

Bishop Alvarez and the U.S. April 2018 Insurrection against Nicaragua: An Open Letter to President Lula of Brazil

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His Excellency Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil:

On March 17, 2003, I was in your Cabinet as a representative of the National Council of Churches of the United States, asking for your help with the presidents of the non-aligned nations to seek to avoid the war of the United States against Iraq. You received me with a warm embrace, because you remembered my case as a Methodist missionary, collaborator of Dom Hélder Câmara in Recife, kidnapped by the Fourth Army and tortured by the same for 17 days before being expelled from Brazil in 1974.

Unfortunately, President GW Bush declared war against Iraq that same night at 9:00 p.m. (Brazilian time) and you didn't have a chance to help avoid that war.

In 2021, I retired after 68 years as a Methodist minister and moved to Nicaragua, where I live now permanently.

I'm writing to you now about the case of **Bishop Rolando José Álvarez Lagos**, because there is much misinformation about his case being circulated. He is being presented by the North American media as a political prisoner of the Sandinista government. As a Nicaraguan citizen and resident, I can tell you the reality is quite different.

As I'm sure you know, in April, 2018, the US Embassy here in Nicaragua launched an attempt toward Regime Change. During several years prior, the Embassy, USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED—an entity formed and financed by the US Congress), and other agencies of the US government, had sent millions of dollars to Nicaragua in a semi-clandestine manner to support a number of Non-Governmental

Organizations (NGOs) that worked diligently to prepare for a Regime Change Operation to overthrow **President Daniel Ortega's** government.

They sent several hundred Nicaraguan students to the US to “learn about democracy.” This project functioned in a manner similar to the nefarious School of the Americas, located for many years in Panama, presently in Ft. Benning, Georgia, because it was expelled from Panama. This School trained hundreds of Latin American military officers in how to combat “communism”. Major Maia, who was the head of the Torture Chamber of the Fourth Army in Recife, where I was tortured, bragged to me that he was a graduate of the School of the Americas and had spent a whole year in Panama learning his torture trade.

On April 18, 2018, in five different cities in Nicaragua, at 9:00 a.m. “spontaneous” protests erupted. All of these protests were led by students who had participated in the trips to the US for “orientation” during the previous years.

These groups raised roadblocks on the main streets of the principal cities of Nicaragua and in the subsequent days and weeks on the country’s international highways. These roadblocks were operated by common delinquents who were recruited for money, drugs and alcohol to increase the number of participants in the protests and to provide muscle to defend the roadblocks. They deliberately provoked many incidents of violence and armed confrontation against police persons and ordinary citizens that resulted in the deaths of more than 260 people, according to impeccable sources. The autopsies performed revealed that a great many of the people killed were shot in their heads and necks, the obvious result of sniper fire (this is very similar to what happened in Venezuela in the coup attempt of 2002 against President Chavez). Among the dead were 22 Sandinista police officers with another 400 officers suffering gunshot wounds.

There were also a great many cases of torture of Sandinistas who were captured by the “rebels.” Since they were confident of victory, as the US Embassy financed and supported the insurrection, and as a way to intimidate the population, many of the protesters recorded their actions on their smartphones, including acts of torture, and posted them on social media for everyone to see. However, mainstream media systematically suppressed coverage of the many notorious cases of this sadistic opposition activist behavior.

Bishop Rolando Alvarez openly supported the attempts to overthrow the Sandinista government, which had been elected with more than 70% of the popular vote in 2016. From his pulpit as Bishop of Matagalpa and on the streets, he encouraged the faithful of his diocese to support the violent opposition forces and do whatever necessary to eliminate the Sandinista government. Bishop Alvarez was one of three leading bishops in the Bishops Conference who demanded the withdrawal of the police to their stations as a pre-condition to a National Dialogue, a demand to which President Ortega agreed in order to facilitate Peace.

In July of 2018, in response to massive popular demands for a return to order, the Sandinista government said “Enough!” and began to arrest the violent activists and criminals who had tried to overthrow the government. As was mentioned before, many of them had recorded their actions on their smartphones and with this evidence it was easy to convict many of them, including those who had tortured and murdered hundreds of people, including non-political citizens and Sandinistas. More than 200 were convicted and imprisoned.

