**FEATURED Q&A**

Can Int’l Pressure Stop Ortega’s Action Against Opponents?

Members of the Organization of American States on June 15 voted to “unequivocally condemn the arrest, harassment and arbitrary restrictions placed on presidential candidates, political parties and independent media” in Nicaragua following an unprecedented crackdown by the government of President Daniel Ortega against political rivals. The OAS also called for the immediate release of political prisoners, of whom nearly 20 have been arrested in recent weeks. Five members, including Argentina and Mexico, abstained from voting on the OAS resolution, and Bolivia was among those that voted against it. What are the major implications of Ortega’s recent round-up of political foes? What role should the international community play in the face of Ortega’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies, and to what extent will international action be effective? What options does the Nicaraguan opposition have ahead of the Nov. 7 presidential election given the current circumstances?

**Q**

**A**

Robert Callahan, former U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua:  
“Since Ortega’s return to power, the Sandinista government—in practice, Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, who is also his vice president—has now created a one-party state, complete with all the coercive attributes of Castro’s Cuba or Xi’s China. Ortega and Murillo have bought or co-opted most of the independent media, gained full control of the courts, made the national police force into a Praetorian guard and worked to intimidate the political opposition. They have never conducted a fair election. In just the past two weeks, Sandinista police have arrested the leading potential opposition presi-

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Brazil Environment Minister Resigns Amid Investigation

Brazilian Environment Minister Ricardo Salles resigned Wednesday, weeks after federal police raided properties belonging to him in connection with an investigation into illegal logging in the Amazon, The Wall Street Journal reported. Salles, who had been in the post since 2019, has been controversial as Brazil has seen high rates of deforestation. “I understand that Brazil, throughout this year and the next year, in terms of international insertion and also on the national agenda, needs to have a very strong union of interests, desires and efforts,” Salles said at a news conference, CNN reported. “And for this to be done as smoothly as possible, I presented my request for resignation to the president, which was granted.” This month, Brazil’s Supreme Court launched a probe into allegations that Salles obstructed a federal police investigation into illegal logging in the Amazon. The launch of the inquiry came after Alexandre Saraiva, Amazonas state’s former chief of the federal police, filed a lawsuit alleging that Salles hindered the probe that led to the country’s largest-ever seizure of illegal timber. Salles is under investigation on allegations of administrative advocacy, hindering environmental inspections and hindering an investigation of a crime involving a criminal organization, CNN reported. The federal police are also probing Salles over accusations that he sought to use his position to weaken timber inspections by the country’s environmental agency, IBAMA. Salles has denied wrongdoing. “Not a moment too soon” said Marina Silva, a former presidential candidate and environmental activist, celebrating Salles’ resignation, The Wall Street Journal reported. “The exit of Ricardo Salles is a victory for society,” she said in a tweet. Salles had led recent efforts by Brazil to try to persuade the United States to pay Brazil $1 billion to help finance sustainable development in the region in exchange for reducing the level of deforestation. However, last month’s police raids of Salles’ properties threw that effort into disarray. Some 224 square miles of trees in the Amazon were lost in April, the highest level ever for that month since Inpe, Brazil’s space agency, began tracking the data using its Terra Brasils platform in 2015. Salles will be replaced by Joaquim Alvaro Pereira Leite, an Environment Ministry official who previously oversaw monitoring of the Amazon. Leite previously had ties to Brazil’s farming lobby, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Indigenous Groups Protest Brazil Bill Over Land Protection

Hundreds of Indigenous people gathered outside Brazil’s Congress on Wednesday in protest of legislation that could soften protections for their territories and open them up for commercial agriculture and mining, the Associated Press reported. Protests continued following clashes with Brazilian police a day earlier, with authorities in riot gear firing tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators, and protesters fighting back with bows and arrows, The Guardian reported. Three civilians and three police officers were injured, authorities said. “We were surprised from behind with gas bombs and rubber bullets. People were hurt in the confrontation,” said Indigenous leader Dinamam Tuxá in reference to Tuesday’s clashes, The Guardian reported. “It was an abuse of power, with violence from the police.” On Wednesday, hundreds of protesters returned, dressed in traditional clothes and carrying bows, and Indigenous women handed roses to police officers, the AP reported. Protests have been ongoing for the past two weeks against the bill, which the lower house’s Constitution and Justice Committee approved last week, opening the door for it to proceed to the floor for a vote. The legislation would require Indigenous people seeking full protection of their territories to have been occupying the land since 1988, the year Brazil’s constitution was signed after the country’s return to democracy. Indigenous rights activists say the date neglects the fact that many communities had been forcibly

Head of OAS Human Rights Body Condemns Nicaragua Crackdown

Antonia Urrejola, the president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, on Wednesday slammed Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, saying the Central American nation had entered a new stage of repression amid his crackdown on some 20 opposition figures in recent weeks and “constant human rights violations,” the Associated Press reported. Urrejola told members of the Organization of American States’ Permanent Council that recent arrests appear to be part of a wider strategy to eliminate internal dissidence ahead of the Nov. 7 presidential election.

Mexico’s Slim Willing to Help Repair Part of Metro Line: President

Mexican business tycoon Carlos Slim is willing to help repair part of Mexico City’s metro, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday after the two and Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum met in the presidential palace a day earlier, The New York Times reported. It was not clear whether that meant Slim would pay for full or partial repairs of the line. The meeting came after a Norwegian risk management company found defective construction of the transit line at fault for a collapse last month that left 26 people dead. [Editor’s note: See related Q&A in the May 12 issue of the Advisor.]

