



Nicaragua 2018: uncensoring the truth

Testimonies of victims of opposition violence
during the failed coup attempt of 2018

Introduction

A group of people in solidarity with Nicaragua's Sandinista Revolution have recorded, transcribed and translated the testimonies of over 30 people of different backgrounds about their experience of the violent failed coup attempt in Nicaragua between April and July of 2018.

No human rights organization and practically no journalists, writers or academics out of all those who have written so glibly about the crisis of 2018 in Nicaragua have taken the trouble to talk to any of the thousands of victims of violent opposition attacks during that crisis.

This fact makes nonsense of any pretense on their part to be reporting truthfully the events in Nicaragua of 2018

Among well known writers, the only exceptions of which we are aware are the Italian journalist [Giorgio Trucchi](#), Max Blumenthal and Ben Norton of the [Grayzone](#), the writer and human rights lawyer [Dan Kovalik](#), the independent journalists [Dick y Miriam Emanuelsson](#), [John Perry](#), Steve Sweeney of [Morning Star](#) and the [Redfish](#) documentary company video team.

The very simple reason for this reality is that the mainstream account of the violent failed 2018 coup attempt in Nicaragua, repeated also by many so-called alternative media, portrayed the very opposite of what really happened.

International human rights institutions like the Inter American Commission for Human Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights completely ignored opposition violence so as to be able to claim, with the utmost falsehood, that the government crushed peaceful protests with disproportionate, brutal violence.

That is a shameless lie. These institutions appear to have promoted that lie under pressure from the governments of the United States and the European Union

The testimonies gathered here demonstrate the undeniable false witness of these international institutions, of human rights NGOs and international news media, who comprehensively failed to report facts they found inconvenient.

A recurrent theme in gathering these testimonies is the total lack of interest in the experiences and suffering of the people concerned on the part of representatives and researchers of the Western human rights industry.

Some important points

Three things are important to understand in order to make sense of these interviews.

Firstly, the testimonies refer almost exclusively to incidents that took place while Nicaragua's police were confined to their stations.

On April 22nd 2018, President Ortega publicly asked the Catholic Bishop's Conference to serve as mediators of a national dialogue between the government and the opposition.

The bishop's took two weeks to reply and, when they did, they set various conditions one of which was that the police be removed from the streets.

The Nicaraguan government agreed to this condition prior to the talks starting on May 16th and this explains why the general population was exposed over so many weeks to violent attacks and intimidation by opposition activists as described in these testimonies.

A second important point to understand is the operation of the so called “tranques” or roadblocks set up by the opposition activists at strategic points both in Nicaragua's national highway system and within urban centers.

These roadblocks served as bases for the opposition to carry out their crimes and as control points to intimidate, monitor, rob and extort anyone passing through them, as these testimonies vividly describe.

The roadblocks were operated by opposition activists and paid delinquents who often ended up fighting among themselves over what they stole from all the people they extorted before letting them pass.

A third recurrent theme in these interviews is the issue of the 2019 amnesty setting free all the opposition activists and their delinquent accomplices charged, tried, convicted and imprisoned for criminal offenses committed during the 2018 crisis.

For bereaved families and for people who suffered directly from opposition violence in 2018, it took a huge act of faith on the part of Nicaragua's people in the wisdom of President Daniel Ortega, Vice President Rosario Murillo and their government for that measure to be as successful as it has been..

That is why, for people in Nicaragua, all the victims and relatives of victims of opposition violence during the failed coup attempt are regarded as Heroes of Peace because they put the need for their country to heal and reconcile above their own personal suffering and grief.

But that is something far beyond the pitiful moral understanding, wholesale intellectual abdication and sly cynicism of practically all North American and European media journalists and editors, university academics, functionaries of the OAS and the Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner or any of the leading international human rights NGOs.

The “Rural Workers Movement”

These testimonies focus on victims of the so-called Rural Workers Movement, a small organization whose aggressive leaders, like Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena, deliberately project a false image that they represent a large number of rural workers in Nicaragua.

In fact, local people calculate the core membership of the Rural Workers Movement at no more than around 2000, although by means of payment, intimidation and disinformation their protest marches occasionally mobilize many more.

By comparison the long established Association of Rural Workers (ATC) is a genuinely national organization with over 47000 members. Nationally, there are over 5300 registered cooperatives, mostly in the agricultural and livestock sector, with more than 350,000 members. Not one of those cooperatives is of the Rural Workers Movement.

This movement initially began supposedly in protest against Nicaragua’s proposed interoceanic canal. To promote herself as an important rural workers leader Ramirez boasts of having organized over 80 protests involving many thousands of people. At the same time she makes the contradictory claim that she is the victim of a dictatorship that denies freedom of speech. In any case, she has never developed her movement's base significantly. The main area in which Ramirez and Mairena have mobilized support is the stretch of land between the area around El Tule on Lake Nicaragua's eastern shore and the area south of Bluefields where the canal is planned to enter the Caribbean Sea.

This area covers the central and eastern parts of the municipality of Nueva Guinea and the adjacent territory of the municipality of Bluefields. The area’s settlement, especially in Nueva Guinea, developed in the 1970s.

This resulted partly from a mis-named land reform by the Somoza dictatorship which cleared landless rural families from areas on the Pacific Coast where the ruling Somoza clique wanted to grow cotton during the boom in cotton prices of that time. But many families made homeless following the 1972 earthquake were also effectively dumped in Nueva Guinea..

Many hundreds of families were moved to Nueva Guinea at different times during that period. They were settled on land with practically no support or amenities, resulting in an extremely impoverished population with no access to adequate health care or education.

Geographically, the area is still difficult of access, with poor road communications, especially around the municipal boundary between Nueva Guinea and Bluefields. This makes effective security provision for the local population by the police extremely difficult.

These geographical characteristics combine with a socio-economic profile very favorable for an organization like the Rural Workers Movement, enabling its leaders to cloak their criminal activities with a right wing political discourse.

Historically, the region has been a bastion of the right wing Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC). During the 1980s the US backed Contra fighters contested control of the area with the Sandinista army. The patterns of that history prevail to this day.

Medardo Mairena was elected as a PLC councilor to the Regional authority of the Southern Caribbean Autonomous Region. A leading accomplice of Mairena, Pedro Mena, has been a PLC municipal councilor. Francisca Ramirez Torrez and her partner Migdonio López Chamorro have also both been long standing activists of the PLC.

During the 1980s, López Chamorro was a *comandante* in the ARDE branch of the Contra based in Costa Rica, with the nickname “Brasita”.

While Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez project themselves overseas as noble fighters on behalf of impoverished rural families and as victims of unjust repression, their image locally is very different.

Mairena lost his Costa Rican residency and was expelled by the Costa Rican authorities accused of people trafficking.

Ramirez and her family, far from being impoverished peasants, are registered by the local police in Nueva Guinea as owning two large cattle trucks and a very expensive Toyota Land Cruiser SUV. Local people say she and her family own between 500 and 700 acres of land.

As of September 2020, Ramirez and her family are involved in litigation in Costa Rica over property she is alleged to have usurped from a local landowner there, as well as accusations of corrupt use of funding to help alleged “refugees” from Nicaragua.

Thanks largely to coaching and support from, among others, Monica Baltodano and her daughter Monica López via the Baltodano family’s now closed down NGO Popol Na, Ramirez and Mairena have also accessed substantial funding totaling certainly many hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of dollars.

Funding has come both directly from discretionary USAID funds managed by the US embassy in Managua and from foreign human rights NGOs like Ireland’s Frontline Defenders, among others. Ramirez and Mairena are totally opaque about how much money they have received and its use.



Monica López (left) with Francisca Ramirez at her side, meeting with right wing Liberal leader Fabio Gadea in the offices of far right media outlet Radio Corporación which he owns and which has been funded by USAID



Clockwise from top left: Francisca Ramírez with Carlos Fernando Chamorro; Ramírez with Fabio Gadea; Ramírez with CENIDH's Vilma Nuñez; Ramírez with reactionary Catholic bishop Silvio Baez. both CENIDH and the Chamorro family's NGOs have been funded by USAID.

The witness testimonies collected here demonstrate that in practice the Rural Workers Movement operates effectively as an organized crime operation.

Ramirez and Mairena and their accomplices use extortion, menaces and outright murderous violence to intimidate local rural families into supporting them and keeping quiet about their crimes.

Medardo Mairena was tried and sentenced to long prison terms as the intellectual author of the massacre in El Morrito of July 12th 2018 in which thugs organized by himself and Francisca Ramirez murdered four police officers and a primary school teacher. He was set free in 2019 under the terms of one of the the controversial government amnesties of that year.

These witness testimonies from a wide variety of ordinary people victimized by Rural Workers Movement activists and their accomplices confirm that ever since the first big anti-canal protests of 2014, the Rural Workers Movement has been relentlessly violent, essentially adapting the terrorist practices of the 1980s US-trained wartime Contra to further their contemporary political agenda.

That criminal violence reached a crescendo in 2018 when Ramirez and Mairena operated systematic roadblocks extorting huge amounts of money from local people seeking to go to work, study, do business or seek health care.

Police sources in the area calculate that the amount extorted daily by Mairena and Ramirez at the roadblocks they controlled and from other illicit activities may have averaged as much as US\$50,000 over around 80 days from the end of April to early July 2018, implying a possible total amount extorted of around US\$4 million.

Even so international human rights organizations and North American and European information media still portray Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena as selfless heroes striving to serve impoverished rural families in Nicaragua.

To the contrary, the testimonies gathered here confirm President Daniel's Ortega's contention made repeatedly to foreign news media during interviews in 2018, that armed opposition gangs in very remote rural areas are violently targeting vulnerable rural families and especially sandinistas in order to instil terror, destabilizing the country's rural economy and destroying social peace

The testimonies gathered together here present the bitter truth about the activities of Francisca Ramirez, Medardo Mairena and their accomplices in the Rural Workers Movement.

Interviews in Juigalpa, San Carlos and Nueva Guinea

with victims of armed opposition activists of the Rural Workers Movement.

Juigalpa – August 25th 2020

Compañero William José Sirias Quiroz

<https://youtu.be/AFXZB8jSTEA>

Armed opposition activists abducted William, tortured him, threatened to set fire to his house with his family inside it. He was exchanged for opposition activists detained by the police.

Compañera Claudia Tamara García Barbarena

<https://youtu.be/w6IyMsqq-Hc>

Opposition activists attacked her house where she lived with her elderly parents and set it on fire.

Compañera Dominga Janeth Fernandez

Compañera Danieska Alai Granja Fernandez (Janeth's daughter)

Compañera Heydi Antonia Guzman (Janeth's niece)

<https://youtu.be/63TZzfNEVT0>

Armed opposition activists attacked her house and threatened her and her family

Compañero Juan Alberto Rodriguez Mena

<https://youtu.be/ZrM9DfE5zkw>

Armed Opposition activists abducted his family and threatened to kill him

Compañero Jhonny Javier Ruiz Urbina

<https://youtu.be/RSUdE5STRv0>

Armed Opposition activists murdered his father Teodoro Vidal Ruiz Arana (qepd)

Compañera Maria Mercedes Hurtado

Compañera Heydi Fabiola Baez Hurtado (hija de Meria Mercedes)

<https://youtu.be/qTbG-MdNFAk>

Armed opposition activists murdered Maria's son, the police officer Luis David López Hurtado (qepd)

Capitán Atrida González Ramos

<https://youtu.be/rlZPZ1U8GyE>

Armed opposition activists attacked Atrida and her comrades in their police station in Cuapa

Capitán Elvin Gutiérrez Martínez

https://youtu.be/QLOCtSD_etE

Armed opposition activists attacked Elvin and his comrades in their police station at El Coral

Empalme de Lóvago – August 26th 2020

Compañero Walter Suárez

<https://youtu.be/UAnZ306pHfo>

Armed opposition activists threatened and encircled the house of Walter y his family constantly over two months

San Carlos - August 26th 2020

Inspector Milena del Rosario Medina

https://youtu.be/lm13KPwk_mg

Milena suffered the violent attacks of the Movimiento Anti-Canal at El Tule in 2014

Inspector Marta Machota Beltran

Sub-Oficial Mayor Biron Alberto Moreno Navarro

<https://youtu.be/L8wnjxZ61Co>

Marta and Biron suffered the violent attacks of the Movimiento Anti-Canal at El Tule in 2014

Sub-Oficial Mayor Ana Cecilia Arana

Sub-Inspector Javier Antonio Bolaños

https://youtu.be/mJg_1UOeGRA

Ana Cecilia and Javier witnessed the massacre at El Morrito and describe their abduction and ill treatment by activists of the Rural Workers Movement

Compañera Mayra Elisabeth Vásquez

<https://youtu.be/w1VJ5KRj9pQ>

Mayra talks about the murder of her husband police officer Marlon José Requene López at the massacre in El Morrito

Sub-Inspector Yorlenny Avaloz Moreno

Sub-Oficial Evert Mairena

Sub Oficial José Matamoros

<https://youtu.be/PCTtek—dNY>

Yorlenny, Evert and José witnessed the massacre at El Morrito and describe their abduction and ill treatment by activists of the Rural Workers Movement

Compañera Salvadora López

https://youtu.be/d_oyXByYvzA

Salvadora talks about the murder of her son, police officer Marlon José Requene López at the massacre in El Morrito

Compañera Juana Cruz Bravo

<https://youtu.be/qBAhqYglvMI>

Juana talks about the murder of her partner police Commissioner Luis Emilio Bustos Lopez in the massacre of El Morrito

Compañera Claudia Carolina Alaniz

y Compañero Pedro Olivas Alaniz

<https://youtu.be/SdDYol9o7Ac>

Claudia y Pedro talk about the murder of Claudia's son police officer Lenin Ernesto Olivas Alaniz in the massacre at El Morrito

Nueva Guinea - August 27th 2020

Dr. Odanel Casco Villalobos

https://youtu.be/GdKI2-_jYxs

Dr. Casco explains how the roadblocks operated by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement destroyed the local economy

Señor Wilberto Vargas García

<https://youtu.be/GkORUrMGgVg>

Wilberto explains how the roadblocks operated by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement affected his business.

Policía Carla Vanessa Guzman Centeno

https://youtu.be/rZk__rHKk5w

Carla talks about the armed attack she and her unarmed police comrades suffered by over 1500 violent activists of the Rural Workers Movement led by Francisca Ramirez on 19 de abril 2018

Sub-Inspector Oscar Ismael Luna Mairena

<https://youtu.be/Xng7WZKO4B4>

Oscar describes the context of the burning down of the police post at Puerto Príncipe near Nueva Guinea and the intimidation of sandinista families in the area by activists of the Rural Workers Movement

Compañero Heyder Omar Candray

<https://youtu.be/2Rc0Fhz7dZc>

Heyder describes his detention and ill treatment by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement and the abuses and attacks suffered by the local population

Nueva Guinea September 24th 2020

Santos Romero Reyes, su familia y parientes

http://www.tortillaconsal.com/sonido/santos_romero_reyes_louder.mp3

Santos explains why he and his family abandoned their land following the murder of his son by members of the Rural Workers Movement. Santos and his family declined to be filmed because they fear continuing violent persecution by members of the Rural Workers Movement.

*As an **Appendix** to these testimonies an interview is included with **Doctor Javier Morazán, Director of the Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Specialist Unit for Offenses of Organized Crime**. Dr. Morazán explains the role of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the administration of justice in Nicaragua and elucidates the issue of terrorist crimes in the context of the failed coup attempt in Nicaragua in 2018.*

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Maps of the region

Juigalpa – Nueva Guinea – San Carlos

Nueva Guinea is a municipality in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region that was once part of a now defunct administrative region Zelaya Central, although that designation is often still used when talking about the area. In 2019, the first highway in Nicaraguan history was completed, connecting the port of Bluefields by land to the country's Pacific coast, passing through Nueva Guinea and Juigalpa. Another land communication route connects Juigalpa with the port of El Rama and communities north of Bluefields such as Laguna de Perlas and Kukra Hill.



Highways connecting Juigalpa, Nueva Guinea and San Carlos

The city of Juigalpa is the departmental capital of the department of Juigalpa. San Carlos is the departmental capital of the department of Rio San Juan. Nueva Guinea is the municipal capital of the municipality of Nueva Guinea which borders the municipality of Bluefields. Nueva Guinea and Bluefields are part of the Southern Caribbean Autonomous Region. The entire area is an important region for the production of livestock, dairy products and various agricultural crops, including pineapple and tubers such as yucca, malanga and quequisque.



Glossary of Acronyms

- AKA - AK-47 automatic rifle
- CENIDH - Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights
- COSEP - Superior Council of Private Business
- DOE - Special Operations Department of the Nicaraguan Police
- FAREM - Regional Multidisciplinary Faculty
- FSLN - National Sandinista Liberation Front
- GIR - Rapid Intervention Group of the Nicaraguan Police
- INSS - Nicaraguan Social Security Institute
- INTA - Nicaraguan Agricultural and Livestock Technological Institute
- IPSA - Institute of Agricultural and Livestock Health
- MINSA - Ministry of Health
- OEA - Organization of American States
- UNAB - National Blue and White Union - opposition political grouping
- UNAN - National Autonomous University of Nicaragua
- UNEN - National Union of Students of Nicaragua

Note on the exchange rate:

In April 2018 the exchange rate of the córdoba against the US dollar was just over 31 córdobas to the dollar.

Interview with William José Sirias Quiroz

Juigalpa, August 25th 2020

Armed opposition activists abducted William, torturing him and threatening to burn his family to death by setting fire to their house.

Tortilla con Sal: You were here in Juigalpa during the failed coup attempt of 2018. Can you tell us a little bit about what happened to you?

William Sirias Quiroz: Well, in 2018, exactly on June 18th, between 6:30 and 7:00 in the morning I got ready to go to work, to my job. When I left here I saw a lot of movement earlier in the morning. I never suspected anything about what was being planned or who they were. I knew about the roadblock and that it was doing a lot of damage.

They had already kidnapped several officers from the prison system and beaten them up. I had realized this because from here to the roadblock, all this is an area they control and which they were occupying. It's fifteen blocks from here. Fifteen blocks and each block is a hundred meters long. So, a mile from here, imagine that. I never realized that they were planning something against me.

So when I left here I was making a turn 200 meters in front of the main entrance of (*location not understandable*) and I observed a vehicle, a white vehicle, a new white vehicle, a pick up truck, I moved across to the right hand side because it seemed odd to me where it was located. And when I was passing in front of where that vehicle was, four armed and hooded men got out and they were carrying pistols and shotguns. They hit me immediately without saying anything first, with the shotgun in the back. Another one of them was in front of me.

They forced me to get into the vehicle. There were people at that time who were out making tortillas, selling tortillas there. Other people were just behind me. They saw everything, people from here in the neighborhood... because it was in the neighborhood itself that I was kidnapped.

