Statement of Loyola University New Orleans on the Emerging Political Crisis in Nicaragua

A serious political crisis is emerging in Nicaragua, as protests have unfolded over the past six weeks in Managua and other major cities in response to the administration of President Daniel Ortega. Peaceful demonstrations by Nicaraguans seeking democracy, liberty, justice, and other basic human rights have resulted in the use of force by police and pro-government forces. According to the Nicaragua Human Rights Center, more than 100 civilians have been killed since April 1. Many have been gunned down in city streets as they sought an end to senseless violence.

As a Jesuit, Catholic university, Loyola University New Orleans joins the international call for a swift and peaceful negotiated end to this tragic situation. Our Catholic beliefs center around respect for all forms of life and the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. As educators, we believe that a peaceful end to this conflict will come through thoughtful dialogue and negotiation—not force, insult, or intimidation.

The Rev. José Alberto “Chepe” Idiáquez, S.J., rector of our Jesuit sister institution, the Universidad Centroamericana de Nicaragua, has attempted to bring peace throughout this conflict. As the leader of a major Jesuit, Catholic university in the nation’s capital of Managua, Fr. Idiáquez has participated in dialogues central to resolution. Throughout this conflict, he has voiced his support of civilians peacefully and legitimately demanding constitutional rights; he has called continuously on the Nicaraguan government to show a legitimate commitment to peace in the name of justice and democracy. Throughout this conflict, too, Fr. Idiáquez has stood in solidarity with students.

Tragically, on May 30, police and pro-government forces opened fire on protestors as they neared the end of their march near UCA. Eleven people died and 79 were injured during this attack, and the university opened its gates, providing refuge to thousands. We since have learned through our Jesuit network that the life of Fr. Idiáquez has been threatened and he may be in grave danger.

The UCA of Nicaragua, like all Jesuit institutions, has the mission to both provide students with professional formation and to encourage their commitment to a just, humane, and environmentally sustainable world. The UCA also has an obligation to protect its students; to speak for justice; and, where possible, to shelter citizens who are under attack.

Loyola University New Orleans unequivocally stands in solidarity with Fr. Idiaquez, colleagues, and students at the Universidad Centroamericana and calls for their continued safety. We call on the Nicaraguan government to honor the constitutional rights of residents, starting with freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate peacefully. We unequivocally condemn the violent suppression of non-violent demonstrators and any threats to the lives of leaders pushing for peaceful negotiation.

We call on President Ortega to take an important first step and bring all parties to the negotiating table to work out solutions for the good of all the people of Nicaragua. Our prayers go out to residents of this beautiful country, and we ask our community and Catholic brothers and sisters to continue praying for—and supporting—a path to peace.