

NICARAGUA

Republic of Nicaragua

Head of state and government: **Daniel Ortega Saavedra**

Gender-based killings became increasingly brutal. Attacks against human rights defenders persisted. A total ban on abortion remained in place. Impunity persisted for perpetrators of violence against Indigenous Peoples. The authorities continued to deny a genuine and effective consultation process for communities likely to be affected by the construction of the Grand Interoceanic Canal.

BACKGROUND

In January, Daniel Ortega assumed office as President for a third consecutive term. Rosario Murillo, his wife, assumed office as Vice-President for the first time.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Between January and December, there were 55 gender-based killings of women, according to the NGO Catholics for the Right to Decide. The NGO found that the killings were more brutal than in previous years and tended to be committed by perpetrators acting in groups.

In June 2017, the National Assembly approved an amendment to the Comprehensive Law on Violence against Women; the amendment reduced the scope of the definition of femicide to the private sphere, limiting the crime to relations between spouses and partners. Critics said the new definition denied the reality of femicides, which were also committed in public places.

Abortion remained banned in all circumstances. Nicaragua continued to have one of the highest teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality rates in the Americas region, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Impunity persisted for crimes such as killings, rapes, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, death threats and forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region, even though both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had ordered Nicaragua in 2015 to adopt all necessary measures to investigate those crimes.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Attacks against women human rights defenders continued, as reported at a public hearing before the IACHR in September. Women's civil society organizations reported receiving death threats as well as being arbitrarily detained and attacked with the complicity or acquiescence of state officials.

In March, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued its judgment in *Acosta et al. v. Nicaragua*; it found the state responsible for having violated the rights to access to justice, truth and physical integrity of human rights defender María Luisa Acosta, following the murder of her husband Francisco García Valle.¹ The authorities had yet to take steps to comply with the judgment, in particular to put an end to the impunity in the case and ensure the rights to justice and truth of María Luisa Acosta.

In August the IACHR granted precautionary measures to Francisca Ramírez and her family after they were victims of death threats, harassment and attacks in retaliation for her activism in opposition to the construction of the Grand Interoceanic Canal.

GRAND INTEROCEANIC CANAL

There continued to be no genuine and effective consultation process for those who would be affected by the construction of the Grand Interoceanic Canal, in violation of international human rights principles.²

According to the Centre for Legal Assistance for Indigenous Peoples, the right to free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant Rama Kriol people relating

to the project had not been guaranteed, despite several appeals lodged with the courts. Civil society organizations noted that the scale of the project, which would include an oil pipeline and two ports, among other infrastructure, would affect hundreds of thousands of people and would put them at risk of eviction.

Human rights organizations and peasant farmer communities continued to call for the repeal of Law 840, the law regulating the Canal, due to its insufficient safeguards to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights. Their demands continued to be rejected and the authorities had yet to open a meaningful dialogue with the communities likely to be affected by the construction of the Canal.

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

In November, municipal elections took place in a context of violence, with at least five people reported to have been killed and 30 wounded in six municipalities.

There were also reports of unnecessary and excessive use of force by the police against people peacefully protesting against the construction of the Canal, as well as reports of arbitrary detention of protesters. Human rights defenders were also reported to have been harassed and intimidated for their opposition to the project.

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1. Nicaragua: The state must uphold, without delay, the judgment issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ([AMR 43/6173/2017](#))
 2. Danger: Rights for sale – the Interoceanic Grand Canal project in Nicaragua and the erosion of human rights ([AMR 43/6515/2017](#))

NIGER

The Republic of Niger

Head of state: **Mahamadou Issoufou**

Head of government: **Brigi Rafini**

Armed conflict continued and armed groups carried out at least 70 attacks, killing tens of civilians. The humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. Over 700

suspected Boko Haram members went on trial. Hundreds of people, including prisoners of conscience, were arrested and prosecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association. Security forces used excessive force against protesters. The rights of refugees and migrants were violated.

BACKGROUND

In March, the government declared a state of emergency in the western areas bordering Mali and extended the security forces' powers after attacks by armed groups in Tillabéry and Tahoua. It renewed the state of emergency in the Diffa region, where attacks by armed groups continued.

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

Hundreds of people, including prisoners of conscience, were arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.

In May, Insar Abdourahmane, a member of the Association of Action for Democracy and Human Rights, was arrested and detained for more than 20 days in Agadez town for criticizing the authorities on Facebook. He was given a six-month suspended prison sentence for inciting violence.

In April, security forces used excessive force to repress a student protest in Niamey, the capital, against the suspension of bursary payments and new age restrictions on welfare payments. One student, Mala Bagallé, was killed after being shot in the back with a tear gas canister, and dozens were wounded. In May, a commission of inquiry found that the gendarmerie was responsible for the killing; and a judicial investigation was opened.

At least 300 students, including board members of the Niger Union of Students, were arrested throughout the country, detained for a few days and released without charge for participating in a protest and blocking traffic.

In May, Amadou Ali Djibo, leader of the opposition coalition Front for the Restoration of Democracy and the Defence of the