Then the hooded men put me in the truck and we went past my house. I only saw my house and I said to myself, "May your will be done Lord," which is the first thing that came to mind after thinking of the children.

When the same people who were just behind me came back here to the house, they told my son that I had been caught by some hooded men in a white van and that they had taken me away. Well... they took me right to the roadblock...

TcS: Here in Juigalpa...

William: Here in Juigalpa, here to what they called the "mother of the roadblocks", they called it in the fifth region, here in Juigalpa... that is what they said it was "the mother of the roadblocks". They took me away, hooded me with a shirt rolled around my head. They put me in a house they had and started beating me. And they asked me silly questions, which I didn't know how to answer, like, "How many people are armed in the party offices?"



That was their justification for hitting me. And “who are the bosses there? Who are the leaders?” One of them, when they were beating me, even told me that if I didn't tell them anything that they were going to come here (*to his house*), take the children and that they were going to suffer just like in Managua, like some children that they had burned in Managua.

TcS: There in the Barrio Carlos Marx...

William: In the Carlos Marx... then because it was recent, they mentioned that. We are going to bring your children and if we can't abduct them we are going to burn them just like there. They mentioned that to me so that I would give in to their questions, otherwise that's what they were going to do.

I just thought I wasn't going to get out of there alive. Because they took my shoes. They took everything I was wearing.

I still wore my clothes that they had not taken from me but they were going to take them. And they began to argue among themselves. Among those who were there, I knew several of them and I mentioned them in the formal accusation.

When I filed the accusation, I mentioned the owner of the truck, I mentioned the driver who was driving the truck, I mentioned all those who were involved. And in that place, the person there in charge, because it was something aimed at me, was Medardo.

TcS: Medardo Mairena?

William: Medardo Mairena was there. He was there in the commission they had there.

TcS: And he was present when they were beating you?

William: He was there. One of them even said to be careful with me, they looked at the handcuffs on me because they were fitted so violently. They pressed far too tightly. They pressed on the circulation here they squeezed so hard that I couldn't stand it, because I have diabetes and I am hypertensive.

And I said to myself, "I don't want this to happen now".

I entrusted myself to the Lord. Because they were so violent. Because one of them said, "Let's kill him... let's kill him and set an example. Even Medardo said, "We have to make an example of this one..."

So they were going to kill me and let me know that I was to be the first to be killed... And they said that it was the mother of all the roadblocks. They talked a lot about how it was the mother of all roadblocks.

And when I was there, they were even communicating with a brother of Medardo who was in the Acoyapa roadblock. And they called him. They called him there.

TcS: You heard them?

William: I heard them.

TcS: On their mobile phones?

William: Yes they were talking on their mobile phones but they were close by. There were several of them there. They even said they were going to bring other comrades who were going to be kidnapped. I don't know who or who they were talking about but that they were going to kidnap others.

In all that confusion they were hitting me, there were others who said, "Don't kill him because we're going to exchange him. Don't beat him much because the human rights are here now".

The human rights delegate there is Denis Baez of CENIDH. And I know him because they are in the neighborhood where my mother lives. So I know him and another one, and they were there and when they showed up they stopped beating me. They stopped hitting me and they were talking about dialogue

TcS: And the people of CENIDH didn't see that you were beaten?

William: They helped me. One of them even said, "Take off the handcuffs." And just imagine how long it took them to take them off... 15 minutes to get the handcuffs off me because of the way they had been put on. I had both arms asleep and it took me about 10 months to recover the use of my wrists. And they looked at my bloody shirt because it was with a metal tube that they were hitting me in the back. After that they had a look and they gave me back my shoes because they saw that I was without my shoes.

Then I saw that the Lord was looking for a different way out for me and that He was saving me and that there were talks. Some said to kill me. Others said to set an example. Others said, don't, let's exchange him.

It seems that there were two detainees, two detainees who had been caught with weapons coming towards Juigalpa from El Ayote. The police had arrested them. So they wanted these two people to be free. So that's when they started the talks.

Afterwards, it seems that Baez from CENIDH contacted the police to exchange me. There was the Peace Commission that had been formed, and the talks finally started with that Peace Commission. It was a really difficult time.

TcS: William, can I ask you for a detail? After all that had happened, you made a formal accusation. Did CENIDH support the filing of the accusation?

William: No. CENIDH was just there. It seems to me that they were there from the beginning. That's what I reckon. Because when I heard them talking when they had my head covered and then they took the cover off away.

TcS: So they hooded you with a bag?

William: When they arrived, when they all arrived, I was hooded. They were talking and everything and then they took it off. And that's when I observed who they were.

TcS: William how long in total were you held hostage?

William: From six in the morning until it was already midday.

TcS: On the same day?

William: On the same day. Because if it were not for the fact that those two had been captured two that they wanted. If there was no one to exchange for me, then I would have been dead... I would have been dead already. Also, when they took me out for the exchange...

TcS: So there was an exchange...

William: Yes, they took me out. They put me in the CENIDH van. They also put a hood on me. He said, "I'm going to take him in the van", Baez, CENIDH, said. So I just. That's why I watched. I didn't see anything wrong with it. So they took me hooded, up to the truck. They put me in and took off my hood. Only then did they take it off when they put me in the truck.

The one from CENIDH was the driver in the truck and the other CENIDH colleague was sitting beside him. And they put me in the back seat.

TcS: Heading for the exchange...

William: For the exchange. The others were going to get on the pick up truck but the CENIDH person told them not to. And I say to the CENIDH guy, "And where are you taking me?"

"We're going to make the exchange," he says, "We're going to exchange you for two people.

"But where?" "In the church of El Divino Niño," he says.

When he told me that, I said to myself, "Father Enrique", because he's the priest at the Divino Niño church. So those men didn't get into the van, and the CENIDH man said, "I'll take him and I'll bring the others," and that looked strange because, hey, if I'd seen the kidnappers and they'd made a deal, could I really just leave and walk away?... But that was it.

So when they took me away there, then I just went along with him and we arrived at the church. The police arrived. And they brought the two people. And so they made the exchange. He took the other two away and I went with the...

TcS: Baez?

William: Yes Baez who is the representative of CENIDH. He took both of them. He put them in his truck. And I went with the compañeros and the Mayor who was from the Peace Commission and another person who was from the Peace Commission.

So I went off with the Peace Commission. And I told them that first I want to see my mother, because she was sick and then later I want to go to the police to file a formal accusation, which is what I did.

I went there and filed a report and I had to tell them all the details. Where did they take me, at what point did they take me, who was there.

And then I was waiting for the report to be processed, for the investigation. Since they were going to call me, I received several appointments to go to Managua. But then came the pardon the President issued on that case.

TcS: And in your case?

William: I had already accused those who took me directly. The one who was driving, the owner of the truck because he was there and he hit me. I mentioned them. Because if I mention them it's because there were so many who took part. So I mentioned them there.

I only mentioned Medardo there because he just watched and withdrew. He would just observe, talk, and leave. He would coordinate. He would make phone calls, and that's when I realized he had his brother at the Acoyapa roadblock.

There was also a woman named Urania who knew me.

TcS: A coup supporter?

William: Yes she was a coup supporter too. And she came from Managua. She came from Managua with things for the roadblocks she was going to unload at San Francisco.

She told me about it herself. "I'm coming to drop off this and that," she told me. And I tell her, "It's going to turn out bad for you," I said.

And then she told me about the attack in El Morrito where the police officers were killed. She told me. She told me that Medardo's brother and Medardo, were there... they were in the attack on Morrito and that they went back to Acoyapa, to the roadblock in Acoyapa, where they had abducted some policemen. She even called me at about midnight when those officers were in bad shape. It was as if her conscience had affected her.

So I warned the police that some policemen had been kidnapped there and that they were in a bad way. And that's when they again made a deal and it's confirmed, my version of the story that Medardo was there, that call she made from there and she confirmed that his involvement was direct.

TcS: At Morrito?

William: At Morrito and here. In my case. Because he said "one got left out".

TcS: And in all that, was Francisca Ramirez involved in one way or another?

William: Yes, she was part of it. They always went about together. Francisca, when Medardo was talking to his brother he told him that Francisca was there in Acoyapa, at the Acoyapa junction.

TcS: At the junction?

William: At the Acoyapa junction. Because at the junction they had a roadblock, where there were a lot of rural workers taking part. She is involved in all the attacks, if you look at it. If I tell you something, then I'm involved. They were the leaders. Look at the El Morrito attack. They were there at the roadblock, and even if they were there waiting for the result. That's just their excuse.

But they did receive the police officers there in Acoyapa. Because that woman called me at twelve o'clock at night, that person, and she was there treating, she was treating the officer comrades. Some people there even wanted to kill her because she was treating them and because she stood up to them and she called me, "It's like this and like this, so, you were right..."

Well, we were hurt financially. We were doing fine. We went backwards. But today we're getting back into the rhythm we had before and... God forbid it should all happen again.

Interview with Dominga Janeth Fernández, her daughter Danieska and her niece Heydi

Juigalpa. 25 de agosto 2020

Armed opposition activists attacked her house and threatened her and her family.



Tortilla con Sal: We're here now in Juigalpa with compañera Dominga Janeth Fernández. Janeth, you had quite a difficult experience during the failed attempted coup d'état in 2018. Can you explain to us what happened?

Janeth: Good afternoon. As you were saying compañero, my name is Dominga Janeth Fernández. Yes, it's certainly true that in 2018 the roadblocks were erected, led by Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramírez. There was a roadblock half a block away from me where they started harassing me, firing hand held mortars at me. On two occasions they threw Molotov cocktails at me.

