News

Jesuit Father Andreu Oliva, rector of the Central American University in San Salvador, El Salva

Jesuit Father Andreu Oliva, rector of the Central American University in San Salvador, El Salvador, speaks during a 2016 news conference. (CNS photo/Jose Cabezas, Reuters)



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February 7, 2022

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SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Members of El Salvador's ruling party face criticism and ridicule after questioning the rector of Jesuit-run Central American University, whose members have been critical of the president and the Nuevas Ideas party he founded.

"It was vile, disrespectful, irreverent, and, above all IGNORANT in uppercase letters," wrote Oscar Picardo Joao, a columnist and academic, in a Feb. 4 opinion piece in one of El Salvador's national newspapers, referencing the line of questioning.

In questioning Jesuit Father Andreu Oliva Feb. 3, members of the ruling Nuevas Ideas party insinuated that the school, known as the UCA, had financially benefitted from previous governments ruled by parties that oppose Nuevas Ideas and its founder, President Nayib Bukele.

Previous ruling parties were rife with corruption, but Nuevas Ideas has not escaped similar problems. Last year, the United States stripped some Salvadoran Cabinet members from privileges, including canceling their visas; the U.S. called them actors of corruption and anti-democratic.

Father Oliva explained that the university had received funds to educate and train teachers in El Salvador on various subject matters as requested by the department of education. Other universities in El Salvador also received funds, but only the Jesuit university was questioned by a commission that says it's seeking to root out questionable nonprofits.

Teachers, schools and students have benefited from the university's workshops and training, textbooks, teaching materials, training brochures, standardized test booklets, and other resources, Picardo Joao wrote in his opinion piece in El Diario de Hoy.

"The UCA, despite government corruption," has helped the country's educational system he wrote.

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Father Oliva defended the institution and its work to improve the country's school system.

"You are committing a serious mistake by confusing the public, saying that in 2017 the government donated $3 million to the UCA, when what the UCA did was implement educational projects commissioned by the (ministry of education)," Father Oliva said.

He told Nuevas Ideas members not to create confusion and not to sow disinformation.

"You have the obligation to tell the truth just as I do," he said.

On Twitter, some Nuevas Ideas members continued to paint the university as being in the pocket of previous governments. Father Oliva told one of them, "If you say we haven't been critical (of past political parties), that's because you haven't been reading" what members of the university write.

Alumni went online to defend the school.

On Twitter, Ricardo Valencia, an assistant professor at California State University, Fullerton, compared the attacks against the university to attacks that had taken place against Jesuits at the institution during the country's civil conflict in the 1980s.

He tweeted on Feb. 4 that the Jesuits were being "harassed by a thin-skin regime that portray them as political enemies."

"Catholics must denounce injustices and the culture of lies in El Salvador and (Central America), as Jesus did in his days," he said.