



GENDER-BASED POLITICAL PERSECUTION IN NICARAGUA: NO SILENCE, NO OBLIVION

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IM-DEFENSORAS

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IM-DEFENSORAS

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1

Introduction

For several decades now, women in Nicaragua have organised themselves into an autonomous social movement, with a critical stance in favor of human rights and the rule of law. The movement opposes the authoritarian model consolidated under the leadership of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

The information gathered in this report indicates that the Nicaraguan authorities have gradually identified leaders, members, supporters within the women's movement (as well as their relatives), as a specific social group, perceived as a political and social threat, and have deployed differentiated patterns of repression targeting them. These patterns include severe deprivations of fundamental rights, such as arbitrary detentions, restrictions of freedom of association and expression, criminalisation, public smear campaigns and acts of physical, psychological and sexual violence committed in contexts of deprivation of liberty or state control.

There are reasonable grounds to sustain that these actions are not solely a response to real or perceived political opposition from the victims but are also driven by gender-based discriminatory motivations aimed at attacking women's leadership, bodily autonomy and the transgression of socially imposed gender roles.

This investigation documents, systematises and analyses patterns of the gender-based violence and persecution waged by the Ortega-Murillo totalitarian regime against the feminist and women's movement (movimiento feminista y de mujeres) in Nicaragua during the period running from April 2018 to April 2025. It aims to assess the existence of a policy of gender-based persecution in the country, both from legal and factual standpoints.

To this end, the research factors in background events that occurred between 1998 and early 2018, as they provide essential context for these patterns. The analysis identifies severe deprivations of fundamental rights, patterns of state action, elements indicating a gendered discriminatory motivation, as well as their insertion into a widespread and/or systematic attack on an identifiable civil population, pursuant to international criminal legal standards.

The investigation also seeks to contribute to processes of memory, truth and recognition of the harm suffered by women, as well as to support efforts to achieve justice, accountability and guarantees of non-repetition, through the preservation, organisation and legal analysis of information that can serve as

a basis for domestic or international proceedings to address a crime that, to date, remains largely unpunished.

This report was prepared by the Consortium on Gender in Nicaragua, comprised of the Guernica Center for International Justice, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras), and independent human rights activists and defenders, who formed an alliance to carry out this research project.

It was supported by The Global Women's Institute, the Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAU-LAC), and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation.



2

Method

The Gender Consortium¹ conducted an investigation of cases of gender-based persecution that occurred between April 2018 and late 2025, supported by a team of four consultants (two researchers and two legal scholars).

RESEARCH APPROACHES

This report was prepared from a feminist perspective using a human rights-based approach, grounded in gender and intersectionality of discrimination. It recognizes that human rights violations affect women and other historically marginalized groups, such as LGBTIQ+ persons, in differentiated ways, paying special attention to the feminist and women's movement.² The research places the voices, experiences, feelings and knowledge of the affected individuals at the centre of the inquiry, acknowledging them as rights-holders with an active role in the pursuit of justice, and prioritising their well-being, consent, confidentiality and use of safe spaces.

SCOPE AND CASE SELECTION

This study draws on an analysis of a sample of 120 emblematic cases associated with the feminist and women's movement that occurred between April 2018 and 2024. Cases were selected based on their representativeness, diversity of victimisation patterns, and the availability of verifiable information, with the objective of identifying consistent trends and patterns of gender-based violence and persecution. The selected cases were systematised in a database with structured variables, including the identity of the person involved,³ the time, place and form of the victimising events, the identity of possible perpetrators and reports filed with the authorities.

Within the sample, 42 cases involved acts of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, including sexual violence, threats related to motherhood, and other equivalent forms of gender-based violence. The dataset further included 52 cases of arbitrary detention; in 50 cases, conditions of detention were

documented, and in 46 cases information regarding the release process was recorded; additionally, 61 cases concerned persons forced into exile, 28 of which involved persons banished from their country or arbitrarily deprived of their nationality and their property. Other 33 cases correspond to forced exile, resulting from situations of harassment, threats and constant surveillance following release or in anticipation of imminent detention.

SOURCES

The database was compiled using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included semi-structured interviews conducted with direct victims, relatives and experts, as well as information from judicial case files and reports submitted for international advocacy. The secondary sources consisted mainly of reports produced by research centres and human rights organisations, which were used to provide context and triangulate the information.

ANALYSIS AND STANDARD OF PROOF

The information was analysed using systematic qualitative approach aimed at identifying convergent indicators and consistent patterns of human rights violations. Particular care was taken to test for the existence of severe deprivations of fundamental rights, the recurrence of modes of conduct, the potential presence of gender-based discriminatory motivation, and its insertion of such conduct within a widespread and systematic attack against an identifiable civilian population, in accordance with international criminal law standards. The conclusions were based on a standard of reasonable grounds to believe, without prejudging individual criminal responsibility.

The rigorous analysis of the information collected identified systematic and widespread patterns of human rights violations against the feminist and women's movement. It bears emphasizing that the 120 selected and documented cases do not encompass the full range of possible experiences. Accordingly, this report is not meant to replace more comprehensive judicial investigations, or to exhaust all dimensions of the phenomenon; it seeks to contribute to the recognition of the existence of the policy of persecution, as well as its understanding and greater visibility.

LIMITATIONS

The research faced limitations inherent to the context of state repression, including extremely restricted access to official information (e.g., judicial records), which hampered the reconstruction of some persecution processes. In addition, given the persistence of threats and the fear they generate, underreporting and omission of information by interviewees could not be ruled out.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the research was made possible by the trust and legitimacy that the feminist and women's movements have built and sustained in Nicaragua and internationally.



3

Legal framework and analytical boundaries

Throughout history a range of forms of gender-based violence, including rape and sexual violence, has been used as a weapon in armed conflicts, as a mechanism for spreading terror and humiliation and as instrument of state social control, particularly in contexts of repression and detention.

Some of the foremost examples in the region of Mesoamerica may be found in cases of sexual violence in armed conflicts in Guatemala and the repression in Atenco.⁴

These and other cases, as well as analyses of such occurrences, have led to the conclusion that the use of gender violence has a deep symbolic and political dimension, because it sends its victims a clear message of exclusion and subordination. Gender violence is used to punish those who do not abide by the gender roles and norms dominant in patriarchal societies and to discipline persons whose expression, gender identity and sexual orientation challenge those roles and norms.

Gender persecution can be a crime against humanity recognised in both article 7.1.h of the Rome Statute and customary international criminal law as implemented in the jurisprudence of international criminal courts and the consolidated practice of international investigation mechanisms.⁵ Case law and legal practice establish that a crime against humanity exists when these six elements are present:

1. The conduct must have targeted an identifiable person or group on the basis of their real or perceived membership in a group or collective, or against the group as such. When the persecution occurs for reasons of gender, it may target persons in connection with “sex characteristics and social constructs and criteria used to define maleness and femaleness,

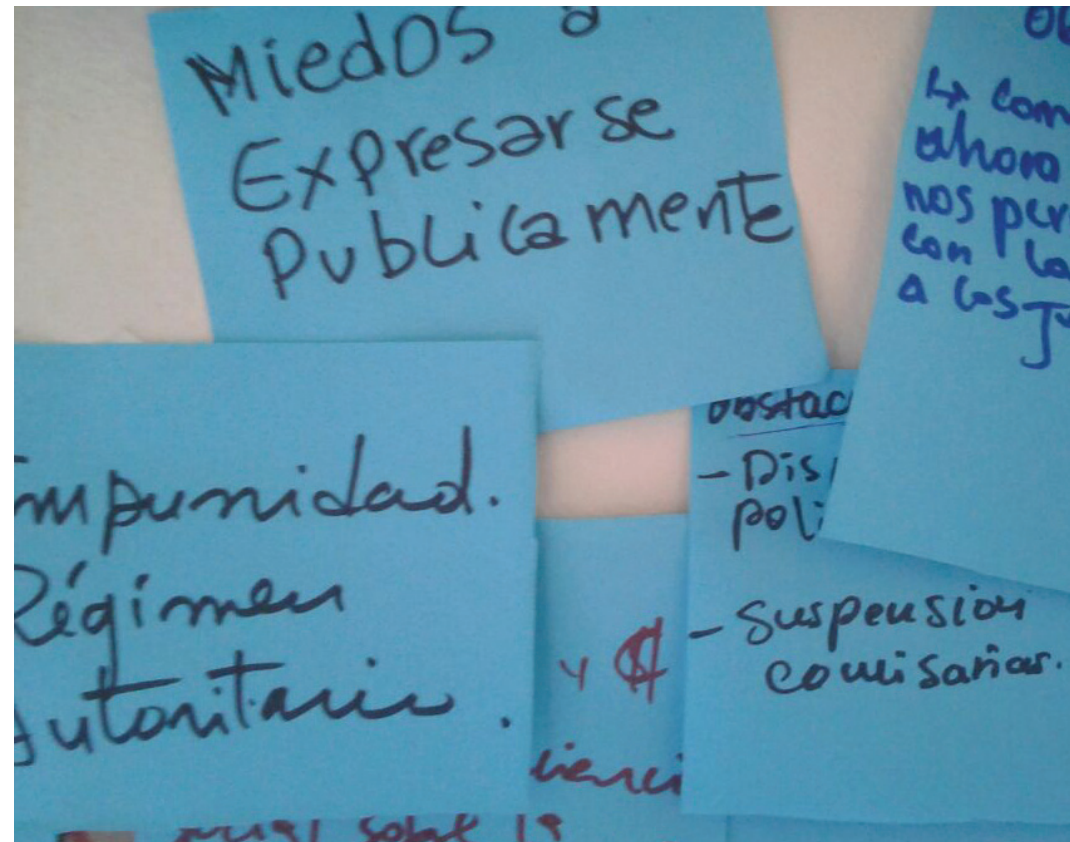
including roles, behaviours, activities and attributes”.⁶ The victim need not self-identify as a member of the group; it suffices for the perpetrator to perceive the victim as a member of the group.⁷

2. The conduct must have been committed for discriminatory reasons, in this case gender-based reasons. This means that a specific discriminatory intent apart from the perpetrator’s personal motivation must be proved. This intent may be inferred from objective signs, such as the selectiveness of measures, use of stereotypes or smear campaigns and repetition of conduct against the same group.⁸
3. The persecution must have been committed in connection with other crimes against humanity or another crime within the cognisance of the International Criminal Court.⁹
4. The conduct must form part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, meaning a standard of conduct that implies the multiple commission of acts to execute or promote a state or organisational policy.¹⁰
5. The perpetrator must have been aware of the context of the attack or intended for the conduct to form part of said attack, pursuant to the standards of mens rea in international criminal law.¹¹

Bearing in mind that the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) and other international investigation mechanisms have concluded that there are reasonable grounds for believing that crimes against humanity have been committed in Nicaragua, this report does not set out to reconfirm the existence of the widespread or systematic attack nor state

responsibility for the attack. The legal analysis reported here concentrates specifically on the second and third elements of gender persecution, to wit:

- (i) identification of the feminist and women’s movement as a target group persecuted for its real or perceived membership in a collective defined by gender; and
- (ii) existence of gender discriminatory intent, which is inferred from the selectiveness of the repressive conduct, the use of gendered forms of punishment, the use of gender stereotypes and stigmatising discourses.



4

Background of the feminist and women's movements in Nicaragua, 1998-2018

Since the 1980s, the Nicaraguan feminist and women's movement has played a central role in the transformation of gender relations and the promotion of women's and girls' rights in the country.

During the years of the Sandinista Revolution, many of its members had organisational ties to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or FSLN). However, the FSLN's electoral defeat in 1990 marked a turning point: in the context of the political transition and the party's withdrawal from state power, the movement consolidated greater political and organisational independence, strengthening an agenda of its own focused on boosting women's autonomy, combatting gender violence and demanding accountability, including that of former political allies.

Throughout the 1990s, the movement flexed its autonomy through sustained advocacy campaigns for the establishment of a normative, institutional and political framework designed to prevent, address and sanction violence against women. It also pushed for the creation of a comprehensive and interinstitutional system of response, with the active participation of women's organisations, with concrete obligations for the institutions responsible for its implementation.

The movement played a decisive role in placing women's right to a life free from violence at the centre by promoting legal reforms, public policies, and comprehensive and interinstitutional programs to support victims and ensure access to justice. It thereby contributed to a shift away from historically tolerant paradigms toward such forms of violence.

In 1998, a profound rupture occurred in the relationship between the feminist and women's movement and FSLN leadership. Zoilamérica Narváez, the stepdaughter of FSLN leader Daniel

Ortega, publicly denounced, that year, having been subjected to sexual violence by her stepfather, since her childhood. The feminist movement's public support for the victim had significant political and symbolic repercussions: for the first time, a social actor with historical legitimacy openly challenged not only Ortega's exercise of power, but also the patriarchal structures underpinning it. From that point onward, the feminist and women's movement began to be perceived and treated by the Ortega-Murillo leadership as an opposition actor, not only for its political stance, but also for directly challenging the prevailing gender order.

In the years that followed, these events contributed to the emergence a political alliance between former adversaries Daniel Ortega and the then-President Arnoldo Alemán in what various analysts have described as "patriarchal pacts"¹² aimed at securing impunity in relation to allegations of corruption and sexual violence, as well as consolidating arrangements of governance and institutional power. In parallel, Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo pursued a strategy of conservative legitimisation, reinforcing their alliances with religious hierarchies.

In 2005, the feminist and women's movement and several other organisations took a public stand and participated actively in marches against the Ortega-Alemán-Bolaños-Obando pact.¹³ At the same time, they continued their work and kept expanding their collaborative networks, notably through increased engagement with organizations representing sexual diversity.¹⁴ However, despite women's widespread mobilisation and sustained criticism of the patriarchal pacts, the backing of the Catholic Church proved decisive in strengthening Daniel Ortega's presidential candidacy in 2006.

From that point onward, the conservative influence of various churches became increasingly apparent within the pact that

emerged among forces competing for political hegemony.¹⁵ In this context, women's human rights were used as a currency to secure political alliances and religious backing, manifested both in institutional tolerance toward sexual violence and in the dismantling and denial of sexual and reproductive rights.

This shift materialized in October 2006 with the outlawing of all forms of abortion -including the previously legal therapeutic abortion (1870)- shortly before Ortega returned to the presidency in January 2007. According to Lacombe (2010), "the anti-feminism of the Ortega-Murillo tandem is directly linked to feminists' support for Zoilamérica. Some of them [...] fiercely criticised the abuses of power by Ortega and by people supporting Danielismo, going so far as to state that an FSLN victory in the 2006 elections was the worst possible scenario."¹⁶

The first systematic acts of criminalization against the feminist and women's movement were registered in 2007 and 2008. In September 2007, Nicaragua's public prosecutor office initiated a criminal investigation against nine feminist leaders, with a clear intent to criminalise their actions. They were initially accused of collusion, having accompanied a child victim of sexual abuse (the "Rosita case"), and of advocating for abortion. However, the investigation was subsequently dismissed by the public prosecutor's office due to a lack of evidence. The case did not proceed to judicial review, nor were any formal charges filed.¹⁷

At the same time, feminist organisations filed numerous constitutional challenges against the prohibition of therapeutic abortion, none of which were ever ruled upon by the Supreme Court of Justice.¹⁸

In 2008, Rosario Murillo led public smear campaigns that portrayed feminism as a "foreign" and "destabilising" ideology¹⁹ linked to strategies of destabilisation, counter-revolution and "somocismo" (from the ex-dictator Somoza). Because of

their opposition to the criminalisation of abortion and their open demonstration against Daniel Ortega's re-election, in September 2008, the Centre of Communication Research (Centro de Investigaciones de la Comunicación - CINCO), the Women's Autonomous Movement (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres or MAM), OXFAM-GB and various organisations belonging to the feminist and women's movement were publicly accused of destabilising the government,²⁰ money laundering, embezzlement, contractual influence peddling and bid-rigging. The attacks extended to the private lives of women human rights defenders, including the scrutiny of personal and intimate relationships between the targeted organisations' members²¹

The smear campaign was further reinforced by the initiation of additional judicial and administrative investigations against 17 non-governmental organisations for money laundering, financial triangulation fraud, and advocating abortion. These proceedings led to searches in the premises of both MAM and CINCO.²²

Over the following decade, these practices were further entrenched through a regression in women's rights. The new Penal Code maintained the total criminalization of abortion; Law No. 779²³ was weakened through restrictive implementing regulations; special police units for women and children were progressively closed, institutional spaces for dialogue between the State and feminist organisations were dismantled.

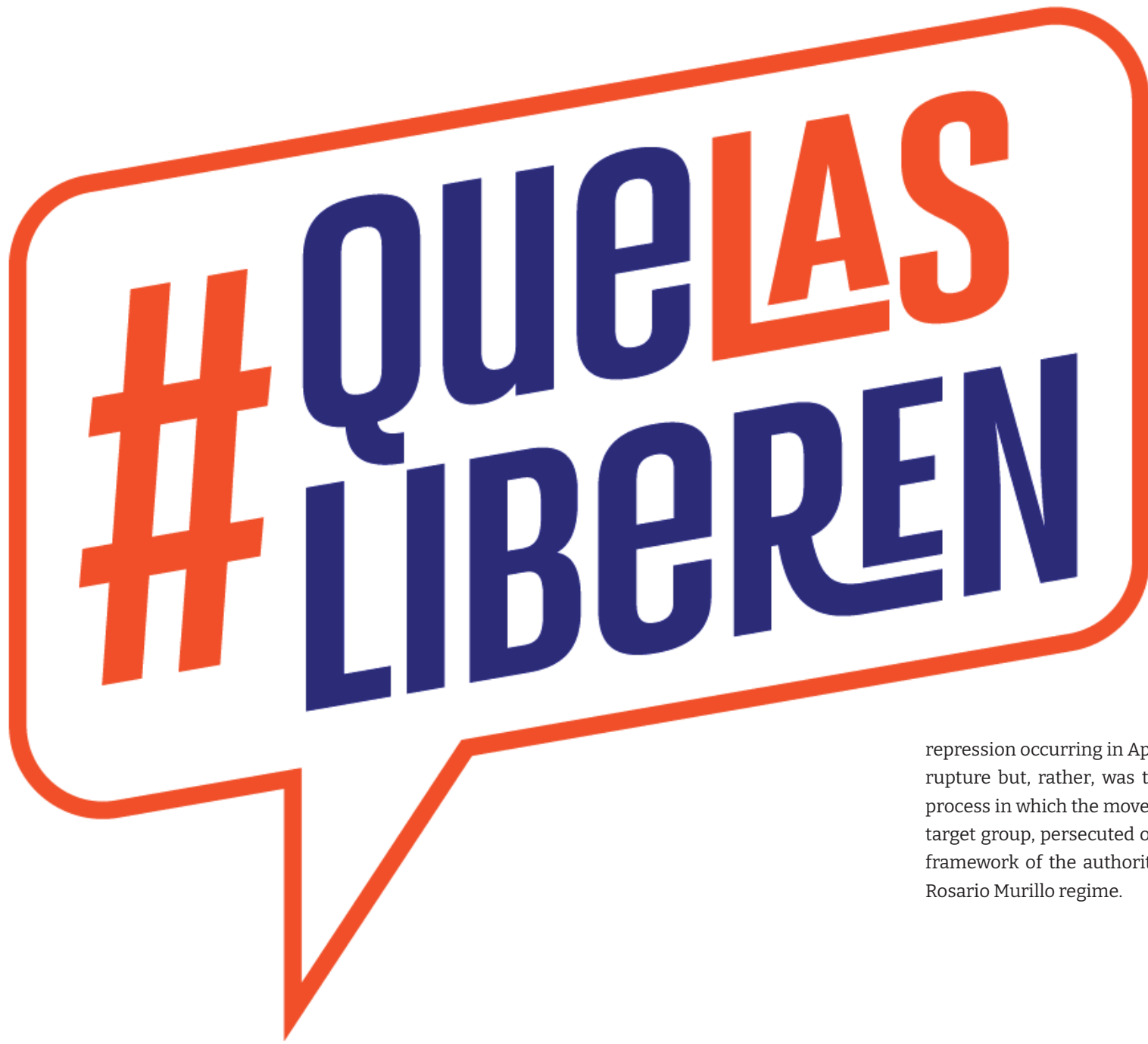
In parallel, media outlet aligned to Ortega-Murillo disseminated sexist, lesbophobic, and libelous hate speech against feminist leaders on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation and political participation.

These narratives were also spread by government allied media. This was particularly evident in the article "Las cuatro damas más 'sufridas' de Nicaragua" ("The four most 'suffering' ladies in

Nicaragua"), published in 2016, which used derogatory, sexist, lesbophobic, pejorative, and denigrating language to refer to the four women leaders who were named. The piece referred to them as "females" ("hembras") rather than women, it trivialized the struggles for women's rights, and accused the women of using their status as women and their sexual orientation for political purposes. It asserted that they derived benefits and funding by "portraying themselves as victims because they are women" and that they had manipulated "their lesbian identity to get money for their political group, the MRS and their opposition NGOs."²⁴ The attacks targeted them for being women, for the work carried out, their presence in the public political sphere and for their sexual orientation.

"...[W]e declared ourselves completely against Ortega, because by then [...] he shouldn't have run, because it was against the Constitution [...] we questioned that very forcefully, protesting hard [...]. Then in 2012 there were local elections. We called for abstention, and there was a strong show of abstentionism [...]. In 2013 they passed Law 840 [...] and, well, again we organised major mobilisations for this too. We filed writs as legal challenges, we convened demonstrations, and we were against that whole process. As a result, we were constantly subjected to harassment, threats..."²⁵

The movement participated actively in the 2013 opposition to the Inter-oceanic Canal Law, maintaining close coordination with other social movements as well as regional and international bodies. These actions further reinforced the identification of the movement as an actor to be neutralised, not only because of its political opposition, but also due its sustained challenge of imposed gender roles and its political capacity for articulation and coordination with other expressions of social movements.



Between 2008 and early 2018, a sustained pattern of gender discrimination against the feminist and women's movement was consolidated. This pattern was characterised by smear campaigns, selective criminalisation, and the deliberate weakening of standards for the protection of women's rights and their exclusion from civic space.

These precedents enable one to understand that the

repression occurring in April 2018 did not constitute an abrupt rupture but, rather, was the intensification of a pre-existing process in which the movement was progressively made into a target group, persecuted on gender-based grounds within the framework of the authoritarian project of the Daniel Ortega-Rosario Murillo regime.

5

The *continuum* of violence and persecution against the feminist and women's movement during and after the 2018 protests

From the beginning of the onset of the 2018 social upheaval, the feminist and women's movement intensified its public presence through a range of actions, including participation in the national dialogue processes, engagement in platforms of political convergence, and involvement in organisations of victims and relatives of political prisoners, alongside those who had been forcibly disappeared or killed.

The movement's active, plural, decentralised presence was perceived as a serious threat to the Ortega-Murillo's totalitarian regime, insofar as it challenged the regime's political legitimacy, denounced its human rights violations, and confronted the regime's hegemonic model of womanhood. Women's subordination was promoted by the authorities, which was instrumentalised in alignment with conservative views on power. The feminist and women's movement was identified as an opposition actor, not only because its contestation of political power, but also because it challenged the symbolic and cultural representations underlying the State's authoritarian structure.

The 2018 social protests initially emerged in response to State negligence in addressing the fire in the Indio Maíz biological reserve in early April and the social security reforms imposed a few days later. The mobilisations soon evolved to denounce corruption, impunity and abuses of power, and to demand democratic reform and the resignation of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

Expressions of social repudiation and discontent were met with generalised State repression. In this context, the feminist and women's movement became the target of selective and differentiated attacks. Its members were stigmatised as "traitors", their identity as women, feminists and mothers

(where applicable) was questioned, and they were portrayed as a threat to the traditional family values promoted by the regime.

The State authorities under the control of Ortega and Murillo, ordered and coordinated actions against the feminist and women movement, portraying it as subversive, dangerous and an enemy of the State. According to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, this kind of characterization of a gendered social movement that is advancing legitimate demands constitutes a form of gender-based violence, and this has a deep political and symbolic dimension inasmuch as it conveys a clear message of exclusion and subordination directed pointedly at its victims.²⁶

Rosario Murillo, who served successively as government communications director, then vice president and later co-president, has been a key voice in the government's imposition of a singular type of womanhood, notwithstanding the contradictory representations she publicly embodies. While in some discourses she presents herself as a Christian and compassionate mother, proclaiming saccharine messages of love and solidarity, in others she exercises power through the rhetoric of hatred and hostility toward women who represent diverse, autonomous and critical understandings of being a woman, and who refuse to be moulded into the ideal of self-sacrificing mothers and homemakers.²⁷

“There is hatred toward women, but not toward just any woman, because she hates us for what we are, because we fight back, because we denounce them, because we stand up to them, because they can't beat us down, because we won't give up. They hate us for what we are as women. Women in the deepest sense of the word, I mean, women who stand up to them. Then they proceeded to toy with the idea that they were going to make us kneel; that they were going to break us’.”²⁸

During the period of social upheaval, the feminist and women's movement, through its networks of organizations and individual feminists, played a leading role in political and social action at both the national and community levels. Women from diverse social backgrounds, territories, and age groups participated and assumed leadership roles across multiple expressions of resistance to the repression unleashed by the Ortega–Murillo authorities. This engagement included, inter alia, participation in the April 19 Movement across different territories, as well as in the Unidad Nacional Azul y Blanco (Unidad Nacional Azul y Blanco or UNAB), the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy (Alianza Cívica por la Justicia y la Democracia), the National Coalition (Coalición Nacional), and the opposition space known as “Monteverde”.

“Feminist and non-feminist women alike assumed a leading role as a result of the organizing work carried out prior to 2018. Women's participation was described as “active and participatory”: they carried the microphones, banners, and pots, and even used religious spaces for protest, organizing “lock-ins” following mass.”²⁹

Young women led the occupation of universities and roadblocks, organized marches against the government, and coordinated hundreds of local events and protest actions across different departments of the country.³⁰ Women medical students participated in emergency response teams in temporary clinics established in universities and safe houses, and, together with women physicians, were part of mobile health brigades organized to provide care and protection to activists and human rights defenders wounded during the protests. Women lawyers volunteered to defend those detained by the police, while women psychologists formed a psychosocial support network promoted by women human rights defenders.

“This holistic understanding of life and of human rights defence became a central contribution of women’s activism across multiple fronts. Feminists and women defenders were involved in preparing food for students, collecting supplies, documenting what was happening, sheltering individuals at risk, opening their homes as safe spaces, and advocating for the recognition of women’s leadership [...]”³¹

Women also organized teams to coordinate with the private sector and civil society the donations of medical supplies, clothing, and food for those entrenched in universities. They transported essential goods to several departments, and, more broadly, thousands of women, both individually and through organized networks, provided refuge in their homes to individuals persecuted by police forces.

“Wherever a march took place, whether in the same city or elsewhere, our ‘compañeras’ were there. We never abandoned a broader political position [...]. For us, it was essential to strive for the best possible conditions [...] for the advancement of women’s rights, there must be a more enabling political environment. Under a dictatorship, there is no way for women’s rights to advance.”³²

Women also participated in the dialogue processes with Daniel Ortega beginning in May 2018, positioning feminist demands within those spaces.³³

“I believe they saw us as women who were not confined to single issues [...]; rather, everything that affects the population concerns us, the canal project concerns us, politics concerns us, elections concern us, and the economy concerns us.”³⁴

While not all women who led or participated in organized expressions of struggle for justice identified as feminists, a significant proportion of the political initiatives that emerged were accompanied, sustained, or strengthened by members of the feminist and women’s movement. As noted by Yang Rappaccioli (2022), feminist women and activists played a fundamental role in the creation of the Association of Mothers of April (Asociación de Madres de Abril) and in supporting women political prisoners and their families.³⁵

Women’s leadership, especially from young women, was evident in departmental capital cities across nearly all regions of the North Pacific and central areas of the country.³⁶

“We joined the protests naturally, and at that moment the student movement was formed (...), it began with 30 young women, and six of us were leading it. That was the start of building community networks. I took part in the roadblocks (tranques) and in the marches. We were the ones who organized everything, the marches, carrying the megaphones and the banners; we were the ones making the decisions about how to do it (...). As a feminist collective, it was us women who were there from the beginning to the end (of the protests).”³⁷

On the Caribbean Coast, the role of women is also evident through resistance that reclaimed the history of discrimination and marginalization that was endured by the Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations of the region, as well as the systematic violence the Ortega-Murillo regime had exercised against them long before.

“We are not 2018; we are a historical resistance to systemic violence (...) a wound left by colonial thinking (...). In 2018, women took part in the Southern Caribbean Coast (region); in the Northern Caribbean Coast

(region) it was more through social media and word of mouth. For us it was very unusual, but there were some Indigenous people who tried to repress students from one of the universities. The mobilizations were about the invasions (of territories); it was the women who raised their voices, made banners, and went out across the territories, in territorial assemblies, they said it was better for men not to participate because they were at greater risk.”³⁸

Resistance on the Caribbean Coast has historically focused on the territorial and communal defence of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples,³⁹ as well as on demands for the use, administration, and management of their traditional lands and natural resources.

“Our marches did not begin in 2018; they began around 2007 or 2008 (...). It was not yet clear that the government was rejecting so many longstanding demands related to the territorial demarcation process, but in 2014, when the lawsuit was filed against the State over the interoceanic canal, that’s when they really showed their claws. And by 2018, they came at us with everything, even killing journalist Gahona right before our very eyes.”⁴⁰

The 2023 report of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) highlights the long-standing resilience and mobilization capacity of the women’s movement:

“...the significance of the women’s movement (in all its heterogeneity) in Nicaragua (...) has been a critical voice against President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo. Historically linked to the Sandinista struggle, it developed an autonomous political and social force independent from the FSLN, and has

broad, strong, and active territorial bases connected through networks.”⁴¹

In response, Vice President Murillo, through the so-called proclamation “against gender-based violence” of 22 November 2018, published by the National Assembly, stated:

“Sandinista women from social, labour, and youth movements denounce the constant extortion carried out by these self-proclaimed feminist movements, which have sought, obtained, and continue to obtain abundant and illegitimate resources to attack and destroy Nicaraguan women and families (...). We are women, let me repeat, we are women, not undefined persons who use disrespectful, offensive, and humiliating language and models, discriminating against the majority of women who are good, simple, humble, and hardworking, and who, without imported sophistication, strive to live within a culture of peace, respect, and well-being (...). The personal, social, and gender conduct of these political activists with women’s names represents other realities and other cultures, neither related to nor identified with our circumstances, our culture, or our highly respected traditions and ways of life.”⁴²

This narrative is built around an alleged antagonism between Sandinista women, portrayed as “brave, hardworking, and committed,” and feminists, who are depicted as seeking to “destroy Nicaraguan women and families,” as “opponents,” “traitors,” and “recipients of illegitimate foreign funding.” Within this discourse, the leadership of the feminist and women’s movement is acknowledged only to manipulate events and portray them as responsible for the violence during the social uprising; it denies them their identity as women by labelling



them “political activists with women’s names” and erases their struggles and demands, clearly revealing the motives behind the Ortega-Murillo regime’s aggression against them.

This narrative is not only consistent with the violence and repression carried out simultaneously against the feminist and women’s movement and the expansion of permanent

surveillance networks as part of a strategy of gender-based persecution, but it also fuelled the violent repression.

Human rights violations, directly linked to the identity and work of the movement, were calculated to dismantle and eliminate the feminist and women’s movement in Nicaragua and were carried out through the State’s actions that followed.

6

Violation of the fundamental rights of women and people with diverse sexual orientations, identities or gender expressions

Based on the documentation gathered in this report, it can be established that the repression practised by Ortega-Murillo's totalitarian regime as of April 2018 did not come from nowhere. It represented the deepening of a prior pattern of smear campaigns, criminalisation and institutional dismantling aimed at the feminist and women's movement since at least 2007. This historical process—identified through antifeminist narratives and official propaganda, legislative retrogression, selective criminal persecution and the gradual shutdown of civil spaces—was the immediate antecedent of the phase of widespread violence that followed the social uprising of 2018.

On this pre-existing foundation, the regime rolled out a web of legislative, administrative, police, judicial, media, digital and penitentiary measures aimed not only at repressing social protest, but also at silencing women's voices, neutralising the political and territorial leadership of the feminist and women's movement and reducing their capability for public influence. This pattern of persecution had a two-part effect: it sought to break up a sector considered to be one of the most troublesome and autonomous of the sectors facing off against the government, and it sought to send a corrective message to Nicaraguan women as a group, with devastating impact on women's public participation and systems of protection from gender violence.

In this framework, the violations described and analysed in the following sections of this report—which range from the criminalisation of women defenders to the mass cancellation of feminist organisations, sexual and gender violence against persons held in state custody, digital surveillance, gendered torture, arbitrary deprivation of nationality and forced exile—cannot be seen as isolated events. On the contrary, they belong to a continuum of gender persecution characterised by the severe, cumulative deprivation of fundamental rights aimed against a specific group targeted due to their sex, gender, social

leadership, sexual orientation or gender identity, and executed with the clear intent to discriminate.

The above provides the contextual framework necessary for reading the detailed analysis that follows, which examines each of these violations in the light of the constituent elements of gender persecution under international law, including the nature of the affected group, the rights infringed and the specific types of violence used.

6.1 Violation of the rights of freedom of assembly and association

6.1.1 Attacks against women human rights defenders in the feminist and women's movement

Between September 2020 and January 2021, laws were adopted to restrict civic and civil society space in order to impede the work of human rights defenders in Nicaragua, by facilitating their criminalisation and limiting their rights of defence. The GHREN (2023) reports that the government created “a legal framework to dismantle and criminalise any form of political opposition or activism in order to perpetuate the government”⁴³

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights even declared the total closure of civic space in Nicaragua.⁴⁴ This scathing assertion was based on the steps the Ortega-Murillo regime took to pass Law No. 1040, the Regulation of Foreign Agents Act of 15 October 2020. This law forces non-governmental organisations to abstain from activities related to political affairs and prohibits any funding enabling them to engage in “activities considered political”. The government thus managed to cut off funding to many women’s organisations.

This was followed by Law No. 1042, the Cybercrime Act, enacted on 27 October 2020, which penalises the dissemination of “false information”, a concept defined in vague, subjective

terms. This law has been used systematically, arbitrarily and disproportionately to criminalise people considered to be opposed to the government, including women in the feminist and women’s movement, and it has been effective in using the court system to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

Law No. 1055, the Sovereignty Act, passed on 22 December 2020, classifies people perceived to oppose the government as “traitors to the homeland” and disqualifies them from elected office. This law provided the basis for the government’s decision to dissolve the opposition’s main political coalition, and it was used to revoke the Nicaraguan nationality of 316 people, bringing the total number of people arbitrarily stripped of nationality to more than 450.

Law No. 1057 of January 2021, the constitutional reform act, and Law No. 1060 of February 2021, the Criminal Procedure Code Reform Act,⁴⁵ restrict the procedural guarantees of arrestees and in so doing violate rights relating to due process for people who have been criminalised.

Law No. 1070, the Electoral Reform Act, enacted on 4 May 2021, ensures that the president and co-president will remain in power, since it expanded the grounds for disqualifying candidate registrations. Under this law, two political parties that might have participated in the 2021 presidential elections, where one of the presidential candidates was a woman, had their registration cancelled.

Law No. 1115, the General Act on the Regulation and Control of Nonprofit Organisations of March 2022, and Law No 1127, a reform passed five months later, state that the assets of dissolved organisations will become state property, except in cases of voluntary liquidation and dissolution. The reform act gives the Ministry of the Interior the authority to cancel the legal status of nonprofit organisations through ministerial resolutions.

Law No. 977, the Act Against Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Funding for the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, was passed in November 2023 and establishes obligations leading to arbitrary searches of nonprofit organisations, including women’s organisations.⁴⁶

These legislative changes were part of a strategy that paved the way to the criminalisation of human rights defenders, the cancellation of civil society organisations, the restriction of procedural guarantees and the loss of nationality and statelessness for hundreds of people.⁴⁷ In addition to identifying the impact this legislation has had on women’s and feminist organisations, the CEDAW Committee stated that women defenders have been the targets of intimidation, harassment, libelous government smear campaigns, retaliation, rape, physical assault and injury to relatives, property damage and death threats.

Arbitrary detentions, arrests and trials have been leveraged against women defenders of human rights, religious leaders, journalists and university students. Loss of nationality and restrictions on entering and leaving the country are also used as mechanisms to punish people who oppose or are perceived to oppose the government, including women.⁴⁸

These impediments have also affected the resistance of indigenous peoples and people of African descent. The Alliance of Indigenous and Afro-descendent Peoples of Nicaragua (Alianza de los Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes de Nicaragua or APIAN), which was harassed more severely in the aftermath of 2018, stopped holding meetings due to increased harassment and the persecution of its main leaders, many of whom were forced into exile.

The September 2024 Report of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua says,

“Indigenous and Afro-descendant activists and leaders, or persons who worked in organisations focusing on the defence of the rights of these populations, were also subjected to arbitrary restrictions of their right of free movement and their right to choose freely where they reside.”⁴⁹

6.1.2 Right of freedom of assembly and association: the mass cancellations of civil society organisations

Between 18 April 2018 and 31 August 2023, the authorities cancelled the legal status of 3,390 of the 7,227 organisations legally registered in the country in 2018.⁵⁰ The IACHR found that, in the early stages of repression in 2018, this practice formed part of a strategy applied selectively to punish organisations identified as the government’s harshest critics during the social uprising.⁵¹ It also confirmed that the cancellation decrees were groundless and had no legal basis and that they were adopted through an “express” procedure with no legal guarantees for those affected.

The first cancelled organisation was part of the feminist and women’s movement, the Health Information and Advisory Services Centre (Centro de Información y Servicios de Asesoría en Salud or CISAS). CISAS worked on promoting sexual and reproductive rights. It was cancelled on 29 November 2018.⁵² The fact that the first organisation to be cancelled was a women’s organisation is not happenstance but rather, is key to understanding the persecution targeting women’s organisations in Nicaragua.

IM-Defensoras’ Mesoamerican Register of Attacks Against Women Human Rights Defenders has documented the cancellation of another 282 feminist organisations and organisations for women’s and girls’ human rights up to April 2025.⁵³ The IACHR⁵⁴ and the UNHCHR⁵⁵ offer very similar figures. According to the IACHR, the strategy of attack via

mass cancellation enabled the government to close 78% of the organisations in the feminist and women's movement.⁵⁶ For the UNHCHR, these events form part of the cancellation of 3,641 organisations since 2018.⁵⁷

Among the organisations hardest hit were those that worked on gender violence, economic empowerment and the health, sexual and reproductive rights of indigenous, Afro-descendant and mestiza women.⁵⁸

The GHREN and the IACHR highlighted the direct attacks and viciousness unleashed against women's and feminist organisations⁵⁹ as the government sought to dismantle the movement politically and socially.⁶⁰ This was because it was one of strongest and most troublesome autonomous opposition movements thanks to its capacity for mobilisation and the breadth of its regional bases, which were key in the April 2018 uprising.

The cancellations also involved the confiscation and illegitimate appropriation of assets, police occupation of the streets and the freezing of bank accounts and other assets. In the case of some feminist collectives, in addition to the cancellation of their legal status and the appropriation of the organisation's facilities, steps were taken to erase the very memory of the group's struggles by setting up a women's credit bank on the feminist group's confiscated premises, hanging up a large photograph of one of the women Sandinista leaders and replacing the group's name with the name of other groups allied with Sandinismo. This symbolic violence sought to erase anyone regarded as contesting the model of womanhood imposed by the regime.

The cancellation of organisations in the feminist and women's movement makes it impossible for women defenders to access financial resources and keep up their work. It thus hampers their ability to denounce violence and discrimination against women, fight against impunity in cases of gender violence, promote

sexual and reproductive rights and maintain spaces specialising in care for women and individuals of sexual and gender diversity. It is a measure designed to weaken the social fabric, coordination and information processes, the capacity for advocacy, political reflection and autonomy of women human rights defenders and their entire movement.⁶¹

6.2 Violation of the right to security: violence and gender discrimination facilitated by technology

Online platforms became a means of repression, control and surveillance used in a targeted, discriminatory fashion against the feminist and women's movement. This occurred primarily on social networks, blogs and pro-government media. The Ortega-Murillo's totalitarian regime surveilled, threatened, intimidated, ran smear campaigns, released fake news and published private information, including addresses and other personal data that have endangered the life and integrity of a diverse range of women,⁶² including students, activists, human rights defenders, journalists and politicians.⁶³

Since 2018 the government has used troll farms or "net centres" to carry out this gender violence,⁶⁴ operating through multiple platforms on social networks to run intense smear campaigns used to justify arbitrary detentions and accusations against women as "traitors to the homeland".⁶⁵

In 2021 the 2020-2025 National Cybersecurity Strategy⁶⁶ and through the Law No. 1040, the Special Cybercrime Act,⁶⁷ known as the "Muzzle Law", established a series of penalties for publishing or disseminating news that the authorities deemed false or creating alarm, fear or unease. This law was then used to criminalise members of the feminist and women's movement under claims that they were spreading fake news.

In 11 of the 120 textbook cases chosen for this report, the official allegations included as evidence social network posts that

supposedly took anti-government stances. One of the case files reads as follows:

“[T]hrough information and communication technologies, the defendant has shown her satisfaction with the approval of laws handed down by the governments of foreign powers aimed at imposing economic sanctions on the State of Nicaragua, for the purpose of causing harm to its economy [...] the defendant applauds the interference of foreign states in Nicaragua’s internal affairs.”⁶⁸

A woman activist and environmentalist, criminalised and sentenced in 2019 for alleged participation in organised crime, kidnapping with extortion, aggravated robbery, carrying or illegal possession of firearms and possession and use of restricted weapons,⁶⁹ was subjected to online violence after imprisonment. She was the object of threats, doxxing and degrading language, and hackers even blocked her social networks.

Like her, other women from the feminist and women’s movement⁷⁰ who were criminalised and later released were subjected to gender persecution facilitated by technology as part of a strategy aimed at silencing them, symbolically annihilating them and portraying them as incompetent at their job.⁷¹ This strategy also sought to correct or punish them for challenging social norms,⁷² reinforce traditional gender roles, discriminate against them for qualities linked to their social, cultural or ethnic origin and especially because of their real or perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

6.3 Violation of the right to freedom and personal integrity: forced disappearances in criminalisation processes against the feminist and women’s movement

Women human rights defenders were a specific objective in the targeted criminalisation and discrimination strategy. The Mesoamerican Register of Attacks Against Women Human Rights Defenders by the IM-Defensoras identified 233 cases of arbitrary detention of women defenders from the start of the crisis in April 2018 to July 2025.⁷³ This practice was yet another tool for impeding the defence of human rights.⁷⁴

The sample of 120 textbook cases selected for this report includes 52 documented cases of arbitrary detentions against women, sexual and/or gender diverse individuals (LGBTQI+ community) as activists, women human rights defenders, feminists, environmentalists, students, women leaders on the barricades, and protest participants. There were also registered cases of women involved in providing humanitarian aid in 2018 as lawyers, journalists, opposition activists and women politicians in the feminist and women’s movement.

The victims’ ages ranged between 19 and 66. Twenty-one of the cases happened in 2018, two in 2019, three in 2020, seven in 2021, three in 2022, 13 in 2023 and one in 2024. The detentions occurred in 10 of the country’s 15 departments and two autonomous regions. The number of detentions, their geographic range and the fact that they all followed a similar pattern, reveal the generalised nature of these violations of the right to personal freedom for reasons of gender.

Among the cases prioritised for this report, 22 of the detentions were carried out in operations involving a disproportionate number of police officers and riot squad members (15 to 20

trained persons). In at least 13 of the cases, the detentions were made by armed groups of pro-government civilians, in some cases operating in tandem with the police.

34 women described an excessive and disproportionate use of physical and psychological force during their detention, including the discharge of firearms, physical blows, pushing, kicking, slapping, pulling their hair, tearing out fingernails and choking using a plastic bag over the head. They also reported that they received discriminatory insults based on their gender: “prostitute”, “cunt”(hija de puta literally slut's daughter), “tramps, bitches”. In five cases the women reported that their relatives were subjected to intimidation and/or violence at the time of their detention or immediately afterward.

One 30-year-old activist and protest participant was detained without an arrest warrant in 2018 at the conclusion of a march in Managua. A mixed squad of police officers and hooded armed persons intercepted her and her sister, shooting at them with their firearms while they were in a moving vehicle on the way home. They forced the women to leave their van, pulling their hair and aiming at them with long-barrelled weapons. They laid the women face down in the rear of the vehicle with their hands cuffed behind them. The police officers kicked them while insulting them, calling them “tramps and bitches”. They were later taken to the Directorate of Judicial Assistance at El Chipote.⁷⁵

Two women political leaders detained on 13 June 2021 in their home were subjected to violence in an operation involving over 60 members of the Special Police Operations Directorate (DOEP) and the Directorate of Citizen Security (DSC). The officers entered their home combat-ready, breaking down the front gates, wearing bullet-proof vests and armed with AK rifles, without any search or arrest warrant.

These events happened within the framework of other seizures of political leaders of the Unión Democrática Renovadora party (UNAMOS) in the context of the 2021 elections, and they were done as a form of violence with a clearly gender discriminatory intent, due to the fact that both women identified as lesbians and feminists. The officers improperly interrogated other people in the house about the identity of the detainees' sexual partners⁷⁶

Consistent patterns of irregularities were documented in the detentions of the 52 cases in this sample; in 30 cases there was no prior arrest warrant, nor was flagrancy an issue. In 24 cases the obligation to bring the detainees before a judge within the legally established period was not complied with, and in some of these cases the women remained detained for weeks or months without being brought to court. In 32 cases they were never even informed of the reasons for their detention.

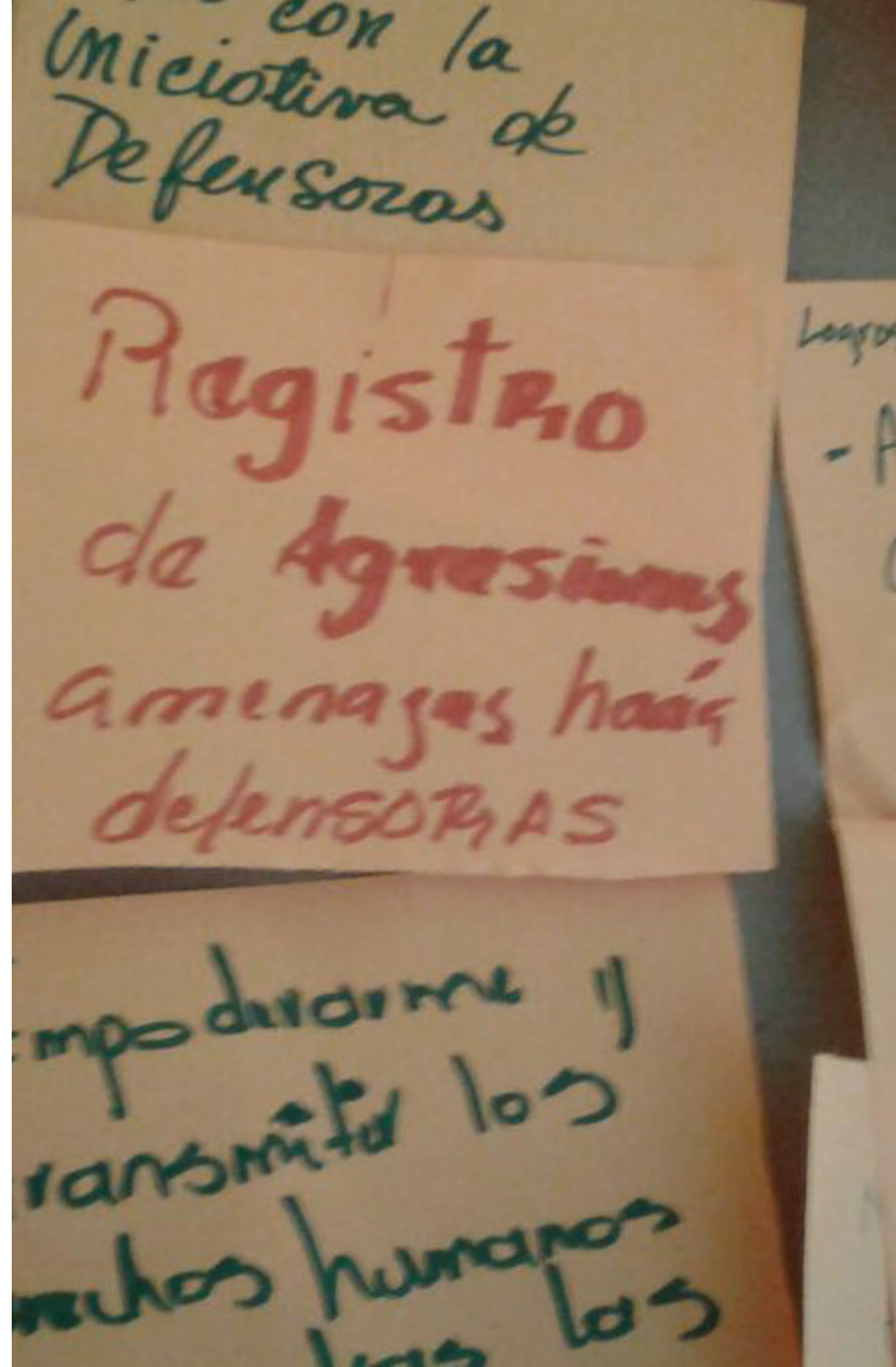
Furthermore, in 18 documented cases the women were denied access to their own attorney or trusted legal aid, and in other cases the women were forced to accept a court-appointed attorney. The files contain charges of serious crimes like terrorism, terrorist financing, robbery, aggravated damage, arson, attempted homicide, conspiracy to undermine national integrity, propagation of fake news and organised crime. Several rulings were based on the testimony of state officials and screen shots of WhatsApp conversations and social networks where the detainees allegedly expressed opposition to the government.

In other cases, evidence for the defence, such as proof that the defendants were elsewhere at the time of the alleged events, was systematically dismissed. In six of these proceedings, the women were sentenced to 10 to 15 years' imprisonment.

6.4 VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY: Forced disappearances in criminalisation processes against the feminist and women's movement

Eight of the 120 textbook cases analysed in this report are documented cases of women who were the victims of forced disappearance following arbitrary detention. Their cases show a pattern in which the detention was conducted by members of public forces without an arrest warrant and was not officially registered afterward,⁷⁷ the authorities refused to give relatives or defenders information on the victims' whereabouts, and lastly the victims were held incommunicado for a lengthy period.

Four women leaders of UNAMOS were held incommunicado for over 80 days while detained, without the authorities' officially reporting the location and conditions of their detention. In these cases, none of the legal requests filed with the court system in search of information about the detainees' whereabouts were effective.⁷⁸ Some of them were not even processed.





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7

Violation of the right to personal integrity of women political prisoners: torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, threats linked with motherhood, including sexual and gender violence

Of the sample of 120 textbook cases chosen for this report, 39 women⁷⁹ were tortured or endured cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment during their imprisonment on political grounds, including practices that displayed a gender discrimination component. Except for one case, the violence happened during detention while the detainee was in the custody of National Police officers and Penitentiary System employees or civilians acting with the acquiescence of the state.⁸⁰ Different forms of gender-based violence were used, like rape and other forms of sexual violence. There are also documented cases of sexist, chauvinist, homophobic and transphobic insults or disparagements, threats focusing on motherhood and a higher incidence of temporary and prolonged solitary confinement for detained women as a form of torture and detentions under inhuman, degrading conditions. Taken together, this demonstrates the use of gender discrimination against women, lesbians and trans women.⁸¹

Of the 120 selected cases, 24 involved rape and other forms of sexual violence, such as threats of rape and forced nakedness, which are levied to a disproportionate degree against women political prisoners.⁸² Fourteen cases happened in 2018, in the time around the state crackdown. Another three happened in 2019, two in 2021 and 2022, and three in 2023.

Although greater sexual violence was registered in the period around the social uprising, the use of sexual violence continued in subsequent years.⁸³ In 21 of the prioritised cases, the detained victims were forced to strip in front of officers; they were also forced to do squats naked in front of various National Police officers and in some cases hooded civilians as well; other detainees were photographed naked. One woman was forced to strip on a military base in front of a women military officer.

According to documented evidence, the practice of forcing the women to strip was intended to punish, intimidate and humiliate them. It is a form of sexual violence intended to reinforcing discriminatory and unequal social norms.

The other acts of sexual violence were committed against 21 women age 19 to 55 having varied profiles: university students, opposition politicians, former police officers, barricade leaders, activists, human rights defenders and feminists. The reported practices were used mainly at the El Chipote Detention Centre (11), but some took place at Nuevo Chipote, the police stations in Jinotega, León and Matagalpa, the Directorate of Judicial assistance in Carazo, National Police District 3 in Managua and a military base. Altogether, victims reported forced stripping at six detention centres belonging to the National Police or the Army and at penitentiary centres located in five Nicaraguan departments.

Nine women of various profiles were raped. Five of them were university students who participated in the protests, one was a former member of the Sandinista Youth, another was a former member of the Citizen Power Councils (Consejos de Poder Ciudadano or CPCs),⁸⁴ another was a barricade leader, and two were activists defending women's rights in the protests. There are some overlaps as some of the victims fit into more than one of these categories.

Five cases happened in 2018, two in 2019, one in 2020, and one in 2022. Four cases took place at El Chipote, one at the Jinotega Police Station and one outside the detention centre while the victim was under National Police custody, one at a military base, and in two of the cases the aggressors were paramilitary group members who committed rape while their victims were imprisoned at an unidentified location.

In four of these cases, the victims were raped multiple times by several National Police officers (mostly men, with women present in two of the cases) and hooded civilians. The rapes formed part of the interrogation technique used early in detention.

One woman who led a barricade in July 2018 spent eight days naked in a cell with no food. She was the victim of multiple rapes and acts of sexual violence, such as breast biting and physical violence perpetrated by police officers and other men who wore hoods and civilian clothing. They wanted to extract information and punish her for being a woman. She was constantly insulted with discriminatory, sexist expressions: "This is what's done to all sluts".⁸⁵

A man who was also a barricade leader detained in 2018 was also the victim of sexual violence in the form of electrical shocks to his genitals. As a consequence, he lost one of his testicles.⁸⁶ In this case the point of the sexual violence was to dominate him and feminise or emasculate him.

In another documented case, a woman activist who participated in the protests and was held in detention at El Chipote in 2018 was interrogated three times by a policewoman who forced her to strip, get on her knees and then do 15 squats. The policewoman asked the detainee what the marches were for and who was financing them, while slapping her head and calling her "tramp" and "bitch". One day the policewoman threatened that she would bring in a man to rape the detainee if she did not talk, and she groped the detainee. She pushed the detainee to the floor with her hands cuffed behind her; the policewoman covered the detainee's mouth with her hands while a hooded man raped her. When that was over, she threatened the detainee that "if she talked about what had happened, she'd take away her daughter".⁸⁷ These practices demonstrate that there was a clear discriminatory intention in terms of both the persons

targeted, who were assaulted and deprived of fundamental rights, and the format and mechanisms of the practices used, which constituted gendered torture.

7.1 Degrading treatment of women political prisoners through use of verbal violence based on discriminatory stereotypes

Members of the feminist and women's movement underwent torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, gender-stereotyped verbal violence, the use of stereotyped insults referring to the victims' sexual life or the victims' nonconformity to gender roles, with the intention of humiliating and insulting the women. This kind of violence was generally perpetrated by National Police officers.

The words and expressions used were: "locas" (crazy women), "cochonas" (dykes),⁸⁸ "lesbianas" (lesbians), "feministas" (feminists), "hijas de puta" (as strong as "cunts", literally "slut's daughters"), "te vamos a quitar lo gallita" ("we're going to knock you down a peg"), "qué bueno que no está en Afganistán, porque allá te pegan un tiro por lo que haces y por ser mujer" ("it's a good thing you're not in Afghanistan, because over there they'll shoot you for what you're doing and for being a woman"), "abortistas" (abortionists), "golpistas" (coup makers), "eso te pasa por no estar cuidando a tu hijo" ("this is what happens for neglecting your child"), "sos una vaga, perra" ("you're a tramp and bitch"), "hija de la gran puta vos andas con una, con todas esas cochonas del MRS" ("you fucking cunt, you're with one of them, with all those dirty MRS dykes"), "Te estás haciendo la nueva, como que sos una niña, ¿ahora sos señorita? ¿acaso vos no has cogido? ¿o sea vos no cogés pues? ¿no cogés? ¿no te cogen?" ("You're acting like you've never done this before, like you're a little girl? So now you're a proper young lady? Haven't you ever fucked? So, you don't fuck, then? Don't you? Never been fucked?). In some of the cases, the women report that allusions

to their real or perceived sexual orientation were a constant in their interrogations while detained.⁸⁹

7.2 Use of threats against motherhood as a torture mechanism against mothers in the feminist and women's movement

In six of the cases selected for this report, threats linked to the fact that political prisoners were mothers were used during interrogations. This is evidence of clear gender discriminatory intent, because it attacks care responsibilities stereotypically associated with women in terms of care and therefore generates additional hurt.

Four de-facto dimensions are identified in this pattern. The first is to threaten to harm and even to murder the detainee's children. The second is to threaten to separate the detainee from her children or keep her away from them, even in the case of breastfeeding mothers. The third is to deprive the detainee of contact with her small children for a lengthy time and even to refuse to allow her to receive photographs or have any communication with her children.

The fourth and last dimension is to repeatedly question the detainee's performance as a mother from a patriarchal standpoint, with the intention of making her feel guilty.⁹⁰ In these cases the women political prisoners stated that these threats, linked with other extreme factors of their detention, caused them severe psychological suffering and in some cases triggered anxiety attacks.⁹¹

One feminist activist belonging to the UNAMOS political party⁹² was held prisoner for a year and three months without being allowed to have any contact at all with her four-year-old son. She stated that it was an experience of torture.⁹³ During 10 months' detention, she was interrogated constantly with accusations of



being a bad mother; this shows that agents of the state used her role as mother to punish her and break her emotionally.

7.3 Solitary confinement as a form of torture against women political prisoners from the feminist and women's movement

Since April 2018, 11 women political prisoners of the 120 textbook cases selected for this study were held in solitary confinement, in some cases for a prolonged period under inhuman, degrading conditions. These cases happened in

the Nuevo Chipote Detention Centre, the Integrated Women's Penitentiary Establishment (known as "la Esperanza", or "Hope") and the Jinotega Police Station.

The solitary confinement conditions followed a pattern. The prisoners were assigned to solitary cells, they were forbidden to communicate with other detainees, and disciplinary isolation cells were used on an ongoing basis. The people victimised through temporary and prolonged solitary confinement were women activists or defenders of human rights, women's rights

and sexual diversity (LGBTQI+ rights) and women from a political opposition party.

Eight of the 11 women placed in isolation were feminists. Of the eight, six were held in prolonged solitary confinement, unlike the men imprisoned during the same period. Four women leaders of UNAMOS were held in prolonged solitary confinement in separate individual cells with limited access to light, where they were forbidden to speak.

One member and leader of UNAMOS and the Political Council of opposition group Unidad Nacional Azul y Blanco⁹⁴ was a political prisoner from 12 June 2021 to 8 February 2023 at Nuevo Chipote, where she was held in isolation conditions for a year and two months in a locked cell that prevented her from coming into visual contact or communication with other people. She was not given sufficient nutritious food and lost 20 pounds, becoming undernourished and amenorrhoeic. She was interrogated nonstop, at least three times a day, sometimes before daybreak, even after she had already been sentenced. She was forbidden to communicate with her four-year-old daughter and was allowed family visits and food packages only irregularly. In addition, she was forbidden to have reading material.⁹⁵

Four women political leaders among the selected cases were held in prolonged solitary confinement, were forbidden reading and/or writing materials and for a lengthy period were prohibited from communicating with each other or with other persons held in confinement, their defence attorneys or their families.

7.4 Prison conditions that constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of women political prisoners from the feminist and women's movement

In 52 of the cases in the sample chosen for this report, prison conditions were inhumane and cells were tiny and unventilated and lacked daylight and proper hygiene. Political prisoners were given limited or no access to suitable quality medical care for their ailments and had restricted access to food (very scarce rations). One punishment was to reduce their already insufficient portions.

During confinement, the prisoners were subjected to constant interrogations, even at night or before daybreak. They were refused family visits generally, and in the exceptional events where visits were granted, they were monitored constantly. The prisoners were held in the El Chipote Detention Centre, the Nuevo Chipote Detention Centre, the Integrated Women's Penitentiary Establishment known as La Esperanza and, in the case of trans women and lesbians, detention units for men at La Modelo prison.

7.5 Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment as a form of punishment against women political prisoners from the feminist and women's movement for their sexual orientation and gender identity

In four documented cases (one of a lesbian woman and three of trans women), political prisoners were held in penitentiary centres or detention facilities for men as intentional punishment for their sexual orientation and gender identity. One of the prisoners was a guerilla commander, feminist, historian, politician and founder of MRS-UNAMOS; three were leaders, activists and defenders of women's rights and sexual diversity.⁹⁶

The trans women were misgendered from the start of their criminalisation and they were treated as men at all times, despite their objections. They were forbidden their hormone treatment and were threatened with punishment at the detention centre if they continued to identify as women. In one of the testimonies, a trans woman confirmed that she was always called by her masculine name and was never acknowledged by her woman's name:

“[...] they were always saying, ‘You’re a man, you’re a ball bag, you have balls’. It was tough. I had to get up very early, almost five in the morning, half past four, in order to wash and not feel the awkwardness of being with a lot of naked men while I washed”.⁹⁷

7.6 Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as a form of punishment extending to spouses and relatives of women political prisoners

Spouses and relatives underwent constant attacks, interrogations and irregular detentions. In some cases the interrogators endeavoured to obtain information about prisoners from their families. In others, detentions were used to silence and punish denunciations made previously by relatives reporting degrading treatment inflicted on political prisoners or on themselves because they were visiting political prisoners.

One woman homemaker accompanied by her underage daughter was detained when taking breakfast to her husband, who had been arbitrarily detained the day before. The child was left alone outside while the mother was detained without a warrant and taken to El Chipote and later La Esperanza, where she spent four months. She was baselessly accused of conspiracy and terrorism and was later released under the conditions set out as of Family Living Arrangements. Her children could not continue their education, her family business went bankrupt,

and she was the target of harassment and threats that forced her into exile.

When visiting women political prisoners, relatives were forced to disrobe, especially women and elderly persons. In November 2022 several relatives reported that they were forced to strip and do squats while entirely naked at the El Chipote Detention Centre.⁹⁸

Visitors were also insulted and arbitrarily forbidden to bring food, clothing or medicines. In many cases visits were cancelled without notice or ring-fenced with conditions. As many relatives were unable to work their scheduled hours, many lost their employment, since it was vital to keep visiting women political prisoners in order to confirm their continuing personal integrity given the punishing conditions they faced. The visits also created an increase in the need for unpaid care work, generally shouldered by other women of the family according to traditional gender roles. Many relatives had to find new livelihoods or sources of funds to make up for the drop in family income.⁹⁹

The documentation this project handled also shows that relatives under these circumstances were baselessly dismissed from their jobs, especially when working for public or state institutions.

8

Violation of the right to personal integrity: political prisoners from the feminist and women's movement released under conditions of harassment, control and threats

Of the 120 selected cases, 19 women were the object of various acts of harassment, control and threats after being released.¹⁰⁰ Some were also deprived of their liberty again without good cause.

The Ortega-Murillo government exercised control through permanent police surveillance, officers patrolling outside the victims' homes, constant harassment through stalking and being followed, and/or photographic records made by third parties and threats designed to make victims give up their activism or work and renounce their political views. There was also police harassment at their workplaces. As soon as political prisoners were released, they faced the threat of violence against themselves or their children, made with language and actions that were intentionally gender discriminatory and attacked the victims' sexual orientation and gender identity.

Lesbians and other "sexual diversity" LGBTQI+ people were threatened with rape as a corrective punishment.¹⁰¹ One of them testifies that she was directly threatened: "Hey, lesbo, stop fucking around, because if you don't, we're going to remind you of what you are. You're a woman, right? [...] We're going to destroy you (literally slit your throat). We're going to keep reminding you you're a woman"¹⁰²

Several women defenders were detained again by the police for further interrogation after their release, and even though they were set free afterward, they were again subject to intimidation and felt themselves in danger; as a consequence, in nine of the cases of the selected sample, the women activists were forced into self-exile from Nicaragua.

9

Violations of nationality and free movement: arbitrary deprivation of nationality, exile, migratory repression, surveillance and gender persecution

According to GHREN data, the Ortega-Murillo government has arbitrarily stripped Nicaraguan nationality from 452 people and has forced 451 of them to leave the country. A deportation order dated 8 February 2023 issued by the Managua Court of Appeal expelled 222 people to the United States of America. Four months later, their assets, shares and companies were confiscated¹⁰³ without any judicial or administrative procedure against which they could appeal.

On 15 February 2023, the same court declared another 94 people traitors to the homeland and sentenced them to be stripped of their nationality.¹⁰⁴ In addition, they were declared fugitives from justice, were disqualified from holding or being elected to public office. They lost all their citizen's rights in perpetuity, and their assets were seized.¹⁰⁵ There was no due process, and the people concerned —of both sexes, including journalists, members of religious orders, human rights defenders, writers, scholars, former public officials and feminists¹⁰⁶— found out about it through the media. Some of them, women political prisoners released from various penitentiary centres, were taken to the military airport and forced to sign papers that they were leaving the country for the United States.

“The uprooting that goes with banishment has been so hard. I never wanted to be an exile, leave Nicaragua... I have so much respect for the people who decided to leave, and those are really painful decisions... but I never went through the mental process where my brain took the decision that I had to go in order to protect my life. I never went through that process, so for me the shock of having been put on a plane and taken elsewhere has been so big, and it took me months and months to wrap my head around it”.¹⁰⁷

On 5 September 2024 the same measure was applied to another 135 former prisoners who lost their nationality and had their assets confiscated. They were expelled to Guatemala.¹⁰⁸ The official list of people was never made public, so misinformation and confusion abounded.¹⁰⁹ This kind of violence was made official—and it remains so—through the constitutional reform of 18 February 2025 that declares that “traitors against the homeland lose Nicaraguan nationality”.¹¹⁰

94 of these people were women who were deprived of their nationality arbitrarily. The majority of them, 59, were human rights defenders according to the records of IM-Defensoras, and they were identified by the regime as “opponents of the Government or they represent a threat to the Government”.¹¹¹ The same happened to other women for participating in the 2018 demonstrations.

Many of the banished women were also mothers who were incarcerated and were so completely deprived of contact with their children that their children were not informed of their release or their being sent to another country. The banished prisoners’ names were erased from civil registers, creating a civil death for them and their families and serious consequences for their children; with their mothers’ names erased from their birth certificates, the children cannot prove a blood relationship, and that spawns fresh administrative difficulties should they try to prepare any applications or legal procedures such as family reunification applications.

“It’s like the first impact is when they put you on a plane. I feel like that was, for me, the first reality check. They force you onto a plane, and they make you leave your country. It’s that feeling... When am I coming back? When am I going to be able to see my daughter again? All that uncertainty is really hard, and then you

reach a new country undocumented, without a shred of paper showing that you are who you say you are... It’s a parallel reality. I can’t get my birth certificate, because I no longer exist; but I keep using my passport for paperwork in the US, but it’s not valid.”¹¹²

A little girl who was 16 months old when her mother was detained was placed in the custody of relatives when her mother was expelled. Later, in response to harassment and threats from the National Police, the family had to move to Costa Rica, where the child is currently seeking refugee status. She has no passport and cannot leave the country. Her mother cannot leave the United States, either; she does not have her Nicaraguan passport, and she remains separated from her daughter. On top of this, the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration make the situation worse.¹¹³

Forced loss of nationality, erasure of records and permanent banishment have a different impact on women and girls, because patriarchal society leaves them more exposed to physical, legal and social risks. They face additional barriers when seeking protection for themselves or access to their rights, and that is what the perpetrators want. Women and girls are all more likely to suffer sexual violence in the migration process.

In addition, the consequences of banishment persist in their new countries. Because they cannot certify their work experience or education, because they are denied a retirement pension or because they cannot overcome the barriers to the job market (for different reasons including age, health, language, migrant status, gender and identity), they can barely subsist. Their circumstances also block access to health services and the arrangements necessary to guarantee a minimum standard of living and integrity, such as applying for asylum and residence permits.



9.1 Exile as a means of protection against violence aimed at the feminist and women's movement

In addition to the cases of denationalised persons, the state's persecution has forced members of the feminist and women's movement from all over the country into exile. As one-woman defender put it, exile represents a tough experience that "covers every area of the persecuted person's life: the point is to control, injure or destroy your body, your psychological integrity, to destroy your personal reputation, to punish the collective you come from [...] the state manifests utter power".¹¹⁴

A woman educator was detained together with her 23-year-old son, a university student, on 8 November 2018, when police went to their house without an arrest warrant.¹¹⁵ She was unjustly accused of arson, kidnapping, torture, assault, bodily harm and illegal possession of arms. She spent 13 days detained in the city of León, after which she was moved to El Chipote, as punishment for her and her son's participation in the April 2018 protests. "They told me they were going to rape me, that if I didn't talk, they'd cut off my son's testicles, and in that place I felt death". After 80 days in jail without a trial, she was freed,¹¹⁶ and at the same time, she was fired from the educational institution where she worked, and her son could not carry on with his university studies. When they were released, they were subjected to police harassment and recurring threats, which forced them to stay on the move, completely upsetting their family life, careers and peace of mind. After two years under these conditions, they were forced into exile in 2021. Migration officials harassed her but let her leave only after forcing her to sign a statement saying she would never again return to Nicaragua, thus turning her into a de-facto stateless person.¹¹⁷

The Mesoamerican Register of Attacks Against Women Human Rights Defenders from IM-Defensoras has documented a total of 347 people displaced in Nicaragua between 2018 and 31 July

2025. 95 of these persons are women activists and human rights defenders displaced within the country, and 252 have been displaced internationally. There are 6 cases from 2015 to 2017 involving displaced persons prior to 2018, since when violence has been on the rise. The Register has also documented a total of 84 forced displacements of relatives of women activists and defenders in the same period, 11 of whom are internal displacements, and 73, international displacements.

Out of the 120 cases selected for this report, 34 documented cases were of women and sexually/gender diverse and dissident people forced into exile.¹¹⁸ 25 of them were exiled in the face of imminent detention, attacks, threats, constant surveillance (by the police, Consejos de Poder Ciudadano - CPCs, Sandinista Leadership Councils, members of paramilitary organisations, Sandinista youth), cancellation of the organisations or media where they worked, smear campaigns against them or internal displacement, or for being a relative of someone subjected to State repression for participating in the April 2018 demonstrations.

One lesbian feminist was threatened by the police with corrective rape:

"Watch it, you go out ... [to demonstrate] ... what you're looking for is a few dicks,¹¹⁸ because that's what you want", since I'm a self-declared lesbian [...] "you deserve a few dicks [...]" a policeman said, "to control you, that's what you need" [...] I felt just awful there, I was so fucking scared that I still remember it and it makes me so angry. That's where I felt like he broke me.¹¹⁹

In other cases, they left the country for personal or safety reasons, and when they tried to return, they were refused admission, and they have been in exile ever since. One woman with double nationality tried to leave the country after being

intimidated and kept under surveillance. She was not allowed to go, and they took away her Nicaraguan passport. She was forced to apply for permission to leave the country as a foreign citizen and to ask for a consular escort from the country of her second nationality. Not even that kept her safe from harassment by the migration staff until she successfully left.

9.2 Exile and migratory repression of women political prisoners and relatives of members of the feminist and women's movement

Many mothers, daughters, partners and siblings of women who used to be political prisoners or were criminalised for membership in the feminist and women's movement have had to leave Nicaragua after enduring constant surveillance, threats, smear campaigns and institutionalised violence as a consequence of their tie to a person considered to be anti-government or dangerous to the Ortega-Murillo's regime. Fear of arbitrary detention, the impossibility of earning a living or the mere act of accompanying a public denunciation—all these things have forced relatives to flee, leaving behind their homes, jobs and communities. A public school teacher had to self-exile after being fired due to her daughter's feminist activism:

"My mum had to go into exile too, because my mum is a teacher, and they practically told her, "Either inform on your daughter, or we're going to run you out", and that's what happened: my mum resigned and fled to Spain because she practically had no life, because she had to be, like, watching me."¹²¹

In addition to directly enduring exile, many families were subjected to other forms of migratory repression, like denial of passport applications and prohibitions against leaving or entering Nicaragua. Families that survived attack after attack also had to face the impact of expulsion from their country afterward.

"Nobody in my family could get a passport. They won't let them in. The ones who were abroad and left have to stay out, of all ages ... I have to say, it's been really tough dealing with the repression against our families when they leave. That's been a double victimisation, and it's like living it all over again. We managed to get out of jail, but what we found outside was the reality of seeing our families expelled."¹²²

The mother of one detained, banished political opponent was not allowed to leave the country for medical testing in Costa Rica. Her health worsened as a result, speeding her death and preventing her exiled relatives from saying goodbye.

"The fact that mum couldn't get out and therefore I couldn't see her afterwards, hug her after I was banished. The criminalisation of my siblings and therefore their subsequent exile. The fact that my nieces and nephews couldn't get into Nicaragua; they're not activists, and they're teenagers. Those are consequences."¹²³

9.3. Expansion of surveillance networks and the continuum of gender persecution against the feminist and women's movement

In addition to all the measures of violence perpetrated against the feminist and women's movement, the totalitarian regime has institutionalised permanent surveillance through coordinated networks for State repression made up of volunteer police officers, civilian government loyalists who are assigned security powers without formal controls, and state and parastatal actors.

Thus, the feminist and women's movement continues to face all the kinds of violence analysed in this report as well as the



infringement of fundamental rights by state and parastatal structures and volunteer police officers.

The violence perpetrated against the feminist and women's movement has gradually isolated the women defenders who remain in the country by limiting their capacity for coordination, collective protection and international denunciation. According to the November 2025 monthly report by Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners (Mecanismo para el Reconocimiento de Personas Presas Políticas),¹²⁴ 56 hombres and 6 women remained political prisoners, and all the women remained disappeared. The same report reflects as follows on Nicaragua's current trend of forced disappearance:

"Gendered use of forced disappearance against women—where 83 % of the women political prisoners remain disappeared, in contrast to 37 % of the men—reveals a sexist discrimination component in the repression policy. This bias reproduces historic patterns of state violence against women defenders, women community leaders and persons associated with care roles or social resistance, showing that repression in Nicaragua is not just political, but also strongly guided by gender inequalities."

9.3.1 Repression targeting the feminist and women's movement

Since the early nineties, and especially since the widespread attack against the civilian population that began in April 2018, the Ortega-Murillo's regime identified organised women (particularly the feminist and women's movement) and people from the "sexual diversity" (LGBTQI+) community as a target group whose political, symbolic and social existence was incompatible with the government's authoritarian and patriarchal model.

This targeting process was not limited to state surveillance. It also operated through sustained public discourse—stoked by Rosario Murillo and echoed by pro-government media—portraying these women as dangerous adversaries, "deviants", "bad mothers", "lesbians", "cochonas" or directly as "traitors". The accusation of treason cast them not only as enemies of the state, but as women who betrayed the gender mandates the regime endeavoured to impose. This stigmatising framework enabled the state to conceptualise the movement as a target group separate from the opposition in general, and it legitimised the adoption of specific repressive measures aimed at neutralising the movement's ability to intervene politically and have an impact. The feminist and women's movement was identified as a threat due to its long career of political autonomy, its opposition to the "submissive womanhood" model promoted by the regime, its ability to coordinate widespread regional networks, its leadership in the April 2018 protests and its transformative role in matters of equality, sexual and reproductive rights and gender justice.

