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Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega has saved lives – not 'murderously oppressed'

By [Readers of The National](#)



Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega is at the heart of a debate between our readers

IT would appear I am being accused of excusing “murderous oppression” (Letters, July 29). Not guilty! On the contrary, the Nicaraguan government of Daniel Ortega, whose record I defend, has likely saved many lives through sensible forward-planning.

Nicaragua is currently one of the 10 safest countries in the world, because its government started making preparations for a forthcoming global pandemic at the end of January 2020, when the World [Health](#) Organization first raised the probability, rather than waiting until it could see the whites of its eyes. This has been achieved despite having no lockdown, and keeping their borders open, but been hampered by illegal US sanctions and vaccine-blocking.

A strategy for mass evacuation had already been introduced by the government when two high-category hurricanes, Eta and Iota, struck within a fortnight of each other in November 2020.

Unfortunately, 21 people lost their lives, as they had either refused to leave their homes or returned before the all-clear. Contrast this with the thousands who perished in the wake of Hurricane Mitch during the corrupt, US-backed Aleman government in the late nineties.

Ortega/Murillo government forces did not murder “more than 300 peasants and students protesting against cuts in pensions and social security”.

I doubt if there were many peasants on the protests, as the measures impacted mainly on the better-off, fee-paying students and the Nicaraguan equivalent of the CBI. The government withdrew these measures and offered a National Dialogue.

However, the goalposts had moved and the protesters now called for the removal of Ortega, despite his winning over 70% of the popular vote just 18 months earlier. The students had now been sidelined and replaced by masked, armed combatants, who erected roadblocks throughout the country.

The government, which had ordered the Nicaraguan army to remain in their barracks throughout the crisis, now confined their hopelessly out-of-depth, community-style police force to their stations as their part of the agreement reached at the National Dialogue.

Ordinary people, with no political affiliation, were humiliated, extorted and beaten if they refused to pay for crossing a roadblock to get to work or buy food. Identified FSLN supporters suffered much worse – torture and death, in many cases.

The police stations came under arson and arms attack, even though the police had been ordered not to retaliate. There were more than a score of police casualties, at least as many, if not more Sandinistas killed, than known opposition supporters, but the largest number of deaths were those of no known political persuasion.

The building of an inter-oceanic canal cannot fail to have an environmental impact. However, I have more confidence in this being handled by a government who, initially, refused to sign the Paris Agreement, because it didn't go far enough in tackling the causes of the climate crisis, generate 85% of their electricity from renewable sources and positively promote sustainable farming practices, than by the US government or big business

On repeated occasions, the Nicaraguan government have appealed to the destructive opposition's better side. In choosing dialogue, rather than the crackdown the western media and human rights NGOs accuse them of, in pardoning those guilty of lesser crimes during the coup in exchange for a promise not to engage in such activity in future, and in going so far as to declare an amnesty for all imprisoned in the aftermath of the terrible events of 2018.

It is not I who is guilty of excusing murderous oppression, but the Nicaraguan government!

I rest my case.

Nicholas Whytock

Bathgate