



Nicaraguan government liberates 222 prisoners – NSCAG Statement

On 9th February Feb 2023, by a swift political decision of the Sandinista government, 222 imprisoned *golpistas* (coup mongers) convicted for their roles in the US-led and US-financed 2018 coup attempt, were liberated. Despite customary mainstream media spin, President Daniel Ortega informed Nicaraguans that no negotiations about it were held with the Biden administration, that the whole affair involved no more than a proposal by the Nicaraguan government to send the 222 to the US and the US government willingness to receive them. As publicly stated by official statements, there was an organisational dialogue between Nicaragua's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US Embassy in Managua. No more no less.

Allegations made in much of the corporate media that those sent to the US were forcibly deported are not true. All of those who left Nicaragua did so voluntarily – two of those on the original list refused to go and four were rejected for various reasons by the United States. It should also be made clear that those released were not in any sense 'political prisoners'. All of them provoked or committed acts of violence, most if not all received US funding and several benefitted from the amnesty of 2019 and abused its terms. In addition, many advocated for the violent overthrow of the Government, including calling on the US to intensify sanctions and even to intervene militarily.

The Sandinista government decision is in line with the 2019 amnesty to 50 political opponents who had also been convicted of crimes for their participation in the violence that surrounded the 2018 coup attempt. In their case, the National Assembly passed a specific amnesty law for their release, which at the initiative of the Sandinista government took place under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross. By the end of 2019 the total number of detainees, not necessarily serving prison terms, who benefitted from this approach of the Sandinista government reached a total of 336.

All these decisions have been taken as measures to contribute to national reconciliation. It is fitting, since even at the worst moments of the wanton violence perpetrated during the US-led and US-financed 2018 coup attempt that led to a death toll of over two hundred, the government led by Daniel Ortega put enormous efforts into seeking dialogue, which was invariably rejected or sabotaged by the opposition. The official name of the Nicaraguan administration is Government of Reconciliation and National Unity (GRUN in its Spanish acronym).

There is irrefutable proof that the 2018 coup attempt was funded by the Trump administration to the tune of at least US\$40 million. The US-funded opposition used a simple, unproblematic, reform of the social security system, which the Government quickly withdrew, as an excuse to launch violent protests. However, the opposition not only intensified the protests but also escalated the violence and moved to demand early elections, the resignation of President Daniel Ortega and, of course, 'regime change.'

The NSCAG statement in July 2018, after four months of unrelenting violence aptly captured the situation:

“The situation has in some areas escalated into extreme violence resulting in the tragic deaths of over 200 people; hundreds have been injured, including members of the national police, students, trade unionists, government

employees, business owners, journalists and citizens who were innocent bystanders. There has also been widespread arson and the deliberate destruction of public buildings, police stations and private property. Opposition organisations, as a means of pressuring the government to meet their demands for the resignation of President Ortega, have constructed thousands of road blocks in towns, cities and on major highways on the Pacific Coast. As with the demonstrations, these largely started peacefully but rapidly descended into opportunities for violence and extortion.”
(<https://www.nscag.org/resources/July%20statement%20and%20briefing.pdf>)

Imagine if a political coalition in the UK, the USA (or anywhere) went on a three-month wave of national violence demanding the resignation of the government and were led and funded by a foreign power. The material and intellectual perpetrators of three months of terrorism, carnage and wanton destruction would correctly be charged with sedition and treason. In the US treason is punished with the death penalty or not less than five years. And in the UK a person convicted of treason is liable to imprisonment for life or for any shorter term.

In line with Art 1 of the Nicaraguan Constitution (and an updating of Art 21 consistent with that), which stipulates that the duty of all Nicaraguans is to preserve and defend independence, sovereignty and national self-determination, the National Assembly consequently removed citizenship from the 222 who were sent to the US

Since 2006, when the FSLN won the presidential election with 38%, these opposition forces have been repeatedly defeated at the polls. The FSLN won again in 2011 (62%), in 2016 (72%), and 2021 (75%). There is clear correlation in these figures, the more the FSLN in power does for its people (see Annexe 1 in <https://www.nscag.org/resources/July%20statement%20and%20briefing.pdf>), the more votes it gets. The opposite is the case: the more extreme the opposition current, the less votes it gets.

A central issue of concern here is the persistent US interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua, with Trump taking it to funding violent regime change, followed by nasty and cruel US sanctions against this small, poor though very proud Central America nation (see details here - <https://www.nscag.org/resources/SANCTIONS%20BRIEFING%20MAY%202020.pdf>). In his national TV address on the release of the 222 President Ortega made it clear “We’re not asking that they lift the sanctions. We aren’t asking for anything in return.”

US State Secretary Anthony Blinken, in welcoming the release of so-called ‘political prisoners’, has stated that the US ‘will continue to support improved conditions for the Nicaraguan people’. After years of persistent interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua, including providing the funding for violent regime change, the US would do well to lift its illegal sanctions against Nicaragua and cease the application of further sanctions and threats of trade embargoes.

The vast majority of Nicaraguan people want no return to the violence which took place in 2018. On 12 February hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans, who endured those horrific months of opposition-led wanton violence in 2018, took to the streets in support and celebration of the government’s decision. Nicaragua’s only historic fault has been the ‘threat of a good example’ – its people now have the absolute right to live in peace and to enjoy a future which proves that a better world is possible.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group
February 2023