They tried three times. The third time was when they managed to enter the house, they destroyed everything, the roof, the windows, everything. Unfortunately, they forced us out. But thanks to the Holy Spirit, we managed to escape. We were inside the house, we were asleep at the time. My husband and my two children. I hid her (Danieska) in the kitchen because they were hurling stones and large mortar rounds. They climbed on to the roof with bars, pick axes, with everything.

The gate where you came through still has signs of where they broke through the rails and entered and they caused complete destruction, taking everything from me. We managed to escape just here, up this hill. It was very saddening because never in my life had I expected something like this would happen after we, in the Sandinista Front, have been working for the benefit of all the population without prejudice in relation to skin color, religion, even political parties.

Because that's how we've defined ourselves as the Sandinista Front. Unfortunately, I have suffered all these attacks simply for working for the state and for this good government by people who still to this day... I was attacked again on the 16th of July.

TcS: ...this year?

Janeth: Yes, in the early hours of the 16th of July, the 19th was approaching, when we go out to the square to celebrate, we had the program of events to celebrate the 41st anniversary. They're historic dates that we celebrate. On the day of the 16th I was attacked again by people who always come to harm me. In reality, I'm always living through the same thing, the same harassment. And what is clear, what do they say? ...that Francisca Ramírez and Medardo Mairena are the ones behind this, behind these attacks.

TcS: How do you know this for a fact Janeth?

Janeth: From the same people who come to cause harm... Subsequently there come the comments, they tell you "We're organized, we're doing this". For example, speaking of the incident on the 16th, I knew exactly who it was that came to harass us again. At midnight, when one is already asleep, they come to cause trouble. The very same people who cause harm are the ones who make the comments. So, what they're saying gets around. In this town, as the saying goes, small town, big hell.

TcS: So, by way of these comments, you deduce that those behind the attacks, both in 2018 and more recently, are people from the so-called Rural Workers Movement or the leaders of that group?

Janeth: Yes. Because when we suffered the attack in 2018, my children don't let me tell lies. They shouted at us: "We've come to kill you because you're a Sandinista. Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramírez have sent". They shouted.

A large number of hooded people. That's what they were shouting.

TcS: They shouted that? That brazenly?

Janeth: Yes, brazenly, that's what they shouting. They were saying that they'd sent them to kill me simply for working for the Sandinista Front... For being a toad. Those were the phrases that they used. Toad, toad, toad...

TcS: I really like toads...

Janeth: Now I've gotten quite used to them calling me a toad. The truth is there's a big soft toy toad here now because they gave me a present which makes me more famous by the day because a short while ago they put me up on social media.

Those people put me up on social media, on a few pages that they have, saying things about me.

TcS: The people from the Rural Workers Movement?

Janeth: Yes there's a page of theirs. There they talk about each one of us Sandinistas saying all kinds of things, saying things which make me laugh because the truth is I'm not what they say I am.

TcS: Danieska, at that time in 2018, how old were you?

Danieska: At that time in 2018, I was 12 years old.

TcS: 12 years old... What was your experience of the attack?

Danieska: The truth is that in my life up until I was 12, I never imagined having such a bad experience. I feel that I try to get on well with people so they don't cause me any harm, and the truth is I never expected this.

TcS: Janeth and Danieska, perhaps you could both answer this. What after-effects do you feel given the experience of this incident has had on you?

Janeth: The truth is that this is still deeply affecting us. Since 2018, so many things have happened to us. I always remember these things, I still have them in my mind, because they were very tough, very sad. To watch my kids flee. They went to take shelter with my niece.

Heydi: They followed us to the place we went because they wanted to discover the whereabouts of my aunt. And yes, they were armed. At 7 at night they came to the house armed and they told us that we had to turn off the lights and close the doors... That we had no reason to leave the doors open or the lights on. They were the ones in charge. They went from house to house and they told us to turn off the lights and close the doors.

Fights among them could be heard at midnight, they were drugged up, attacking each other with firearms, mortars. Amongst themselves, when they were high on drugs and drunk. They fought amongst themselves.

I would hide under the bed at nighttime with my precious son because we were scared that a bullet would hit us in the bed, kill us. It was terrible. Not long ago they attacked us again because although they come to attack my auntie, my house is below, the rocks hit the roof there and then bounce onto my house. My son cries. I'm sure it's affecting him even though he's only small. When he hears the rocks he wakes up and cries. So the truth is we're still quite afraid. And yes, they were really well armed.

Janeth: My young son, who's around here somewhere, came looking to hide in the house. They too were also directly attacked. We've all been violently attacked. Subsequently, my daughter was going to school and go after. God only knows how I have her here today. She was chased on three occasions.

TcS: Danieska, can you talk to us about this? What are the after-effects that you have experienced?

Danieska: The truth is that these things make me a little afraid of going outside by myself. Since the moment when they attacked us, I prefer not to go out alone. I feel like sometimes when I'm asleep and I think they're coming to the house and are going to attack us again.

TcS: And what happened in relation to what your mother said about the times that you've been chased?

Danieska: I remember one time I was coming back from school and one man pursued me on a motorbike, harassing me and saying things like "I'm can take you on the motorcycle", saying things that were real harassment. I remember another time, also when I was coming back from school, a large group of young men and women pursued me. They were saying that because I was a toad, a Sandinista, they were after me and they were going to kill me.

TcS: After the attack were you able to stay living in your house or did you have to move to another house?

Janeth: We left the house. We didn't return again. It was the 15th of May when we were attacked. How could we return with the roadblock just there, half a block away from us on the Panamericanan Highway. We couldn't come or go. The day that we left we kept going and we got to the post of the 5th Military Command and they sheltered us there. They gave us a hand. After we'd left I never returned here to the house with my children because there was no way of entering. At that time my house was usurped by them.

TcS: Another detail which is important to understand Janeth is why did they decide to attack you? You say you're a well-known Sandinista but did you hold a specific position?

Janeth: Yes. At that time I was the political secretary and councilor for the Sandinista Front in the community, as I am at the moment.

TcS: Of this neighborhood or of the municipality?

Janeth: The municipality. Sandinista Front municipal councilor.

TcS: Do you think that that's the reason why they identified you as a target?

Janeth: Yes, I say that was the motive because there were only two of us who they attacked violently. One person who used to walk with me... I remember it was compañera Lesley Arián... she was also seriously assaulted in her house.

Something that I would like to add... Thank God for letting me be here, he'll know the reason, and why this experience happened to us. And why we're able to relate it, because it wasn't nice at all. It's something you wouldn't wish on anyone.

We've tried to be people who get on with everyone in the world, and truthfully, I don't know what their reason for attacking us was. Wishing peace and unity to all those people who have their hearts full of hate. I think this is the time... We are all Nicaraguans, we're brothers, we all have to be united. Because going around mistreating one another...

What I want is peace in my home, for my family, tranquility... that they stop harassing us, because like I told you, from the 16th we're still suffering from that last attack.

Interview with Claudia Tamara García Barbarena.

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020

Violent activists of the political opposition attacked her house and set it on fire with her and her elderly parents inside.



Tortilla con Sal We're here with compañera Claudia Tamara García Barbarena. Claudia, during the failed attempted coup attempt in 2018, you were Student President here in UNAN, Juigalpa, is that correct?

Claudia: That's correct.

TcS: Can you explain to us what happened to you at that time?

Claudia: Ok. In 2018, I was still president of the National Student's Union of Nicaragua for UNAN FAREM Chontales. Back then, in April, the failed coup attempt began. On the 4th of June, I was attacked at my house by people who were part of the roadblock. The roadblock was one block from my house.

At about 11 at night we were attacked for the first time at my house. There were just my two parents there, both elderly, and I was the only young person there. At around 11 at night I was on a phone call when we heard glass breaking in the porch and saw fire. What they had thrown at the house were Molotov cocktails, about three Molotov cocktails.

One fell on the roof of my bedroom and obviously we were alarmed. We were alarmed because we knew what the situation in the country was. It was chaotic, stressful, and sad to see what our country was turning into because of these types of people.

At around 1 in the morning there was a second attempt to burn down my home with my parents inside. This attack was more forceful. The entire patio caught flames along with the front of the house. Thank God, I don't know how two friends managed to get into my house and they helped us. We grabbed hose pipes from inside and started to put out the fire. And outside, the relevant authorities of Juigalpa were mediating to try to get them to stop attacking us.

It was very sad, painful, because as a young person you're capable of enduring, moving and escaping, but with two elderly parents in the house... and living through that distressing situation, because in any case, if we left the house, we knew what we would find them outside because the roadblock was only one block away and they dominated the area.

And obviously, here in Juigalpa, they had their leaders. Those in charge in Juigalpa were Francisco Sequeira and Lenín Salablanca, and in the larger area, those in charge were Francisca Ramírez and Medardo Mairena who had come Nueva Guinea and who lead the entire Rural Workers Movement. So, here, in what were the strongest roadblocks in Lóvago and Juigalpa, they were the ones who gave the orders. They gave the orders, who could pass, who couldn't...

It was a distressing time, distressing because of these people, these people leading the roadblocks who had all Nicaragua living in fear.

TcS: Claudia, one of the things that's said outside the country is that the government was repressing peaceful protesters. In your experience, apart from this attack with Molotov cocktails, were the protesters armed or unarmed?

