

FRIENDS OF LATIN AMERICA



Civil Society Stakeholder Submission - UPR, 4th Cycle, Nicaragua

Friends of Latin America (FoLA) hereby submits a follow-up review of Nicaragua's May 6-17, 2019, document, "National Report Submitted In Accordance With Paragraph 5 of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21" (i.e., 3rd Cycle) for this current 4th Cycle.

Friends of Latin America (FoLA), founded in 1986, is a human rights organization promoting awareness, activism, and social responsibility in the United States for improved relations with Latin America. Our activities include:

- Coalition building with other human rights organizations;
- Promoting greater recognition of human rights issues through public presentations, including participating in nonviolent demonstrations;
- Holding educational programs that are advertised to and open to the entire community;
- Inviting guest speakers from within and without the US for these programs;
- Meeting with local, state and federal legislators and agencies to promote improved respect of human rights within and without the United States;
- Visiting Latin American countries to meet with their human rights organizations and observe their elections;
- Raising funds to support progressive grassroots efforts within the United States and abroad;
- Promoting and supporting sister communities across Latin America;
- Promoting fair trade;
- Advocating for international lending agencies to fund sustainable development in Latin America;
- Responding to emergencies and natural disasters in Latin America;
- Connecting visiting Latin Americans with United States officials and media; and,
- Exploring how United States policies in Latin America are linked to injustices within the United States itself.

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Note: This submission is organized following Nicaragua's May 6-17, 2019, document, "National Report Submitted In Accordance With Paragraph 5 of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21." FoLA provides the following personal, direct, in-country testimonies of our members who have traveled to Nicaragua to meet with Nicaraguan human rights representatives, variously,

1. in 2020 and/or subsequent to 2020 (Erica Caines; Scott Hagaman, M.D.; Jessica Ryan; and, Tammy Spengler);
2. both prior to 2007 and subsequent to 2020 (Rita "Jill" Clark-Gollub; Richard Kohn, Ph.D.; Barbara Larcom; and, Arlene Reed); and those of us who,
3. now live in Nicaragua (Susan Lagos; and, John Perry).

Victory for peace after failed coup d'état

John Perry lives in Masaya, Nicaragua (pop. 190,000) and was living there during the attempted coup of 2018. John directly experienced, directly witnessed, and directly engaged in community discussions of this protracted event as it began, progressed and concluded. John testifies that this coup attempt was broadly and profoundly traumatic, threatening the right to life for many of his community. In John's own community, five police officers - public servants, all - were killed, one after severe torture. John saw that public buildings, schools and homes were destroyed by the coup proponents, including homes of two of his friends. John was warned that his own house was "on the list" to be attacked. Mortar rounds exploded directly outside his property. His wife was threatened with firearms at an opposition roadblock. John was directly affected by the severe damage to the economy of the city and to children's education, during those three months when the coup proponents controlled the streets and the police were confined to their barracks. On July 17, the police and volunteer police liberated the city, restoring peace, rebuilding damaged streets and buildings, and allowing economic life to begin again. John testifies with gratitude and praise, "The government's action restored our human right to live in peace and without threat to one's wellbeing, after the extreme damage done by those who carried out the coup attempt."

Jill Clark-Gollub has visited Nicaragua numerous times to visit relatives and six times since 2019 to meet and learn from people in social movements. Jill describes, "I first met the women of Fundación Entre Mujeres in January of 2019, while they were still visibly shaken by the 2018 attempted coup d'état. They broke down crying when describing the violence near their headquarters in the city of Estelí, and the terror the community experienced while violent protesters burned down government buildings and held the population hostage through a series of roadblocks. They were visibly relieved that calm had returned and that their country had resumed the path of peace and development."

