Oral update of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN)

Statement by Jan-Michael Simon
Chair of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua

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Mister Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

For the first time, Nicaragua was included on the agenda of the Third Committee of the General Assembly. The decision is a matter of great significance. It reflects the growing concern of the international community about the human rights situation in Nicaragua, one of the most alarming among Latin American and Caribbean States.

The Nicaraguan authorities have refused to acknowledge or engage with our Group. We have been denied access to the country and have received no response to multiple letters. One day before the presentation of our most recent report,[1] which is now before you, Nicaragua withdrew from the Human Rights Council. It also decided to discontinue its cooperation with the Universal Periodic Review.

In this context, the Human Rights Council extended our mandate until 2027 and moved it to item 4 of its agenda, relating to situations requiring its special attention. The resolution was adopted by a large majority of 29 votes in favour and 4 against.

Since the beginning of our mandate in 2022, we have published three reports and eight supplementary documents. Our findings are based on more than 1,900 interviews and 9,300 documents.

We have documented patterns of serious, systematic and widespread human rights violations and abuses committed since April 2018 against an ever-growing range of real or perceived opponents and their relatives inside the country and abroad.

Some of those violations constitute, *prima facie*, the crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, deportation and persecution.

In compliance with our mandate, six months ago, we published a list of 54 alleged perpetrators of violations. We also published ten functional diagrams illustrating the *de jure* and *de facto* connections between different State and non-State entities involved in the repression.

Excellencies,

The repression that began in 2018 has passed through four interconnected phases. Each phase furthered the dismantling of the rule of law and the civic space and consolidated the full concentration of power in the hands of now Co-Presidents Ortega and Murillo.

[1] A/HRC/58/26, referred to the Assembly by the Secretariat on 11 July 2025 (A/80/145).

The **first phase,** from 2018 to 2020, was marked by the violent and disproportionate suppression of widespread, legitimate protests. Hundreds of extrajudicial executions and serious bodily injuries were committed. People with key roles in the protests were detained *en masse* and arbitrarily. An amnesty law guaranteed impunity for those responsible.

The **second phase,** in 2021, was marked by selective repression, focusing on arbitrary arrests and unfair trials. Its aim was to remove any obstacle to President Ortega's re-election. Opposition parties had their legal status revoked, candidates and civic leaders were arrested, and the main independent media outlets were closed down and confiscated.

The **third phase**, 2022, was characterised by the complete eradication of organised political opposition and social sectors with the capacity to mobilise people and autonomous social influence. Thousands of non-profit organisations and the remaining independent media outlets were shut down.

The **fourth phase**, which began in 2023 and continues today, has focused on consolidating the total concentration of State power in the Presidency. A large number of Nicaraguans have been expelled from the country or prevented from returning. Hundreds of victims have been stripped of their nationality, property and pensions. The repression extends beyond national borders.

The total erosion of human rights and the rule of law culminated in early 2025 with a major overhaul of the Constitution. The de facto dissolution of the separation of powers was formalised, with the granting of virtually unlimited authority to the Co-Presidents.

Distinguished Delegates,

The serious and systematic violations of human rights are part of a policy designed to silence, incapacitate and punish anyone and everyone who opposes the Co-Presidents politically, even remotely.

The Co-Presidents have merged the State and the Sandinista National Liberation Front into a unified machine of repression.

The result is a state apparatus that turns the State and the homeland from a safe place into a trap for human rights.

The large-scale deprivation of nationality has been one of the most egregious practices. Since February 2023, at least 452 Nicaraguans have been stripped of their nationality through court orders.

These actions have rendered hundreds of Nicaraguans *de jure* stateless, in open violation of Nicaragua’s obligations under the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961.

I thank you for your questions in this interactive dialogue.

SECOND PART

Excellencies,

Our presentation before you today underscores the urgency of attention, solidarity and action of the highest UN forum. The situation that Nicaraguans are facing, whether in the country or abroad, warrants it.

