News



People hold up a crucifix during the Good Friday procession in the courtyards of the Metropolitan Cathedral, in Managua, Nicaragua March 29, 2024. (OSV News/Maynor Valenzuela, Reuters)



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The ruling Sandinista regime expelled the president of the Nicaraguan bishops' conference, further decimating the country's Catholic leadership as clergy are forced into exile.

Bishop Carlos Enrique Herrera of Jinotega was forced to leave Nicaragua after accusing a local Sandinista mayor of sacrilege for disturbing a celebration of the Mass by blaring loud music outside the cathedral, according to Nicaraguan media.

The bishop was to board a Nov. 12 flight from the country's capital to Guatemala City, independent news outlet Confidencial reported. His whereabouts are unknown, though Confidencial reported he was received by the Order of Friars Minor, which he belongs to.

Herrera said during the Nov. 10 Mass: "We ask the Lord's forgiveness for our faults and also for those who do not respect worship and truth," as "this is a sacrilege that the mayor and the municipal authorities are committing. … Go tell them because they know the time of the Mass."

The Mass was broadcast on the diocesan Facebook page, but the page was subsequently inaccessible. Local governments throughout Nicaragua routinely surveil priests during Mass and stage noisy events nearby — such as boxing matches outside the Cathedral in León earlier this year.

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Herrera, who has been the president of Nicaraguan bishops' conference since 2021, becomes the third bishop expelled from Nicaragua in 2024. Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, who was serving a 26-year prison sentence, and Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna, who was detained in December 2023 after expressing support for Bishop

Álvarez, were sent to the Vatican in January after Nicaragua and the Vatican reached an agreement for the release of 19 churchmen.

The expulsion of clergy has left four dioceses without bishops. Just 22 priests remain in the Diocese of Matagalpa, which had 70 priests prior to the regime's attacks on the church and Álvarez, according to Martha Patricia Molina, a Nicaraguan lawyer in exile who tracks church persecution in the Central American country.

The regime of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, have targeted the Catholic Church as they concentrate power and stamp out any space for dissenting voices.

The bishop's expulsion took place while priests across Nicaragua report being barred from entering hospitals to perform the sacrament of anointing the sick, Molina told OSV News.

"The repression hasn't changed," Molina told OSV News. "They want to eradicate Catholicism from the country, make it atheist. They want to have total control over the Catholic Church."