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THE SANDINISTA WAR ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Four years ago today, the Sandinista revolution toppled the Somoza regime, which had ruled Nicaragua for 43 years. The rebels' victory was widely hailed as a triumph over what was seen as one of the worst violators of human rights in the Americas. Ironically--and tragically for the close to three million Nicaraguans--the Sandinistas have proved that they surpass their predecessors in abusing the basic rights of their own people. What has erupted in Nicaragua is an all-out war on the human rights of all those who oppose the regime. The victims number in the thousands and include journalists, businessmen, politicians, Catholics, Moravians, the Miskito Indian tribes and even Nicaragua's entire Jewish community.

Today's human rights violations affect all aspects of Nicaraguan life. There are restrictions on free movement; torture; denial of due process; lack of freedom of thought, conscience and religion; denial of the right of association and of free labor unions.

Since the Marxists took over, Nicaraguan Jews have seen their human rights systematically violated. Their property has been confiscated and they have been arrested arbitrarily and physically harassed. Inspiring this sudden anti-Jewish campaign, in part, is the intimate ideological relationship between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Sandinistas.

Catholics have been subject to similar attacks. Before their victory, the Sandinistas enjoyed the backing of Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, of Nicaragua. Once in power, the Sandinistas discovered that the Archbishop's commitment to human rights, civil liberties and social justice was more than rhetoric. As a result, according to official church reports, prominent clerics are defamed and attacked physically. Religious education is under siege.

The Moravian Church, too, is under assault, particularly along Nicaragua's Eastern Atlantic coast, where it claims the loyalties

of 80 percent of the population. The Sandinistas denounce this church as a center of counter-revolutionary activity. Some Moravian pastors now must submit their Sunday sermons for government approval. One pastor reported that the censors asked him: "Why do you always preach on sad themes like sin and redemption? Why don't you preach about liberation like some of the Catholics do?"

Mormons, Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists, meanwhile, have seen their churches seized and then returned only under the condition that their pastors not criticize the revolution or the Sandinista programs.

One of the most brutalized communities is that of the Miskito Indians of the Atlantic Coast. Independent human rights organizations have been kept from visiting Miskito detention camps. Nonetheless, the record of the Sandinista atrocities against the Miskito is widely known. Among these atrocities are: arrests of the entire Indian leadership; banning of the Indian organization Misurasata; forcible relocation of over 15,000 Miskitos; total destruction of 39 villages, including livestock, personal effects, crops, fruit trees; killing, arrest and torture of hundreds of Indians; and the imposition of harsh military rule on the entire Indian region.

Similar methods have neutralized political parties that do not belong to the Sandinista Front, as well as independent labor unions and their leaders.

It has taken four years of cruel repression for the reality of human rights violations in Nicaragua to become undeniable. Recent statements by a former Sandinista Intelligence officer disclosed that some 5,000 Nicaraguans were slaughtered in the early months of Sandinista rule. The Sandinistas have assassinated and kidnapped their opponents whether inside or out of Nicaragua. Examples: the murders of Commander Bravo in Honduras, Jorge Salazar in Managua, Hector Frances in Costa Rica, and Anastasio Somoza in Paraguay. Repression is not limited to political foes. Nicaraguans who refuse to bow to Sandinista rule are likely to be harassed, arrested or tortured. If an individual fails to conform to Sandinista standards, he will be prohibited from obtaining employment, food and shelter. Enforcing this is a vast domestic security network. A Nicaraguan today, in sum, enjoys few human, civil or political rights.

THE PERMANENT COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Permanent Commission of Nicaraguan Human Rights (CPDH), was founded in April 20, 1977, in Managua. During the Somoza regime, reports of human rights violations by the regime were allowed to be published daily by the CPDH and were frequently quoted by the international press. Amnesty International, for example, was able to monitor violations in Nicaragua based on the reports of the Commission.