Colombia’s Habi Real Estate Platform Raises $100 Million in Funding

Real-estate platform Habi announced Wednesday that it raised $100 million in a fundraising round. The company said in a statement that the amount was the largest-ever for a Colombia-based company in a series B round. Habi said it plans to use the money to expand into Mexico.
expelled from their ancestral lands, especially during the military dictatorship, or may not have formal means to prove possession, the AP reported.

**ECONOMIC NEWS**

**IDB in Talks to Provide Credit for Vaccine Purchases**

The Inter-American Development Bank is in talks with Argentina and Panama as well as with Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers to provide credit for purchases of between $50 million and $100 million for each country, Mauricio Claver-Carone, the president of the multilateral institution, said Tuesday in an interview, Bloomberg News reported. The IDB can deploy approximately $500 million to fight the pandemic in Latin America, which has been the region hit hardest by the Covid-19 outbreak. With just 8 percent of the world population, Latin America has registered one-quarter of Covid-19 deaths. The IDB has so far used about half of the $1 billion announced in December to help Latin American and Caribbean nations purchase and distribute vaccine doses. Among the countries it has partnered with are Argentina, Belize, Ecuador and Trinidad and Tobago, helping them purchase vaccines against the novel coronavirus through the Covax facility, according to the report. "We're still in negotiations with various pharmaceuticals" on the vaccines for Argentina and Panama, Claver-Carone said. "It's not an issue of money, it's an issue of legal details to ensure that it's done correctly to the satisfaction of all parties," he added. Chile and Uruguay lead the region in vaccination rollout, with nearly 50 percent and 38 percent of their populations fully inoculated, respectively, according to data compiled and updated this week by the Americas Society/Council of the Americas. [Editor’s note: See Q&A on international patent waivers for Covid-19 vaccines in the May 19 issue of the Advisor.]

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**Orlando J. Pérez, dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of North Texas at Dallas:** "President Daniel Ortega's crackdown on political opponents, journalists and activists represents a clear and present danger to democratic governance in Nicaragua. The recent repression by the Ortega-Murillo duopoly aims to close any possibility of free and fair presidential elections in November. The attack on regime opponents has been facilitated by a series of recent laws aimed at criminalizing criticism of the government, regulating organizations that receive funding from abroad, curtailing access to social media under the guise of combating 'fake news' and penalizing 'hate speech.' While the international community has been slow to react to Ortega's assault on democracy, recent actions by the Biden administration, the OAS and the U.N. Human Rights Council are indicators the world is finally taking notice of the democratic backsliding in Nicaragua. To be effective, however, condemnations must be followed by more robust actions. The United States should redouble efforts to build a multilateral consensus to increase pressure on the Nicaraguan government. The OAS should follow up their recent statement by considering the full array of measures contemplated in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The Biden administration should work closely with regional allies, such as Canada and the European Union, to escalate targeted sanctions to additional regime collaborators, including prominent members of the private sector who have colluded with Ortega, and institutions responsible for most of the repression, such as the police. In addition, Nicaraguan participation in CAFTA-DR should be reconsidered. International efforts, however, cannot succeed without a unified opposition capable of mobilizing the Nicaraguan people. Unfortunately, such unity has yet to materialize."

**Manuel Orozco, director of the Center for Migration and Economic Stabilization at Creative Associates International and senior fellow at the Inter-American Dialogue:** "Ortega has compressed detention, intimidation and elimination of parties in time and space. After the only legitimate opposition party, CxL, opened its doors to all presidential candidates, it irked and scared the regime of its chances of having an 'easy' electoral victory. Ortega thus oxygenated the electoral, most militant segment of his base to compensate for the loss of political advantage and the continued economic deterioration. Ortega is..."
It has been clear for some time that the conditions for free and fair elections do not exist in Nicaragua.”

— Christine Wade

Christine Wade, professor of political science and international studies at Washington College in Chestertown, Md.: “It has been clear for some time that the conditions for free and fair elections do not exist in Nicaragua. Since the passage of a spate of legislation designed to silence the opposition last fall, it has been clear that Ortega and Murillo would ’win’ the November elections. The rules were written in their favor, and even a unified opposition would have faced a formidable challenge. At this point, the threat from the opposition is existential; it exists only in the minds of Ortega and Murillo. Historic figures from the FSLN, journalists and members of civil society posed no material threat to the regime despite its oft-repeated coup narrative. Rather, their arrests are driven by retribution, self-preservation and the desire of the Ortega-Murillo inner circle to cling to power, whatever the costs. While the recent wave of arrests has further isolated Nicaragua from the international community, it has also increased the urgency for engagement. While additional punitive options, including more targeted sanctions, travel bans, suspension from CAFTA, among others, are likely on the table, a number of these options may be unpalatable for a variety of reasons. Ideally, a third-party mediator would be engaged to negotiate a path forward (perhaps even a way out), but that seems unlikely so long as Ortega and Murillo perceive they hold the upper hand. The prevailing siege mentality means that it will take considerable effort to move the needle at this point. That will require focused, sustained energy from the international community.”

[Editor's note: The Advisor requested a commentary for this issue from Nicaragua’s ambassador to the United States but received no response.]

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.