Vatican
Vatican News
An image of a black-haired man with a mustache wearing a ball cap and blue next to another

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and the dome of the Vatican's St. Peter's Basilica are pictured in a combination photo. Twelve detained Nicaraguan priests were sent to Rome late Oct. 18, 2023, after an agreement with the Vatican, the Nicaraguan regime said. (OSV News photo/Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters/CNS file, Paul Haring)

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The Vatican has confirmed that it has been asked and has agreed to receive 12 priests who had been detained in Nicaragua.

"The Holy See has agreed; they will be received by an official of the Secretariat of State in the afternoon (Oct. 19) and housed in facilities of the Diocese of Rome," Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said in a written statement Oct. 19.

The release of the priests and their expatriation to Rome came following "fruitful talks with the Holy See," ending in an agreement between the Vatican and the

government of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, according to a government communique dated Oct. 18 and published on social media Oct. 19.

The Nicaraguan government note said the decision, which "was reached with the intercession of high authorities of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua and in the Vatican, represents the enduring will and commitment to find solutions, in recognition and encouragement of so much faith and hope that always animates the Nicaraguan faithful, who make up the majority" of the population.

The list of 12 priests does not include Bishop Rolando Álvarez Lagos of Matagalpa, who has been in prison the past 16 months after being sentenced to more than 26 years on charges of treason.

Some of the priests sent to Rome have been accused of supporting the anti-government protests in April 2018, which left more than 300 people dead and thousands more exiled.

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Pope Francis said in February he was "pained" by the news coming out of Nicaragua and recalled "with concern" the situation of Álvarez, who was sentenced Feb. 10 and stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

The pope prayed for Mary's intercession to open the hearts of the "responsible politicians and all citizens" to the pursuit of peace, which he said is achieved through the "patient exercise of dialogue."

Álvarez played an important role in mediation efforts between the Nicaraguan government and protesters in 2018 following waves of civil unrest which killed more than 360 people. Ortega, who has been in power since 2007, has since accused the bishop and the church of attempting to overthrow him.

In his comments the pope also noted the 222 political prisoners deported from Nicaragua to the United States Feb. 9, a group which included five priests, a deacon, two seminarians and two media professionals employed by the Diocese of Matagalpa. Álvarez was on the list of deportees to be sent to the United States but refused to leave Nicaragua.

Those who did go to the United States were stripped of their Nicaraguan citizenship and were given a two-year humanitarian visa by the U.S. government. Spain has offered to give them citizenship.