News

A monument to university students fallen in 2018 protests against Nicaraguan President Dani

A monument to university students fallen in 2018 protests against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government is seen at the Polytechnic University of Nicaragua in Managua. (CNS photo/Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters)



David Agren

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

February 4, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

MEXICO CITY — The Nicaragua national assembly ordered the revocation of the legal status of five universities — including a Catholic university — along with several Catholic educational and charitable projects, marking the latest act of repression targeting supposed opponents of President Daniel Ortega.

Projects that would be forced to close in the Diocese of Estelí include an association of parochial schools, an agricultural institute, a Catholic cultural association, the diocesan justice and peace commission and the diocesan Caritas chapter. The

Universidad Católica del Trópico Seco also lost its legal status.

The country's Interior Ministry alleged in a report that the targeted universities and nonprofits thwarted attempts at oversight, failed to properly disclose financial details and did not identify their directors, according to the Nicaraguan newspaper La Prensa. Members of the Ortega-controlled assembly accused the nonprofits of improperly profiting from their legal status.

Attempts to reach a diocesan spokesman in Estelí were unsuccessful. The Spanish news service EFE described the Diocese of Estelí as "one of the most critical of the Ortega government."

Msgr. Carlos Avilés, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Managua, told Catholic News Service that retired Estelí Bishop Juan Abelardo Mata "was very critical of the government and denounced many things."

"It's all false and a pretext to repress," Msgr. Avilés said. "They want to mess with the Diocese of Estelí."

He added that Caritas chapters have had difficulties presenting paperwork to the Nicaraguan Interior Ministry. In a diocese like Estelí, he said, Caritas often delivers grains and food, which is received via in-kind donations, but the Interior Ministry wants church officials to put a value on the donations.

Advertisement

Nicaragua's Catholic Church tried to promote dialogue as an exit to the political crisis in 2018 and allowed protesters to seek refuge in parishes. But the Ortega regime turned paramilitaries on protesters. It also is holding political prisoners, whose families have been harassed while holding prayer services in churches.

Ortega was reelected in November, but church leaders said the election was fraudulent.

"There is no institutionalism here," Msgr. Avilés said. "There is no law, and nothing is independent."

Nicaraguan journalist Wilfredo Miranda Aburto described one of the canceled schools, Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua, as a "cradle of the 2018 student

rebellion," which demanded Ortega's ouster. The Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana, where students also protested in 2018, previously suffered budget cuts.

Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez of Managua said in a tweet after the announcement of universities being canceled, "Neglecting quality education, impeding critical thinking and seizing universities are ways of concentrating irrational power, subjugating people and stealing their futures."