Introduction
This bulletin covers a two-month period between 1 October and 30 November 2019. In a context marked by the end of the negotiations between the Government and the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy in order to address the consequences of the social and political crisis, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) registered increased violations to the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, as well as acts of harassment and targeted persecution against dissenting voices. Persons previously detained in the context of the protests, relatives of jailed or deceased political opponents, catholic priests, journalists, social leaders and human rights defenders suffered attacks against their life and personal integrity, arbitrary detentions and different types of threats and intimidation by both police officers and pro-Government elements.

International efforts in response to the socio-political crisis
On 14 October, the Council of the European Union (EU) adopted new conclusions on Nicaragua and a framework for targeted and individual sanctions.¹

On 11 November, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) held two hearings in Quito, Ecuador, during its 174th period of sessions, on the Amnesty Law and on the Challenges to the autonomy and independence of the judicial system in Nicaragua, respectively.

On 19 November, the Organization of American States (OAS) High-Level Commission on Nicaragua, established to carry out diplomatic efforts to seek a peaceful and effective solution to the crisis in this country,² submitted a report to the OAS Permanent Council. Although the Government of Nicaragua

¹ See: www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2019/10/14/nicaragua-eu-adopts-conclusions-and-a-framework-for-targeted-sanctions/, last accessed on 6 November 2019. The EU recalled the three main areas in which it considered that tangible progress needed to be made in order to create the conditions for a peaceful and democratic exit to the crisis: 1) the full implementation of the 29 March 2019 agreements to strengthen civil and political rights and guarantees; 2) full cooperation with and the return of international human rights bodies to Nicaragua, including OHCHR; and 3) an agreement on electoral and institutional reforms, between the Government and the opposition, aimed at guaranteeing fair and transparent elections.

refused to meet the OAS High-Level Commission and did not authorize its members to enter Nicaragua.\(^3\) the latter were able to hear testimonies from a number of victims and stakeholders, and took into account reports issued by independent international bodies, including OHCHR.\(^4\) According to the report, the ongoing human rights violations “are giving rise to an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in Nicaragua”. Among its recommendations, the Commission requested to immediately convene a special session of the General Assembly to review the situation of Nicaragua. It also recommended the return of the regional human rights bodies, along with OHCHR team, to the country.\(^5\)

During the special meeting held on 25 November by the OAS Permanent Council to consider the above mentioned report, most of the Member States supported the High-Level Commission’s findings, and a few opposed the perceived intrusion on Nicaragua’s internal affairs. The representative of the State of Nicaragua "reiterate[d] [the] official position to consider the so-called OAS High-Level Commission non-existent".\(^6\)

**Economic contraction** On 10 October, the World Bank (WB) issued its last update on the growth rate of Nicaragua's economy, according to which, it projected a fall of -5.0 percent of the growth in 2019, which would recover slowly to 0.6 percent by 2021.\(^7\) WB attributed the negative figures to the social and political unrest that started in April 2018, which generated job losses and a fall in consumer and business confidence, plus a decline in sectors such as tourism and construction, threatening recent efforts in poverty reduction.\(^8\) The WB figures coincided with those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), issued in its World Economic Outlook of October 2019.\(^9\)

**Violations to the rights of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and freedom to manifest one’s religion** The National Police continued restricting fundamental freedoms through the systematic prohibition of protests and the deployment of a large number of police officers in public places, which prevented people from protesting, for fear of being arrested. Police also limited the right to freedom of expression during religious acts, in which persons held impromptu protests, in a manner that appeared disproportionate to protect public safety. In some occasions, pro-Government elements, who appeared to act with the acquiescence and tolerance of the National Police, physically attacked and threatened protesters, catholic priests and other worshipers at the church entrance or inside churches, in violation of the right to manifest one’s religion.

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\(^5\) Ibidem.


\(^8\) Ibidem.

