

Sr. Presidente Daniel Ortega
Palacio Nacional
4 Calle Noroeste
Managua, Nicaragua, 11001

April 30, 2018

Dear President Ortega:

We are very perturbed at the authorities' violent response to the demonstrations and protests that broke out throughout the country after you announced changes to the National Institute of Social Security (INSS) and pension benefits on April 16. In the last two weeks of April, more than two dozen people have been killed, many more injured, and many more detained; there are also reports of disappearances. Repression against students and journalists has been particularly strong. When the demonstrations began on April 18, security forces and armed civilians who sympathize with the government hit several journalists and threatened them with stealing their equipment.


Ángel Eduardo Gahona, the director of the local, independent television program *El Meridiano* in Bluefields, was fatally shot in the head on April 21. He left his home around 5:00pm to report on protests that continued after an anti-government march had ended. He decided to broadcast via Facebook Live because the government was censoring and disconnecting local television channels. The Facebook Live video shows him approaching an ATM outside the mayor's office, describing damage that had been done to the glass doors, and then collapsing to the ground with blood on his face when he was shot. Witnesses say that the shot must have come from the police because no one else near the journalist had a gun.

We strongly urge that you

- conduct an immediate and transparent investigation into the killing of Ángel Eduardo Gahona, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- engage in dialogue with civil society sectors, including the victims of state repression, to find a peaceful solution to this grave situation
- immediately guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and assembly to all in your country, and release those detained solely for expressing those civil rights
- share with us the report of the official Public Prosecutor's investigation into the protests and deaths

We are encouraged by your decision to revoke the government changes that would have increased workers' and employers' payments to INSS and would have also reduced pension payments. And we are pleased to learn that the Nicaraguan National Assembly has approved the creation of a truth commission composed of religious leaders, academics, lawyers, students and social movements to analyze the current political situation and the recent protests.

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

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Sarah Rupert, Nicaragua Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights: Antonia Urrejola (Nicaragua), Edison Lanza (Freedom of Expression) ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, 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: