

March 2, 2022

Dear Comandante –

I am writing to you for two reasons. The first is to convey to you my very deepest gratitude for the tremendous honor you have given me for more than 40 years: the opportunity to serve Nicaragua as its international legal advisor. This has been one of the greatest blessings I have ever received. It has made my life special, filling it with meaning, especially and above all by allowing me to join you in fighting for justice for the heroic country and people that I came to love.

I have enough memories to enrich many lifetimes. I owe them to you, starting with the day, in January 1984, in Padre Miguel's home, when you told me that Nicaragua had decided to sue the United States in the International Court of Justice to hold it accountable under international law for the war, aggression and terrorism it had launched against Nicaragua's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; and, in the same meeting, you told me that you wanted me to be a part of Nicaragua's legal team prosecuting the case in The Hague.

Nicaragua might have chosen other weapons to defend itself against the U.S. Instead, under your leadership, it chose the law. It did not fight aggression with aggression, or terror with terror; it pursued the principled path of peace by seeking a judicial resolution by the World Court, confident that its cause was just. It was an example to the world, for which Nicaragua earned broad international acclaim even before the Court issued its historic Judgment in Nicaragua's favor in June 1986. That Judgment, combined with other events, finally led the U.S. Congress to terminate military aid to the counter-revolutionary forces, and created the conditions for an agreement ending the war.

That agreement was signed at Sapoá, in March 1988. It was preceded by your agreement with the other Central American Presidents at Esquipulas, in Guatemala, to enter direct negotiations with the contras. This was another courageous decision on your part, reflecting a firm commitment to an honorable peace. In December 1987, you appointed me to the government's negotiating team, but also sent me on clandestine missions to meet with contra leaders outside the formal negotiations, to determine whether there was real interest in a settlement and on what terms.

I vividly recall the night before the Sapoá Accord was signed. You were meeting with the Nicaraguan negotiating team, led by Humberto, at a secure house in San Juan del Sur. A favorable agreement with the contras was within reach, but certain concessions had to be made by the government, or the talks would fail. The decision would be momentous. Peace or more war would follow, depending on your choice. You chose peace, and the historic agreement was signed the next day.

The Sapoá Accord promised democratic elections, and they were held in February 1990. The political opposition was skeptical at first, threatening not to participate. You made the critical decisions that persuaded them to do so, agreeing to many of the conditions they

insisted upon to ensure an open and honest electoral process. One of those was to invite international observers, including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, whom you instructed me to contact and convince to accept this critical role. During the elections, at your request, I served as liaison between the government and President Carter and his team, working very closely with them.

One of the most unforgettable nights of my life was 25 February 1990, after the polls had closed and the ballots were counted. Like millions of other supporters of the Revolution, in Nicaragua and around the world, I was shocked and devastated by the unexpected results. I accompanied President Carter, his wife and his assistant to the midnight meeting with you that has become part of history. President Carter told you what you already knew: that the FSLN lost, and Doña Violeta had been elected President. Some false “historians” have written that President Carter persuaded you to accept the results and hand over power. As an eyewitness, I know that is not true. You told President Carter that the government and the party leadership had already made that decision. You authorized him to communicate it immediately to Doña Violeta, with a request that she say nothing publicly until you made a formal announcement in the morning, when it would be easier to prevent partisan conflict in the streets. I left with President Carter, who expressed only the greatest respect and admiration for you.

When Doña Violeta and her government took office in April 1990, I learned that it was the first time in Nicaragua’s history that a sitting government had allowed itself to be voted out of office. A critical chapter of that history had closed. It began in 1979, when the FSLN led the Nicaraguan people to overthrow a brutal, ruthless, corrupt dictatorship that had ruled the country for 45 years, promising to install a democratic government; and it ended in 1990, when the FSLN left Nicaragua with the full-fledged democracy it had promised. Nothing else that happened during those 11 years, or afterwards, could ever erase those accomplishments. It was my great honor, privilege and blessing, to have served such a government.

My service resumed after the 2006 elections, when you became President again. By this time, Nicaragua had capitalized on its reputation as a steadfast promoter and defender of international law, which it had earned as result of its legal victory over the United States, by returning to the International Court of Justice to resolve disputes with Costa Rica, Colombia and Honduras. At your instruction, I was added to Nicaragua’s legal team against Costa Rica and Colombia. Under Carlos Arguello’s leadership, both cases (as well as the one against Honduras) resulted in historic victories for Nicaragua.

In 2009, the ICJ ruled that Nicaragua alone is sovereign over the Rio San Juan, and that its sovereign rights permit it to prevent Costa Rica from performing any police or governmental functions on the river, and to impose regulations on use of the river by Costa Rican commercial vessels. In 2012, the Court unanimously rejected Colombia’s claim that the maritime boundary in the Caribbean Sea followed the 82nd meridian, and it awarded Nicaragua over 75% of the contested sea and seabed, extending 200 miles from its Atlantic Coast. I was honored and proud to have helped Nicaragua defend and extend its sovereignty in both cases. I would not have had these opportunities without your trust and confidence in me.

I cannot thank you enough for this, and for all the opportunities you gave me between 1979 and 2012, and beyond, to serve Nicaragua and its people in important ways, and, in so

doing, to give meaning to my life and professional career. Apart from my time with my family – my wife and my daughter – the time I spent working for Nicaragua has been the most rewarding and enriching of my life. I will never forget that I owe this to you, and, as I conclude this part of my letter, I thank you profoundly and irrevocably from the deepest part of my soul for making all of this possible.

My second reason for writing to you is to terminate my relationship with you and your government. I do not know what caused you to change, but you are no longer the Daniel Ortega whom I so greatly respected, admired, loved, and proudly served for so many years.

That Daniel Ortega was a true hero, who courageously, nobly and selflessly served his country and his people, governing wisely and generously in their best interests, and, in the process, changing Nicaragua for the better. It is inconceivable to me that that Daniel Ortega would have repressed peaceful demonstrations so ruthlessly, resulting in hundreds of tragic deaths, in April 2018. It is even more inconceivable to me that that Daniel Ortega would have arrested, confined in intolerable conditions, and brought to trial more than 50 other leading citizens – from politics, the media, universities, and business – on trumped up charges that are no more than a pretext for eliminating dissent and opposition.

It is inconceivable to me that the Daniel Ortega whom I proudly served would have destroyed the democracy that he was instrumental in building, and established a new dictatorship, not unlike the one he was instrumental in defeating, with sham elections, a rubber-stamp legislature, a corrupt judicial system that is incapable of rendering justice, and the silencing of free expression and independent news media.

It is also inconceivable to me that the Daniel Ortega I served could have forced into exile its greatest citizens, including Sergio Ramirez, Luis Carrion, Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Edmundo Jarquin, Gioconda Belli, Monica Baltodano, Julio Lopez Campos and countless other Sandinista and non-Sandinista heroes, as well as thousands of Nicaraguans of all political tendencies whose freedom has been denied or threatened. It is unthinkable to me that that Daniel Ortega would have murdered Hugo Torres, and sadistically brought the other great patriots, now locked in their prison cells, to the brink of starvation and death.

I will continue to respect, admire and love the first Daniel Ortega, even as I despair, and grieve, over the one who has taken his place. I will always treasure my service for the former, even as, for the reasons stated above, my moral conscience dictates that I must sever my ties with, and refuse to serve, the latter.

Meanwhile, I will pray for the day when Nicaragua once again becomes free.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Reichler', with a large, stylized initial 'P' and 'R'.

Paul Reichler