Susan Lagos - who began visiting Nicaragua in 1987 and has lived there since 2004 - testifies, "The vision of Sandino of Sovereignty - having no interference from foreign powers - has finally become reality after the 2018 coup attempt shook everyone awake to the danger. I was deeply moved when, at his inauguration, President Daniel Ortega held up his sash, calling on El Pueblo - the people - to take his oath also, promising to work for peace in order to achieve the goals of well-being and progress for everyone."

Public policies

University of Maryland, College of Agriculture, Professor Rick Kohn, Ph.D., last visited Nicaragua in 2023. Dr. Kohn reports, "Domestic food production is perhaps the most dramatically transformed

sector of Nicaraguan agriculture. Whereas most developing countries rely on food imports, Nicaragua produces a lot of its own food. Nearly all domestic food crops are produced by small-holder farmers using highly sophisticated methodologies that are very efficient at using land and labor with positive environmental and social impacts. Last year, I accompanied a group of students and faculty from the University of Maryland who visited Nicaragua to study their agroecological model, and we found Nicaragua to be one of the most advanced countries in the world at democratizing food production, mitigating effects of climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

Jill Clark-Gollub met women in the Gloria Quintanilla farming cooperative in El Crucero (2023), who described to her many new rights and programs implemented by the Ortega government since 2007. “The Zero Hunger program has given them farm animals, seeds, and inputs to produce food for the family and to sell at market, which has improved families’ diets and finances. The Zero Usury microloan program has allowed them to improve their entrepreneurial skills and bring in further income. The agrarian reform has allowed them to own their land, further strengthening their independence.”

Right to health and social security

Tammy Spengler, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker. Ms. Spengler testifies on her personal experience, “I traveled to Nicaragua in 2023 to study the rights of women in Nicaragua. One of the many advances I witnessed was in the area of healthcare. We stopped at a community hospital in the impoverished city of Ciudad Sandino, outside Managua. The hospital had a third-trimester maternal wait home. Pregnant women to whom we spoke had come early to deliver their babies safely since they lived in the countryside - identified and brought in by a nurse. Being a social worker, I am certain that programs like this greatly reduce infant and maternal mortality. The women were being taught the basics of child care and nutrition. They were informed of opportunities for education, taught skills for earning an income so they could be financially independent, and were informed of their rights for safety from violence. These women spoke to us directly, sharing their stories and expressing their gratitude for being offered these services. I was also impressed by the medicinal plants grown in the courtyard of the hospital. They were grown so that doctors could provide them as treatments to patients who had indigenous backgrounds and/or preferred these treatments. There was an overall sense of respect for patients and their culture. Mental health patients were treated holistically with efforts to reduce isolation and integrate them in the community with a sense of purpose. Everything was free.”

John Perry has personal experience with Nicaragua’s free and well-provided public health system protecting the right to health. He describes, “One day in 2021, my wife was experiencing severe abdominal pains and feared appendicitis. Wanting urgent treatment, we went to a private doctor who diagnosed appendicitis, warned me that an operation was urgently needed, and offered to carry it out immediately for \$1,500 USD plus hospital charges for bed and nursing care. We next went to the public hospital where doctors immediately examined my wife and said additional tests were needed. They carried out the tests within two hours, concluding that the problem was intestinal. While there was no immediate danger, they admitted my wife for observation. She was discharged the following day with medication, no operation having been required. She has been healthy since. There was no charge for the hospital treatment.

Jill Clark-Gollub testifies, “My own family has benefited from the vast improvements to the health system in Nicaragua. They were quickly and efficiently vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as the vaccines arrived in the country, and have access to the many new public hospitals. In February, 2024, I was in the Hospital Militar Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolanos where my sister

underwent major surgery in the highest rated hospital in all of Central America, with excellent care, and all free of charge. The government's ever expanding health program brings adequate health services to all the rural communities."