On 7 October, on the occasion of a religious procession in Estelí, some persons staged a protest against the Government. At the end of the procession, many worshippers took shelter inside the cathedral and closed its doors, considering the presence of a large group of police officers and pro-Government armed elements who showed up at the procession. A pro-Government element managed to enter inside the cathedral and allegedly pointed a firearm at a seminarian. According to the Government, the deployment of police officers took place in response to a prior request from a nun to protect the procession and to remove the aggressor from the cathedral but, when a police patrol arrived, the aggressor had gone. According to the Government, there was no formal complaint about this incident, nor about the fact that the alleged pro-Government element was armed.

On 18 October, activities intended to collect necessity goods for people detained in the context of the protests were organized in different parts of the country, including in Managua, Estelí, Matagalpa, Masaya, Chinandega and León. OHCHR was informed that various places where the goods were planned to be collected, including parishes in Managua and Matagalpa, were surrounded by police officers, including riot police, who took pictures and videos of the participants. In at least one case, police officers reportedly blocked access to people who were bringing goods to the collection centers.

On 20 October, dozens of police officers, including riot police, surrounded the San Miguel church, located in Masaya, during the celebration of Sunday mass. The police deployment seemed to respond to the presence, inside the church, of persons who had been detained in the context of protests and who had been released in application of the Amnesty Law. On this occasion, no incidents were reported.

On 30 October, two journalists, who were covering a picket line against the Government at the Metro Centro shopping mall in Managua, were assaulted by the police when trying to cover the event.

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11 Information sent by the Government to OHCHR on 18 November 2019.


13 See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQv5TqZP-6Y, last accessed on 8 November 2019.
On 31 October, two picket lines took place in Managua amid an important deployment of police officers, including riot police, after members of the University Coordinator for Democracy and Justice convened a protest demanding the release of “political prisoners”.14 According to the information received by OHCHR, members of the University Coordinator tried to file a request for authorization to stage the demonstration, but National Police allegedly refused to receive the documentation.

On 14 November, eight female relatives of people deprived of their liberty and another woman started a hunger strike inside San Miguel church, in Masaya, calling for the release of more than 130 individuals detained allegedly in the context of the protests. The same day, they found themselves surrounded by the police and pro-Government elements inside the church, together with the church’s priest, and four other people. The authorities cut water and electrical services off and prevented anyone from entering the church and delivering humanitarian supplies, including water and insulin to the priest, who suffers from diabetes. The 14 people remained inside the church in precarious conditions for nine days until 22 November, when the entire group was evacuated. The 14 persons evacuated were brought to a hospital and then to their homes, with the exception of four people, who remained in the hospital for a few days.15

During the night of 14 November, police detained 16 political opponents (nine men and seven women). The arrest of 13 of them, who were also members of the Blue and White National Unity (UNAB by its Spanish acronym), took place right after they managed to deliver water to the nine hunger strikers, the priest and four other people who had been surrounded by the police without access to humanitarian supplies at San Miguel church, in Masaya.

On 17 November, the 16 political opponents detained were charged with trafficking of weapons. Prominent human rights defenders, such as Amaya Coppens and Olga Valle, were among those detained. Coppens is a Belgian-Nicaraguan medical student leader who had been detained in the context of the protests for eight months and who was released on 11 June 2019, in application of the Amnesty Law.

On 18 November, another group of at least eight women started a hunger strike inside the cathedral in Managua, also demanding the release of people allegedly detained in the context of the protests. Along with the hunger strikers, there was a male doctor and an 11-year-old boy. In the afternoon, dozens of pro-Government elements, allegedly acting with the acquiescence of

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15 See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qASYWAg5M4 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpgJvcAVwwM, last accessed on 3 December 2019.
police officers surrounding the cathedral, entered the premises and intimidated, hit and threw stones against the hunger strikers, a priest and a nun. The women hunger strikers spent the night isolated in a small room inside the cathedral premises to avoid being attacked again by the pro-Government mobs, who had taken over the cathedral. The next day, for security reasons, they were evacuated by the Nicaraguan Red Cross. The cathedral was handed over to a priest once all the strikers left.

