

Ortega Continues to Persecute Independent Media in Nicaragua

By Confidencial

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Miguel Mora: “They don’t want us to work”



Ex-political prisoner, journalist Miguel Mora, owner of the occupied 100% Noticias station, with Maria Elvira Dominguez, president of the Inter-American Press Society (SIP). Photo: Jorge Torres / EFE

“They’re trying to kill us in a civic manner...and they are using state institutions to stop 100% Noticias from going back on the air,” he told Confidencial

HAVANA TIMES – On June 9th journalist Miguel Mora, owner of 100% Noticias, warned that the Nicaraguan government is trying to kill his media through a “civil death,” by preventing the television channel—his only source of income—from returning to the airwaves after the government confiscated it last December.

“They want to kill us in a civil manner, they don’t want us to work and they are using state institutions to stop 100% Noticias from going back on the air,” Mora told reporters.

Mora was illegally imprisoned last December and freed in June. Ortega’s justice system accused him of “inciting hate and violence,” because his channel did not stick

to covering the government's agenda while government security forces attacked civilians.

"They are looking for new excuses and using journalists who support them, inventing lawsuits, and threatening international service providers so that they don't advise us on how to recover our media or start a new channel," Mora explained.

Two months before his arrest, Mora received the Inter American Press Association's Grand Prize for Press Freedom, as a representative of independent journalism in Nicaragua. After he was freed in June, Mora said the government threatens to arrest him, again, to stop the channel from returning to the Internet.

Since the National Police captured Mora and Lucia Pineda, top news editor for 100% Noticias, they have occupied the channel's building which is now covered with graffiti and flying the governing party flag of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

"Our journalists in exile are afraid to return, they fear for their lives and would be returning to unemployment," the businessman emphasized, while promising that his channel would return to the airwaves.



Lucía Pineda and Miguel Mora, 100% Noticias, June 11, 2019, just after they were freed following nearly six months in prison. Photo: Carlos Herrera

The disappearance of 100% Noticias and the exile of 68 journalists is part of Daniel Ortega's government policy to restrict journalism in Nicaragua, in the middle of a sociopolitical crisis during which hundreds of died, been imprisoned or disappeared, with tens of thousands going into exile.

The Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation documented at least 1,080 government violations of press freedom between April of 2018 and March of 2019, including the assassination of journalist Ángel Gahona.

Police still occupy the offices of Confidencial and Esta Semana. And although Customs returned part of El Nuevo Diario's raw printing materials that the agency had been withholding, materials belonging to the newspaper La Prensa are still being impounded.

Some Raw Printing Materials Given to El Nuevo Diario

According to the independent daily El Nuevo Diario, the government finally handed over part of the raw materials belonging to this newspaper that had been impounded by Customs for ten months, in the middle of the country's sociopolitical crisis.

Nicaraguan Customs turned over "9.6 tons of paper held since last year, the equivalent of 20% of the raw material impounded without any explanation to this newspaper," the media stated.

Since last September, the government of Daniel Ortega impounded 100% of the imported raw materials belonging to the main independent print media in Nicaragua.

According to representatives of El Nuevo Diario and La Prensa, Customs has still not given any explanation for why it impounded imported materials.

Back in March, the government promised to release raw materials to independent media as part of one of the agreements signed with the opposition in the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy, within the framework of negotiations to resolve the crisis.

According to El Nuevo Diario, Customs continued to withhold all materials despite the official promise made in March and two resolutions in the newspaper's favor on the part of the Customs and Taxation Tribunal, the last of these resolutions in June.

Along with a portion of the printing paper, Customs released "15 barrels of ink, 6000 printing irons and a shipment of chemicals needed for the newspaper's printing process, all of which make up 100 per cent of those materials that had been impounded," the newspaper added (this media is owned by the Nuevo Amanecer publishing company).

Since last December, El Nuevo Diario had to stop publishing on weekends because of the impounding of raw materials. The paper also had cut its number of pages down to eight.

The release of materials will not alleviate El Nuevo Diario's situation since the printing paper is not the right size needed for printing," media representatives explained.

This paper "is used on half-reels, strips normally used to print tabloids such as the Metro newspaper (owned by the same publishing company). No whole reels were delivered, the ones that are used to print standard-sized newspapers such as El Nuevo Diario," they added.

The government is also still withholding 92 tons of paper, ink, printing irons, rubber, developing materials and parts for La Prensa's rotary printing press, another independent media.

The policy to impound paper belonging to media that do not adhere to the government's agenda forced the grassroots newspaper Q'Hubo off the streets, while El Nuevo Diario, La Prensa, Metro and Hoy had to reduce their number of pages.

The government policy towards communications media in Nicaragua has also led to the demise of several television programs, a TV channel that continues to be occupied by the National Police, and at least two radio stations that have been repeatedly sabotaged.