Claudia: No, at the beginning when this began, there were only hand held mortars, that's what was seen. Afterwards, things escalated, they used artisanal weapons Then they used firearms, because my house was only one block away from the roadblock and everything that was happening could be heard. Neighbors even made recordings and when they were saying that the government was attacking them, it wasn't true. Rather, it was fights among themselves. As this became... as they lost control over it, there were more people, how do I say it, people that rob, that kill... delinquents. They were delinquents. They robbed each other. And they started to attack each other, and they would say, to post online, that they were being attacked, that it was the government, but no, it was amongst themselves. And they had firearms, that's without doubt.

TcS: When you say firearms, what type? Were there rifles, shotguns, pistols?

Claudia: Pistols. AK47s. I don't know how those people... Well, when there's "help" right, I think they get them from wherever. Yes, they had all types of firearms.

TcS: Ok. One of the things that has been said is that it was strange that Francisca Ramírez's people, who were from Nueva Guinea, came here to Juigalpa to participate in the roadblocks. Is it true that there were some of Francisca Ramírez's people there from Nueva Guinea?

Claudia: There were a lot of people from rural areas at the roadblocks in Lóvago and Juigalpa that came from the wider area. Given that it's the people who've always been against the canal that took control over them. I imagine that they were promised that if they supported them, the building of the canal wouldn't be carried out. So, they took control of all the rural people from their area and they were the ones that controlled the roadblocks of Lóvago and Juigalpa primarily.

TcS: It has also been commented that some of the internal conflicts among themselves were due to conflicts surrounding the wielding of power and management of the roadblocks between the rural people and people from other parts that were at the roadblocks, from here, from Managua...

Claudia: Without doubt that is true. There's proof that was true. Yes, that's self-evident about the conflicts. Videos of meetings between them have been leaked where obviously they were fighting for power. Everyone wants to be a leader. It's impossible in these situations. When they all want to lead something, not everyone can be in charge. And that was the internal fight among themselves. This has led to a break-up in the unity they had previously.

TcS: And was it evident during the time of the roadblocks that there were quarrels among them?

Claudia: Yes it was, among those who remained at the roadblocks there were quarrels... who took in the most money, who took this and that... So from the smallest to the largest issue, one can see that evidently there was a power problem, there was a power conflict among their organizations.

TcS: Claudia, on the night when your house was attacked, how did you all manage to escape?

Claudia: At the time of the attack, at first we didn't manage to escape from the house because the back of my house is very closed off, the only exit is out the front. Then my two friends managed to enter and they helped us. What they did was ask permission from the neighbor next door and use a ladder so as to pass my parents over to the other house.

Thank God, the neighbor gave me permission.

I managed to pass my parents to my neighbor's house, but with difficulty, because as I've told you my parents are both elderly. We stayed there until 5 in the morning. My friends stayed in my house, guarding against another attack, and thanks to the mediation carried out by the authorities of our government here in Juigalpa, they managed to control the people and stop them from attacking again.

TcS: At the time of the attack, when the house was in flames, was it the case that you couldn't escape out the front because they were harassing you so that you couldn't leave? Forcing you to stay within the house even though it was in flames?

Claudia: It was silent. It was quiet, as if they had just thrown the Molotov cocktails and then hidden. So we were scared of leaving because we thought that leaving was what they wanted... for us to come out of the house. So, we didn't attempt to leave at any time because we knew that they controlled the whole area. The whole area was already closed off, so the only thing I thought of was of getting my parents into the neighbor's house.

We had to spend two months away from our home which was very difficult. We traveled to Managua because we couldn't stay in the house that was attacked. We decided not to stay in the house where the attack was for fear that they would attack us again given that the roadblocks were still continuing. And over time it was getting more intense. On top of that, after we had been attacked during the week two neighbors were kidnapped, kidnapped by people from the roadblock.

The authorities also had to mediate to free these two people who had been kidnapped and because of that we decided to move to another place. We stayed in Managua with all my family until the roadblocks ended. This was very difficult, but thank God we got through it. I think the motive for the attack against us was due to the position that I held. They spoke about freedom of expression, right...

TcS: The position of president of the UNEN?

Claudia: Yes, at that time I was the president of the UNEN for Chontales. One of the main targets of the attacks they carried out at a national level were all the presidents of the Student's Union.

TcS: They attacked compañero Leonel*, right?

Claudia: Yes, they attacked him. He suffered a very severe attack. It's a miracle he's alive. It's a miracle he's alive, thank God. Of all those of us who were threatened, I think they did actually target their attacks on the presidents of the UNEN.

** Leonel Morales was the national president of the UNEN in 2018. He was abducted, beaten and shot by the gangs occupying Managua's Polytechnic University, then driven to a different part of Managua, shot again and left for dead. He survived and [recounted his experience here](#).*

Interview with Juan Alberto Rodriguez Mena,

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020

Armed opposition activists abducted his family and threatened to kill him.

Tortilla con Sal: So here we are with compañero Juan Alberto Rodriguez Mena, here in Juigalpa. Juan, you and your family had a very bad experience during 2018 and the failed coup attempt. Can you tell us a little about what happened to you?

Juan Alberto: Absolutely. First of all, I want to explain to you that these are moments of bad memories. Bad memories, because in 2018 for three months we were practically held hostage, Nicaragua, Juigalpa. They were difficult months. Just a block from here from my house was the main roadblock.

The main roadblock that was being run by the very well known Medardo Mairena. One of the leaders of the rural workers who, so far as being a rural workers' leader goes, we believe he is not that at all.

It was also being directed by Francisca Ramirez, well-known for operating roadblocks.

And in fact, my family at 8.45 one night we were here sitting watching television when suddenly five people appeared, armed with AKAs, guns. They aimed their guns at my son-in-law. I was in my room, on my own, and when I heard the noise I froze. Then they abducted my entire family. A reminder of that is the door that they broke down on me. I still haven't repaired it.

In that attempt, they first entered here and took all my family, the two-year-old grandchildren, who are hereabouts. Those children were traumatized. This is a trauma that my wife has not been able to overcome at all. Honestly, we lived through three months of terror and anguish.

When they took my family, I went out to the street to see what my neighbors were shouting at me. When I was outside, they came back in a white Hilux van, I was at the door and I saw that they stopped and said there's the old man whom they want to get hold of.

TcS: But Juan, why did they attack you?

Juan Alberto: We simply understood that it was out of hatred, hatred against people who identify ourselves as Sandinistas. It was that simple. A hatred they had for us which they had to express.

To the point that when they came back, they came in armed, and after they broke down my door I ran into the courtyard and quick as I could I climbed out at the back and "Where did the old man go? Where did the old man go?" Because they really intended to do to me what they...who knows.

But thanks be to God, I didn't let myself get caught and they couldn't catch me. So at that moment I set out to look for my family and they had them in the roadblocks there at the road out of town.

TcS: So they took your whole family to the roadblocks, including a two year old boy.



Juan Alberto: Two year old twins. They're about here somewhere... They were traumatized. Why? Because one of them didn't want to leave. But they grabbed the mother and took her by force. So they took the children there, the little twins. But what happened at that moment? I was overcome with anguish and at the same time...

TcS: Juan, forgive the question but it's a question people are going to ask. How do you know that Mairena left weapons for the roadblock? How do you know that?

Juan Alberto: Why? Because two months or one month after those roadblocks were in place we identified who the people were that were really organizing and directing the roadblocks in Nicaragua. We know perfectly well that they were the main leaders we had in this region.

I know this region like the back of my hand because I spent five years working in Nueva Guinea and I met Chica Ramirez in La Fonseca. I know a lot about her. I'm retired from the army and I know. And they were really the ones who were organizing. Because on that road there were long lines of vehicles that were stopped there so they could charge them a toll for passing through, and the one who had a clear path to pass through was Francisca Ramirez and her trucks full of cheese.

Even when the roadblocks were cleared, at the entrance to town, a truck full of cheese was confiscated from her and a dead man was found there. And one has to ask if she ever explained about the dead man she was carrying. That dead man was being brought from the interior. That's why they call her "The Ramirez girl who sells cheese and corpses". It's as simple as that.

TcS: Do you remember the exact date when the incident happened?

Juan Alberto: It was June 18th. On the 18th of June, a Sunday, I think, at 8.45pm.

TcS: And how long did they keep your family kidnapped?

Juan Alberto: From 8:45 to 1.40 or 2 in the morning. Why? Because when they came for the second time to abduct me, to get me, and they couldn't, then our compañeros from the Party came to fetch me, they came to get me out. So at that moment the comrades Julio Ramsa, Javier Carillo, were the only ones to talk with them, saying that my family had to be handed over safe and well, just as when they were taken. Because my family is not a criminal family like they are.

So, they negotiated that they had to hand over my family safe and sound and I actually risked my life to collect them here two blocks away, because were going to leave them with me. So they gave me my children, my wife, my son-in-law, and we left. I left the house practically abandoned for a week. Because they were close by, I was easy prey for them. So I had to leave the house behind and I went to stay with a daughter that I have nearby, for a week.

TcS: And when your family, Juan, was kidnapped, did they mistreat them or did they leave them alone?

Juan Alberto: One of them, yes, they stood on him, one of the roadblock gang. And he was told that my son is diabetic. His mother said not to beat him, she said, because he was sick. They knew us very well. All they told my wife is that they were being held there and what they were waiting for was to see what was going to be done.

They did take the older boy, there is a house on the way out of town that was their headquarters and they put him on the floor and stood on top of him with the intention of beating him, but because his mother said not to beat him because he is sick... but another lady whom they kidnapped, Doña Gloria, was beaten. She was beaten...

TcS: Is she family or a neighbor?

Juan Alberto: A neighbor.

TcS: Was she kidnapped at the same time or at another time?

