

## Nomination for the Sakharov Prize 2023:

### **Human rights defender Vilma NUÑEZ DE ESCORCIA and Monsignor Rolando José ALVAREZ Lagos, Bishop of the Diocese of Matagalpa**

These two individuals remain two of the most courageous symbols of the struggle for the defence of human rights in Nicaragua. Both of them are leading the fight against a brutal regime and paying the consequences, one in jail and the other one locked up at home. The repressive State has made them stateless by taking away their nationality and basic rights. Nevertheless, the situation in Nicaragua hardly gets into the news. This award would contribute to keeping Nicaragua on the international agenda and it could make a real difference on the ground. It would support the Nicaraguan civil society inside and outside the country. And most importantly, the prize could contribute to saving the life and integrity of Vilma Nuñez and Monsignor Álvarez – two defenders in high need of both visibility and protection!

**Vilma NUÑEZ DE ESCORCIA** is a human rights defender who co-founded the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos or CENIDH), one of the most emblematic human rights organizations in the country. At the age of 84, she has been fighting for the human rights of Nicaraguans for decades. She was the first Nicaraguan woman Magistrate of the Supreme Court of Justice in 1979. For several years, she has faced a campaign of disqualification and harassment that exposes her safety and life. For this reason, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has granted precautionary measures to her since 2008, and currently she has received provisional measures. In February 2023, without any legal procedure, the regime declared her a traitor to her country and a fugitive from justice. She was stripped of her nationality, deprived of her assets, retirement pension and medical care. Still, she decided to remain in her country, in a situation of “civil death”.



**Monsignor Rolando José ALVAREZ LAGOS**, Bishop of the Diocese of Matagalpa, has since 2018, been the victim of persecution for his homilies, in which he has reflected on the country's crisis, state repression and the victims of human rights violations. He has been instrumental in the efforts led by the Church in their mediation efforts in the national talks of 2018 and their denunciations of the human rights violations committed in the context of Nicaragua's ongoing crisis. Bishop Álvarez has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Ortega regime, and its crackdown on civil and religious liberties. In May 2022 he announced he was beginning a hunger strike to protest against Police harassment. On 9 February, the regime tried to expel him with 222 political prisoners, but he refused to leave his country to stay and continue raising his voice for all the Nicaraguans. On 10 February, without a formal accusation or trial, Monsignor was arbitrarily sentenced to 26 years in prison and to the suspension of his nationality, among other penalties. Since that day he has been imprisoned and formally stateless, in one of the country's torture centers, subject to multiple human rights violations. His current physical and psychological condition remains unknown.



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