Dear friends,

In spite of the alarming news coming from Nicaragua, we've also been getting some good news from our Nicaraguan partners.

Axayacatl just sent new photos of their women’s center as it nears completion. Last week, we sent down $5000 to cover scholarships for three youth from remote communities in the north to attend college. This week Brooks Smith and Skip Winter will pick up an entire hospital x-ray unit for the Jubilee Center outside of Managua. And we just packed and sent off our 73rd humanitarian aid shipment to Nicaragua—a PeaceWorks community-wide effort in which we sent down 898 boxes of school supplies, bikes, sports equipment and so many other things. Thank you!!

All good news. But of course Nicaraguans have been facing a new and complicated set of challenges since April 16th. That’s when proposed changes to the national social security system ignited protests across the country.

Overnight, Nicaragua fell back into a violence it had not seen in nearly 30 years. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission says the government is largely responsible for 76 deaths and over 800 wounded. Protesters in cities across the country have ripped up city streets made of interwoven cement blocks to make barricades, stopping not only traffic, but the economy. Peace negotiations were started but opposition groups said they were there to negotiate the terms of President Daniel Ortega’s resignation. The government responded by walking out. The last we heard, there were negotiations to get the negotiations going again.

Saturday June 9th Dinner Forum, 6:30pm at the Chatham Friends Meeting
But most frightening are the emails from our partners and friends. Reliant on international support, some fear that they will be forced to shut their doors. Others, like Inhijambia and Axayacatl, are cut off from the constituents they work with because of barricades and other factors. Even partners in remote areas like Las Penitas are suffering because they can’t transport the fish they catch to their usual urban markets. All are terrified not knowing when and where protesters and government forces will clash.

What can we do? What we’ve always done: stick together, listen to our partners and learn what we can. More concretely:

1) read the attached “NicaReader” to get more familiar with what has happened.

2) attend our June 9th dinner forum on the recent violence with Nicaragua expert Aynn Setright.

3) Donate to help our partners get through this unusually rough time.

Thank you for staying the course together, in good times and in bad.

En paz,
Denis, Diane, John, Micha, Maggie, Susan, Marilyn and Guy
The PeaceWorks Board

I’d like to contribute to the general PeaceWorks Fund to support our Nica partners through tough times:

$__________

Please add me to the PeaceWorks email list for meeting reminders and events announcements.

Name: _________________________________________ Email: _____________________________________

See you on Saturday July 14\textsuperscript{th} at 3pm for our 26\textsuperscript{th} Annual Solidarity Roast!
The following are a collection of articles, blog posts and eye-witness accounts describing the recent violence in Nicaragua.

In no way is this reader comprehensive, nor does every perspective necessarily reflect the opinions of the PeaceWorks Board and its members. However, we feel it is critical to provide you with a range of information and opinions to help foster discussion about the best way to support our partners in Nicaragua through these difficult times. This information will also serve as background for the dinner forum with Aynn Setright on June 9th. Download a copy at PeaceWorks.org with links to full articles.

April 16, 2018

**Government accuses COSEP of blackmail and breaks consensus model in INSS reform**

La Prensa (Managua)

After years of locally and internationally extolling the success of dialogue and that has defined the relationship between the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) and the Government, government officials have walked away from the relationship. The government accused the business organization of leaving behind its responsibilities in the governing body of the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) for several months in an attempt to use social security reform to blackmail for a broader fiscal reform.

April 16, 2018

**INSS orders increase of workers contribution and reactivation of 5% deduction to pensioners**

La Prensa (Managua)

The Government of Nicaragua through the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security ordered an increase in the contribution rate of workers and employers, reactivate a 5% deduction in pensions, change the formula for calculating new pensions and eliminate the maximum salary of contributors, as measures to save from bankruptcy that entity, which in 2017 closed in its fifth year in crisis.

April 18, 2018

**So, let's tell you about Ortega's aggressions against citizen resistance in Managua**

A group of self-organized citizens meet in Camino de Oriente to protest against reforms to the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security, which, among other measures, increases the contribution of workers and employers, reduces future pensions and creates an illegal tribute to pensions of the five percent. Ortega-supported mobs and the Sandinista Youth showed up to attack the people who came to demonstrate.

April 20, 2018

**Daniel Ortega agrees to dialogue with the private sector over INSS protests, which leave almost 10 dead**

El Nuevo Diario (Managua)

The president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, accepted a dialogue with the private sector to address various issues, including the reform of the INSS, which sparked a series of protests that have left almost a dozen dead in just three days. The vice president of Nicaragua, Rosario Murillo, said today that reforms to the INSS are not a closed issue, and said that the president, Daniel Ortega, agrees to set up a negotiating table. "We are going to retake that dialogue table, of consultation, which should be fraternal," said Murillo.
Nicaragua’s social security system, INSS, is facing a budget shortfall — that much is true. The shortfall is actually running at about $75 million a year, or about 0.5 percentage points of GDP. A potential problem? Yes, but far from the calamitous situation that it has been described as.

To address the situation, the Nicaraguan government, together with COSEP, have been at the negotiation table for years.

But earlier this month, COSEP backed away from the table, refusing to discuss the issue unless it was linked to a broader fiscal reform plan. The government responded by publishing its proposed INSS reforms, without an agreement, on April 16. That a unilateral action, in a highly charged atmosphere, would elicit a backlash is hardly surprising. But the specifics of the reforms being negotiated might be.

The IMF has recommended slashing benefits by as much as 20 percent, gradually raising the retirement age from 60 to 63 (or even 65), and indexing benefits at a lower level, among other tweaks. COSEP, the group that organized “one of the biggest protest marches,” has largely supported these cuts. Presumably, ordinary Nicaraguan workers would greet such reforms with much less enthusiasm.