Arlene Reed visited the impoverished rural community of Laurel Galan in 2022 and 2023 - with the Sandinista Government in power - and was able to see numerous improvements since her seven visits to Nicaragua between 1990 - 2006 under the Chamorro, Alemán and Bolaños neoliberal governments, affirming, "I had an excellent first hand observation of the tremendous progress the Sandinistas made for the country." Ms. Reed testifies that there is now a well-organized health center in Laurel Galan with an actual doctor all day from Monday through Friday, and a new hospital in San Francisco Libre.

Erica Caines toured Nueva Vida Clinic and Dr. Fernando Velez Paiz Hospital (2023) and testifies, "Community efforts and organized popular education led to over 90% of the population being vaccinated, mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nueva Vida Clinic engages community members as health promoters, emphasizing the collective responsibility for well-being. State-of-the-art facilities like Dr. Fernando Velez Paiz Hospital provide quality healthcare across specialties, demonstrating the success of community-based organizing in achieving favorable health outcomes."

Right to education

Barbara Larcom visited a public pre-school in San Juan de Limay in 2024 - one she has visited repeatedly over the past 20 years - founding it to be amply-supplied and guided by friendly teachers in brightly-decorated classrooms, with free lunches being provided.

Arlene Reed observes that many more students now attend both primary and secondary school in Laurel Galan compared to the years under neoliberal governments, and that free meals are provided in their schools. Many students progress to university and INATEC (trade school) on Saturdays, and many of these students are women. She toured the new agricultural college in San Francisco Libre.

Susan Lagos contrasts the prior educational plight with the turnaround since 2007, when, "Daniel Ortega declared all education free of cost. Now primary students all over the country are served a daily nutritious meal for free, receive backpacks, school notebooks and utensils for free to start the year, and have nice buildings, desks, and textbooks with trained teachers. All rural areas have technical trade schools and university branches to serve their communities."

Jill Clark-Gollub testifies, "Education has finally become accessible to the women of El Crucero. Some older women have completed their studies and all of the younger women are getting educated through the university level, free of charge."

Women's rights

Erica Caines spent ten days touring Nicaragua as a guest of the Nicaragua-based Jubilee House Community (2023). Ms. Caines was profoundly stirred, testifying, "This eye-opening experience highlighted the resilience, creativity, and collective power within the stories of the Nicaraguan women I met, unveiling a society steering away from traditional norms, guided by empowerment and community values and prioritizing the well-being of its citizens through participatory democracy. The nation's solutions for local issues emphasize women, trade skills, education, healthcare, and child care. This approach empowers workers, communities, and families by fostering organized networks rooted in community."

Arlene Reed personally knows women who have developed small businesses with help from the government.

Rick Kohn, Ph.D., testifies, “Women are often farm owners and leaders.”

Susan Lagos testifies, “Special policewomen in local offices attend to cases of domestic violence. By law, women hold half of all government offices.”

Jill Clark-Gollub adds, “The female officers go into the community to inform women of their rights and how to access protective services should they ever experience violence.”

Right to drinking water and sanitation

Arlene Reed has monitored progress of Laurel Galan in working with the government to secure potable water, which project was ultimately completed in 2023. She was gratified to see the pumping, the pipes, the distribution, the project office, and more. An early part of this project was to install well-functioning good latrines prior distributing potable water.

Access to electricity, production infrastructure and communications

Barbara Larcom traveled both by car (2022) and by public bus (2024) on the new public roads connecting Managua and the rural municipality of San Juan de Limay - variously via Estelí and via Achuapa - and found them excellent, easily cutting travel time in half compared to her previous travel.

Arlene Reed is gratified seeing that Laurel Glenn now has electricity and that many of its citizens now have cell phones. She is amazed by the progress in construction of roads and bridges in surrounding areas of San Francisco Libre.

Right to decent housing

Arlene Reed toured and observed construction of government housing (Bismarck Martinez, in 2022) being built for the poor for their eventual ownership. She was impressed that they used all Nicaraguan labor and materials.

