

Nicaragua Inquiry 2024

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UK Parliamentarians launch inquiry into the suppression of religious freedom, media freedom and opposition voices in Nicaragua. Bianca Jagger provides opening testimony.

On 8th February 2024, in the UK Parliament, an inquiry was launched under the auspices of three All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), to consider the situation in Nicaragua and the ever-growing suppression of the rights of religious leaders and institutions, the media and the opposition, and to identify practical and meaningful steps that can be taken by the UK Government, and other States, to address this, as a matter of international concern.

The parliamentary groups involved are the APPGs on Central America, International Freedom of Religion and Belief, and International Law, Justice, and Accountability. The APPGs are made up of cross-party parliamentarians, including from the government and opposition parties, from both houses, with expertise and interest in these areas.

The Nicaragua Inquiry includes leading human rights parliamentarians including Lord Alton of Liverpool, Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws KC, Baroness Hooper, Mark Menzies MP, Brendan O'Hara MP, Philip Mounstephen - Bishop of Winchester (author of the Truro Independent Review into the Persecution of Christians), and Fiona Bruce MP - the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Inquiry is convened by Lord Alton.

Commenting on the Inquiry, Lord Alton said 'it is a privilege to convene such an impressive panel of expert parliamentarians to look into the credible reports of human rights violations in Nicaragua, particularly human rights violations that may meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity.'

Prominent human rights advocate, Bianca Jagger, was among the first witnesses to provide evidence to the Inquiry, describing Nicaragua as 'probably one of the worst dictatorships in the world today' and explaining that the persecution of bishops, priests, nuns, and seminarians, is because 'the Catholic Church is the last bastion of opposition left in Nicaragua.' She highlighted the irony that the president of Nicaragua, who was originally seen as a great liberator against a historic dictatorship has taken the country 'from a police state to a terrorist state.'

Former congressman and prolific Commissioner with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USIRF), Frank Wolf, addressed the Inquiry describing the 'purging' of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, and highlighted USCIRF's designation of Nicaragua as 'a country of particular concern' because of the dire legacy on the right to freedom of religion or belief in the country.

Other witnesses provided testimony with the assurance of anonymity due to the possible ramifications to their families and communities. Indeed, the fear of repercussions for speaking out has been consistently and only highlighted by the inquiry procedures.

Further evidence sessions will be conducted this month, as well as analyses of written submissions of evidence.

The Secretariat to the Inquiry is provided by the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute.

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Photos:

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