In a 1982 interview in Washington, D.C., Dr. Jose Esteban Gonzalez, then National Coordinator of the Permanent Commission, said that under Somoza he could "call the editors of major U.S. newspapers and my statements concerning violations of human rights by the Somoza regime made headlines the following day. Today, they don't even answer my calls." At the time of his visit to Washington, Dr. Gonzalez had been forced into exile after numerous threats from the Sandinistas and several closures of the Commission's offices in Managua. Dr. Gonzalez believed that he could no longer serve as a functional member of the Commission inside Nicaragua, and has since started a human rights group in exile.

The Commission's chairmanship was assumed by Javier Sabala; the present coordinator in Managua is Martha Baltodano, who files monthly reports from Managua under difficult conditions. The Commission's reports of continued violations of human rights by the Sandinistas are filed with the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Under Somoza, 1,000 political prisoners at most were jailed without due process. Amnesty International conducted an international campaign on behalf of them. It was not until June 22, 1982, however, that Amnesty International first urged the "Nicaraguan government to review the cases of over 3,000 people convicted after the 1979 revolution of criminal offenses committed under the previous government."

The request was made after evidence mounted that 4,331 Nicaraguans had been convicted by special Sandinista tribunals after the fall of Somoza. The Amnesty International report, however, ignored the plight of the thousands of Miskitos who were evicted from their villages and who were made to walk eight hours to a "relocation center." Nor was mention made of the burning and killing of hundreds of other Miskitos including the destruction of 39 villages along the Coco River, bordering on Honduras.

NICARAGUAN LABOR VIOLATIONS

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), officially protested to the Nicaraguan government on December 18, 1981, concerning the restrictions placed on attendance at a union training course given by the International Center for Advanced and Vocational Training in Turin, Italy. One candidate was selected from the government-controlled Sandinist Confederation of Nicaraguan Workers (CST) and one from the Confederation of Trade Union Unity (CUS), an independent free trade union. The CST candidate was approved, but the Nicaraguan government denied permission to the representative of CUS. The government dismissed the incident as a bureaucratic mistake--the candidates had not cleared exit permits with the Ministry of Planning, they said--and neither candidate went.

In February and October 1982, the International Organization of Employers (IOE), filed complaints charging the government of Nicaragua detained Enrique Bolanos Gayer, acting Chairman of the Supreme Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), to prevent his participation in a joint economic forum between the governments of Nicaragua and Venezuela. Also restricted or detained were Enrique Dreifus, Chairman of COSEP, Ismael Reyes, Vice-Chairman of COSEP, William Baez, Assistant Director of the Nicaraguan Development Institute, Rosendo Diaz, Executive Secretary of the Union of Agricultural Producers, and Alejandro Burgos, Executive Director of COSEP.

The Nicaraguan government denied the charges and Dreifus and his associates later were arrested. Many labor and private enterprise representatives are now in exile, due to restrictions imposed by the Sandinista regime.

Since the creation of the Sandinista-controlled union, CUS has come under attack, and its members have been repeatedly harassed. Members of CST have been rewarded by the Sandinistas for their loyalty. As a result it is increasingly difficult for the independent CUS to survive as a free trade union.

THE SYSTEM OF REPRESSION

One of the first rights to be attacked by the Sandinistas was freedom of the press. The new regime censored La Prensa, the country's only independent newspaper. For years it was the voice of opposition to the Somoza regime. It now is repeatedly shut and is heavily censored. Copy must be submitted to the censors seven hours before printing. This directly violates the Sandinista's own laws "guaranteeing" freedom of expression and thought. The press is not allowed to criticize the Sandinista government.

From the beginning, the new regime instituted the "block" system under the General Directorate of State Security (DGSE), and under the direct supervision of intelligence sector F7. This is a "spy on your neighbor" system that encourages citizens to report to the authorities those who do not work for the revolution. Should a member of the community be reported as a counter-revolutionary, the security representatives of the "block" may come and harass the neighbor, destroy his property and stone his house. The neighbors observe the punishment and heed the warning: do not work against the revolution. This is the system common to Soviet-bloc countries.

