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NICANOTES

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2021: A Year of Big Advances in Nicaragua

By Nan McCurdy



Health personnel carry out house to house vaccination

[This article is an updated version of a webinar presentation given December 18 hosted by Task Force on the Americas, Ecumenical Peace Institute, and Mt Diablo Peace & Justice Center.]

In 2021 Nicaragua made great leaps in improving lives and recuperating essential rights!

Defending Sovereignty

In my opinion the most important advance in 2021 for Nicaragua is defense of their right to sovereignty. As their historic leader, Augusto Sandino said: "Sovereignty is not discussed, but rather defended." This is essential for Nicaragua but also an excellent example for other small nations still treated like colonies by the US and Europe.

Analyst William Grigsby asserts that 2021 was the year that Nicaragua began the final offensive to achieve full independence. He says, *"We have a model of nation-building, very different from the Yankee model of colony building. The only way we can progress is if we are independent, sovereign, and express self-determination. It's the only way and this has already been proven. In the 17 years between 1990 and 2007 Nicaraguans suffered the pro-Yankee predatory model in which we were effectively annexed to the United States in our*

foreign, economic and, in reality, in all policies. We were annexed to the Yankee logic of imperialism and the result was a social catastrophe: poverty and backwardness in all walks of life. The logic of building a country for everyone did not exist. There were no social rights. The logic was to build a country to serve a few, and even those few were beholden to foreign interests. With our current model our social rights have been recuperated. If we return to the Yankee colonial model, our social rights will end; our unique model of development that includes things like empowering small and medium-scale producers will end. It is the people who build the nation and defend a development model that builds social justice to end poverty.” (Sin Fronteras, Radio La Primerisima, 27 September 2021)

Relations with China

On Dec. 9, Nicaragua reestablished relations with China. Analyst Oscar Gómez writes: *“Nicaragua has made a wise decision to establish diplomatic relations with the one and only*

China. This transcendental news for Nicaragua must be understood as a matter of National Security for Nicaragua's development. Investments with China can be projected to modernize the infrastructure of land, air and port transportation."

Foreign Minister Denis Moncada said to China on Dec. 9 when they reestablished relations: *"We emphasize the need for mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, the dignity and territorial integrity of states, the right of states to development, to have social security systems... and to resolve disputes by peaceful means. We reject the threat or use of force as a means of conflict resolution. We reject unilateral, coercive measures contrary to international law. We need to urge the international community to foster a new kind of international relations based on mutual respect, equity, justice, and mutually beneficial cooperation."*

Leaving the OAS

Another important action was the decision to leave the US-dominated Organization of American States – a process that will take about two years.

Responding to US Interference

Still another advance in sovereignty is in regard to US agents. In early 2021, the Nicaraguan agents of the United States were on constant trips to Washington to receive their orders, while at the same time they were continuing to receive millions directly and through their nongovernmental organizations for a new coup attempt.

These are the same agents who carried out the 2018 US-funded coup attempt handing out the money and the orders. In June, this came to a virtual stop with the arrest of Cristiana Chamorro and the suspension of her organization for money laundering. Others were arrested later for money laundering and other very serious crimes like treason, acts that are crimes in every nation on earth. In part what made this possible were new laws at the end of 2020, one of which was similar to the US Foreign Agents Registration Act. The new law said that if

you receive money from a foreign government you have to report on it – and these people didn't. The population appears pleased with these actions as there has not been even one small street protest, even by their friends.

Economic Advances and Government Transparency

Central Bank President Ovidio Reyes reported that the Nicaraguan economy grew by more than 9% in 2021, one of the best growth rates in the Americas. Nicaragua grew by about 5% from 2007 to early 2018 until the US-supported coup attempt. In that year the GDP dropped but by 2021 growth had reached a record US\$13.85 billion.

There were also record exports; according to the Export Processing Center, CETREX, exports grew by 22% reaching US\$3.6 billion and US\$6.6 billion if you include exports from the Free Trade Zones. (*Informe Pastran, 4 and 6 Jan. 2022*)

Foreign investment income was 65% higher than in 2020. Foreign Investment in the Free Trade Zone in 2021 was US\$70 million with seven new companies opening in the

departments of Estelí, Managua and Matagalpa.

<https://radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias-generales/destacado/cierre-grandioso-de-la-economia-crecio-mas-del-9/> (*Radio La Primerisima*, 17 Jan. 2022)

In 2021, family remittances also grew and reached US\$2.15 billion, 16% higher than in 2020. (*Informe Pastran*, 25 Jan. 2022)

The World Bank and the United Nations Development Program report that employment in Nicaragua has already recovered to pre-pandemic levels. (*Informe Pastran*, 30 Nov. 2021)

On July 30, the World Bank said that Nicaragua completed disbursements of US\$99 million in project fulfillment, for a disbursement rate of 53.%; both the amount and the rate being record figures in the last 10 years that place Nicaragua among the top 10 in the world. (*Radio La Primerisima*, 30 July 2021)

The transparency of government officials and the satisfaction of the population with public services were highlighted by the Inter-American Development Bank in an Aug. 14 report.

Investment in Public Infrastructure

The World Bank reported on October 11 that Nicaragua ranks third in the world in renewable energy with 70% of its energy production from renewable sources. The report states that "since 2007 Nicaragua has implemented an electrification program that tripled energy production from renewable sources and expanded electricity coverage from just 54% in 2007 to 99% in 2021.... In a few years Nicaragua will overcome dependence on fossil fuels...." (*Nicaragua News*, 12 October 2021)

On October 11 the Strategic Alliance for Measurement of Public Investment in Infrastructure (INFRALATUM) published a report entitled "Public Investment in Economic Infrastructure in Central America," that says that Nicaragua ranks third in

Latin America (after Bolivia and Belize) in infrastructure investment. (*Nicaragua News*, 15 October 2021)

The 2022 Budget follows the National Program for the Fight against Poverty and for Human Development 2022-2026: 23% goes for education, 22.2% for health and the rest for social protection programs. Among the priorities are access to quality health services, and education at all levels.