And here’s what the government proposed: raising employer and employee contributions to the INSS system over the next few years by 3.5 percentage points and 0.75 percentage points, respectively, and a 5 percent cut to pensions. Yes, benefits would be cut, but by far lower amounts than what the IMF and COSEP have been proposing.

Nicaragua’s president has withdrawn changes to the social security system that triggered deadly protests and looting. President Daniel Ortega said in a message to the nation that the social security board of directors had cancelled the changes implemented on 16 April. The overhaul was intended to shore up Nicaragua’s troubled social security system by both reducing benefits and increasing taxes.

The changes touched off protests across the Central American nation that escalated into clashes with police as well as looting. The demonstrations appeared to expand to include broader anti-government grievances. Human rights groups said at least 26 people were killed in several days of clashes. Dozens of shops in the Nicaraguan capital of Managua were looted during unrest that extended into Sunday.

Unlike his appearance on Saturday with the police chief, Ortega announced the cancellation of the overhaul accompanied by business executives who account for about 130,000 jobs and millions of dollars in exports.

Sunday morning several supermarkets in Managua were looted. People went out to establishments against delinquents, who were neither students nor demonstrators.
May 4, 2018

**As Nicaragua Death Toll Grows, Support for Ortega Slips**

New York Times

The uprising began on April 19, led by university students in Managua protesting against an unpopular social security decree that would have forced workers to pay more and retirees to receive less. The students were already worked up over a fire at a nature reserve that the government had failed to control.

The response to the crackdown was intense, and the protests quickly broadened to encompass a much wider set of grievances with the Ortega couple’s rule and the steadily increasing concentration of power in their hands. Even government concessions, including the rescinding of the social security reform, did not quell the unrest.

Protesters turned out around the country, blasting the president’s control of the Supreme Court, the National Assembly and the elections council. The violence escalated when the student protests were met not just by the riot police, but also by swarms of young men in white and pink T-shirts declaring their membership in the Sandinista Youth — a pro-government organization that has been harassing demonstrators and sometimes throwing stones at them. Videos showed the police handing the young men rocks.

May 15, 2018

**Eye-Witness Account: Email from a local PeaceWorks partner**

"The situation intensified since this weekend; They blocked the roads because the transport sector joined by demanding a decrease in the price of fuel, which is why we have our staff watching our office in 48-hour shifts due to the difficulty of finding transportation to the workplace. This situation has led to people taking advantage of the situation, carrying out acts of vandalism, but we hope that everything will be resolved soon because there is already date for the dialogue to be tomorrow, Wednesday, the 16th at 10 in the morning; the whole population has their hope in this one so that normalcy returns to the country.

The truth is that the situation goes beyond what you imagine, because the right manipulates the situation to take political advantage, and as I said, criminals are plundering and committing acts of violence.

At the national level, the marches are not peaceful, they burn the "trees of life," the town halls, the Sandinista offices ... they are destroying the country that has cost so much to build, it is people against people!

The saddest thing is that we are isolated. The barricades (made of street blocks) do not allow us to go see our most vulnerable children, nor are they allowed to come to our office, because the slogan is 'Nobody enters. Nobody leaves.' We can only hope that tomorrow the peace that we so long for will be restored."

May 18, 2018

**The national dialogue agrees: a weekend of peace**

La Prensa

In the second round of the National Dialogue, the Government undertook "to withdraw its police barracks and withdraw its anti-riot forces," while civil society "should join forces to promote better conditions for dialogue, normalize road traffic and continue in a better atmosphere on Monday, May 21, 2018," according to a statement issued by the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference (CEN), at the end of the nine-hour meeting.

In this second meeting the presidential couple, Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, were not present. The representatives of the Government arrived two hours late to the meeting that took place in the Seminary of Our Lady of Fatima (Managua), and the presence of the media was not allowed as in the first meeting.
May 21, 2018

**Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo are not open to discussing their resignation**

La Prensa

The appointed vice president Rosario Murillo, spokeswoman for the government of Daniel Ortega, limited Monday the government's willingness in the national dialogue to discuss issues "that represent the constitutional order", with which he responded to those requesting his resignation, while insisting again on that protesters must remove the barriers and allow free movement in the country.

"We are going to maintain the disposition that this government has always had to listen to all the proposals and to go through all the routes that represent the constitutional order, where there is a State of law and that we all have to respect," said Murillo in the pro-government media.

May 24, 2018

**US congressmen request to approve Nica Act before political crisis of Nicaragua**

La Prensa

Republican congresswoman Ileana Ros-lehtinen called on Thursday to approve the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act, better known as the Nica Act, as a response to the crisis in Nicaragua, which already leaves at least 78 dead. The Nica Act is a bill that intends for the United States to veto the loans that Nicaragua requests from multilateral organizations.

May 21, 2018

**Preliminary observations of the working visit of the IACHR to Nicaragua**

Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

During its visit, the IACHR gathered documentary and audiovisual information and listened to hundreds of testimonies that demonstrate serious human rights violations during a month of protests, characterized by the excessive use of force by State security forces and armed third parties. What resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of people injured; illegal and arbitrary arrests; practices of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; censorship and attacks against the press; and other forms of intimidation such as threats, harassment and persecution aimed at dissolving the protests and inhibiting citizen participation.

According to the information received by the IACHR, since April 18 there were at least 76 people killed, 868 were injured in the vast majority in the context of the protests. Of the latter, five remain in hospitals in serious condition. Also, 438 people were arrested, including students, civilians, human rights defenders and journalists.