

Sra. Aminta Elena Granera Sacasa
Director General of the National Police of Nicaragua
Email: agranera@policia.gob.ni and relacionespublicas@policia.gob.ni

December 11, 2016

Dear Director General Granera Sacasa:

We are extremely concerned about recent events which suggest violent repression looming over Nicaraguan civil society.

On December 1 **Francisca Ramírez**, Coordinator of the Council for the Defense of Our Land, Lake and Sovereignty, was in Managua to participate in a peaceful demonstration organized by the Council against the possible negative impacts of the upcoming construction of the Nicaraguan Grand Inter-oceanic Canal. That day police confiscated two of her vehicles: her van parked in El Boninche and her truck parked near La Lechera. They took both vehicles to the Nueva Guinea police station. Images and local media videos showed numerous police officers guarding the two vehicles, which appeared to have been damaged; it appeared that gunshots had been fired at the wind shield of one of the vehicles.

Francisca Ramírez was not been presented with a seizure order to justify the confiscation of her property. On December 5 she waited three hours at the police station. On December 10 the vehicles were returned, but she did not receive any compensation for the damages incurred while the vehicles were in police custody. As a farmer she is totally reliant on these vehicles for transporting and selling her produce at the market.

The Council for the Defense of Our Land, Lake and Sovereignty is a *campesino* (peasant farmer) community authority established in 2014 in response to the impacts that the Nicaraguan Grand Inter-oceanic Canal could have on rural communities and human rights. Between November 27 and December 1, demonstrators from all over the country attempted to make their way to the capital to reject the canal construction and to denounce the lack of transparency in the general elections of November 6. Authorities harassed public transportation drivers and searched demonstrators. Human rights defenders in El Tule, Nueva Guinea and the RAAS (South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region) reported that police used tear gas, rubber and lead bullets against protesters. During that time, Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), visited Nicaragua where he met with President Ortega and members of opposition parties, the private sector, and civil society, including a meeting with Francisca Ramírez.

We believe the arbitrary seizure of Francisca Ramírez's property is in retaliation of her legitimate work in the defense of human rights. Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- appropriately compensate Francisca Ramírez for any damage to her property while in police custody;
- immediately cease all further harassment of Francisca Ramírez;
- guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Nicaragua are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all undue restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

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US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: