

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 21, 2018

The Honorable Luis Almagro  
Secretary General  
Organization of American States  
200 17<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Secretary General Almagro,

We write with continued concern about the deterioration of democratic institutions and the rule of law in Nicaragua, particularly in the wake of recent efforts by the government of Daniel Ortega to silence civil society and independent media outlets. The release of a new report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) provides further evidence that Nicaraguan police and security services used excessive force to put down widespread protests this year and that the Ortega government has abused power to create a climate of impunity.

During the last week, Nicaraguan police forces raided the offices of leading civil society organizations – including the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), the Center for Investigation of Communications (CINCO), *Hagamos Democracia*, and the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policies (IEEPP) – and stripped them of their right to operate legally. Nicaraguan police also seized and occupied the headquarters of leading independent media outlet, *Confidencial*. The Ortega government, citing a hastily-passed set of recent laws that categorize virtually any form of protest as terrorism, claimed without proof that the organizations had “actively participated” in terrorist acts, hate crimes, and a failed coup attempt.

This week’s IACHR report, which reflects the work of the Commission’s Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), examined over 100 cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and cruel or degrading treatment inflicted by the Nicaraguan government during widespread protests in April and May of this year. It also describes the Ortega regime’s systematic politicization of Nicaragua’s police, prosecutors, and courts in order to deny justice to victims, and to intimidate others who might contemplate expressing their dissent.

The GIEI found that of the 109 cases examined, only nine have gone to trial, and several of these were cases that involved government prosecution of dissidents, as opposed to investigations into abuses by security forces. In addition, in fourteen of the cases involving the criminalization of protests, the GIEI found that Nicaraguan prosecutors and the judiciary had violated citizens’ due process rights in every case.

As the Ortega government continues its campaign of unchecked human rights abuses, the international community has a responsibility to help Nicaraguans uphold justice and define a path that restores the country's democratic institutions. It is also imperative that the international community works to ensure accountability for government security services responsible for extrajudicial killings and detentions. We commend the GIEI's thorough examination and its recommendations to encourage and facilitate Nicaragua's return to democratic norms, including the formation of a special prosecutor's office that will ensure accountability for those who violate Nicaraguans' constitutional rights.

We respectfully request that you work with the member states of the OAS Permanent Council to publicly recognize the recommendations included in the GIEI's report and urge the Nicaraguan government to cease its attacks on civil society and the media.

We thank you for your continued engagement on these troubling issues and the work you have already done with the IACHR to seek justice for victims and freedom for the Nicaraguan people.

Sincerely,




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Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



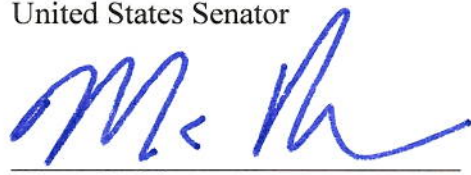
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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator




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Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



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Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



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Albio Sires  
Member of Congress