Between 15 and 19 November, the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference issued two press releases and one statement condemning the events that took place in San Miguel church in Masaya and in the cathedral of Managua, as well as the harassment against priests, parishioners and the Catholic Church of Nicaragua by the Government and pro-Government groups.

On 19 November, in a press briefing, the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about the situation of the individuals on hunger strike in churches in Masaya and Managua, and about those detained after delivering humanitarian aid to the people inside San Miguel church, in Masaya. He highlighted that the detention of Amaya Coppens “could be considered as an act of reprisal for speaking up about the human rights situation in Nicaragua and reaching out to UN officials [including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights] and mechanisms”. In addition, he expressed great concern about the “trump-up charges” of trafficking of weapons against the people detained, which “may constitute a renewed attempt to stifle dissent”. He also stressed that “everyone should be allowed to exercise the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without fear of being attacked”. He reiterated OHCHR readiness to provide support to the Nicaraguan State to fulfil its international human rights obligations and to return to the country, if access is granted.

On 20 November, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, issued a declaration on behalf of the EU deploiring the detention of the individuals supporting hunger strikers inside San Miguel church and the “siege of the church by police forces”, considering it an infringement of fundamental rights of Nicaraguan citizens. She also reaffirmed the EU’s determination “to react to the ongoing deterioration of human rights and the rule of law”.

On 21 November, a group of pro-Government elements violently attempted to enter St. John the Baptist church, located in Masaya, while a mass was being celebrated in solidarity with the hunger strikers that remained surrounded by police in San Miguel church. The violent mob was repelled by parishioners, who managed to close and block the church doors. A pro-Government group reportedly retained and hit a person outside the church, who was then turned over to the police. Police officers refrained from intervening to control the Government supporters outside the church. Due to the


disturbances, the priest suspended a procession that was due to leave St. John the Baptist church towards San Miguel church.

On 25 November, a large deployment of police officers, including riot police, prevented a group of women activists, who gathered peacefully outside the premises of a women organization in Managua, from marching to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Women organizations reported that from January to November 2019, at least 59 women were victims of femicide in Nicaragua and eight continued to be deprived of their liberty in relation to the protests.

**Targeted persecution of dissenting voices** OHCHR continued to receive reports of arbitrary detentions, surveillance, and, in some cases, harassment of individuals considered as opponents of the Government, including journalists, relatives of persons deceased in the context of the protests, and former detainees. President Ortega, Vice-President Murillo and their son, Juan Carlos Ortega, publicly labelled those who dissent from the Government as “traitors”, “bleached graves”, “enemies of the people” and “cheaters”. According to international human rights norms and standards, any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred should be prohibited. It is particularly important that authorities refrain from using inflammatory speech, since it may incite members of the population to use discriminatory, hostile or violent language and/or to act violently.

On 7 October, in the margins of his official visit to Costa Rica, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General on Human Rights met with five Nicaraguan human rights defenders, three men and two women, who suffered reprisals for having cooperated with the United Nations. They reported the ongoing harassment and persecution by both State actors and pro-Government elements against leaders that were deprived of their liberty in the context of the 2018 protests and then released under the Amnesty Law, as well as against human rights defenders, journalists, and defense lawyers.

Following the inauguration of the museum of memory in Managua (see section below), the April's Mothers Association (AMA by its Spanish acronym) denounced intensified harassment and intimidation against its members by the police, other State officials and pro-Government elements, in Carazo, Ticuantepe, León, Estelí and Managua. They reported that their houses were under constant surveillance and that they were prevented from holding religious services peacefully, in memory of their loved ones. They also reported that the graves of relatives of two members of the association were desecrated by pro-Government elements. On 29 October, the tombstone of José Manuel

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24 See: article 20.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

25 See: [https://twitter.com/GilmourUN/status/118142055035228357](https://twitter.com/GilmourUN/status/118142055035228357), last accessed on 12 November 2019.
Narvaez, a 22 year-old male died of gunshot wounds during the 2018 protests, was damaged and marked with political insults in Carazo. Similarly, on 1 November, the tombstone of Josué Mojica, a 20 year-old male also dead of gunshot wound on 8 July 2018 in Diriaamba, was vandalized in the cemetery of the same city. These two attacks are particularly heinous, since they re-victimized the relatives of the deceased.

