

June 11, 2021
MEDIA RELEASE

**URGENT APPEAL FILED TO UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE ON
BEHALF OF FÉLIX MARADIAGA, NICARAGUAN OPPOSITION LEADER AND
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

In a secret hearing yesterday and without access to counsel, Judge Henry Morales ordered him held in judicial detention for 90 days.

WASHINGTON, D.C. and GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – Today, international and domestic counsel for Nicaraguan opposition leader and presidential candidate Félix Maradiaga filed an urgent appeal to Dr. Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Félix Maradiaga is a Nicaraguan citizen who was beaten, arrested, and disappeared after he was informed that he was under investigation for a series of transparently baseless charges.

In their appeal, international lawyers Jared Genser and Brian Tronic of Perseus Strategies and Nicaraguan counsel Roger Reyes, Arnulfo López, and Alberto Arguello requested Dr. Melzer act urgently to assist Mr. Maradiaga, who was severely beaten while being taken into custody and is being detained in an undisclosed location. They explained that he has had no contact with his family or authorized legal counsel since he was disappeared. The appeal also provides a complete narrative of the timeline of what has happened to Mr. Maradiaga, including past instances of serious physical abuse at the hands of Nicaraguan security forces.

The Government of Nicaragua reported that on June 10, in a secret hearing, Judge Henry Morales of the Sixth Criminal District of Managua ordered Mr. Maradiaga be held in judicial detention for 90 days in relation to an investigation into allegations that he “attacked Nicaraguan society and the rights of the people” in violation of Law No. 1055. Mr. Maradiaga’s legal counsel only learned this hearing had taken place after it was over and was never given the opportunity to advise him on his rights or defend him in court.

Dr. Melzer was asked to open up an immediate investigation into Mr. Maradiaga’s treatment and to reach out to the Government of Nicaragua immediately to demand proof of life and ensure his mental and physical integrity is respected, especially in light of his serious health issues, at least one of which (hypertension) require him to take ongoing medication, in addition to the continuing threat of COVID-19, for which he has not been vaccinated.

They also emphasized that the combination of his ongoing and illegal *incommunicado* detention with President Daniel Ortega’s repeated attempts to eliminate his political opponents by using criminal investigations as a strategy to bar them from running for office is not merely a flagrant denial of his right to the presumption of innocence, but could also provide license to the police or prison authorities to execute jailhouse justice rather than treat him in accordance with the rule of law.

Jared Genser, counsel to Mr. Maradiaga further observed:

“We are gravely concerned for Félix’s health and welfare. President Ortega has openly targeted him and he has been physically assaulted repeatedly and received countless death threats. He continues to be disappeared and *incommunicado*. To make matters worse, we just learned that Félix was ordered to be held for 90 days in judicial detention in a secret hearing without access to counsel, in flagrant violation of international law. Ortega’s ongoing and transparent attempts to decapitate the political opposition give license to police and prison authorities to torture or murder Félix, outside any legal process. I urge the world to demand that he be immediately and unconditionally released. In the meantime, I urge the international community to impose targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on Judge Henry Morales because he has willfully betrayed his oath by choosing to be Ortega’s puppet rather than adhere to the most basic legal duties to respect human rights and the rule of law.”

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