

Martha Patricia Molina Testimony

I am Martha Patricia Molina, author of *Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church*, and coordinator for Nicaraguans in the World Texas.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share under oath the religious persecution that Nicaragua is suffering.

19,836 aggressions and attacks have been perpetrated by the dictatorship of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo in Nicaragua against priests, nuns, and lay people. I have documented each of them since April 2018.

The lack of religious freedom has profoundly limited the pastoral work of priests; they are literally forced to be careful about how they preach for fear of being imprisoned or exiled.

Nicaragua, a country with a history of being predominantly Catholic and Evangelical Christian, lives in fear because of the voracity with which the dictatorship acts. They have arbitrarily closed thirteen universities and institutes; they have also, with hatred, shut down centers for young people who were studying to become priests.

304 priests and nuns have been exiled from Nicaragua. Many are expelled or prevented from entering the country. Today one priest has house arrest in Nicaragua. Nine out of ten priests and nuns are Nicaraguan.

The Ortega and Murillo regime also denies consular services to priests who are outside the country carrying out pastoral missions, leaving them in a de facto stateless condition; they deny them the processing of their passports and copies of their documents, such as birth certificates.

There are dioceses in Nicaragua that are surviving with only thirty percent of their priests. As a consequence, communities in the interior of Nicaragua see their religious practices limited; they cannot go to confession regularly. There are no longer enough priests to attend to them as before.

Nicaraguans in general are spied on by the Nicaraguan National Police and their paramilitaries who attend all churches and temples with phones to take photos and videos of those attending masses and religious services. This situation discourages the faithful from going to their churches.

In Nicaragua, praying in public is considered a crime. People cannot gather to pray anywhere outside the church because they are watched and intimidated into leaving, and if they are seen again, they are arrested. People attending Mass inside Catholic churches

cannot pray aloud and ask God for their bishops, such as Monsignor Rolando Alvarez or Monsignor Silvio Baez; mentioning their names inside a Catholic church or even publicly is a crime, and people are sent to prison as political prisoners.

We have many examples of imprisonment, such as the case of Carlos Bojorge, a young man who carried a photo of Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero from El Salvador, and during Mass shouted: "Long live Christ the King!" and was taken to a torture prison called El Chipote.

We also have the case of a choir member who was imprisoned simply for sharing a video of himself singing at Mass and because I published the video and he shared my posts on Facebook.

At Nicaraguans in the World Texas, we handle asylum cases for Christian pastors and Catholic priests, their families, and lay people, such as the case of a priest's sister-in-law, who was forbidden to mention his name in public or she would be arrested.

Altar boys from different dioceses, all minors, are harassed and monitored by the National Police and forced to sign documents whose contents they do not understand; their parents are harassed and threatened with imprisonment if they speak to the media.

The persecution in Nicaragua has not ended. The Sandinista dictatorship prohibits the entry of Bibles into Nicaragua and also controls the workshops where the images that Catholics use for veneration are made. They demand that the artisans provide the names of the people who buy the images and the amounts spent on each purchase. Immigration authorities break and discard religious images and articles such as rosaries that Nicaraguans and tourists try to bring into the country.

Thank you very much for your attention.