News



Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa is pictured at the Vatican Oct. 5, 2024. Nicaragua called the Vatican a "depraved," "pedophile" state after Bishop Alvarez gave his first televised interview Feb. 7, 2025, since being exiled to Rome. (OSV News/Alessia Giuliani, CPP)



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Nicaragua's government issued a statement attacking the Vatican as "depraved" following interviews in which exiled Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa reaffirmed the pope's desire for him to continue leading a pair of Nicaraguan dioceses from afar.

The Feb. 8 statement from the foreign ministry of the regime accused the Vatican of using its "websites and platforms" to transmit statements "that constitute an insulting aggravation for the Sovereignty and Dignity of the Nicaraguan State."

It described Álvarez's recent comments as "irresponsible and disrespectful. They violate the supreme Laws and Norms which govern the Independent Life of our Blessed Nicaragua."

The condemnation followed Álvarez speaking to the media for just the second time since his January 2024 banishment from Nicaragua, which followed more than 500 days of detention. The bishop had not previously spoken specifically of his detention prior to a Feb. 6 interview with Paola Arriaza of EWTN News, but said "what sustained me was prayer."

"I always thought and believed in my freedom. ... When? When? I don’t know, I didn’t know, but I always hoped to be free and what sustained me was prayer," Álvarez said. "Now that I am out I have realized that it was not only my prayer but also the prayer of all the faithful and holy people of God, not only Nicaraguan, but spread throughout the world," he continued. "There is no human explanation for me to be with you at this moment."

Álvarez became the voice of the persecuted in Nicaragua, which descended into a path toward totalitarianism after Ortega cracked down on protesters demanding his

ouster in 2018. He also became the face of repression against the Catholic Church — an institution the regime has attempted to crush and control as it stamps out all spaces for dissent and infringes the freedom of worship and assembly.

The bishop refused to be exiled in February 2023 and was subsequently convicted on sham charges and sentenced to 26 years in prison. But he was finally exiled with 18 other churchmen in January 2024 after a wave of arrests targeting clergy.

"I felt a deep joy, but above all it was an experience of faith, because at that moment I recited and professed the Creed, which is why I suffered that experience: for my faith in one holy, Catholic and apostolic (Church)," he told EWTN.

Álvarez said he arrived in Rome "with the illusion of praying, praying and walking the streets being happy." He planned to submit his resignation as bishop of Matagalpa to Pope Francis.

"But I met with the goodness of God and the Holy Father who wanted me to continue to be the ordinary of Matagalpa and the apostolic administrator of Esteli, even though I was in the diaspora. I don't call it exile because I am not exiled, I am liberated," he told EWTN.

His comments on remaining the bishop of Matagalpa seemingly drew a sharp response from the regime of Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo — co-presidents of Nicaragua after recent constitutional changes, cementing the couple's grip on power.

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The Vatican closed its embassy in Nicaragua in March 2023 after the regime called for suspending relations. The apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag, was expelled from the Central American country in 2022.

"Having no supranational political authority, the Vatican State seeks to assign Positions and Powers that it purports to grant, in Nicaragua, to People who ceased to be Nicaraguans as a result of improper, intolerable behavior promoting politically instigated crimes," the foreign ministry said.

Álvarez and other Nicaraguans sent into exile were stripped of their citizenship.

Some observers have posited the co-presidents want to establish a regime-friendly church, where ecclesial appointments are made with their consent.

"From their vacuous pulpits and would-be thrones, these prophets and merchants of falsehood, know nothing of Christ," the oft-hyperbolic statement continued, according to the English translation provided by the regime. It added that the Vatican has no "authority to make appointments of any kind, in the Sovereign, Dignified Territory of our Nicaragua."

Francis has raised the plight of Álvarez. He expressed his closeness with Nicaraguans in December in a letter sent as they celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The bishop said he developed a friendship with Francis while visiting the Vatican during the violence in 2018. He told EWTN an anecdote about praying the rosary for 30 minutes while waiting for his meeting with the pope.

Francis "opened his arms to me and said: 'Forgive me because I made you go through purgatory waiting so long.' And I, with my rosary in my hand, said: 'Don’t worry, Holy Father, because I took the opportunity to pray the rosary.' It seems to me that there was a moment of sympathy, because from that moment on I remember that the pope always sent me greetings whenever a bishop from Nicaragua came to visit me."

Álvarez responded to a question on how the Nicaraguan church is experiencing the situation there by referring to an April 2023 pastoral letter from Francis, which he carries in his pocket.

The letter exhorts Nicaraguans "to believe and trust in divine providence, even in those moments in which we cannot understand what is happening," he said. "In other words, even in those moments when hope becomes darkness, we have to firmly believe that God is acting in the history of human beings and in the history of peoples, and I am convinced of that, and that is why I am a man of hope and I believe that my people, my town, are a people of hope."