

### Background

The effects of the agreement signed in 1999 between the two main political parties, the ruling *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista*, Constitutionalist Liberal Party, and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, Sandinista National Liberation Front, started to emerge. They were criticized by sectors of civil society as a threat to the democratic process and to basic human and civil rights. For example, electoral reforms introduced in January established new rules for the creation of political parties, imposing difficult conditions, and changed the requirements for the registration of candidates. During municipal elections in November, a significant number of parties were left out of the contest and candidates were prevented from running for office.

### Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations were threatened. In March government ministers accused Vilma Núñez de Escorcia, President of the *Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos* (CENIDH), Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights, of obstructing police work. Pro-government newspapers and radio stations suggested her death might be the answer to the unrest in the northeast of the country. CENIDH had been investigating the killing of three men, former members of an armed group of ex-soldiers, the *Frente Unido Andrés Castro* (FUAC), Andrés Castro United Front. In May an anonymous letter with further threats was delivered to CENIDH's office.

Government authorities, including President Arnoldo Alemán, were reported to have strongly criticized non-governmental organizations, calling them "merchants of poverty" among other things. In some cases these attacks came after the groups had criticized the authorities' handling of aid for victims of natural disasters.

- In December, Dorothy Virginia Granada, a 70-year-old US citizen working as a nurse in a cooperative clinic in Mulukuku, North Atlantic Autonomous Region, was harassed and intimidated by police and immigration agents. The clinic had faced allegations of attempting to influence its patients politically; of illegal abortions; of treating members of FUAC; and of not being properly registered to practise. President Arnaldo Alemán had attacked Dorothy Granada in the press, claiming that she was an illegal resident. On 8 December, 15 heavily armed anti-riot police, accompanying immigration officers, entered her house without a warrant to arrest and deport her. She was not at home at the time. She went into hiding in fear of another display of force and her health deteriorated. On 13 December, the Minister of the Interior, José Marengo, announced that her residency had been revoked on 7 December, and that she had 24 hours to leave the country. However, a judge reviewing the case annulled the minister's decision and ruled that she was a legal resident. The minister appealed and a final decision was pending at the end of 2000..

### **National Police**

Police officers reportedly used excessive force, causing injuries to demonstrators, and ill-treated detainees. In March about 20 demonstrators protesting against law reforms were beaten and injured by members of the National Police who used rubber bullets and tear gas against them. Dozens of police officers were expelled from the force for corruption or abuse of authority, including beating people in their custody. In August a police officer was expelled from the force after a photograph appeared in the press showing him kicking two young men.

### **AI action**

AI called on the government to protect human rights defenders and others who were being threatened.

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