



April 18th, 2021

Dear friends,

Georgia has been on all of our minds.

Two weeks ago the Georgia Legislature passed the most restrictive voter rights laws since the Civil Rights era. Targeting black and brown voters who handed Joe Biden 16 Electoral College votes in November, and later put Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in the Senate, Governor Brian Kemp and GA lawmakers are flying wild punches. But with more than 40 US states contemplating laws to suppress voters, we are deeply troubled by the anti-democratic forces working to deny people the ability to choose their own leaders.

That is also one reason why Nicaragua is particularly on our minds right now. The Nicaraguan people will go back to the polls to elect their president on November 7th. But at the end of last year the Nicaraguan Assembly began tinkering with the rules with two major pieces of election related legislation, raising concern both locally and internationally that the election could be stolen. The Organization of American States (OAS) has set a May deadline for the government to make electoral and constitutional changes if the Nicaraguan election is to be deemed legitimate.

LET'S GET TO THE POINT.

A LIVE ZOOM WITH ENRIQUE SAENZ

In seven months Nicaraguans will go to the polls to elect their president. Daniel Ortega is vying for a 4th consecutive term. Political violence has shaken the country. The OAS and European Parliament have set a May deadline for changes to laws that may stop opposition candidates and disenfranchise voters. Where is this all headed? Who are the players? What will it take for free and fair elections in Nicaragua?

Join us for a special evening with long-time political insider Enriques Saenz.

SATURDAY MAY 8TH, 7:30PM

TO REGISTER IN ADVANCE WRITE
CINEMAUS@GMAIL.COM

PeaceWorks , 1125 Woolley Avenue. Union NJ 07083
917-301-6967, peaceworks.org

The backdrop for a looming deadline

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega is set to run for a 4th consecutive term. There are a half-dozen or so opposition candidates, and probably more to come. On its face it sounds like a normal election cycle, but as with Georgia, things are more complicated when you look under the hood. In Nicaragua this started when President Ortega nimbly sidestepped term limits in 2016 to run indefinitely. He now shares the political stage with his wife and Vice-president Rosario Murillo.



**HELP LIGHTEN
THE LOAD!**

**WE GOT THE WATER
TAPS TURNED ON IN
SAN ANTONIO.
HIGH-EFFICIENCY
LETRINES ARE NEXT.**

**WE SET A GOAL TO
RAISE \$5K...
WE'RE \$3K SHORT.**

After the 2016 elections, the Ortega administration actually began to work with the OAS on electoral reforms, but after a three-year memorandum of agreement passed with little to show in terms of change, President Ortega walked away. By that time, the political landscape had changed dramatically in Nicaragua. April 2018 began with protests and a political uprising that shook the government - and the country - to its core.

Economic and political unrest

From 30,000 feet above, we can see how cheap Venezuelan oil during Ortega's first two terms subsidized the expansion of the Nicaraguan economy and dramatically drove down poverty, thanks in no small part to government policies that prioritized tackling extreme poverty. But Venezuela got mired in its own economic troubles and the oil spigot got turned off around 2017. To make ends meet Nicaragua began cutting back wherever it could, including scaling back pensions and services promised to elderly retirees. For everyday Nicaraguans enough was enough and the people protested well into the summer of 2018.

It's been politically messy ever since, with large scale protests that were met with what international human rights organizations characterized as government repression: police and paramilitary groups attacking students at the national universities and Catholic priests and churches. There were reports of torture. Opposition press was targeted, their staff jailed and worse, and their facilities even burnt to the ground like Radio Dario. Around 325 people lost their lives during the unrest, thousands were arrested and it is reported that there are still around 100 political prisoners being held. Thousands of Nicaraguans fled the country, mainly to Costa Rica.

