News



Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, a frequent critic of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, prays at a Catholic church in Managua May 20, 2022. After spending over 500 days in jail, the Ortega regime released him and 18 other imprisoned clergymen Jan. 14, 2024, exiling them to Rome. (OSV News photo/Maynor Valenzuela, Reuters)

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Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa has been released from prison and sent into exile — along with 18 other churchmen who had been imprisoned — as Nicaragua's government expelled its most prominent critic. Bishop Álvarez's presence behind bars bore witness to the Sandinista regime descent into totalitarianism, along with its unrelenting persecution of the Catholic Church.

Vatican News confirmed Jan. 14 at 10:41 p.m. Rome time that with the exception of one priest who remained in Venezuela, all released priests, including Bishop Álvarez and Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna, have arrived in Rome "in the last few hours" and are "guests of the Holy See."

Nicaraguan independent media *100% Noticias* posted a photograph on X, formerly Twitter, of the two freed bishops concelebrating Mass in Rome.

Independent Nicaraguan media reported Jan. 14 that the churchmen had departed Nicaragua on a flight for Rome after the government reached an agreement with the Vatican for their release and exile. Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez of Managua — who left the country in 2019 — also confirmed the news at his weekly Mass in Miami, and was visibly moved.

"This is the power of the people of God's prayers," he said. "The criminal Sandinista dictatorship of (President) Daniel Ortega has not been able to defeat the power of God."

The Nicaraguan government acknowledged the churchmen's release in a Jan. 14 statement, which "deeply thanked" Pope Francis and Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, "for the very respectful and discreet coordination carried out to make possible the Vatican trip of two bishops, fifteen priests and two seminarians."

The statement continued, "They have been received by Vatican authorities, in compliance with agreements of good faith and good will, which seek to promote understanding and improve communication between the Holy See and Nicaragua, for peace and good."

The statement struck an unusually respectful tone — far from the government's frequent accusations of terrorism and coup mongering against church leaders, who attempted to unsuccessfully facilitate a national dialogue after mass protests

erupted demanding Ortega’s ouster.