



August 26, 2020

Dear friends,

First of all, we are proud supporters of the U.S. Postal Service, with over 450 PeaceWorks newsletters delivered monthly nationwide! Join us...before your corner mailbox mysteriously disappears in the middle of the night. Make a plan now to get your ballot, send it in early and track it online!

In spite of the pre-election mayhem we still try to stay focused: our partners have yet to emerge from the chaos surrounding the pandemic in Nicaragua and **they need our support.** A lack of credible information by local authorities and sparse international reporting makes it very difficult to understand what is happening down there. So, through our own sources, here's what PeaceWorks has found out...and how we can help.

Our sources on the ground in Nicaragua

“At the beginning of the pandemic, people wore masks on their own,” we were told by a Nicaraguan physician and close friend of PeaceWorks for decades. “But people could not enter a hospital with masks on, because if they did, they were taken from them. The authorities of those health centers were ordered to prohibit masks as if it were a policy of herd infection.”

“Now they have accepted the wearing of masks,” the doctor recognizes, “but there is a huge problem: the secrecy of the State.” The doctor believes the government had a strategy of herd immunity thinking it would bring few cases. “The truth is that the contagion is rampant, very high.”

WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS?

Inhijambia Educator (2020) →

Geffraan Hernández

Street kid (2008) →

STREET CHILDREN IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Join us for a live zoom with Inhijambia's Carlos Ernesto Molina on keeping Nicaragua's children safe during the pandemic.

SATURDAY SEPT. 12TH, 7:30PM
LIVE ZOOM MEETING
SIGN UP AT PEACEWORKS.ORG OR
WRITE CINEMAUS@GMAIL.COM

The secrecy was also the subject of International and local news reporting. In May, when over 600 healthcare professionals signed an open letter to the government complaining of the lack of PPE, at least a dozen were fired from their jobs. As of mid-August the Nicaraguan government reported around 4300 cases and 133 deaths. The local “Citizens Covid Watchdog Group” or “Observatorio” made up of independent doctors and health professionals reports nearly 10,000 infections and over 2600 deaths.

The physician we spoke to told us that the government’s numbers are way off. In mid-July, he knew of at least 80 healthcare workers alone dying from COVID-related illnesses. In fact, they told us, “In my own registry of people who call me, I’ve had six hundred and twelve patients with symptoms attributable to COVID...and 12 of my patients have died.”

This doctor wasn’t the only expert questioning whether official numbers add up.

“We... believe that there's probably been more [deaths] because a lot of people died without actually ever making their way to a hospital,” said an American academic who has lived in Nicaragua since the 1980’s. “People have this kind of a gesture, you know? [raises their hand to their mouth]...for if someone has been intubated or they died of COVID because they died when they were intubated.”

They went on to tell us that people are being turned away from public hospitals or simply refusing to go to the hospitals out of fear.

“My [spouse’s] cousin a week or so ago was having problems breathing. He’d been having fever and they assumed he had COVID. So they went to four different public hospitals to try to get him to the emergency room so they could take care of him. He was turned away at four different public hospitals because there was no room for them to attend to him.” Their family finally found a private hospital that would admit him and he survived, but many are not as fortunate.

“I think there's... a lot of truth to the fact when [President] Ortega explained in his second appearance during COVID that Nicaragua isn't a country that has the luxury of telling people to not leave your house because so many people leave their house every day so they can eat every night,” they continued. “But I think history is going to look back and see this kind of very cavalier lack of how to protect yourself and they’re going to judge this government very harshly.”



Besides not providing clear guidance on prevention and dramatically understating the numbers, this same source personally observed the Nicaraguan authorities actively working to control the narrative around COVID-19.

“When two students from the National University who shared a house one street away from us were taken away by an ambulance with respiratory distress and signs of COVID, a police patrol came as well to make sure that none of the other students were filming on their cell phones or that no other information would get out because there has been a real attempt to control those views of people being taken away.”

Our Nicaraguan partners are stepping up

In spite of the challenges of getting reliable information, we also heard many stories of people taking enormous risks to ensure the well-being of their neighbors, friends and families. At the end of June, we spoke to representatives at the Axayacatl Women’s Collective in Masaya.

“People are afraid to go to the market to sell things because of the spread of the virus. And that’s eliminated a lot of jobs, too. So there is an economic crisis right now,” the Axayacatl representatives told us.

“We began to do house visits and we armed ourselves with masks and long sleeve shirts and gloves. We went to visit [the women] in the communities so we could continue to help them with their family gardens and the chicken program, so they can grow their own food.”

Axayacatl provides support and advocacy for around 600 women who live in extreme poverty or have experienced domestic violence.



Axayacatl has provided critical material support to help women in Masaya during the pandemic.



In spite of the risks, Axayacatl continues to help women build small-scale farming projects that bring in desperately needed income.

In response to COVID-19, Axayacatl is providing emergency items like masks, hand sanitizers, soap, detergent and grocery cards for the women to buy food, in addition to seeds and animals. But these items are not the only support these women need.

Because of the pandemic the government released nearly 3000 prisoners from its jails in May.

“None of the released were political prisoners,” Axayacatl told us. “Five hundred of the released prisoners were convicted of femicide or rape or domestic violence or some sort of violence against women. So that’s 500 of those criminals back in the community, including Masaya.”

“A lot of the women that were abused or that know people that were abused are afraid now because the perpetrators are free and moving

around and able to commit crimes again. So this is creating a high level of anxiety and desperation in the community”

What’s happening now

Thankfully, July and August saw a reduction in the rate of infection and deaths in Nicaragua, as reported by both the government and the independent “Observatorio.” But the road ahead will be long.

While most Nicaraguans are taking precautions to stay safe, the government has yet to require wearing masks and enforcing social distancing. For example, in early August when 10,000+ crowded into Managua’s Denis Martinez Stadium to watch the finals of the baseball championship, photos showed little respect for social distancing and many fans didn’t wear masks. Local medical experts are already sounding the alarm on a second wave.

At PeaceWorks, we hear the alarm loud and clear.

In New Jersey and around the United States, we know all too well how the lack of clear national guidance, along with an effort to hide reality and an unwillingness to listen to experts has led to catastrophic outcomes. That is why we believe our partners need our help more than ever.

Get involved

We have already sent down nearly \$20,000 to our partners to help them get through difficult times and maintain support to the women, children and families they work with. But there is so much more to do. We greatly appreciate any help you can give.

Also, we are tentatively planning to go through with our fall humanitarian aid shipment. While we are not requesting material aid donations, we need support to offset the \$10,000 it will cost to get a shipping container full of desperately needed items to Nicaragua.

Finally, please join us on Saturday September 12th for a Zoom call with Inhijambia’s Carlos Ernesto Molina on the status of their work helping street children and their families in the time of COVID-19. Zoom details at peaceworks.org. It will begin at 7:30pm EST.

Be well, stay safe and we hope to see you someday soon.

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

I’d like to contribute to the emergency fund to keep our Nicaraguan partners safe and working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$250 \$500 \$1000 \$ _____

I’d like to help offset the costs of the next humanitarian aid shipment this fall:

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$250 \$500 \$1000 \$ _____

I’d like to make a general support donation to PeaceWorks:

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$250 \$500 \$1000 \$ _____