

The Guardian – a critique by NSCAG

On 8 June, the Guardian published an article entitled “Sandinista leaders fall victim to coronavirus outbreak they downplayed”. The article is full of inaccuracies and unverified claims, as detailed below:-

- There has been no "string of marches" - the FSLN organized just one march, on March 14; Nicaragua's first coronavirus case was recorded on March 18.
- Diagnosis - Nicaragua has adopted the same policy on certifying cause of death as Germany, namely someone with COVID-19 who dies of a pneumonia related to an underlying condition is certified as having died from pneumonia. Nowhere does the article refer to the limited supply of test kits in Nicaragua, due in part to US-imposed sanctions which severely inhibit Nicaragua's ability to obtain medical supplies.
- The government has not reported absence of “community spread” of the virus since May 5; official reports make clear that there is community transmission without stating so explicitly.
- Deaths of “20 prominent Sandinistas” - all are of older people all with chronic illnesses – as in the UK, government officials have continued working and put themselves at risk; only some of these cases have tested positive for Covid-19.
- “independent estimates say the figure is closer to 4,000 cases” – it is impossible to make such estimates because only the Health Ministry is able to carry out reliable tests; no specific source is identified – if as is likely it is the so-called “Citizens’ Observatory,” it says on its website that its figures are based on “civil society, networks, digital activists and affected families” and are “verified by the citizenry,” i.e. totally unverifiable sources. The “Citizens’ Observatory” has no official status and therefore there is no way of checking the figures it produces. The “Citizens Observatory”, only established in April 2020, is just one of a number of spurious organisations which have sprung up over recent months in what is part of a constant attempt by the opposition to discredit the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health and colleagues who work in the health system
- "30 local medical associations" – not identified, but these are all private doctors politically aligned with Nicaragua's opposition and most of these organizations seem to have been only set up very recently
- “collapse of the public and private health systems” – this claim does not bear serious investigation, there are numerous instances of people leaving hospital cured of Covid, thanking the staff and praising the service they received
- there is an odious smear against the deceased Orlando Noguera, who was instrumental in the policy of setting free people who were guilty of violence in 2018, despite his own brother's house being burnt down during this period and his car being destroyed, leaving his wife and children by the side of the road
- Miranda's claim that Noguera “led” a “brutal counterattack” in Masaya is false; it faced violent armed opposition and led to the killing and wounding of several police officers

- Miranda says the deaths of figures like Noguera are “personal tragedies”, then quotes people celebrating his death, with no recognition that under normal circumstances hundreds of people would have turned out for his funeral and would have celebrated the life of a decent man who was mayor of Masaya for several years and a respected, friendly figure in the local community.
- Miranda makes another slur regarding ‘express burials’ – this procedure in fact follows the WHO approved protocol produced by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health MINSA in early February. This states that cadavers should be handled and moved in black plastic bags and sealed coffins and that the burial of the cadaver should be carried out immediately.

In addition to the points above, Miranda repeats the false statistic that more than 300 people died in the opposition’s failed attempted coup in 2018. In fact, the actual figure is well under 300 and most of these were Sandinista supporters or people with no partisan sympathies; under a dozen were students, including student Sandinista supporters.

The article repeats the erroneous claim about systematic harassment of journalists. This links to a false Guardian report based on uncorroborated claims by journalists such as Miguel Mora, all of whom are aligned with Nicaragua’s opposition.