

# Nicaragua: UN experts urge freedom for Bishop Álvarez after 12 Catholic priests were released

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GENEVA (7 November 2023) – UN experts\* today demanded an end to the arbitrary detention of the Bishop of Matagalpa, Monsignor Rolando José Álvarez, following the release of 12 Catholic priests on 18 October 2023.

“We are deeply concerned about the systematic patterns of harassment against members of the Catholic Church and other religious denominations by Nicaraguan authorities,” the experts said. “The Government must immediately and unconditionally release Monsignor Álvarez and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief in the country,” they said.

In an [official communication](#) sent to the Government of Nicaragua on 2 August 2023, the experts expressed grave concern arising from reported restrictions to the exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief and the harassment of religious organisations in the country.

The experts observed that the repressive measures adopted by the authorities appear to include the arbitrary arrest and detention of members of the Catholic Church and other religious denominations; their forced deportation and arbitrary prohibitions of entry into the country; the criminalisation of their pastoral activities; prohibitions on the performance of religious ceremonies; police harassment at their homes or places of worship; the closure of media outlets, universities and organisations belonging to religious groups, as well as the confiscation of their assets.

It is estimated that since 2022, Nicaraguan authorities have cancelled the legal status of at least 1,000 non-profit organisations, of which more than 320 are said to be of a religious character. In August 2023, the Government cancelled the legal status of the historic Central American University (UCA) run by the Catholic order of the Society of Jesus, and confiscated its facilities. In 2023, it also reportedly cancelled the legal status of two evangelical Christian universities, and another associated with the Catholic Church.

The experts stressed that these acts are contrary to international law and that they appear to be part of a broader pattern of repression against different elements of Nicaraguan civil society, especially against persons or entities that are perceived as critical of the Government. In this manner, the authorities are seriously violating,

among others, the human rights to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of association, and freedom of expression and opinion, the experts said.

They expressed deep concern about the situation of Monsignor Rolando José Álvarez Lagos, who is in solitary confinement and in conditions of detention that gravely contravene the [Nelson Mandela Rules](#). Monsignor Álvarez has been noted, since the 2018 National Dialogues, for his calls for the release of political prisoners and for pacification and reconciliation among Nicaraguans. The experts noted his situation of arbitrary detention in which he has been held since August 2022, as well as the severe sentence imposed on him without a trial, including the loss of citizenship rights and nationality.

On 18 October 2023, all Catholic priests who had been arrested as part of the recent crackdown on the Catholic Church, with the exception of Monsignor Alvarez, were released from prison. Their release and transfer to Rome were agreed with the Holy See, according to a statement from the Government of Nicaragua.

Nota: el texto que antecede ha sido reproducido en forma íntegra de la siguiente fuente <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/nicaragua-un-experts-urge-freedom-bishop-alvarez-after-12-catholic-priests>