

We condemn the creation of legislations designed to restrict critical voices in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

We, the undersigned organizations, reject the implementation of laws that jeopardize fundamental freedoms, including the right to free association and assembly, the right to defend human rights, as well as freedom of expression and access to information, currently happening in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

This May, the governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua approved a reform and a law, respectively, which weaken the legal framework of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The expeditious manner of their approval and the context from which the already approved norms emerge, shows the degree of animosity towards critical voices that have pointed out the human rights violations that persist in both countries. The impact even affects people who, out of necessity and/or obligation, are far from their homelands, support networks, and families, as is the case in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua: Constitutional Reform to limit nationality

On May 16, 2025, during the special session on the *130th Anniversary of the birth of Augusto C. Sandino*, the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo unveiled the initiative to reform the Political Constitution modifying articles 23 and 25 on nationality in order to restrict Nicaraguan nationality to citizens who opt for a second nationality. The reform was approved through urgent processes; a common practice with this type of legal resources¹. The initiative was approved by a show of hands of a total of 91 deputies, without any counterbalance or discussion.

The situation places journalists, human rights defenders and critical voices exiled by the regime in even greater vulnerability. Many of these people are in a situation of “de facto denationalization” because of the confiscation of their passports, refusal to renew their passports and the ban on entry to the country. The denouncement of 20 Nicaraguan exiled journalists in Costa Rica about having access to protection measures in the host countries, is an urgency in the current context.

This new constitutional reform goes precisely against the human dignity of those who continue to denounce what is happening in the country, even from outside. Access to civil and political rights through nationality is not a privilege, but a right which the State must guarantee.

El Salvador: New Foreign Agents Law

In the northern triangle, Ernesto Castro, president of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, [announced](#) the approval of the *Foreign Agents Law* with 58 out of 60 votes. This initiative was approved after a wave of reprisals against critical voices of Nayib Bukele's government, such as is the case of the journalist of the media El Faro, who published about

¹ This reform was preceded by the modification of Article 20, which was approved in 2023, on the same day that 222 former political prisoners were released from prison and deported to the United States, with no other option than deprivation of liberty. On that occasion, the reform considered the deprivation of nationality against persons identified as “traitors to the homeland”. This was confirmed during the second legislature in January 2025.

alleged gang links with the national administration; the arrest of carriers who refused to provide free transportation, including the death in custody of one of them; repression of the demonstration of the Cooperativa El Bosque outside Bukele's home, as well as the arrest of human rights defenders, including the renowned lawyer Ruth Lopez.

This new law seeks to impose a 30% tax on foreign donations received by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and creates a Registry of Foreign Agents (RAEX). Ernesto Castro stated that “This is a good day for the country, the day has finally arrived”. The president of the assembly continued stigmatizing civil society organizations: “The decision we are taking is so fair and so beautiful that now even these thugs disguised as NGOs will have the opportunity to support the people”. The allusion to the homonymous Nicaraguan law implemented as of 2018², does not go unnoticed in view of the closing of the civic space that the country called by its president as “the safest in the region” is experiencing.

Although the official publicly asserted that NGOs “[...] can continue to dedicate themselves to whatever they want, including those that want to continue to dedicate themselves to political issues”, in practice, this legislation selectively violates their work. The authorities mentioned exceptions for health organizations for example, while human rights organizations will have to report even more information about their activities to the government. While good transparency practices should be encouraged, the use of the information required to these social organizations.

In this sense, we remind the government of Nayib Bukele that the exercise of transparency and accountability needs to be monitored and strengthened within the State. We observe with concern the lack of commitment to the principles of state transparency, which has been repeatedly questioned by independent media and journalists who today function as a counterweight to a government that threatens the democracy of their country.

Strengthening of regulatory frameworks restrictive of human rights

In view of this strengthening of restrictive regulatory frameworks that affect, among other rights, freedom of expression, assembly and association, the undersigned organizations call on the international community to continue monitoring and demanding the eradication of these initiatives and legislation contrary to human rights. It is necessary to stop authoritarian practices and it is essential that decision makers at the regional level speak out in a critical, constructive, and demanding manner in the face of the closure of civic space in the region.

It is of vital importance that, in the face of the instrumentalization of national resources for the persecution of citizens, mechanisms are contemplated to encourage States such as El Salvador and Nicaragua to adapt their national legislation to the highest standards of human rights framed in the international treaties and conventions.

Signatory organizations:

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² At least 10 out of 15 regions have been catalogued as “information deserts” by the Foundation for Freedom of Expression and Democracy. The information is included in the most recent quarterly report. Consult at: <https://articulo19.org/analisis-trimestral-sobre-el-estado-de-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-centroamerica-y-el-caribe-enero-marzo-2025/>

Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador - APES
ASOPODEHU
Comité para la Protección de los Periodistas - CPJ
En Alta Voz
Revista Factum
Free Press Unlimited
FOCOS, El Salvador
Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia- FLED
Fundamedios
Reporteros de Investigación
Reporteros Sin Fronteras
Protection International Mesoamérica
Periodistas y Comunicadores Independientes de Nicaragua - PCIN
PEN International
Infodemia, El Salvador
Red Centroamericana de Periodistas
Revista GatoEncerrado
Revista Elementos
Redacción Regional
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