The US and EU governments and their human rights industry proxies protested immediately, declaring that all of these were “political prisoners,” including even those who were convicted of murder. However, the Sandinista government freed them all via an amnesty law, conditioning their freedom on their not repeating their crimes. In the case of further criminal activity, they would have to serve out their sentences.

Unhappily, many broke the agreement and were imprisoned again. In June of 2021, another group were arrested and taken to the courts for various crimes, including fraudulent abuse of non-profit status and money laundering.

Bishop Alvarez did not cease to criticize the government and publicly encouraged his followers that they should continue the struggle to overthrow the government. In the 2021 election, the Sandinistas got 76% of the popular vote, while the candidate in second place got only 12% and the combined vote of the five opposition parties participating in the elections was around 30% of the electorate. Bishop Alvarez had access to and control of various radio stations in two major Nicaraguan cities, Matagalpa and Estelí, which were part of his diocese. Urging the people to rise up, he used them to promote the violent overthrow of the government.

The Catholic Church has been the official religion of Nicaragua for centuries. The priests have enjoyed “diplomatic immunity” during this entire period. On a variety of occasions priests accused of common crimes, such as rape and robbery, escaped consequences claiming this immunity. A majority of the countries of the Hemisphere are “secular states” today, with no official religion. Recent polls have indicated that less than 40% of the people of Nicaragua claim to be Catholic today, the great majority are evangelical protestants.

In March of this year, **the Sandinista government recalled its ambassador to the Vatican and then the Vatican closed its Embassy in Managua.** As a result, Bishop Alvarez does not enjoy any kind of immunity and finally the Sandinista government accused him of insurrection.

With the presentation of the evidence of five years of public opposition to the government from his pulpit and his radio stations and on the streets, the courts convicted him and sentenced him to 26 years in prison. Respecting his position as a bishop, they gave him “house arrest” in the Bishops’ Palace in Managua.

In February of this year, the Nicaraguan government offered the humanitarian release of 222 opposition persons who had been imprisoned for a variety of crimes, mostly acts against the government and fraudulent abuse of non-profit status and money laundering, to the United States. The US authorities responded by sending a chartered jet to take them all to Washington, DC. Bishop Ronaldo Alvarez refused the invitation. As a result, he was sent back to serve his 26-year sentence, but he was sent to prison, not to the Bishops’ Palace where he had previously been under house arrest.

Bishop Rolando Alvarez is not a political prisoner, unless promoting a violent insurrection resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people were to be considered a purely political act.

The government of the United States is doing everything possible to convince the world that Bishop Alvarez is the victim of political persecution, instead of being a criminal who tried to violently overthrow the government elected by the people of Nicaragua.

Dear President Lula,

I hope that you can understand this reality and not play the game of the US government. I believe that those persons who tried to overthrow your government in January of this year are not political prisoners, but delinquents.

One more detail: I lived in Brazil during more than 10 years under the military dictatorship established in 1964 with the aid of the CIA. During those years, thousands of persons were kidnapped by the security forces and tortured and many were “disappeared.” The military made no effort to hide their use of torture. On the contrary, they wanted the people to know that criticizing the government could easily result in torture or even death. Everyone knew of a colleague, a cousin, an aunt or uncle, a journalist or politician who was tortured. And in this fashion the people were intimidated. As a result, no one said a word against the government, not even in a family gathering, and even less in a restaurant or bar.

I have been living in Nicaragua for a total of eight years now, and during all this time I haven't heard of a single person who has disappeared or who has been tortured. I live in a middle-class neighborhood, where many of my neighbors are not Sandinistas. Anyone who does not like the government freely expresses their opinion; no one is afraid to speak. My neighbor across from my house works for a TV channel that broadcasts scandalous criticism against the Sandinistas every day—and nothing happens to them.

The Nicaraguan government is not a dictatorship, it is a government of the people, for the people.

With my greatest respect,

Reverend Fred Morris

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