Under the state rationale, the visible participation in the uprising by the feminist and women's movement was interpreted as a challenge to the regime-backed patriarchal order. Therefore, the repressive response was not limited to feminist organisations, but extended to young activists, women human rights defenders, LGBTQI+ women and students, regional leaders and women who joined expressions of resistance without ever having participated in the movement formally before. They were all arbitrarily lumped into a group identified as "the enemy", against which the state deployed actions aimed at shutting the group down and eliminating it as a political actor.

LGBTQI+ people from the "sexual diversity" community were also special targets: in numerous cases of criminalisation and

imprisonment, they were misgendered, subjected to corrective sexual violence, confined in men's prison units and exposed to cruel treatment with the explicit intention of denying their identity. All this confirms that the state persecuted not only political opinions, but gender identities, gender expressions and bodies that it perceived as disobeying the patriarchal order.

9.3.2 Discriminatory repression

State repression of the feminist and women's movement was systematic, comprehensive and deeply discriminatory. State repression has been developed through a combination of legal, administrative, police, judicial, migratory, discursive and symbolic measures designed to dismantle the movement's very existence. The mass cancellation of feminist organisations, the confiscation of their assets, the closing of specialised police stations, the deliberate rollback of legislation against gender violence, selective criminal persecution, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, sexual violence under detention, deprivation of nationality and banishment were aimed repeatedly against women identified as opponents. Sexual violence and forced nakedness, threats against children, misogynist and lesbophobic insults and corrective violence against lesbian and trans women were not isolated abuses, but torture mechanisms designed to punish their victims' identity and crush their agency.

This targeted categorization not only affected women directly linked to the movement but also had a structural impact on women in Nicaragua in general. The destruction of organisations that provided victim care, legal accompaniment, safe houses, sexual education and psychological support weakened the ability of women—especially girls, rural women, indigenous women, women of African descent, lesbians and trans women—to gain access to justice and protection.

The closure of civic spaces and the criminalisation of feminist activism sent the message that defending women's rights was a punishable act. The official story, which ridiculed and demonised feminists, reinforced patriarchal stereotypes and fostered social permissiveness toward violence. The outlawing of abortion consolidated a system of control over women's bodies, and regressive reforms dismantled the country's fragile institutional progress, which had taken decades to build.

The persecution of the movement also had effects that overflowed into women's daily life: increased fear of reporting domestic or sexual violence; greater risk to women community defenders; restrictions on social mobilisation; mistrust toward institutions that used to protect women; weakening of networks offering support and refuge; and the imposition of a climate of state control over women's sexuality, reproduction and social behaviour. The message was clear: any woman who challenged the patriarchal order could become a state target.

10

Conclusions on the existence of gender persecution in Nicaragua

The gender persecution that the Ortega-Murillo's totalitarian regime unleashed, starting in 1998, against the feminist and women's movement¹²⁵ of Nicaragua, and which intensified during the widespread attack against the population after April 2018, is characterised by the perpetration of serious human rights violations.

Acts of aggression and discriminatory violence have been designed based on identifying members of the movement, or people close to them, as opponents and enemies, with the intention of eradicating their work and the movement's very existence. This violence was driven by their struggles against state, public, and relational inequalities and oppression, and by the confrontation with the authoritarian, misogynist model espoused by the regime. It also sought to neutralize the movement's ability to build political networks through different forms of political organisation, collective expression and social struggle, and to achieve symbolic and structural changes in Nicaraguan society in favour of women and people of diverse gender identity and sexual orientations.

The regime has singled out the movement as one of its primary targets of its widespread and systematic attack against those persons it perceives as opponents, subjecting its members to specific and gendered-based violence, that spreads and affects other women and persons of diverse gender identity and sexual orientation. Through acts directed at both individuals and collectives, the regime seeks to dismantle the feminist and women's movement, for multiple reasons:

1. The movement has stood up against the imposition of a docile, submissive model of womanhood loyal to the regime, making it a threat to the strategy of oppression, fear and concentration of power and control.

2. The movement is one of the longest-standing autonomous opposition movements that has demonstrated its strength and dissent in the face of years of authoritarian rule.

3. The movement retained its capacity to rally, mobilize and lead across broad territorial bases, influence that proved decisive during the April 2018 social uprising.

4. Because of the movement's clear objectives of social transformation, many women, young people, students, LBT women, activists, human rights defenders, political opponents, politicians, feminists and other individuals of sexual and gender diversity joined the call to resistance against oppression, even when they had never heard of, supported or actively participated in the feminist and women's movement before.

5. The movement's challenge to patriarchal order destabilises governmental pacts and access to institutional power, questioning the mechanisms that enable the regime to exert political, social and cultural control.

Following the leadership exercised by the feminist and women's movement during the April 2018 protests, state violence against them continued and revealed both its symbolic and material dimensions through serious abuses: on the one hand, the government deployed a narrative delegitimising, distorting and criminalising the movement's political and social action; on the other hand, violence was perpetrated specifically because the movement's members are women, because of their identity, the way they inhabit the world, the collective work they carry out.

The Ortega-Murillo's regime identified the rights most essential to feminist and women's movement and deliberately targeted

them with every intention of punishing the movement, send a warning, and ultimately dismantle it. That is why, even within the widespread attack on the population, the series of human rights violations the movement suffered is too specific to deny the existence of a specific, targeted, gender-motivated discriminatory attack.

Based on the above, a pattern of violence can be identified that goes beyond isolated incidents and amount to a coordinated, intentional and discriminatory attack against women and other persons for gender and identity reasons.

This pattern includes the outlawing of all forms of abortion; a severe regression in the legal and institutional framework designed to protect against gender-based violence; the mass cancellation of the legal status of feminist organisations and organisations that defend women's rights; the confiscation of their assets and the erasure of their symbols and spaces of memory. Taken together, these measures cumulatively infringe the rights to freedom of association, expression, political participation and access to specialised services, weakening the very roots of the feminist organisational fabric and capacity for resistance and denunciation.

Furthermore, the documented and analysed violations are marked by a clear gendered intent in the use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including the recurrent use of sexual violence, forced nudity, threats of "corrective" rape and symbolic attacks that exploit motherhood and gender roles as instruments of coercion and punishment. These practices reveal a differentiated use of state violence based on gender, in which overt discrimination reinforces patriarchal power relationships.

The characterisation of the acts of violence described above entails a dual dimension of responsibility: on the one hand, the responsibility of the state and para-state agents who directly commit the attacks under orders, and, on the other hand, the responsibility of the Nicaraguan state as an organised apparatus of power that designs, executes, tolerates and maintains the systematic pattern of persecution.

These actions and their impacts transcend the individual sphere. They stem from policies and practices sustained over time through regressive reforms, the instrumental use of criminal law, the mass cancellation of the legal status of organizations, police repression, torture and violence against women and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. These policies and practices reveal coordination, political purpose and a clear intent to discriminate on the basis of gender.

The evidence collected in this investigation supports the conclusion that the threshold of severe deprivation of fundamental rights required in the definition of gender-based persecution has been met, as have the elements relating to the existence of a targeted group and the fact that conduct was directed against it. The same can be said with respect to the discriminatory intent and the perpetrators' deliberate targeting.

These violations take place within a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population, as concluded by multiple international bodies. At the same time, these patterns, the scale and public nature of the acts, and their commission alongside stigmatizing rhetoric make it difficult to believe that those who participated in them were unaware that their actions formed part of that attack.

The persecution targets precisely women who defy the regime's model of womanhood, and is carried out through a combination of legal, administrative, police and symbolic measures, while being sustained in a context of impunity and regressive legal changes affecting the rights of women and people with diverse gender identity or sexual orientation. From a perspective of international responsibility, these findings constitute a solid basis on which to acknowledge gender-based persecution as a central pillar of state repression in Nicaragua, requiring formal investigations, and the design and adoption of comprehensive reparation measures for the individuals and collectives victimised, along with the explicit acknowledgment of gender-based persecution as a central pillar of state repression in Nicaragua.



11

Notas

1. The Gender Consortium brings together independent activists and women human rights defenders, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras), and the Guernica Centre for International Justice (the Guernica 37 Centre), to create an alliance established for the purposes of this research project.
2. This movement is made up of women belonging to different profiles and age groups, including defenders of human rights, journalists, community leaders, indigenous women, women of African descent and LGBTIQ+ persons. We use the term “feminist and women’s movement” to attempt to recognise and encompass a wide, diverse set of women, including those who identify as feminists and those who do not, as well as those who participate through different forms of organisation and collective expression.
3. This includes information about sexual and gender identity, age, ethnic group, sexual orientation, occupation and areas of activity.
4. Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling on the case: <https://jurisprudencia.corteidh.or.cr/en/vid/883974749>.
5. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 7.1.h; International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Prosecutor v. Kupreskić et al., Judgement, 14 January 2000, available at: <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/kupreskic/tjug/en/>.
6. International Criminal Court. Policy on the Crime of Gender Persecution, p. 5. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-07-Policy-on-the-Crime-of-Gender-Persecution.pdf>.
7. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Prosecutor v. Tihomir Blaškić, Trial Judgement of 3 March 2000, case IT-95-14-T (Trial Chamber I): <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/blaskic/tjug/en/bla-tj000303e.pdf>.
8. ICC, Katanga; International Criminal Court (ICC), The Prosecutor v. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, Decision on the Confirmation of Charges, 30 September 2019, case ICC-01/12-01/18-461-Corr-Red (Pre-Trial Chamber I) <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/190930-al-hasan-qAndA-coc-eng.pdf>; International Criminal Court. (2024, 20 November). The Prosecutor v. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, case ICC-01/12-01/18-2662: Sentencing Judgment [Sentence]. International Criminal Court. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/court-record/icc-01/12-01/18-2662>.
9. Rome Statute, art. 7.2.a; ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia), Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovač & Zoran Vuković, Judgement (Trial Judgement) of February 2001, case IT-96-23-T & IT-96-23/1-T (Trial Chamber II) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/CourtRecords/CR2015_04025.PDF.
10. Rome Statute, art. 30; International Criminal Court (ICC), The Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga, Judgment of 7 March 2014, case CC-01/04-01/07-3436 (Trial Chamber II), disponible at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/court-record/icc-01/04-01/07-3436-tENG.pdf>; International Criminal Court (ICC), The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Judgment of 21 March 2016, case ICC-01/05-01/08-3343 (Trial Chamber III) https://iccforum.com/media/background/responsibility/2016-03-21-ICC-Prosecutor_v_Jean-Pierre_Bemba_Gombo-Judgment-Trial_Chamber.pdf.
11. GHREN reports to the Human Rights Council (2022–2024); concordant conclusions of other UN mechanisms concerning Nicaragua.
12. Ibid.; Lacombe, D. (2024). Violencias contra las mujeres: De la revolución a los pactos de poder en Nicaragua, 1979–2008.
13. Cuadra, E., & Jiménez, J. (2010). La lucha del movimiento de mujeres en

Nicaragua por sus derechos. The movement highlighted similar behaviour and links between Ortega, Aleman, the former President Enrique Bolaños and Catholic Church leader Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo.

14. By 2006 political participation by sexually diverse persons had become more visible thanks to outreach to international human rights organisations, grassroots action and the publication of studies like *La Corriente*. (2016). Una mirada a la diversidad sexual en Nicaragua: visibilizando la realidad de las personas LGBTQI+ en Nicaragua [Interview with Bismarck Moraga, *Cuerpos Sin-Vergüenzas* radio programme].

15. The business sector and government opponents on both the liberal and the conservative sides became party to the pact alongside Catholic and evangelical leaders.

16. Lacombe, D. (n.d.). El escándalo Ortega-Narváez o la caducidad del hombre “nuevo”: volver a la controversia. Dossier, 105.

17. “Rosita,” a nine-year-old girl who was raped and impregnated by her stepfather in 2003 and who gained access to therapeutic abortion because activists defended and supported her.

18. Ipas, C.A., Grupo Estratégico por la Despenalización del Aborto Terapéutico & Iniciativa por los Derechos Sexuales. (2013). Informe sobre Nicaragua: 19° Ronda del Examen Periódico Universal, abril-mayo 2013. https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2014-04/js9_upr19_nic_s_main.pdf.

19. *La Primerísima*. (2020, 20 September). El feminismo chatarra y las guerras de baja intensidad. <https://tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/10242>.

20. Reporteros Sin Fronteras. (2008). Una campaña de acoso político y judicial contra algunas ONG pone en peligro la libertad de expresión y de asociación. <https://rsf.org/es/una-campana-de-acoso-politico-y-judicial-contra-algunas-ongs-pone-en-peligro-la-libertad-de>.

21. NICALEAKS. (2009). Azáhalea, la “consultora” de Sofía en CINCO. <https://nicaleaks.com/azahalea-la-consultora-de-sofia-en-cinco>.

22. BBC. “ONG’s denuncian ataques”. 15 de octubre de 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7670000/7670812.stm

23. Law No. 779, officially known as the Comprehensive Act Against Violence Toward Women and on Penal Code Reform, is a special piece of legislation passed by the National Assembly in January 2012.