Arbitrary detentions and **spurious trials** remain a hallmark of the State's repression strategy.

Enforced disappearances and the death of disappeared persons have increased. In August and September, we requested information from the Government about the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons, as well as the circumstances that led to the death of two of them. No answer has been received to date.

Torture and other ill-treatment have been systematically employed in police and prison facilities. Women and men of all ages, including older persons, have been subjected to beatings, electric shocks, simulated executions and sexual violence, among other atrocities.

We have also documented the **targeted repression of Christian religious institutions**. Sermons are censored. Religious leaders are surveilled, detained, expelled and stripped of their nationality. Processions are banned.

The aim of all of this is not only to silence dissenting voices but also to dismantle every source of social organization outside State control.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is of grave concern that the Nicaraguan authorities have extended their campaign of persecution **beyond national borders**.

This practice is based on a scalable governance model. It employs a "long-arm strategy" of transnational human rights violations and undermines safe havens. It deepens a generalised climate of fear, lack of protection, isolation and self-censorship among the victims.

As explained in detail in our complementary document published last month,[2] the process begins with the uprooting of the victims and the erosion of their legal identity, and extends to their economic collapse, social isolation and pervasive surveillance.

[2] "Nicaragua: Persecution Beyond Borders - Exile and Transnational Human Rights Violations", 23 September 2025, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/grhe-nicaragua/2025-09-23-ghren-transnational-violations-en.pdf.

These acts are complemented by the targeting of relatives who remain in Nicaragua. These are subjected to harassment, arbitrary detention, dismissal from employment, confiscation of properties, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. All this solely by virtue of association.

By resorting to methods of proxy coercion targeting the exiles' most vulnerable loved ones, the State has demonstrated its willingness to use any means to suppress dissent.

We have identified an extensive transnational surveillance and intelligence network instrumental to track targets abroad, including through communication intervention and digital espionage.

We have received multiple testimonies from individuals who report being photographed, followed, harassed, approached by unknown persons and threatened while abroad.

Transnational targeting also includes the abuse of INTERPOL's red notices, the circulation of false alerts on travel documents and the misuse of international financial compliance frameworks.

This practice undermines the very foundation of international cooperation, which relies on trust and adherence to human rights principles.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is alarming that we have received **reports of murders and murder attempts of Nicaraguans in exile**, which are under investigation by the competent authorities.

A particularly visible case was the murder of Roberto Samcam, a retired army major exiled in Costa Rica, on 19 June this year. The Costa Rican Chief Prosecutor confirmed that one of his Office's strongest leads suggests that the crime was politically motivated.

It is crucial that the ongoing investigations seek to determine the responsibility of those who have planned, financed or ordered the crime.

Excellencies,

The human rights situation in Nicaragua has deteriorated to a point where restoring human rights and the rule of law will take a very significant amount of time and resources.

The longer the international community delays firm action, the greater the burden becomes. But the courage of the victims and the persistence of those who document their suffering remind us that change, justice and accountability will come sooner or later.

With a view to enhance the protection of Nicaraguans in exile and foster accountability, we reiterate the following recommendations to the international community:

- Implement comprehensive measures to protect Nicaraguans in exile; in particular, to protect those who have been deprived of their nationality, expelled, denied re-entry or denied access to a passport or other official documentation.

- Provide the same protection afforded to *de jure* stateless persons to Nicaraguans in exile who are denied renewal of their passport or whose civil records have been erased, and do not hold another nationality.

- Strengthen support to Nicaraguan civil society organizations and independent media and journalists by increasing financial and technical assistance.

- Hold the State of Nicaragua accountable for violations of its international obligations. Nicaragua can be brought before the International Court of Justice, in particular for its manifest violations of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

- Extend legal actions and targeted sanctions against the individuals, institutions and entities identified in our reports as responsible for human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

Thank you for your attention.