Juan Alberto: At the same time, they arrived for my family at 8.45 and for her they arrived at about 8.30. They were in a Hilux truck.

TcS: But why were they kidnapping people like your neighbor? You can say that perhaps because you are a well-known Sandinista but why her?

Juan Alberto: Well also, they are another Sandinista family, Don Carlos has been a historic collaborator of the Frente. He was mobilized in the army. And here they know us all well.

TcS: So in your opinion Juan, do you think that anyone who was a Sandinista was vulnerable to that kind of attack? Would it be fair to say that?

Juan Alberto: Look, that is a reality. You see here, we as I said live a block away from the road. There were people painted in blue and white, people stripped naked, just because they might have found a militant card on them.

TcS: So they stripped people naked in the street, painted them with blue and white paint and sent them off running?

Juan Alberto: Naked, out there. People passed by there. I know... I saw several... The neighbor there, I remember, Doña Fidelia, gave a towel to a man, a young boy who came by naked, painted. And that is a terrible violation of human rights.

TcS: How many people did they do that to in your experience?

Juan Alberto: What I remember was five people

TcS: Five... in this neighbourhood?

Juan Alberto: For example I have a pool table place there on the other side of the highway and some players who identified with the Frente Sandinista arrived. And one of them was caught on the way out. They stripped him naked. They painted him and then they shot at him with a hand held mortar on the road, they shot at him and the boy went crazy.

TcS: These experiences are terrible and it must be difficult for you to talk about that, but could you talk about the effects? What effects has your family suffered because of all this?

Juan Alberto: Well, the effects are serious. Psychologically. My wife still hasn't gotten over that. She doesn't want to remember those times. And the little twins, the children, when they used to see the blue and white flag, they were afraid of it. Because they said, "Those are the ones that hurt us, Papa." That flag. So it's been a struggle via psychological treatment to help them learn again that it's not like that.

But they did use our flag, our colors to confuse people. Confuse people and it was deliberate work. They really here looked at Sandinismo with hatred. Some of them still regard it with terrible hatred. Just because people are Sandinista.

We know that we have freedom of speech, freedom of ideology so that everyone thinks what they want to think, but that was our sin, to be a Sandinista.

TcS: The impression that is being spread internationally is that Francisca Ramirez is a humble peasant woman who is making a heroic struggle against a repressive dictatorship and in favor of the peasants. What is the information that you have about this?

Juan Alberto: The information that we have here is real information. The figure of Doña Francisca Ramirez, with all due respect to her as the woman she is, is an apparently humble woman, apparently a peasant. But she is a skillful, cunning woman, owner of properties, owner of trucks, owner of businesses. She did big business with cheese.

That is why I told you that she had a free pass to travel from Nueva Guinea to Managua for all the cheese she bought. She is a rich woman. She has become rich. With that and politics, she has become rich. But we are clear that they have used politics to make themselves rich and to deceive the peasants, to deceive the women of La Fonseca in Nueva Guinea. All of this has happened.

And I know that area well and I know her for who she is. She's from La Fonseca and I know her well because I've been to those places. So you can't tell me that she's a humble peasant woman or that she's a peasant woman who defends the peasants. That is a lie. She used to buy cheese from them for four pesos a pound and take it to Managua to resell it for 25 or 30 or sometimes even 50 pesos a pound. She is a very clever business woman. So it's a lie that she...

And if it's Medardo, the same thing. Medardo apparently poses as a peasant, but a peasant who has also made himself wealthy. So we're clear, they aren't peasants or peasant leaders, what they are is parasites of the peasants. What they have done is to live off the peasants. They live off the producers. Why? Because they are skilled at doing that. Medardo is someone who has figured in trafficking people to Costa Rica. That's his business.

TcS: Am I right in thinking that the Costa Ricans expelled him for that very reason?

Juan Alberto: That is correct. For that very same reason. Because he has been that, he has been a trafficker.

TcS: Another thing is that other information I have received, and it would be very useful if you could confirm it, is that when they were operating the roadblocks, if a truck wanted to pass they had to pay a toll and my information is that for example in the case of a cattle dealer's truck, with cattle, it could have to pay up to 15,000 córdobas. That's what I've been told. Would that be true?

Juan Alberto: Realistic: That is the reality. Look, I used to get up in the morning here to look at the big rows of vehicles with cheese, with cattle, with milk. And they would take off large amounts of money to let people through. They had no morals. They were behaving as if they were the police. They controlled the drugs. They controlled the movement of cattle, the traffic of everything. They were like the police there at those roadblocks.

TcS: During the failed coup...

Juan Alberto: During the failed coup. They were the ones who controlled things.

TcS: Juan, let's say I am a truck driver. I arrive at the roadblock and they tell me I have to give five thousand pesos to get through and I say no, I'm not going to pay you. What happens to me?

Juan: They won't let you through. Simple. So, here a man lost a large amount of cheese that he was carrying, because he refused, and he told them "I don't have any money because I've been paying all along the way where there were roadblocks. I've been paying and paying, and now I don't have any more money, only just enough for fuel". So they didn't let him pass and he lost his produce there

TcS: Let me get this straight. This gentleman had been going through the roadblocks and at each roadblock he had to pay money.

Juan Alberto: Yes

TcS: To the point that when he got here he had no money...

Juan Alberto: Just like I said. He was stuck there. So, anyone who refused to pay them money, they didn't let them through.

TcS: And here at this roadblock Don Juan, do you know of cases of, for example, I remember that there was a very notorious case of a woman, I don't know if she was pregnant, but they didn't let the ambulance through and the woman died. Do you know of another incident of that type?

Juan Alberto: Look, that's why I tell you that this was a nightmare because they stopped not only the producers who were carrying their produce and business people with their merchandise but also ambulances were stopped, ambulances were stopped, people who were in serious condition were not allowed to pass or if they were allowed through, they were searched.

Here, two people died as a result of the roadblocks on this route because they did not allow the ambulances through. Here they even damaged several ambulances that came from the Santo Domingo area, from El Ayote, from other areas, when they came with patients. They painted them, defaced them. So it was really a tough three months for our country, for our people, to put up with these things.

TcS: And were all these harmful activities coordinated by people like Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez?

Juan Alberto: Obviously, we know they were the ones who were organizing, for example, the case of the police officer comrades who they killed in El Morrito. Medardo is a participant in the murder of those police officer comrades and of the teacher who was killed there, there near San Miguelito. They were. Here we know everything. Look, we're a small town and everyone knows each other, we know that they were the ones who were leading... those blockades. They were.

And I tell you something... they were supported by some priests and other religious people. Look, here we knew perfectly well who those priests were, the priests who were involved in this failed coup. Even, once when we as Sandinistas here wanted to go and request something, the protagonists at the roadblocks were the priests, they were there at the roadblocks even praying to a statue of the Virgin.

TcS: At the roadblocks?

Juan Alberto: Yes, there at the roadblocks, there with the Virgin. These are things we know that the priests themselves made a mockery of the Christian faith and of the people and we know very well, about people like Silvio Baez, Abelardo Mata, Brenes himself, and Rolando Alvarez. All of them. We know perfectly well that this was all a well-orchestrated plan for a coup attempt, a failed coup attempt. We are convinced of that.

As militant Sandinistas we were confused about one thing when Comandante Daniel, our leader, said that the police had to withdraw to their stations. Who asked him to do that? The leadership of the Catholic Church asked him. They asked the Comandante to keep the entire police force in their stations, and the police were in their stations and we were left on our own with no defense.

Even here as people who have experienced war because we have lived it... it is not the first time we have lived through things like this coup attempt. We had the war of the '80s. We have that experience and we wanted to have a go and the Comandante told us not to, not to have a go.

And the truth is that it was our responsibility. So we know who the organizers are, who are the financiers, who are the people behind all this.

We know that here the number one enemy we have is not the American people but the American leadership. The US presidents, and the US Congress, with the sanctions that they are going to ask to impose on us.

We are clear about this and now, with technology, we can keep tabs on where these things are coming from, so we want to act with every confidence so we know that we are acting in good faith.

Those three months were hard. But later, when July 19th came and I was here at home, I began to reflect. And I don't know if you want me to talk about it a little bit, but I would like to because it's really part of our work.

I began to reflect when our National Assembly approved this Law 985. This Law 985. Why? Because many of my comrades we felt a lot of hurt. And when we saw that this law was approved in our Assembly.

I said what a terrible thing they have done. Because at that time I could not understand that we had to pardon all these criminal delinquents.

I didn't understand. But through this Law 985, I understood later on that this was a law that was discussed among all sectors when what we were told was that we had to make the effort to reflect, to dialogue, to forge a culture of peace.

So we organized the Peace Commissions. I remember that comrade Carlos Emilio, the deputy, came here and we started talking about the Peace Commissions, we started work on them.

My interest is that I am a member of the Peace Commissions. And in the moments after the failed coup I dedicated myself to go and visit the people who had hurt us, the people who had hurt us because I knew the people who were at the roadblocks, who had been chosen by Medardo, who had been chosen by Chica Ramirez, who had been supported by the priests, who had been supported by COSEP.

So I went to talk to them and say "Brother, we are Nicaraguans. We have to fulfill the Peace".

I remember that we went there to the Santa Clara neighborhood. I went with Janeth that you went to see earlier and I went with another colleague who used to be mayor, Magda Murillo, and we went to talk to them in that neighborhood because that's where they all came from. One thing that they did was to persuade all the drug addicts, all the alcoholics to do those atrocities and while there, some kid who was there in the Penitentiary for the coup, we had to greet him, we had to receive his father there.

