

The Nicaraguan Uprising: Context

On April 18, 2018, demonstrations began across Nicaragua in reaction to a controversial tax increase, meant to rescue the insolvent National Social Security fund. This came in the immediate aftermath of citizens and civil activists protesting the government's complacency, and their lack of action in response to a fire that engulfed the Indio Maíz Biological Reserve, an environmental disaster. This wave of dissent, largely enthused by university students, fed into already existing discontent with the growing authoritarianism and nepotism of President Daniel Ortega, historic leader of the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front). This is the largest political, social and economic crisis Nicaragua has experienced since the Sandinista Revolution of 1978-79, and the US-backed Contra War during the 1980s.

The 2018 protests were brutally repressed by the national police, riot-police, and government supporters. Documentation of such acts was shared widely on social media under #SOSINSS and #SOSNicaragua. Repression tactics included beatings, tear-gassing, the use of rubber bullets, live ammunition, and sniper fire. This led to a rapidly growing ad-hoc movement of auto-convocados (self-assembled). As the repression increased, citizens' responses varied: from the occupation of public universities, marches, sit-ins, vigils, cacerolazos, strikes, general strikes, consumption boycotts, civil disobedience acts, street painting and graffiti, to the setting up of barricades which protected neighbourhoods and blocked traffic.

Since April of last year, over 300 citizens were killed, thousands injured, over 700 arbitrarily imprisoned, and accused under new anti-terrorism legislation (Art. 44 of Law 977 passed on the 16th of July, 2018). According to the UNHCR, more than 25,000 Nicaraguans have left the country, seeking refuge or asylum. All independent media have been censored, while human rights organizations were stripped of their legal status. The aforementioned acts of violence have been thoroughly documented by various national and international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in a series of reports.

Glances of Resistance: The Nicaraguan Uprising Through Artistic Narratives

Glances of Resistance is a collective exhibition of protest art made as an immediate response to the ongoing political crisis in Nicaragua, which began on the 18th of April 2018.

The pieces on view show a cross-section of the indignation and resilience in the country, as seen and experienced by young Nicaraguan artists and photographers. The work was selected from over 100 projects submitted as part of an open call by the auto-convocados (self-assembled) solidarity group SOSNicaragua-Germany. It was first shown in Berlin on the 19th of July, the anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, and has been traveling since to other cities in Germany, France, and Norway.

Since the start of this socio-political crisis, Nicaraguans have been rethinking forms of civic participation and questioning traditional mechanisms of power. These new directions are also reflected in art, shaping a movement full of contradictions, one that engages with previously under-represented feminist, queer and afro-descending issues.

The exhibition provides an opportunity to reflect on the recent history of the country, to come together in grief, yet also to imagine what a new Nicaragua might look like.

This exhibition is organised by SOSNicaragua-Deutschland, with the support of the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), School of Advanced Study, University of London, SOSNicaragua-UK, Morada Feminista Nicaragua-UK, and the European Research Council (ERC) as a part of the project "Citizens of Photography: The Camera and the Political Imagination" at UCL Anthropology.