

Nicaragua: Ortega Strips Nationality from 94 Opponents

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Gonzalo Carrión, one of the 94 stripped of citizenship, was a Sandinista revolutionary. This photo shows him in the early 1980s as founder of the Sandinista Youth organization. Photo from *La Prensa*.

Years ago, the famous Nicaraguan poet Giaconda Belli wrote,

¿Qué sos, Nicaragua

Para dolerme tanto?

What are you, Nicaragua

To hurt me so?

The lines seem particularly poignant and appropriate now.

A few days ago, President Daniel Ortega's Nicaraguan government declared 94 of its citizens to be traitors and stripped them of their nationality, denying them citizenship rights, and seizing their property. While it was a court that issued the order, since Ortega controls not only the executive branch, but also the parliament, and the courts, there is no doubt that he is behind this egregious

violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This Act places Ortega in a category with dictators such as Vladimir Putin of Russia, Xi Jinping of China, and Kim Jong-un of North Korea.

A few days ago I wrote that it seemed that Ortega and U.S. President Joseph Biden had made a deal when the United States government accepted 220 Nicaraguan political prisoners who had been released and deported to Washington, D.C., also stripping them of their citizenship. Now he has stolen the citizenship from 94 more Nicaraguans. Brian A. Nichols, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, immediately condemned the act, but what this means for the future of relations between Nicaragua and the United States remains unclear.

A Who's Who of Political Opponents

The 94 who have now become stateless and therefore rightless, many of whom already live abroad, include some of the country's most famous authors, prominent journalists, and esteemed civil rights activists. Many of them declared that the government had no authority to strip of them their nationality and declared that despite the court's statement they remained Nicaraguans.

Two of the best known of those who have been made stateless are the novelist Sergio Ramírez and poet Giaconda Belli, both of whom working alongside Daniel Ortega, played central roles in the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 that overthrew the U.S.-backed government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Ramírez is best known for his prize-winning historical novel about the assassination in 1956 of Anastasio Somoza García, titled *Margarita, está linda la mar*. But Ramírez was also a revolutionary, serving in the revolutionary *junta* in 1979, and vice-president under President Daniel Ortega from 1985 to 1990. In 1995, Ramírez broke with Ortega and founded, together with other former Sandinistas, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) as a social democratic alternative. In his brilliant and moving memoir *Adiós muchachos: Una memoria de la revolución sandinista* (Goodbye Guys, A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution) he offered his interpretation the successes and failures of the Sandinista revolution.

Belli, who also played an important role in the revolution building international alliances, later served as international press liaison in 1982 and as the government's director of communications in 1984. She too has written a very personal and political memoir, *El país bajo mi piel*, published in English under the title *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* in which she shares thrilling revolutionary struggle for power and the gradual degeneration of the political leadership. She is best known as a poet and one of her most famous poems is "¿Qué sos, Nicaragua?" (What are you, Nicaragua?). The poem describes the beautiful tropical, mountainous country and then ends with this verse:

¿Qué sos

Sino dolor y polvo y gritos en la tarde,

—Gritos de mujeres, como de parto—?

¿Qué sos

Sino puño crispado y bala en boca?

¿Qué sos, Nicaragua

Para dolerme tanto?

That is, "What are you but pain and dust and shouts in the afternoon like the screams of women in labor? What are you but a clenched fist and a bullet in the mouth? What are you Nicaragua to hurt me so?"

Civil Rights Activists, Journalists, Priests, Revolutionaries

Others among those stripped of nationality, citizenship, and property are the civil rights activist Vilma Nuñez, the journalist Carlos Fernando Chamorro, former Sandinista revolutionary Gonzalo Carrión, and Catholic bishop Silvio Baez, all of whom have been critical of the Sandinista regime. Vilma Nuñez is a former Sandinista who was arrested and tortured by the Somoza government. In 1990 she founded the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights in 1990. She challenged Ortega to be the Sandinista's presidential candidate in 1996 and in 1998, leaving the Sandinista party (FSLN), she represented Zoilamérica Ortega Murillo, who claimed that her step-father Daniel Ortega had sexually abused her as a child. Carlos Fernando Chamorro is the country's most prominent journalist, the publisher of the *Confidencial newspaper online* and the host of the show *Confidencial* that can be viewed on YouTube. Gonzalo Carrión was the founder of the Sandinista Youth (JS) organization in the early 1980s. He had declared several years ago, "but there is no more revolution in Nicaragua today." Silvio Baez is the auxiliary bishop of Managua who at the time of the national uprising in 2018 spoke out strongly against the government's violent repression of the protestors, such as at Diriamba where 17 people were massacred by Ortega's police and FSLN gangsters.

Dictatorship, like that of Daniela Ortega and Rosario Murillo, is a pathology that leads those afflicted with it oppress a nation and to murder, imprison, and banish its bravest and most noble citizens, until it falls, as it eventually does. We can only hope that the Nicaraguan people bring down this one sooner rather than later.