

COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION

FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN EXILE



Collective construction of protection routes to face transnational repression

a project by:



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WHAT IS HAPPENING?

In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo regime has carried out systematic and unlimited repression with complete impunity. This repression has stifled civic space to an unprecedented degree in 2025. Arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, and harassment of critical voices continue. Meanwhile, the regime is consolidating a transnational persecution strategy based on surveillance, threats, and the assassination of opposition figures in exile, as well as the selective punishment of their relatives.

EVOLUTION OF REPRESSION

The Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) has identified four phases of repression:

- 2018–2020**
Violent repression of demonstrations.
- 2021**
Selective repression to ensure presidential reelection.
- 2022**
Elimination of opposition figures attacks on the Catholic Church and dismantling of civic space.
- Currently**
Absolute control of the executive branch. A constitutional amendment (February 2025) that eroded fundamental rights and established a surveillance network that targets people in exile.

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION FRAMEWORK

Collective protection is urgent and requires coordination among national and international organizations, institutional commitment, and sustained resources.

These violations are systematic, calling for a coordinated international response that ensures safety and rights and prevents the global spread of repression.

IMPACT IN EXILE

In Costa Rica, the consolidation of Nicaraguan human rights defenders' movements, organizations, collectives, and networks has been accompanied by an increase in threats against those who devote themselves to defending freedom and life. The country that offered them refuge when they fled repression is no longer considered safe.

Although their lives have long been subject to systematic dismantling, the 2025 murder of opposition activist Roberto Samcam marked a turning point, illustrating the heightened risk to which human rights defenders in exile are exposed.

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

Host countries and states are responsible for safeguarding the lives, physical integrity, and freedoms of all people within their territories, without exception. They must prevent, investigate, and punish acts of repression, including those committed by external actors.









However, Costa Rica has a legal and regulatory gap regarding the protection of Nicaraguan human rights defenders in exile who are threatened by transnational repression.



WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION ROUTE?

It is an internal and ongoing process that enables organizations to enhance their protective capabilities, allowing them to continue their work defending human rights. It encompasses multiple spheres: physical, psychosocial, digital, legal, organizational, communal, and political.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

-  Comprehensive approach
-  Analysis of the ever-changing context
-  Intersectionality
-  Collective cooperation
-  Action without harm
-  Responsible approach to trauma
-  Privacy and confidentiality
-  Knowing how and when to ask for help and activate networks



*Risk is never zero.
Protection is a continuous process.*

PARTICIPATIVE MAPPING

CONCERNS

- Inability to return to Nicaragua
- Relatives being hurt
- Living in constant helplessness
- "We never feel safe"

RESISTANCE ACTIONS

- Solidarity networks
- Community organising
- Security practices and protocols
- Shared responsibility regarding risk
- Building the comprehensive protection route
- Continuing with human rights defense work

INCIDENTS

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Surveillance | Assassinations |
| Stalking | Defamation in social media |
| Hacking | Videos or photos taken |
| Threats | |

INCIDENTS

- Harassment and persecution of relatives
- Police interrogations
- Denial of documents (statelessness)
- Confiscation of properties
- Detentions
- Attacks from settlers

IMPACT

- Chronic anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Isolation
- Fatigue
- Exile
- Self-censorship

This map is based on the document "Sistematización sobre Protección integral de personas defensoras en el exilio", PBI-Nicaragua, 2026.