24. NICALEAKS. (2016). Las cuatro damas más “sufridas” de Nicaragua. <https://nicaleaks.com/las-cuatro-damas-mas-sufridas-de-nicaragua/>.

25. Coded interview C004, March 2025.

26. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. (2020, 12 March). Case of Azul Rojas Marín et al. v. Peru: Judgment, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs (paragraphs 90–93). <https://jurisprudencia.corteidh.or.cr/en/vid/883974798>.

27. Excerpt from statements by Rosario Murillo: They “dress in women’s clothing but have never known the sensibility of a woman’s heart”, so they are not women according to the traditional stereotypes championed by the regime. La Botz, D. (2016). *What Went Wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: a Marxist Analysis*. Boston: Ed. Brill, p. 329.

28. Interview, May 2023. Las “enemigas” de la copresidenta Rosario Murillo. Podcast available at: <https://no-ficcion.com/podcast-las-enemigas-de-la-copresidenta-rosario-murillo/>.

29. Coded interview C002, March 2025.

30. One of which included the burning of the governing party’s flag, for which they were jailed and later exiled.

31. Coded interview C002, March 2025.

32. Coded interview C004, March 2025.

33. A team from the Catholic hierarchy was in charge of confirming the group for national dialogue (grupo para el diálogo nacional).

34. C006, personal communication in November 2023.

35. Yang Rappaccioli, E. (2022). Mujeres, madres y feministas en Nicaragua: resistiendo a través de la construcción de la memoria y la lucha contra la impunidad. In V. Romero García, A. Calderón Cisneros and A.G. Rincón Rubio (eds.), *Feminismos, memoria y resistencia en América* (pp. 81–109). Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas.

36. The two autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast are an exception. There, the history of repression and crimes predates 2018 by at least a decade, and where the forms of protest and denunciation followed a different dynamic.

37. Coded interview V004, March 2025.

38. Coded interview V010, March 2025.

39. Asamblea Nacional de la República de Nicaragua. (2003, 23 January). Ley No. 445, Ley de régimen de propiedad comunal de los pueblos indígenas y comunidades étnicas de las regiones autónomas de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua y de los ríos Bocay, Coco, Indio y Maíz. <https://www.leybook.com/doc/839>.

40. Coded interview V005, 12 February 2025.

41. Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN). (2023). Detailed findings of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (A/HRC/52/CRP.5). United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session52/A-HRC-52-CRP-5-EN.pdf>

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44. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Closure of civic space in Nicaragua (2023), OEA/Ser. L/V/II. https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2023/cierre_espacio_civico_nicaragua_eng.pdf.

45. Some of these changes include extending the allowed period of detention in police custody to 90 days before the detainee is tried in cases classified as requiring “complex investigation”.

46. On this point, GHREN (2023) states that “the extent of the requirements imposed on nonprofit organizations, and the discretion given to the authorities in this respect, affects the freedom of association of nonprofit organizations and discourages citizens from joining them.”

47. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (2024). Concluding observations on the combined seventh to tenth periodic

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48. Ibid.

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51. Ibid., paragraph 154.

52. CISAS President Ana Quirós, a naturalised Nicaraguan citizen, was expelled from the country and lost her nationality in late November 2018, before the mass denationalisations of 2023.

53. Coded interview V011, March 2025.

54. The IACHR reports that in 2021 six women's rights and feminist organisations were cancelled; in 2022, 222; in 2023, 12; and in 2024, 33.

55. IACHR, Closure of civic space in Nicaragua (2023), OEA/Ser. L/V/II. Available at: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2023/cierre_espacio_civico_nicaragua_eng.pdf.

56. Ibid., paragraphs 163 and 165.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. IACHR, Closure of civic space in Nicaragua (2023), OEA/Ser. L/V/II. Available at: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2023/cierre_espacio_civico_nicaragua_eng.pdf, and GHREN, Detailed conclusions, op. cit.

60. Ibid. IACHR. Paragraph 80.

61. Coded interview E002, February 2023.

62. Doxxing is a kind of cyberattack aimed at revealing personal information like the target's name, private address, telephone number, social media, place of work, etc. It is a violation of privacy that fosters threats, intimidations and even physical, sexual, psychological and even lethal violence against the targeted persons.

63. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Šimonović, D. (2018). Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective (A/HRC/38/47). United Nations Human Rights Council. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641160/files/A_HRC_38_47-EN.pdf.

64. A troll farm is defined as an organised group whose goal is to influence public opinion by generating misinformation on the Internet. More information at: McCombie, S., Uhlmann, A.J. and Morrison, S. (2020) "The US 2016 presidential election & Russia's troll farms", Intelligence and National Security, 35(1), pp. 95–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2019.1673940>. CICIG (2019) defines a net centre in its report "Bots, netcenters y el combate a la impunidad. El caso de Guatemala" as a "set of accounts directly or indirectly connected physically or virtually. It may include among its users accounts belonging to real persons, real institutions, false profiles of people, of fictitious institutions, users with names and photographs (IDs) stolen from real people" p. 3. Bradshaw, S., & Howard,

P.N. (2017) use the label "cyber troops" for "government, military or political-party teams committed to manipulating public opinion over social media" in Troops, trolls and troublemakers: A global inventory of organized social media manipulation. Oxford Internet Institute. <https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2017/07/Troops-Trolls-and-Troublemakers.pdf>, p. 4.

65. In November 2021 (the run-up to elections), Meta dismantled a troll farm linked to the Ortega government, eliminating 937 Facebook accounts, 140 pages, 24 groups and 363 Instagram accounts used to manipulate public opinion in favour of the government and against the opposition. The troll farm operated from the Nicaraguan Telecommunications and Postal Institute (Instituto Nicaragüense de Telecomunicaciones y Correos or TELCOR) in Managua, with the participation of the Supreme Court and the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute. Deutsche Welle. (2021, 1 November). Nicaragua: Facebook shuts accounts with government ties. DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/nicaragua-facebook-accuses-government-of-ties-to-shuttered-accounts/a-59691995>.

66. Decreto Presidencial No. 24 (2020) Estrategia Nacional de Ciberseguridad 2020-2025. <http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/normaweb.nsf/b92aaea87dac762406257265005d21f7/bed236921a6bc847062585f30068db3e?OpenDocument>; the national strategy is a public political document written by the Nicaraguan state whose declared objective is to protect the country's digital infrastructure, prevent and respond to cyber threats and regulate the use of cyberspace in the name of national security. In 2021 it became especially important, because it provided the political framework justifying the approval of legislation on digital crime.

67. Asamblea Nacional (2020) Ley Especial de Ciberdelitos. [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/normaweb.nsf/\(\\$All\)/803E7C7FBCF44D7706258611007C6D87](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/normaweb.nsf/($All)/803E7C7FBCF44D7706258611007C6D87).

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73. IM-Defensoras, report submitted to the GHREN. Coded interview I004.

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75. Coded interview I004.

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107. Coded interview E003, February 2025.

108. Corte Suprema de Justicia. (2024, 10 September). [Press release]. Poder Judicial de Nicaragua. https://www.poderjudicial.gob.ni/prensa/notas_prensa_detalle.asp?id_noticia=12812 Law No. 1145 of 9 February 2023 regulating the loss of Nicaraguan nationality reforms the Political Constitution of Nicaragua by establishing loss of Nicaraguan nationality for persons considered traitors to the homeland.

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110. Constitución Política de Nicaragua, reform of article 24 and elimination of article 20.

111. Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN). (2024). Violaciones de los derechos humanos a la libertad de circulación y a la nacionalidad (A/HRC/55/CRP.3). United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/es/hr-bodies/hrc/ghre-nicaragua/index>.

112. Coded interview E001.

113. Coded interview V014, March 2025.

114. González, E., & Álvarez, M.A. (2024). Nadie se va porque quiere: Voces de nicaragüenses en el exilio. Unidad de Registro (UDR); Unidad de Defensa Jurídica (UDJ); Periodistas y Comunicadores Independientes de Nicaragua (PCIN); Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (IM-Defensoras); Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Nicaragua Nunca Más. <https://im-defensoras.org/2024/10/nadie-se-va-porque-quiere-voces-de-nicaraguenses-en-el-exilio/>.

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118. In three cases the release process was conducted through Law No. 996, the Amnesty Act, which condoned political and common crimes perpetrated between 18 April 2018 and the law’s enactment date. This law contains a non-repeat article under which amnesty beneficiaries must abstain from engaging again in the same acts for which they were arrested. In other words, they are forbidden to participate in any more anti-government demonstrations. In one case the release was ordered by the León Directorate of Judicial assistance; in another, the release was ordered due to the health of the person concerned, who later received amnesty under Act No. 996; and in another case, it was mentioned that the release was due to family life governance, without specifying the reasons. In the three remaining cases, the type of release is unknown.

119. This is understood as a threat of sexual violence.

120. Coded interview V009, March 2025.

121. Coded interview V004, March 2025.

122. Coded interview E002.

123. Coded interview E003.

124. Mecanismo para el Reconocimiento de Personas Presas Políticas (2025) Lista de Personas Presas Políticas en Nicaragua al 2 de diciembre de 2025. <https://presasypresospolicosnicaragua.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Noviembre-Diciembre-2025.pdf>

125. Although this research and analysis focus on the persecution of the feminist and women’s movement, the study has also shown that gender persecution has been used against all women in Nicaragua (and against other persons for gender or identity reasons), even those who have not engaged in activism. The study focuses on the feminist and women’s movement, because more testimonies and evidence regarding the Movement were available, but evidence of the same persecution against a wider collective has also been gathered along the way.

126. M-Defensoras arose in 2010 to stand up to the violence facing women in their diversities in their territories for defending human rights and for being women or persons with a norm-challenging sexual or gender identity. One of the objectives of IM-Defensoras’ valuable work is to help protect and strengthen the struggles, the organisations and the social movements in which women leaders and human rights defenders participate.



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Who we are?

The Gender Consortium is made up of the Guernica Centre for International Justice (Guernica 37 Centre or G37 Centre), the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras) and independent activists and women human rights defenders who formed an alliance for this research project.

IM-Defensoras¹²⁶ is an initiative that coordinates over 3,000 women human rights defenders and 240 feminist organisations and networks of women defenders from various social movements in Mesoamerica. It has been working for 15 years to protect and accompany women defenders and activists, employing a comprehensive feminist protection focus, which has involved the development and implementation of a painstaking process of recording and documenting attacks and violence against women activists and human rights defenders throughout the region and in Nicaragua.

The Guernica Centre (Guernica 37 Centre or G37 Centre) is a nonprofit organisation whose objective is to revitalise accountability initiatives so they will have a significant impact on the lives of people and communities who demand justice for human rights violations and other heinous crimes. For almost 10 years, the Centre and its local partners have been activating multiple consistent forms of accountability to put a stop to illegal actions and promote changes designed to avoid repeated cases.

The individual women activists and defenders in the Consortium have long careers in the domestic and international defence of women's rights, documentation of rights violations and care.

The Gender Consortium conducted the research, documentation and analysis of gender persecution cases occurring between April 2018 and 2024. After this first effort,

which has involved years of rigorous investigation done through a team of four consultants (two researchers and two legal scholars, all gender experts), this document presents the findings, which have been expanded to include the time before 2018 and cover up to the present date.

We feel it is vital to state that none of this would have been possible without the work done by women's and feminists' organisations in Nicaragua and the voices of the surviving women victims that provide the foundations for this work.





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Acknowledgements

None of this would have been possible without the tireless work of women's and feminists' organisations in Nicaragua and the voices of the surviving victims, who made this report possible by entrusting us with their experiences. The courage they have shown in denouncing, documenting and enduring under egregious circumstances has formed the ethical and political basis for this work. Each story shared, often at a high personal cost, is an act of dignity and an invaluable contribution to the memory, truth and justice of Nicaragua.

We are especially grateful to the women human rights defenders, regional activists and community companions who work, anonymously or in the public spotlight, to keep support and protection networks going for the women and girls in the country. Their unflagging commitment, their knowledge and their coordinating ability have afforded an understanding of the magnitude and the multiple dimensions of the violence this report documents and its gendered impact. Resistance is still possible thanks to them.

We also acknowledge the contribution of all the people who have worked on this project, the researchers, legal scholars, transcribers, editors and contributors who put their rigour, sensitivity and ethics into the creation of this document, highlighting the special contribution of María Francisca Stuardo, an ally communicator. Their work, as experts and as human beings, was fundamental to ensure a solid analysis that is respectful of the victims and is aligned with international human rights standards.

We would also like to thank all our colleagues in the Consortium who have helped make the work effective, the organisations in the Consortium, the colleagues who have made individual contributions and all the networks that have offered solidarity

political and financial support to make this report possible, Their backing means the struggles of Nicaraguan women are not isolated and that the demand for justice, reparations and non-repetition is a shared responsibility. This report is also a testimony to their collective solidarity.

Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude to the public organisations and bodies that provided solidary and financial support to make this report possible.

