

International organizations condemn conviction of independent journalists, members of former Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation and La Prensa in Nicaragua

Latin America, 24 March 2022. We, the undersigned organizations, condemn the judicial farce taking place in Nicaragua where the justice has sentenced independent journalists and former workers for the now-defunct Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation (FVBCH) to between 7 and 13 years in prison.

On Wednesday, March 23, Juan Lorenzo Holmann, general manager of the newspaper La Prensa, was found guilty of the alleged crime of money laundering. Judge Nadia Camila Tardecillas, in the Second Criminal District Court, requested a sentence of nine years and four months in prison plus a monetary fine. Holmann was arrested on August 14 when police raided the media, which at the time was the only independent print media still circulating in the country. His trial ended on Wednesday, March 23rd and his final sentence will be read on March 31st.

On Monday, 21 March, journalist and aspiring presidential candidate, Cristiana Chamorro, was found guilty on charges of money laundering, “abusive management” and “ideological falsehood” by Judge Luden Martín Quiroz in the Ninth Criminal District Court of Managua. The sentence is linked to her tenure as president of the FVBCH. Ms. Chamorro is also set to pay a fine of an amount equivalent to the alleged laundering. The trial took place from 3 to 7 March at the Evaristo Vásquez Police Complex—commonly known as “El Chipote”—where detainees have been subjected to degrading, cruel and inhuman treatment, including acts of torture. In addition, most of the political prisoners in detention at the facility are being held incommunicado.

The arbitrary judicial process against Chamorro and other detainees took place in the presence of an intimidating police contingent and failed to provide any guarantees for due process, including the fact that very limited time was given for defense lawyers to submit statements in support of their clients. Among other serious irregularities and despite the fact that the defendants possessed proofs of innocence, the trial came to an end without the presentation of more than 1000 key documents supporting the defendants’ cases. Cristiana Chamorro has been under house arrest since 2 June 2021. The sentence against her has not determined the place where she is to be transferred.

In addition to Chamorro, three other former FVBCH workers were convicted on 21 March. Accountant Marcos Fletes and finance officer Walter Gómez were sentenced to 13 years in prison for money laundering. Fletes is also set to pay a fine of 300 days, and another one equivalent to three times the amount that was allegedly laundered. Even Chamorro’s driver,

Pedro Vásquez, was sentenced to 7 years in prison for being an “accomplice in the crime of money laundering”.

The Nicaraguan justice system, in servitude to the authoritarian government, also sentenced Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Cristiana Chamorro’s 70-year-old brother and a director of the La Prensa newspaper, to nine years in prison on allegations of misappropriation of funds, “ideological falsehood” and “abusive management”.

These spurious legal proceedings came on the heels of similar rulings in previous weeks wherein sports journalist Miguel Mendoza was sentenced to nine years in prison for expressing his opinions on social media, while political commentator Jaime Arellano and 100% Noticias television station founder and former presidential candidate Miguel Mora were both sentenced to 13 years in prison for “disseminating fake news” and conspiring to “undermine national integrity”.

We, the undersigned organizations, categorically denounce these rulings and others that have been issued against political prisoners detained by Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo’s regime. We hold the Nicaraguan State responsible for the lives and safety of all prisoners of conscience. We call for their immediate release and an end to the criminalization of their activities, as well as the reversal of all rulings that have been issued against them for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression.

In addition, we call on the international community and regional governments to strongly condemn the systematic violations of human rights taking place in Nicaragua and implement all measures at their disposal to ensure the release of Nicaraguan prisoners of conscience.

Finally, we join in the call for the United Nations Human Rights Council to, in its resolutions regarding Nicaragua, adopt a sound, independent and impartial international mechanism for exhaustively investigating and documenting the serious human rights violations that have taken place in the country since April 2018, in order to provide a foundation for accountability and punishment of all those responsible for the abuses. The rights violations that have been perpetrated include serious infringements on press freedom and the rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression.

Signatories,

AMARC-ALC

Artículo 19

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Asociación Nacional de la Prensa Bolivia -ANP

Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador - APES

Comité por la Libre Expresión - C-Libre

Centro de Archivos y Acceso a la Información - CAinfo

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Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión- IPLEX

International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights

Instituto Demos

Instituto Cubano de Libertad de Expresión y Prensa -ICLEP

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