

7 November 2018

Nicaragua: Physical attack against imprisoned woman human rights defender Irlanda Jerez and women political prisoners

On 26 October 2018, between 20 and 25 hooded men broke into the cell of **Irlanda Jerez** in “La Esperanza” prison in Tipitapa, Nicaragua, where she is currently held alongside woman human rights defender [Amaya Eva Coppens](#) and 17 other women political prisoners. The beatings began after **Irlanda Jerez** refused to be taken for an interrogation with unidentified armed men. Other cellmates imprisoned for political reasons were also injured. None of them received medical attention.

[Irlanda Jerez](#) is a dentist, small business owner and human rights defender in Nicaragua. She was detained by the police on 18 July 2018 following the “civil disobedience” campaign she led at the “Mercado Oriental” (Eastern Market), the largest trade market in the country. At the beginning of July 2018, merchants and traders had stopped paying taxes in protest of the human rights abuses and repressive policies of Daniel Ortega’s government.

On 19 July 2018, only one day after she was detained, the Supreme Court communicated in a press release that the human rights defender had been convicted of “fraud” in a civil case from 2016. Initially acquitted, she was found guilty in an appeal and sentenced to five years in prison. Irlanda Jerez was taken to “La Esperanza” women’s prison, where she continues to perform civic resistance acts and gives speeches defending the rights of political prisoners.

On 26 October 2018, around 6 p.m., several disguised armed men dressed in black attacked Irlanda Jerez and other cellmates. The attack appears to be motivated by Irlanda Jerez’s refusal, supported by the other prisoners, to follow four of the unidentified men for an interrogation two hours earlier. The defender accepted to leave due to the severe injuries that she and her other cellmates had suffered – mainly on their mouths, ribs, arms and shoulders, one cellmate was left unconscious for three hours. No medical attention was provided to the injured women.

After the assault, Irlanda Jerez was taken to an office, where she had a gun pointed at her. The assailants declared that they were not police officials and that they would not kill her. In the meantime, the assailants told other prison inmates that Irlanda Jerez had 21 infractions to prison rules, including political statements she made against the government inside the prison facility.

The assailants planned on transferring Irlanda Jerez to an isolation cell in the male prison “La modelo”. However, after other inmates in “La Esperanza” protested for her return, Irlanda Jerez was returned to her prison cell.

Irlanda Jerez reported that she is afraid of being disappeared. Her husband Daniel Esquivel was able to visit her on 30 October 2018, and reported that she had bruises on several parts of her body. Not all family members were allowed to visit the injured inmates.

On 30 October 2018, members of the Special Monitoring Mechanism for Nicaragua (MESENI), established by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), accompanied by the Permanent Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos*), presented themselves to the female prison facility “La Esperanza” to obtain information on the state of health and physical integrity of the attacked prisoners. After several requests, their entrance was [denied by the prison authorities](#).

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the recent attack on Irlanda Jerez in “La Esperanza” prison, as it is believed that it is solely motivated by Irlanda Jerez’s legitimate and peaceful work in defence of the right to freedom of expression in Nicaragua, and is extremely concerned over the possibility of reprisals. Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Nicaragua to immediately and unconditionally release the human rights defenders arrested for political reasons and drop all charges against them.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Nicaragua to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Irlanda Jerez, and quash the sentence against her;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the women human rights defenders, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the ‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Take all necessary measures, in consultation with Irlanda Jerez and the other women political prisoners who were attacked, to restore and guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and security;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Nicaragua are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.