So we told him that we had been working with the Peace Commissions in the reconciliation work, because we have had the experience, for us the war has been a very hard example, very hard and we know that this was provoked by President Reagan himself who financed the Contra, and then Bush and that they were the ones who created hatred among and between Nicaraguans and they are the ones who did so deliberately.

But we are clear that when there are people who sell out their country as we say in each of our countries here, they will always be on their knees. Of that we are clear.

And now, as it happens, I've just come from the Santa Clara neighborhood because I went to observe there with our government, our Revolution. We were there looking at a housing project named after comrade Bismarck Martínez, who was also killed in Managua, and after Teodoro Ruiz, another comrade who was murdered in Villa Sandino.

So I was looking at that housing program that bears the names of Bismarck Martínez and Teodoro Ruiz, where they are now handing over almost 320 housing lots to these same people. That's the beauty of working for that peace, for that reconciliation, for those benefits.

But here I tell you, brother, the nightmare and the hardship of those months of the failed coup left hard scars. So this law helped me a lot because I did not understand it at the time, I asked myself then "how is it possible?"

But then there are a few words that we have taken as our own that say ... "Forgiveness...No forgetting...and no repetition. And we have already said that there will be no repetition here and they are not going to be able to do that again.

So, brother, I say to you with all sincerity, my experience was hard, my family suffered directly at the hands of the delinquents at the roadblocks. We suffered it, and I tell you that having to leave my house alone with the door broken, out in the open, was hard, because it is when you cannot be at peace in your own home.

Interview with Jhonny Javier Ruiz Urbina.

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020

Armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement murdered Jhonny's father, Teodoro Vidal Ruiz Arana with great savagery

Tortilla con Sal: We're here with compañero Jhonny Javier Ruiz Urbina. Jhonny, we're aware that you and your family suffered a very painful loss during the failed coup attempt in 2018. Maybe you could explain to us what happened?

Jhonny Javier Ruiz Urbina: Yes. Truth be told, it's sad to remember that time because it's painful. We lost our father, Teodoro Vidal Ruiz Arana. People turned up at his house to kill him with great savagery.

On the 12th of July, 2018, my father rang my mother and me early in the day and he told us that people were passing by in Villa Sandino whom he didn't know. People he didn't know were passing by on motorbikes.

Later on in the afternoon, he called again and told us that those same people whom he didn't know were still driving by and now they were insulting him. So, my mother told him to be careful.

At that time I was leaving work and when I got home my mother told me that my father had called her. Then, we received another phone call from my father and he asked me if my mother had told me what was happening. Yes, I told him, be careful, lock yourself in your room.

He said: "I have faith in God that all this is going to stop and I'm accompanied by the hand of God". After this, I told my father to be really careful, that those people are not going around peacefully, they're doing a lot of things. And he told me, "don't worry son". Then the phone call ended.

Later, I went home to my own house and after 15, 20 minutes, he called my younger brother. And he told my younger brother to say goodbye to each one of us because they had his house surrounded... hooded people. And that he didn't know if he was going to survive.

Immediately, my brother called each one of us and he told us that they had killed someone who worked for my father. We wanted to call him, it must have been about 5 or 6 in the evening, and now he wasn't answering his telephone.

For us, to remember that day is very painful because they left him practically decapitated. They destroyed him with machetes and they left him thrown out on the street. They burned down his house. Everything was completely burned.

We saw these people with such hatred destroying, killing...

That moment when they advised us of my father's death, the next day a cousin of ours found him lying in the street...



How can I tell you... They were really tough times for us. A family that didn't bother anyone, a person who was in his house, a person who helped those who needed help...

And they came around to his house purely for being involved with a political party that they didn't like... without any motive... without any motive. This is painful, and not only for the family but also for many people who lived through sad times in those places where they were detained, beaten, painted, for the simple reason of not following their ideology.

Because we have an ideology that our parents taught us, a political ideology which is the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a party which has helped the poor and which continues to help the poor and the needy... social welfare...

How are we not going to defend this cause? How are we not going to defend this struggle? It's sad, I tell you again.

It makes me happy that today we're clarifying to the international media, to those people who want to change the history of what happened and make other countries believe in it, what really happened in our Nicaragua, what happened to the Nicaraguan family, what happened to those people that they beat and killed.

TcS: One thing which I and many other people find difficult to understand is why they attacked your father. Why did they attack people who were apparently doing nothing wrong? Why did they attack him?

Jhonny: A compañera from Canal 10, as it was then, broadcast a report at the time of a statement from one injured person... They arrived at the house, first they had gone by on motorbikes... When he was in hospital he stated that he went to my father's house in order to take a weapon off him... to remove a weapon from him.

That's what he said in his own declaration. And he said my father shot him when he arrived to take the weapon off him. At no time did my father have a weapon. The one who had a weapon was the worker at the place on Villa Sandino.

The man said that he had gone through the roadblock in Lóvago and told them that in the Finca de Lomito near Villa Sandino, my father had attacked him. This is a complete lie.

So, the people from the roadblock in Lóvago went to carry out the act. They basically went filled with hatred without confirming anything, without asking... Essentially, what the person told them was enough for them to go ahead and carry out the deed, to go and burn down his house, to go to kill him with great savagery.

He was more or less decapitated, his head split open with blows from a machete. They shot him too and threw Molotov cocktails at his house. So, these people from the roadblocks in Lóvago went and carried out the murder.

TcS: Who was in charge of the roadblocks in Lóvago?

Jhonny: At that time, there was the man who says he protects the Blues and Whites, who says he protects the people from the countryside, Don Mairena. Medardo Mairena was in charge of the roadblocks. And he and his people gave the order to go and carry out the killing, to carry out the act.

TcS: If you don't mind, could you please clarify that a little? When you say that, what I understand is that you are asserting that nothing could happen without the supervision or orders from Mairena?

Jhonny: That's it. He's the one who gave the order because he was the one in charge of that place. Furthermore, when they brought my father the next day, we had to negotiate with the bishop of the diocese so that they would let the body through. And what did they say to us...those from the Lóvago roadblocks who were responsible?

That if the man in the hospital who had been shot in the arm, the man who belonged to their group, wasn't taken out and brought to a private clinic, they would burn the body right there with the coffin.

I don't think something like that has a name. I think they are people who don't have God in their hearts. nothing but hatred, nothing but bitterness, nothing but destroying a country, destroying the Nicaraguan family.

TcS: Jhonny, at any time did you find out for yourself directly that Medardo Mairena was involved in the roadblock in Lóvago?

Jhonny: He was there. He was there.

TcS: At the time that they threatened to burn the body?

Jhonny: Exactly. Exactly. He was in their social media posts when they sent the photos, laughing. He was there where his whole team was.

And the priest, Father Enrique, who at the time was the parish priest for the Divine Child parish, came specifically to my house, where my mother was, and he told her that they wanted to make a deal. At that time the church was involved in mediation.

And he told me that they were asking for the man at the hospital to be collected, the man who was part of their group at the roadblock, and taken to a clinic.

And I said to him, "Father, do whatever you feel is convenient. I just want my father so we can give him a Christian burial". Because they were going to burn him, they wouldn't let his body through.

TcS: Johnny, I know it's very difficult for you to speak about this. But could you perhaps describe a little the effect that this has had on you and your family?

Jhonny: Ok. Two years have passed since that incident, but how can I explain to you... something like that is not forgotten, it's like it was yesterday. We have those images imprinted in our minds.

We've been receiving psychological help thanks to the government... the municipality, the mayor's office, the vice mayor's office that has been very attentive.

There are times when we get up crying. There are times when we feel like something is missing. He always gave us advice. He always called us in the morning. And I think often remember that and realize he is no longer with us.

There are sad times, times when I wish it was a dream and that it had never happened. But unfortunately, those things happened.

And his last words to us when he called us were that if his blood serves to bring peace, he'll give it willingly.

Every time that friends ask me about it, every time that work colleagues ask me about it, I get a lump in my throat. I get a lump in my throat because seeing him thrown on the ground there, comrade, seeing him thrown on the ground there has left such deep pain that we just leave it in the hands of God.

We want peace and calm, we want to continue working. And we continue going to the sessions with the psychologist, also treatment with herbal teas, to relieve the anxiety a little, the pain. And well, here we are.

TcS: Ok Jhonny. Do you want to add anything else? I have no more questions to ask you

Jhonny: Ok. Just to say to the international media and those who are watching us and listening to us that this tragedy that we experienced, the suffering we went through in our Nicaragua because of a failed coup attempt.

They couldn't prevail and won't be able to either because we're here moving forward. Here we are, saying we're with the Sandinista National Liberation Front. We're fighting for the poorest.

TcS: Thank you Jhonny.

Interview with Maria Mercedes Hurtado and her daughter Heydi Fabiola Baez Hurtado.

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020.

Armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement murdered the son of Maria Mercedes, police officer Luis David López Hurtado.



Tortilla con Sal: We are with compañera María Mercedes Hurtado, mother of Police Inspector Luis David López Hurtado. Perhaps Maria you could tell us what what happened in Juigalpa during the failed coup attempt of 2018 and what happened to your son?

Maria Mercedes Hurtado: My name is María Mercedes Hurtado, mother of Luis David López Hurtado, a policeman who was vilely murdered by the gangs operating the roadblocks, of that I am sure, that they were the ones who murdered my son, the roadblock gangs sent by no good murderers, that woman Francisca and Medardo, who caused so much damage. They took my son's life, doing his duty.

He was a dedicated policeman, he was only 24 years old, he had dreams, goals to fulfill. And they killed so many policemen, and now they wash their hands of it.