Right to own property and the restitution of indigenous peoples' property

Susan Lagos testifies on her direct, personal experience that, “Property titles have been a priority of the Sandinista government, so now many people in cities and in the countryside have legal titles to their land. People who had very precarious living conditions now have access to Bismarck Martinez housing for free, and several other very affordable options are available with low monthly payments. In contrast to the neoliberal period, homelessness is rarely seen.”

Right to a healthy environment and protection from the effects of climate change

Rick Kohn, Ph.D., further testifies, “My research includes studying ways to mitigate negative environmental impacts from agriculture. I have studied agriculture around the world with colleagues from many countries. In the 1980s, I worked as an extensionist in Nicaragua for about a year. From 2017 onward I started returning to Nicaragua frequently to study agroecology with members of the ATC (Rural Workers Association), meeting directly with farmers. I saw that Nicaragua is a model country for agricultural development that integrates economic, social, and environmental goals. I could see that their practices would decrease greenhouse gas emissions and make the agricultural

sector more resilient to the effects of climate change. Coffee production also incorporates soil and water conservation methods to make Nicaraguan agriculture more resilient to droughts and flooding. In mountainous regions, many farms today have contour ditches to retain soil and water. Ironically, the US is proposing sanctions on imports of Nicaraguan coffee and beef and people I met would be harmed by lost revenues to large-scale or small-scale farms.”

Right to public safety and justice

Jill Clark-Gollub testifies, “On every visit to Nicaragua since 2019, I have found the country to be very safe. I routinely took pre-dawn walks alone in both city and countryside, and have never had any safety concerns.”

Right to freedom of expression and freedom of association

Jessica Ryan toured Nicaragua for one month in late 2023. Ms. Ryan testifies, “We visited Nicaragua during the celebrations of the Virgin Mary and Purísima. I do not consider myself to be a religious person, yet I clearly witnessed the people of Nicaragua being able to freely, openly, and enthusiastically embrace and express their own religion. On Bolivar Avenue in Managua, we saw parades of families driving and walking down the street to gather at the huge displays of altars for the Mother Mary. We visited several churches that were full of worshipers, beautiful flowers and people playing music. In fact, fireworks were set off every morning starting at 4 A.M. through December for La Purísima, the celebration of the Virgin Mary. The reality of what I directly experienced in Nicaragua stood in stark contrast to religious suppression narratives that the US government and media would have me believe. I personally witnessed that the people of Nicaragua are free to embrace their religion with gusto -and- embrace the socialist policies that provide free healthcare, education and greatly improved infrastructure.”

Barbara Larcom reports on her 2024 experience in the rural municipality of San Juan de Limay, “I attended Sunday Catholic mass. The church was full, the atmosphere lively and friendly, with the people joyously exchanging the peace in exercise of their freedom of religion. While walking outside on weekday mornings, I heard services being held. On several occasions, I heard evangelical churches loudly broadcasting their services to be audible several blocks away.”

Scott Hagaman, M.D., attended a Liberation Theology faith service (2020) held at a local community center.

Right to vote and to run for election

Rick Kohn, Ph.D., reports, “I represented FoLA as one of 232 invited international witnesses to Nicaragua’s Presidential election in Bilwi, Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN), November, 2021. As a researcher, I specialize in mathematical modeling in agriculture, data management, and statistics. I am aware of how to collect accurate data and verify its authenticity. I witnessed that voting and vote counting were extremely secure, transparent, with publicly verifiable accuracy. The ballots in the region I witnessed had 7 candidates for President/Vice President and 8 alliances for Assembly. During the voting, in addition to international observers like me in the room, there were representatives from at least three different political parties always present from the casting of the initial votes to the counting of the votes at the end of the day. Results for each classroom were physically posted at the voting location after the vote counting was completed and results were reported to more centralized locations.”

Jill Clark-Gollub adds, “The large number of young people voting and volunteering at the voting stations was most impressive.”

Respectfully Submitted,
Friends of Latin America
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