

**Statement by Family Members of Political Prisoners in Nicaragua
Managua, October 14, 2021**

This statement is to make the Nicaraguan people and the international community aware of the terrible situation of human rights violations, mistreatment and torture to which our family members who are political prisoners are being subjected at the Nuevo Chipote jail and in the prisons of the National Penitentiary System.

a) Situation of the political prisoners in the Auxiliary Judicial Complex "Evaristo Vásquez" (El Nuevo Chipote)

Regarding the situation of the prisoners being illegally and arbitrarily detained in El Nuevo Chipote, between October 11th and 13th, more than a month after our first visit with our family members --which in some cases was only allowed after 90 days had passed-- we were finally able to visit for the second time, under restrictive and arbitrary conditions. Frequent periodic visits to detainees by family members are a human right recognized by the laws of our country and we demand that we be allowed to visit our family members as established in the initial judicial hearings.

To this date, human rights and due process violations continue:

- **Absolute defenselessness.** The prisoners' cases are not yet posted in the Judicial Branch system, this with the intention of keeping them invisible and maintaining the prisoners defenseless. Contrary to what the judges dictated in the initial hearings, the prisoners have not yet been allowed to meet with their technical defense teams. All petitions submitted by their attorneys have been denied or unresolved. Due process has not been respected. Interrogations continue to be carried out without the presence of their lawyers.
- **Harassment during the visits.** In our visits we noticed an exponential increase in police presence. Many of us went through humiliating physical examinations that included searching our underwear as well as the confiscation of personal items such as eyeglasses, hand sanitizer, and photos of children or sick loved ones. Particularly degrading was the excessive photographing and video recording of the most intimate moments of our meetings, such as the initial greeting and farewell, even forcing us to pose before their cameras and wasting valuable time during our visit.
- **The current health and prison conditions of our family members**
 - Their physical deterioration. In most cases they continue to lose weight and are suffering from extreme weakness as a result of poor nutrition. Of particular concern are cases like José Pallais who has lost 50 pounds and José Adán Aguerri who has lost 30.

- They all continue to be pale, as many do not have access to the sunlight and others have access only once a week.
- The distribution of medications continues to be confusing. Medicines are delivered to the prisoners without any label as to what the medication is or what they are for. Our family members do not know what medicine they are being given.
- No external medical evaluations have been allowed, not even in cases of pre-existing conditions that could develop into other conditions.
- We have been asked to bring anxiety medication to many of our family members who were previously in good health.
- Most continue to suffer from the biting cold during the nights because they have not been allowed to receive bedding, blankets or warm clothing.
- In some cells, the lights remain on 24 hours a day, while others are dark the whole day and night.
- The prisoners don't have access to any reading material or current news, or any other activity that would connect them to the world and allow them to occupy their minds and time.
- Their jail cells are constantly guarded, prohibiting them from communicating with anyone else. Some prisoners are being held in solitary cells. It is a cause for particular alarm and concern that Tamara Dávila continues to be subjected to total and permanent isolation. Her situation is similar to that of the 28 political prisoners who are in maximum security solitary confinement in the national prison system.

We reiterate our deep concern about the conditions in which our family members are being held and that are causing irreparable physical and psychological damage. Despite this, **each and every one of them were strong and firm in their convictions, fully certain of their innocence, and with hopes of justice and freedom in the near future.**

b) Situation of political prisoners in the prisons of the National Penitentiary System

As family members of political prisoners who are being held in the prisons of the penitentiary system we denounce:

- Our main grievance is with the prolonged time of detention and the very serious consequences and irreparable damage that this has caused to the lives and integrity of our imprisoned family members and our families. Some have been deprived of their liberty for more than 7 years, and those who were imprisoned in the context of April 2018 have been unjustly imprisoned for more than 1,200 days.

- We have noticed an increase in the number of political prisoners with COVID symptoms. None of them have been vaccinated. This situation presents a serious danger to the lives and physical integrity of our family members, especially given that the average age of the political prisoners being held in these prisons is over 50 years old.
- The conditions of confinement, mistreatment, threats and torture have significantly impaired our family members' mental and emotional health.
- Visit dates have been arbitrarily changed after they have been established. In many occasions we have arrived from very far away or with food, and it is only once we are there that we are told that they changed the date of the visit. This has sometimes prevented us from seeing our family members.
- We have been obligated to sign a document in which we must state that everything is fine with our family member. If we don't sign, the authorities threaten to suspend the visit and not receive the parcels we bring.
- We also denounce the continued threats to our family members by the prison guards, sending them to the "punishment cell" if by any chance they state their opinion or demand their rights.
- We express our extreme concern for the 28 prisoners who are being held in maximum security or "punishment cells". Some of them have been imprisoned for years with limited access to sunlight, ventilation or communication with the outside.
- Finally, we want to express our special concern with regards to the situation of Eliseo Castro, a political prisoner since 2019, who 28 days ago was admitted to the Lenin Fonseca Hospital after suffering a stroke. We request that instead of moving him back to a cell in the prison system, that he be released or at least be changed to house arrest mode.

c) General demands

In light of all the above, **we continue to demand** the Nicaraguan government, including the Executive branch, the Judicial branch, the Auxiliary Judicial Complex and the National Penitentiary System, the following:

1. **Immediate and unrestricted release for our family members.** Each and every one of them is innocent of all the charges brought by the Prosecution. Their freedom is what is legally required.
2. **Respect for weekly visits directed by the judiciary:** in the case of El Nuevo Chipote we demand them to be in conditions of privacy and without harassment of family members or lawyers, and in the case of the National Penitentiary System, we demand compliance with the visit schedule as initially notified to the family.

3. The establishment of appropriate mechanisms, in accordance with the Code of Children's and Adolescents' Rights, to guarantee **communication between our family members and their minor children.**
4. **In the case of elderly prisoners,** we request respect for the Law of the Elderly and that as soon as possible and until release and full freedom is authorized, the modality of preventive detention is changed to that of house arrest.
5. **Authorization for families to provide food to our relatives,** beyond the few liquids currently allowed. Our relatives need healthy food, aligned with their dietary needs.
6. **The immediate cessation of isolation, differentiated prison regimes, and interrogations** without the presence of their lawyers.
7. **Authorization for the delivery and use of blankets and warm clothing** to combat the cold they feel every night.
8. **Guaranteed delivery of parcels,** so that our family members can manage their own food, drinks, clothing and personal care items in their cells.
9. In the National Penitentiary System, guarantees that weekly parcels are in fact delivered and that food is not removed by the constant requisitions carried out by prison guards.
10. The **establishment of common hours to be on the patio and in the sunshine,** where the prisoners can interact with each other.
11. Respect for rest time and day/night cycles by turning off lights at night in those cells where the lights have remained on 24 hours a day, and by illuminating during the day those cells that have been maintained in constant darkness.
12. Authorization for the entry of **reading material according to each prisoner's preference,** such as books, magazines and the Bible, in order to keep up the mental health of our family members.
13. Permission for our family members to receive **correspondence and photos of their loved ones.**
14. Respect for legal due process, providing prisoners' lawyers with the necessary information to prepare their clients' cases.

We reiterate our collective demand for our family members' freedom and respect for human rights, as well as due process guarantees. They are all innocent.

Freedom for all political prisoners!

- Family members of political prisoners in El Nuevo Chipote
- Association of Family Members of Political Prisoners
- Committee of Family Members for the Liberation of Political Prisoners
- United Group of Political Kidnapees
- Organization of Victims of April