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Former Sandinista Supporters Outraged by Ortega's Abuse of Power

More than 500 sign letter demanding release of political prisoners

More than 500 U.S. supporters of Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution of the 1980s – including Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, authors Alice Walker and Margaret Randall, professor Noam Chomsky and singer-songwriter Holly Near – today [released a statement](#) blasting President Daniel Ortega and his wife Vice President Rosario Murillo for their government's increasing political repression and violence. In recent weeks, the Ortega-Murillo government has arrested more than 20 political opponents, including five presidential contenders, as well as journalists, leaders of social movements and top former Sandinista leaders from the 1980s.

"We have been appalled by the targeting of women's organizations, independent journalists, and environmentalists and indigenous communities opposing construction of the proposed canal. Controlling all branches of government, the regime has totally politicized public institutions and undermined any sense of rule of law," write the former solidarity activists who lived and worked in Sandinista Nicaragua as health workers, teachers, artists and volunteers.

The letter describes the Ortega-Murillo government as "an autocratic family dynasty bent on staying in power above all else."

"I went to Nicaragua as a young person committed to justice and democracy and opposed to my own government's efforts to overthrow a popular revolution," said **Mary Ellsberg**, Director of the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University and professor of Global Health and International Affairs, who lived in Nicaragua for 18 years working in community health and women's rights programs. "It is gut-wrenching to watch the Ortega-Murillo government arrest friends and colleagues in order to crush dissent," added Ellsberg, the daughter of peace activist Daniel Ellsberg.

"What is being perpetrated in Nicaragua by criminals Ortega and Murillo goes against every dream we had in the 1980s," said **Margaret Randall**, author of several books on Nicaragua, including *Sandino's Daughters*. "The duo is power-crazy and cruel. They have usurped power, kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured anyone opposing them, and repressed protestors in general."

The letter's signers state that "the Ortega-Murillo government betrays the memory of tens of thousands of Nicaraguans who died for a democratic Nicaragua."

"The international community must hold Ortega accountable for these unlawful detentions and other egregious human rights violations, to prevent a further erosion of Nicaragua's democratic institutions," said **Beth Stephens**, Distinguished Professor of Law at Rutgers Law School, who worked as a human rights advocate in Nicaragua in the 1980s. "Impunity will only lead the ruling couple to slide further into authoritarianism."

Ortega, elected president in multi-party elections in 1984, was defeated and peacefully transferred power in open and internationally observed elections held in 1990. He returned to power in 2007 after making a deal with right wing parties for their support. Since then, he has increased his repressive hold on all branches of government and amended the constitution to allow him to run for reelection indefinitely. Many former Sandinista leaders have broken with Ortega, and his government has become increasingly autocratic, violently repressing a broad-based, student-led uprising in 2018 that left more than 300 people dead, thousands injured, placed hundreds under arrest and forced 100,00 Nicaraguans into exile.

The letter by U.S. solidarity activists is part of a growing international outcry by human rights activists against abuses in Nicaragua, including a [statement by more than 770 university professors](#) from around the world, and by activists in Europe, Canada and Latin America. More than 20 of U.S. signers did so anonymously because they feared reprisals against family in Nicaragua, themselves or organizations they are affiliated with working in the country. [Read the full text of the U.S. letter.](#)

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