1. I am Nicaraguan journalist currently in exile in Costa Rica. I previously worked in Nicaragua at national television broadcaster Vos TV, covering politics and human right topics. After covering the demonstrations that started in Nicaragua on April 18, 2018, I started receiving death threats and other attacks. On December 30, 2018, after hearing that there was an arrest warrant against me, I left for Costa Rica. In Costa Rica, I have continued covering the Nicaraguan crisis. Along with other exiled Nicaraguan journalists, I founded the media platform Nicaragua Actual.

2. It is very important that the world pay attention to what is happening to press freedom in Nicaragua. We need the assistance of organizations or states that can help Nicaraguan journalists both in- and outside the country.

**Key threats to press freedom in Nicaragua**

3. The key threats journalists face in Nicaragua are intimidation, persecution and death threats. While pro-government paramilitaries are behind most of the threats and violence, even national police take part in the repression. Numerous cases have been recorded in which police are responsible for physical attacks on journalists. Covering demonstrations is one of the most dangerous tasks for journalists because of the violence practiced by the police and paramilitaries. In some cases, journalists are forced to flee from police as if they were criminals.

4. Starting last December, many journalists have been forced to leave Nicaragua in exile because of the level of persecution. In December 2018 the police raided the offices of the privately owned cable and online news station 100% Noticias. The channel was closed, and its director, Miguel Mora, and news director, Lucía Pineda Ubau, were arrested. Both are facing charges of promoting terrorism and inciting violence and hate. They are still being held in pre-trial detention, and the hearings in their case have been postponed several times.

5. The closure of 100% Noticias served as a last warning for a number of journalists. Arrest warrants were issued against several other journalists, including myself. As a consequence, around 76 journalists have taken the decision to leave Nicaragua. Most of the exiled journalists now live in Costa Rica, others in Spain and United States.

6. Meanwhile, dozens of journalists in exile continue to face threats. I have received several messages on Facebook saying that even though I am now based in Costa Rica, one day I will return to Nicaragua and pay for everything that I have done (which is working as a journalist). In addition, family members of journalists who are still in Nicaragua remain in danger and are the target of threats. A month ago, police patrolled in front of my home to threaten my family. An artisanal bomb was thrown at the home of family members of another exiled Nicaraguan journalist. As long as exiled journalists keep publishing news online, their families are under threat.

7. In Nicaragua, there are no longer any institutions that can guarantee and support press freedom in the country. Previously, several human rights organisations existed to which journalists could report attacks the Ortega regime committed against press freedom. However, in December 2018 the National Assembly cancelled the legal status of most of these organisations. Their offices and properly were confiscated; those which had been the
most critical suffered the most. Ortega accused the organisations of inciting chaos and terrorism. As a consequence, human rights advocates have also been forced into exile. Among the organisations forced out of Nicaragua was Cenidh, the Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights). The only human rights organisation left in Nicaragua is CPDH, the Permanent Commission of Human Rights. With the lack of proper institutions to monitor press freedom violations and support and respect independent journalism, journalists are more vulnerable to the media crackdown that ever before.

8. In Nicaragua, there are very few spaces left for independent information. Most of the TV and radio channels and even internet platforms are controlled by President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo. Media houses have been forced into self-censorship amid the persecution and closure of critical channels.

Recommendations

9. Following the start of the demonstrations on April 18, 2018, several media broadcasters have been forced to self-censorship and drop their critical stance. As a response to the closure of 100% Noticias y el Confidencial, and the self-censorship of other broadcasters, new media platforms were born. Exiled journalists have founded new online platforms to cover the crisis in Nicaragua. I along with other exiled journalists based in Costa Rica started a platform called Nicaragua Actual. We transmit a daily news broadcast in Facebook and YouTube. In Spain, a group of exiled journalists have done something similar and founded a media platform called Despacho 505. Ortega wanted to silence us, but we want to keep informing people of the crisis in which our home country is engulfed. Most of us used to work in national media houses in Nicaragua, so we still have sufficient sources of information inside Nicaragua. What we don’t have is any financial support for our journalistic work to be able to continue with our work. We would also need support to buy new equipment. In Nicaragua we worked for national media, and when we left the country, we had to leave our phones and other journalistic equipment with the companies. Here in Costa Rica, we started working with just one phone.

10. Also, humanitarian help for exiled journalists would be fundamental. Most of us left Nicaragua in emergency, without almost any belongings. The international community could help exiled journalists by providing food, accommodation and other basic supplies. Most of us keep doing journalism, but we are not earning anything. For example, in Costa Rica, is not possible to get a work visa before staying five months in the country. Our living conditions are very poor. I live together with six other persons. Some are still sleeping in refuges of 30 persons. We make it through the days thanks to the help and good will of common people (for example, some people donated a mattress to me).

11. Capacity building is needed as well. I believe the most suitable would be related to multimedia skills. For example, workshops on editing on mobile phone, together with the furnishing of much-needed equipment such as microphones.

12. There has been some international support for Nicaraguan journalists to meet with psychologists. That was helpful, since many suffer from trauma after covering the demonstrations and being targeted in attacks and threats.