While elements of the Somoza National Guard tortured political opponents, they did not employ psychological torture. The Sandinistas do. The State Security torture facilities are patterned after Soviet KGB methods. In fact, the Managua prisons were designed from Cuban plans which, in turn, originated in Moscow. The Nicaraguan interrogators are trained by Cubans who have at least five years experience of working in the Soviet Union. One of the early victims of this torture was Miskito leader Stedman

Fagoth, now leader of one of the groups fighting against the Sandinistas.

A particularly sadistic torture method used by Sandinistas is the "vest-cut." As an example of what happens to anti-government sympathizers, captured counter-revolutionaries are taken to the nearest village where their arms and legs are severed, causing them to bleed to death.

One of the most common ways of killing prisoners in Managua is through the "ley de fuga" or "escape law." Prisoners are taken from jail and driven to the countryside. They are told they can go free and are shot as they start to walk away. Later, the prisoners are described as having been killed trying to escape. This method was used against many suspected Somoza supporters.

ANTI-SEMITISM

The Nicaraguan Jewish community, which numbered 200 in the early 1970s, was reduced to approximately 50 individuals after the Sandinista takeover in July 1979. The Sandinistas have driven all Jews from the country. With the support of the Palestine Liberation Organization, an anti-Semitic campaign began in 1977 when Sandinistas defaced Managua's synagogue with anti-Jewish and anti-Israel slogans. In 1978, the same synagogue was firebombed. After the revolution, Jews who had been residing temporarily outside Nicaragua were not permitted to return. When 70-year-old Abraham Gorn was identified as the president of the Nicaraguan Jewish community, he was jailed for two weeks and forced to sweep streets. His factory was expropriated, his bank account seized and he was evicted from his home. Though there are no longer any Jews in Nicaragua, anti-Semitism thrives. The July 15 and 17, 1982, editions of the government-controlled newspaper Nuevo Diario, denounced Jews. Jewish houses of worship were called "Synagogues of Satan." The Sandinistas have converted Managua's synagogue into an elite social club for the children of high-ranking Sandinista officials.

The Sandinistas are also attacking the Protestant minority. Through physical attacks on Protestant villages, harassment of church leaders and the imposition of communist ideology on these communities, the Sandinistas are rapidly achieving a society void of religious diversity.

After coming to power, the Sandinistas immediately began a policy of "reeducation" in the Atlantic Coast, the area inhabited by the Moravian Protestants. The Sandinistas replaced church leaders with Nicaraguan and Cuban Marxists to indoctrinate the populace. The result was the violent rejection of the alien ideology and of its proponents. The Sandinistas then censored the press and cut off charitable funds to the Atlantic coast communities. After isolating the Moravians, the Sandinistas executed many of them and destroyed their churches.

CONCLUSION

In light of the Sandinistas' increasingly repressive and numerous human rights violations, the Reagan Administration must bring the plight of the Nicaraguan people to the attention of the international community.

Pressure applied by the Organization of American States against Somoza played a major role in his government's downfall. Sandinista human rights guarantees to its citizens are based on the Charters of the Organization of American States and the United Nations. The OAS should review the charges pressed by Nicaragua's own independent human rights Commission and by international organizations.

Hearings should be scheduled in the U.S. Congress to study human rights violations in Nicaragua. Special attention should focus on the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities by the Sandinistas.

International and U.S. organizations should call upon the Sandinista government to:

Recognize the rights of Nicaraguan Jewish citizens and return their property and material goods, including their synagogue in Managua.

Permit the Miskito Indians and other indigenous groups to return to their homes on the Atlantic Coast and allow them to continue their traditional lifestyle, compensate them for lost crops, property and personal effects taken by the Sandinistas. Security officers responsible for the murders and abuses against them should be brought to trial and sentenced.

The Reagan Administration, meanwhile, should encourage Western nations to pressure the Sandinista regime to stop violating the human rights of the Nicaraguan people. The West should not consider assisting the Sandinista government until it allows international organizations to investigate charges of human rights violations. The White House should also encourage the U.S. labor movement and those in Japan and Europe to pressure the Sandinistas to recognize the right of Nicaraguan workers to organize freely.

If the U.S. and the West truly are concerned about human rights, they no longer will be silent about the lengthening record of violations against the Nicaraguan people.

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