

## **Joint statement for Day of the Journalist in Nicaragua**

March 1, 2021 -- As Nicaragua recognizes the National Day of the Journalist today, the undersigned organizations express our solidarity with Nicaraguan journalists and call on authorities across the country to put an end to widespread harassment of journalists and ensure the media and press freedom organizations can work safely.

Since Nicaraguan officials and state security forces responded to widespread protests in April 2018 with a [brutal crackdown on protesters and the media](#), Nicaragua has become an ever-more hostile climate for the press. News outlets have been forced to close and [individual journalists threatened](#), harassed, sued, surveilled and jailed, as dozens more fled the country for their own safety. The COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced the lack of transparency, as the national government's [refusal to acknowledge](#) the severity of the crisis has made it [nearly impossible](#) for reporters or citizens to find reliable public health information.

A free press, freedom of expression and access to information are fundamental rights that form the cornerstone of any democratic society. With general elections scheduled for November 2021, the administration of President Daniel Ortega should be enacting proactive measures to ensure the press can freely and safely cover this year's electoral process without facing harassment or retaliation. Instead, the national government has only tightened its control and created more avenues for censorship. In the fall of 2020, Nicaragua's National Assembly [approved](#) two deeply concerning pieces of legislation -- known as the Foreign Agents Law and Cybercrimes Law -- that expanded the government's capacity to control and silence civil society and the press, according to an [analysis](#) by the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

Today, many Nicaraguan journalists remain in exile -- some just over the border in Costa Rica, others much farther abroad. Two major national freedom of expression organizations, PEN Nicaragua and the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation, [announced](#) at the beginning of February that they were suspending operations in Nicaragua due to [concerns](#) about potential prosecution under the Foreign Agents Law, which requires individuals and organizations that receive funding from outside Nicaragua to register as "foreign agents" with the Interior Ministry. Following these suspensions, journalists' union Periodistas y Comunicadores de Nicaragua (PCIN) [declared](#) a "permanent alert" due to the increased risk of practicing journalism in the country.

On February 23, Nicaragua's Health Ministry opened a maternal health center in the Managua offices that previously housed the news website Confidencial and the television program Esta Semana. The facilities where those outlets operated have been under government control since Nicaraguan police [confiscated](#) them in December 2018. The Health Ministry announced it also intends to use the offices where news channel 100% Noticias channel previously operated.

Despite the many challenges of working in an environment with minimal transparency, increasingly repressive legislation and ongoing surveillance and harassment, Nicaragua's brave journalists continue fighting to uncover the truth and share information with their fellow

citizens and the world. Today, we call on Nicaraguan officials to uphold their international obligations to protect these fundamental rights, stop using restrictive laws and the state security apparatus to intimidate and censor the press, and allow reporters and press freedom organizations to resume their activities in the country.

Signatories:

