

Statement by Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda, introducing the Resolution on the Situation in Nicaragua at the Special Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OAS on Friday, 12 August 2022

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I begin by first thanking the speakers from the UN Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua and the President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for their informative, but deeply troubling presentations, on the current situation in Nicaragua.

Their reports give cause for great alarm and emphasise the necessity and importance for this Permanent Council to raise its collective voice, concerning the worsening situation in a member state of our Hemispheric family of nations.

I also thank the 9 other delegations that have cosponsored this Resolution with Antigua and Barbuda: They are: Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Peru, the United States of America and Uruguay.

Distinguished Colleagues, how have we got to the stage of yet another Resolution on Nicaragua?

We have not got here by our choosing.

We have got here because, regrettably, the actions of the Government of Nicaragua against its own people have become increasingly more oppressive and repressive.

None of us can sit by in silence while arbitrary detentions persist, resulting in an increasing number of detainees, including women and elderly persons, are being held in appalling conditions

Civil Society organisations, including Church Bodies and Universities, are being stripped of their legal status on spurious and unsubstantiated accusations, simply because the Nicaragua Government is determined to forcibly stifle any semblance of dissent.

Journalism has become a crime in all but name.

The media is suffering relentless harassment, pushing foreign media out of the country and intimidating what is left of a local independent press.

Not even the Church has been spared in this growing and worrying atmosphere of heightened repression.

Many of our delegations have seen the horrifying pictures of Bishop Rolando Alvarez on his knees, begging for mercy while a group of armed police officers surround him, after he was banned from celebrating mass.

These are not events about which responsible Governments can turn a blind eye and remain silent.

Under our Charters, we observe a constraint not to interfere in the internal affairs of a State, but we also have an obligation and a responsibility to speak out for any of our peoples who are subject to cruel and inhumane treatment, which amounts to torture.

I remind that Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states, with absolute clarity, that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

And, this right is non-derogable.

This means it is a person’s core human right, which must be respected and cannot be taken away or suspended for any reason.

The Charter is binding on us all, including Nicaragua.

Colleagues, these are the circumstances that have brought us to consider this Resolution today.

They are not of our making.

They are entirely due to the repressive and oppressive actions of the Nicaraguan government.

These are the actions of the Nicaraguan government that are causing its own people to flee to neighbouring states, placing enormous burdens on them at a time of grave economic difficulty and uncertainty in the world.

I remind that, for several years now, this Permanent Council has tried strenuously to engage the Government of Nicaragua, repeatedly offering the hand of friendship to help restore democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in accordance with our governing Charters.

We last did so 8 months ago, on December 8th, 2021 by a Resolution in which we authorised the Secretary-General to seek a meeting with the Nicaraguan Government to convey our offer of a high-level good offices mission.

On January 19, this year, the Secretary General reported to this Council that, despite all efforts, the Nicaraguan government would not engage.

Nonetheless, we did not close the door.

The Secretary-General continued, through formal and informal channels, to renew the offer of this Council, only to receive a stony silence in response.

And, while we all recognize that the Government of Nicaragua has decided to withdraw from the OAS, effective November 18, 2023, it is, at this time, still a member of this Organization, subject to the duties and responsibilities of our Charter, including the Nicaraguan peoples’ right to democracy and the obligation of the Nicaraguan Government to promote and defend it.

The Government of Nicaragua may have withdrawn from this family of nations; but the people of Nicaragua have not.

And, none of the peoples of our member states would countenance our governments silence while they suffer.

That is the context of this Resolution, Colleagues – a resolution which, even at this moment of heightened oppression and repression in Nicaragua, still renews its offer to engage the Nicaraguan Government in restoring democratic institutions and respect for human rights in accordance with international law.

We have not shut any doors or burnt any bridges.

The pathway to dialogue remains open.

But, we cannot sit by idly in the face of such evident persecution, harassment and hounding, and deprivation of rights.

In this regard, I call on this Permanent Council to show its unequivocal support for this Resolution by voting in its favour.

I now request a vote on this Resolution, and I ask – Madam Chair – that even though the rules do not require it, that you give the floor to one of the cosponsors of this Resolution, the Ambassador of Chile, to second my request.

Thank you.