Between 2007 and 2021 the government invested more than a billion dollars to bring drinking water and sanitation facilities to people as a human right and not as a business. In 2006 only 65% of the urban population had potable drinking water; today it is 91.5%. Twenty-eight drinking water and sanitation projects were completed in 2021. (*Informe Pastran*, 15 October 2021)

The number of sports facilities has doubled since 2007 when there were 1,015: today there are 2,030. The plan includes 13 baseball and 13 soccer stadiums, 12 sports centers, and the construction or improvement of five major recreational centers

like the large Luis Alfonso Velazquez Park in Managua. (*Radio La Primerisima*, 3 Dec. 2021)

A major new pier in Bilwi was finished in October. The previous one was destroyed by hurricanes in November 2020.

The first Indigenous Agricultural University in Latin America was inaugurated in November located in the South Caribbean Region. The initiative is unique in Latin America, as it provides professional training to Indigenous people who were taught to read and write in their mother tongue through the “Yo Sí Puedo” program, and who have completed their secondary education. (*Radio La Primerisima*, 29 Nov. 2021)

Advances in Health in 2021

Nicaragua began COVID-19 vaccination of those with health problems and 60+ in March. It finally began getting quantities of Covid vaccines in the millions in September and began massive around the clock vaccination throughout the country. In November house-to-house vaccination began, something

that has been done against other diseases like polio. Because of this, the population over 30 years of age was 80% covered with the vaccine by the beginning of December. (*Radio La Primerisima*, 2 Dec. 2021)



Health personnel prepared to do house-to-house vaccination

Nicaragua ends 2021 with the best hospital network in Central America. More than 100 new health facilities were built including ten hospitals: 6 primary hospitals and 4 departmental hospitals. Another ten were rebuilt or expanded. Dozens of health centers and health posts were built. The Prinzapolka and Waspam hospitals in the Caribbean, damaged in the 2020 hurricanes, are almost rebuilt. (*Sin Fronteras*, 20 October 2021)



Woman shows her COVID-19 vaccination card

Community medical brigades made hundreds of thousands of house-to-house visits. Health Minister Dr. Martha Reyes stated that infant mortality has declined from 29 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006 to 12.8 in 2021. With the construction and staffing of maternity wait homes around the entire country, maternal mortality has declined from 92.8 to 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births during the same period. Chronic child malnutrition in children under five years of age has declined from 21.7% to 9.3%. Cancer diagnosis and treatment has vastly improved, including, for example, 22,200 endoscopies and 15,700 ultrasounds for the detection of stomach and prostate cancers. (*Informe Pastran*, 21 Dec. 2021)

#1 in Gender Equality

Nicaragua is number one in the world in women in ministerial positions and is number one in the Americas in Gender Equity. The Women's Police Station in Diriamba was inaugurated on October 28. At least 20 have been opened this year bringing

the total to more than 100. (*Radio La Primerisima*, 28 October 2021)

Advances in Environmental Protection

Nicaragua was elected Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Conference of the Parties (COP) against Climate Change, representing Latin America and the Caribbean, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) held in Scotland from October 31 to November 12. Climate Change Secretary Javier Gutiérrez stated that “the unanimous election of Nicaragua to the COP Board of Directors is recognition of its work on climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as sustainable development with climate justice.” (*Nicaragua News*, 16 November 2021)

A US\$108 million loan for a Bioclimate Project seeks to mitigate the effects of climate change by containing deforestation and forest degradation, conserving biodiversity, and promoting sustainable production systems. The loan is from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and

the United Nations Green Climate Fund. (*Nicaragua News*, Nov. 18, 2021)

Advances in Indigenous Rights

All 25 Indigenous Territories have now been demarcated and titled, in such a way that the rights of 41,000 families in 315 communities of the Caribbean Coast to their ancestral lands have been restored. 371,800 square kilometers, 31.16% of the national territory, belong legally to the Indigenous communities of the Caribbean. Attorney General Wendy Morales said that this land titling represents 30% of the 533,068 titles delivered nationwide in the last 14 years. Thirty-eight thousand square kilometers have been titled just in the Caribbean Coast regions. During this process, a consensus was reached between some long-time occupants and the original ancestral ones, allowing them to work in a better way.

Conclusion

Nicaragua's social and economic progress in the last years is quite surprising given the intensity of the US unconventional war. Starting in 2007, this war has included the funneling of millions of dollars to foreign agents and organizations in Nicaragua, a failed coup attempt in 2018, illegal unilateral sanctions (the 2018 Nica Act and the recently passed RENACER act), and a pre and post-election USAID destabilization plan called RAIN that began in 2020.

Despite all this foreign interference, Nicaragua held very transparent elections (for President, National Assembly and the Central America Parliament) last November, with electoral participation of 65% of eligible voters (with nearly 300,000 electoral volunteers). President Ortega's re-election was due to social and economic advances of the last years as well as the current stability and peace in the country. Specifically, his soaring popularity among teens and young adults was mainly, but not only, due to important improvements in education and sports programs as well as the inclusion of youth at all levels of political power. 2021 turned out to be a very peaceful year

in Nicaragua; Nicaraguans also hope for a peaceful and stable 2022.