Restricting opposition candidates

In December the Nicaraguan National Assembly passed the "Law for the Defense of the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty and Self-Determination for Peace." On its face, the law protects government sovereignty from foreign interference. But critics note that the law goes much further than that - giving the government enormous power to restrict the participation of candidates who disagree

with the Ortega Administration - anyone the government deems has supported sanctions or who they consider to have committed acts of terrorism.

Restricting NGOs and international funding

Two months earlier, in October 2020, the National Assembly passed a "Foreign Agents Act." Again, on its face, the government should be able to know from where money and donations from abroad are coming - it's probably a good thing to know who the next Mike Flynn or Paul Manafort will be. But in context of the Nicaraguan government's response to protests after April 2018, organizations like the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights have called for the Nicaraguan government to repeal it. Scanning local Nicaraguan newspapers, people are worried that Nicaraguans living abroad will not be able to contribute to political parties of their preference. Local parties and non profits are justifiably concerned by the government's ability to close off foreign donors at a whim with virtually no recourse, as the courts are dominated by the same party as the administration. When an organization does get government approval, it's only for six months at a time. Unofficially, the new legislation is being called *La Ley Putin*, Putin's Law because it was modelled on Russia's 2012 law on foreign agents.

Taking into consideration legitimate concerns that the new legislation can be used to stop candidates and disenfranchise voters, the Organization of American States passed a resolution demanding that Nicaragua make changes to its electoral laws and constitution. The OAS has set a May deadline for the changes to be made. Tic toc.

Staying neutral and trusting the Nicaraguan people

PeaceWorks does not support any political party or activities and we have worked with every Nicaraguan government since our founding in 1992. We are morally opposed to interventionist policies by the United States that propped up dictatorship and then caused enormous suffering as a result of the Contra War in the 1980's. We still consider US behavior in Central America a national shame which continues to drive our humanitarian work to this day. We also believe the US Nica Act limiting Nicaraguan access to foreign financial instruments is short-sighted and ineffectual. But we also absolutely believe in and trust in the Nicaraguan people. No matter what happens or who wins, the Nicaraguan people must be able to freely choose their leaders without fear.

CAN YOU GIVE US A HAND?



HELP PACK OUR 78TH HUMANITARIAN AID SHIPMENT TO NICARAGUA

SATURDAY MAY 8TH SHRINE OF ST. JOSEPH STIRLING, NJ 10AM-2PM

cinemaus@gmail.com

Saturday May 8th Zoom with Political Insider Enrique Saenz

To help us all understand the laws, context and nuances in which this electoral process unfolds, on Saturday May 8th we'd like to introduce you to a long-time political player, Enrique Saenz. Enrique is one of the original founders of the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) alongside Sandinista leaders like Sergio Ramirez and Dora Maria Tallez. While he is no longer aligned with any party, Enrique will explain the landscape: the players, the context and changes needed for the full participation of Nicaraguans in the electoral process.

Help rural farmers with water and sanitation

This year the Peaceworks community has helped our partners at FEDICAMP build potable water systems for rural farming communities. In order to keep those systems safe and disease free, we still need to raise \$3k for the installation of modern latrines. Please join us in working with our partners to make these communities healthier and more sustainable.

The gift of home

We are thrilled to announce that the Emmaus Community donated \$10k to help the *Inhijambia Program for Street Kids* build a house for one of its families. Beyond the obvious material and practical needs that this house will fill, the emotional value of a safe stable, home is priceless.

May 8th shipment workday

As we're waiting on logistical details for our spring shipment, we'll be packing and organizing donations on May 8th, 10am-2pm. Contact Austin Haeberle at cinemaus@gmail.com if you'd like to help or drop off donations. Social distancing and safety measures will be observed.

We hope to see you all in person someday soon! In the meantime, please keep in touch.

In solidarity,

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

DONATE TO PEACEWORKS!

I'd like to contribute to help the Community of San Antonio in the next phase of their water infrastructure projects: building latrines. \$5K is urgently needed!

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

I'd like to help offset the costs of the next humanitarian aid shipment:

\$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 \$_____