

NICARAGUA: Human rights organisations and legal professionals condemn the arbitrary disbarment of at least 2,000 lawyers

The regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo has arbitrarily removed numerous lawyers and notaries from the registry of the Supreme Court of Justice, without official notification, prior proceedings, or publication of the corresponding decree in *La Gaceta* (the Official Gazette). According to reliable estimates, the measure has affected at least 2,000 individuals, who have effectively been disbarred and prevented from practising their profession. For many of them, this decision amounts to a genuine "professional death sentence."

Most of those affected remain in Nicaragua, although some legal professionals are currently living in exile. This latest measure appears to be part of the government's strategy to eliminate spaces for the independent practice of law and to exclude those it considers political opponents or individuals not aligned with its interests.

The gravity of this decision has been recognized and denounced by international human rights mechanisms. Both the [Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua \(GHREN\)](#) and [the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers](#) have condemned the measure, warning that it constitutes a serious attack on the independence of the legal profession and the rule of law.

These actions are incompatible with Nicaragua's international human rights obligations. In particular, they violate guarantees enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including the right to a fair trial and to legal assistance of one's own choosing (Article 14), as well as the right to an effective remedy for human rights violations (Article 2(3)). Furthermore, the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers establish that States must ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, or improper interference (Principle 16); that they are not subjected to or threatened with administrative or other sanctions for acting in accordance with their professional duties (Principle 17); and that disciplinary proceedings are conducted before an independent and impartial body, with full respect for due process guarantees (Principle 28).

Beyond its direct impact on legal professionals, this decision seriously undermines access to justice for broad sectors of the population. Without a free and independent legal profession, thousands of people are deprived of their right to legal representation and to effective judicial protection. In particular, women seeking justice for gender-based violence may be left without legal assistance and representation.

Many of the excluded lawyers provided legal advice and representation to victims of political persecution, both inside and outside the country, as well as to human rights defenders, journalists, civil society organisations, and communities defending their territories and other collective rights. By preventing them from practising their profession, the Nicaraguan State further weakens these individuals' and communities' ability to access protection mechanisms and justice.

In the context of the regime of terror established since April 2018, this purge also serves as a message of intimidation to the entire legal profession. The measure is intended to

discourage the independent practice of law and to warn that any legal professional who represents political opponents, human rights defenders, or causes deemed contrary to the government's interests may face similar reprisals. In doing so, it further restricts the right to defend human rights and deepens the closure of civic space in Nicaragua.

We, the undersigned organisations, strongly condemn this arbitrary measure, which constitutes yet another attack on the independence of the legal profession, access to justice, and the rule of law, and forms part of the strategy to consolidate the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

We call on the international community; regional and international human rights bodies; bar associations and legal professional organisations; and international associations of jurists to publicly condemn these measures and urge the Nicaraguan State to:

- Immediately restore the right to practice of all lawyers and notaries who have been arbitrarily removed from the registry;
- Ensure that any decision concerning admission to or continued membership in the legal profession is made solely in accordance with the law, through independent, impartial procedures that fully respect due process and other international standards;
- Put an end to all forms of retaliation, intimidation, or persecution against lawyers for the legitimate exercise of their profession, for defending human rights, or for representing human rights defenders, individuals perceived as political opponents, or persons belonging to groups in vulnerable situations; and
- Adopt the measures necessary to guarantee the independence of the legal profession and full access to justice for all people, in compliance with its international human rights obligations.

We also urge States hosting Nicaraguan lawyers in exile to facilitate mechanisms for the recognition and accreditation of professional qualifications, as well as measures supporting their integration into the labour market, institutional support, and technical assistance, so that these legal professionals may continue their legal, academic, or legal aid work under dignified conditions.

Centro por la Justicia y el Derechos Internacional (CEJIL)
Comissió de Dones Advocades del Ilustre Colegio de la Abogacía de Barcelona
Fundación Justicia y Género
Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (IM-Defensoras)
Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
Observatorio Internacional de la Abogacía en Riesgo (OIAD)