OHCHR was informed that, on 25 November, the Police Commissioner of León, along with police officers and hooded men dressed in civilian clothes, searched the house of a family identified as political opponents to the Government, without allegedly exhibiting any judicial warrant. According to the information collected by OHCHR, three members of the family, including a woman, were handcuffed inside the house, threatened and allegedly beaten, for approximately one hour. Police officers reportedly took short videos, which then circulated through social media, where the three members of the family were compelled by police to commit themselves to stop “bothering the police, the supporters of the ruling party and the Nicaraguan people at large”, while being handcuffed and in a situation of distress.

Right of victims of gross human rights violations to remedy and reparation On 30 September, AMA inaugurated in Managua a museum of memory denominated “AMA y No Olvida, Museo de la Memoria Contra la Impunidad, 2019”. This is an initiative of collective memory intended to “claim, remember and dignify” 71 victims out of the more than 300 people who were killed in the context of the 2018 protests. AMA is currently composed of approximately 160 victims’ relatives who, despite having been subjected to threats and verbal and physical attacks (see section above), continue to demand justice. One year and a half after the eruption of the protests, OHCHR has not received any information about any ongoing criminal or disciplinary investigation against police officers or pro-Government elements, who acted with the acquiescence or complicity of State actors.

States have a duty to investigate and prosecute human rights violations, which constitute crimes under national or international law, including summary or extrajudicial killings, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and enforced disappearances, among others. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, the right to a remedy and reparation of victims of human rights violations became firmly enshrined in the elaborate corpus of international human rights instruments, now widely accepted by

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28 Human Rights Committee General Comment N. 31, para. 18, available at http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6OqG1d%2FPPPRICAghKb7yhsjYoiCfMkoIRv2FVaVzRkMjTniRO%2Fbud3cPvrcM9YR0iW6Txaxgco3f9kUFpWog%2FhW%2FTpK21PhZeEJw%2FGeZRAjSjFuuJQRnbJEaUhtby31WfQPI2mLFD68ZSwMMVvQGVHA%3D%3D, last accessed on 14 November 2019.
Under international law, remedies for gross human rights violations include the victims’ right to a) equal and effective access to justice, b) adequate, effective and prompt reparation for the harm suffered, which encompasses restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-recurrence, and c) access to relevant information concerning violations and reparation mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur further noted that, for the right to reparation to be fulfilled, it is essential that the State and any other actors involved in the violations acknowledge their responsibility.

None of these standards has been met in Nicaragua yet, where the situation continues to be marked by entrenched impunity and lack of accountability for human rights violations.

Conclusions and Recommendations Police officers and in some cases, pro-Government elements continued to intimidate, threaten and attack peaceful protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, catholic priests, as well as persons previously detained in the context of the protests and relatives of detained or deceased political opponents, among others. The repression also reached catholic churches and liturgical rituals, including processions and masses, as they are used as spaces to express dissent from the Government, in a context of shrinking civic space. Widespread impunity for those responsible for committing gross human rights violations registered since April 2018 persists, while victims’ relatives and their organizations demand the fulfillment of their rights to a remedy and reparation.

In line with the statement issued by the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 19 November, OHCHR calls “for the release of all those who may be arbitrarily detained and ensure that their fundamental legal safeguards are respected” and reiterates that “the Government must end the persistent repression of dissent and the ongoing pattern of arbitrary arrests and refrain from criminalizing and attacking human rights defenders, political opponents and any other dissenting voices”.

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