

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

(To read)

### TESTIMONIAL

I am Nicaraguan. I arrived in the United States on February 9, 2023. We were 222 expelled from the country, most of them political prisoners, members of human rights organizations and a group of lay people and priests who had been imprisoned for defending human rights and exercising their prophetic mission of announcing the Gospel and denouncing injustices. These injustices increased in April 2018 when armed paramilitary groups and police violently repressed young people who were protesting in the streets of some departments of the country, against the Social Security reforms carried out by the government.

Bishop Rolando Alvarez and some of his clergy came to the defense of the demonstrators, and some of the churches served as shelters and clinics for young people fleeing repression and wounded by police and ruling party members.

I was kidnapped by the National Police of Nicaragua; I say kidnapped, because that day, at 3:00 a.m., a group of riot police violently entered the building of the Episcopal Curia and without presenting any arrest warrant, they took us out of the rooms and placed us in the conference room of the Curia. There were 5 priests, among them the Bishop of the Diocese of Matagalpa, Monsignor Rolando Alvarez Lagos, a deacon, two seminarians and a layman, a total of 9 people who had been locked up for 15 days, because on August 4 the National Police locked them in that building.

I was transferred to the cells of Auxilio Judicial de Managua, a jail better known as the "Nuevo Chipote". Our rights were violated because they did not tell us anything about the reason for our arrest, they stripped us naked, forced us to wear prison uniforms and transferred me to one of the cells. That same day the interrogations began, there were more than 30 interrogations, which could take place at any time of the day, even in the early hours of the morning. They blackmailed me and threatened the lives of my relatives, because they wanted me to declare that the Bishop was a member of an organization that wanted to promote a coup d'état against Daniel Ortega and that he received money from the US government and the European Union. Other interrogations had to do with homilies that the bishop had said in some Eucharists, and in which, according to them, he was inciting people to rise up to protest against the government, the homilies are all on social networks and in them he simply exercises his freedom of expression and advocates for the defense of the human rights of Nicaraguans. It is clear that this is manipulated by the same government that does not like to hear the truth and the voice of the Catholic Church, so from that date began an open persecution of Catholic institutions, such as Caritas and John Paul II University and more recently the Central American University UCA, thus affecting university autonomy and academic freedom.

While the interrogations were taking place, the trial against the group that was in the Episcopal Curia was also taking place. The trial from the beginning was full of

irregularities, illegalities and vices, the Prosecutor's Office, the police and the judges colluded so that in the end the accusation was practically the same for the majority of the 222, including the priests and the bishop. In the same way, once the sentence was pronounced, we were accused of "treason" and all our civil rights were taken away to the point of not even presenting us at the Civil Registry office.

As I pointed out earlier, we were taken out of jail on the night of Wednesday, February 8, around 10:30 p.m., and taken on three buses to an unknown destination, until we were on the tarmac of the Air Force airport and it was explained to us that we were leaving for exile in the United States. When we were in Washington the next day, we realized that the bishop was not on that plane. He is being held in the prison known as La Modelo, in Tipitapa, Managua, Nicaragua.

I hope that this testimony can be used to negotiate the release of my bishop Rolando José Álvarez Lagos.