They say that the police are the ones who hurt and killed, when it was they who killed a great many police officers and people who were not police officers, they stole, they tortured. If people didn't give them money at the checkpoints they didn't let them pass, they beat them, they threatened them.

The truth here in Nicaragua and in Juigalpa, it was really chaos because of those murderous roadblock gangs who killed my son, who was doing his duty, working for the people. He wasn't some ne'er-do-well, like them going about hurting people, doing damage to a whole people.

TcS: Can you tell me when they killed your son? What day it was and what happened?

Maria Mercedes: Well, although we were here in the house we know he was out doing his duty. It was July 14th. They shot him between Santo Tomas and Lóvago. They came here to tell me at about 10:00 in the morning that he had been shot. You can imagine how it felt as a mother, my only son. They came to tell me he'd been shot. That same day they took him to the Roberto Huembes Hospital, his fellow police officers, gave him every support, gave him good care. but it was all in vain. Four days later on July 18th, he couldn't resist any more and passed away.

TcS: What was his mission on that day?

Maria Mercedes: They were out doing their duty. If there are no police, it is complete chaos. As those people were disturbing public order. He was sent to do his job. He was working.

TcS: And what happened to your son?

Maria Mercedes: I don't know for sure. But it was some sniper, they were well armed those devils at the Lóvago junction, who knows where they got all those weapons, those aggressive criminals.

TcS: And that was at Lóvago?

Maria Mercedes: In Lóvago, yes. In Lóvago. He was the only policeman killed in Chontales, my son.

TcS: Can you talk to us as about the effect on you of losing your son?

Maria Mercedes: Imagine yourself, for a mother... to lose her only son... It's been 2 years since he died on July 18, and the pain is like it was yesterday. People say "Be strong, you have to forget..." How can I? When one has that pain... I wouldn't wish it on anyone to lose a child. No one knows how great the pain is...Days go by, months and the pain is the same as the very first day...

I blame those opposition leaders, Francisca and Medardo. They call themselves the Blue and White, But those people using the flag just make it dirty, they cry the Blue and White!, Self-organized! they're a gang of ne'er-do-wells just hurting people.

TcS: How do you know that it was people organized by Francisca and Medardo, the ones who murdered your son?

Heydi Fabiola Baez Hurtado: There was a roadblock at the exit to Managua, and another one at the Lóvago junction. It was known that these were groups organized by them, sent by them. That was their business: stealing, robbing, beating, murdering and torturing.

There was even a fuel tank truck they hijacked at the road out of town to Managua, which they said they would blow up if people did not do what they said.

TcS: In the town itself?

Heydi: In Juigalpa, yes.

TcS: Right in the town?

Heydi: Yes. And that was the first time My brother was hurt after a brawl broke out among the gang at the road block. The police turned out to keep order. That was the first time my brother got hurt. He got hit in the face with a rock. From there, it started.

On July 14th, my brother was sent out with a group of policemen who were going to clear the roadblock at the Lóvago junction, because the opposition were destroying everything there by Lóvago. And that was where he got shot in the head.

TcS: So it was a sniper...

Heydi: It was one shot, they shot him in the head. He resisted for four days, until 1 p.m. on the 18th. he couldn't hold on and passed away.

He was my mother's only son, and my only brother. It's a great pain for my mother to lose her only son and for me, my only brother. My mother feels the pain above all especially given all those people who did nothing but cause damage.

Almost all of the police who were killed were young, many of them were tortured, killed and burned. For all those mothers of the 22 police officers who were killed that grief is as if it were yesterday. It's a very deep grief,

And what do those families do? The families of the Blue and White political group they complain, that the police are evil, murderers. Not at all. They were doing their duty, their job. Those families aren't the only ones who've been hurt. All these mothers have suffered grief.

Maria Mercedes: I want the whole world to know that they shouldn't listen to these people, or to the news that they see in other countries, that the opposition hasn't done anything, that they are saints. We say this with grief, with experience. My son was doing his job, and they were committing crimes, murdering, stealing. But they are saints, they did nothing.

Let me tell you: That's a lie. They just go around lying, washing their hands, as if they could. Outside Nicaragua they play the innocent victim. But the innocent are those young people, doing their duty, like my only son. They don't consider the damage they did to so many young people. Because most of the police killed were young, they had an aim in life.

TcS: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has not been interested in your case?

Heydi: No. Never.

TcS: Or the UN High Commission for Human Rights? Have they contacted you?

Heydi: No

TcS: Have you had the opportunity to give your testimony to an international human rights group?

Maria Mercedes: No, they have not asked, they have not contacted us to know how we feel, what we think. It's like we don't have any human rights. They have never come to see how I feel about the death of my son. They are only interested in the others, in the coup leaders.

Interview with Captain Atrida González Ramos.

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020

Armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement attacked Atrida and her comrades at the police station in Cuapa.

Tortilla con Sal: We're here in Juigalpa with compañera Atrida González Ramos. What was your experience during the events of the failed attempted coup d'état in 2018?

Atrida: Well, the experience was very painful and very tragic. I was the police chief of the municipality of San Francisco de Cuapa. There were six of us, 4 men and 2 women. We were limited to working in our station because our president gave the order that we couldn't go out and about, so that those people wouldn't think we were repressing them which is what they were saying. So, we couldn't leave the station. However, we had to guard the station and protect ourselves, our lives.



On Wednesday the June 13th, we were in the station guarding it as always, we did so in shifts. And at midnight, which would've been Thursday, June 14th, a pick-up truck arrived with a number of people. All the people we could see were men. Afterwards a truck arrived, what we would call a cattle truck here, a big truck, with what I would say were about 50 men. All armed.

TcS: Excuse me Atrida. What were they armed with?

Atrida: They had long weapons. AK-47s... They had a weapon which I think is called M-16. We were women who were on guard at the station at that time, it was our shift.

TcS: In Cuapa?

Atrida: In Cuapa. We were three women. One was outside, one was in the middle part, and I was inside. When the pick-up arrived, the men got out and started to fire hand held mortars at us. The mortars fell on the roof and a number of men started to get down from the pickup. There were only the three of us women outside. When the roars and noise started to be heard, the men started to get out. My colleague arrived and said to me "Chief, run, they're attacking us".

Cuapa is a fairly calm municipality. I think it's the area with the least criminal activity in the department. It's peaceful, the people are very supportive of one another. It was something that we didn't expect.

However, we had already heard on the news that they had attacked other police stations, that they'd killed other comrades during attacks on police stations, there were injured comrades. But you never expect it will happen to you.

TcS: On what date was that?

Atrida: That was on Wednesday 13th into the morning of Thursday 14th. It was at exactly midnight.

TcS: In June?

Atrida: Yes, in June. It was midnight on the dot when they started to throw mortars at us. They threw stones at us. A mortar landed right where we are now. So what we did was to lock the gates and go inside. I called my chief and informed him that they were attacking us. My chief asked me if I was sure. "Yes, I'm sure they're attacking us". But my boss couldn't believe it either. I put the telephone on loudspeaker so he could hear what was going on because the men were entering and shouting at us. Can I repeat the words that they were saying?

TcS: Sure...

Atrida: So, they entered and they said: "Police shit, surrender. Police shit, we're going to burn you, you're going to die burnt alive. Surrender." My boss told us on the telephone to remain calm, not to lose control. But he never told us that he was going to send backup. And we didn't ask him either.

They arrived, and among all the men who were there, four voices stood out. They were saying to the others: "Let's kill these whores, make them surrender, make them surrender. Fucking police, murderers". We were there. There were about 50 of them. There were two vans. One black Hilux van. One van with a lead colored cabin. And one cattle truck also. All, the majority of the people were male. I didn't see a single woman.

After that, they came up to the gate, the first gate that's there. The gate had two locks, one on the small gate and one on the big gate. They started to hit the locks with the rifles until they broke them. They entered and started to douse the police patrol pick-up truck. They started to douse it and then set it on fire.

TcS: With gasoline?

Atrida: Yes, with gasoline. They doused it in gasoline and set it on fire. So I called my boss and told him that they had set the patrol van on fire and that I was going to go out. Because it was difficult to tell him that we were going to stand up to 50 men when we were only 4 women and 2 men. So my chief said no, material things can be replaced, let them burn it.

But I was angry, indignant, because it wasn't possible that those people... We weren't going to take on 50, it was difficult. However, I wanted to do it, I wanted to do it. And each one of us had out rifles, our weapons. In truth, I was angry, indignant. I wanted them to tell me "Come on, we're going to get you". We're trained for that. But not when confronted by 50 men.

They burnt the patrol van. Then they used the same rifles to break the window glass. They got inside into the first office and they damaged the desks, the computers, the filing cabinets. They smashed, damaged, took out all the papers. And they set everything on fire, everything. They started to shoot at us from the position where they were.

There are marks in the front of the police station from where they shot at us. However, they couldn't get in to where we were because there was another room in between. They had a metal pipe and with it they wanted to break in to where we were.

We responded to the attack. We didn't suffer any injuries. But it was difficult to match them because they were more than 50 men.

They broke all the windows trying to get in. Luckily I think the station's infrastructure helped us a lot, alongside the power of God and Our Lady, because they couldn't get in.

The attack began at midnight and at 2.30am backup arrived from here in Juigalpa. A neighboring unit also arrived. They came to help us. When they arrived, the attackers had just left.

TcS: Did you shoot?

Atrida: We responded to the attack. Yes, we responded to the attack. But I don't know if any of them were injured. I don't think so.

TcS: No one was left injured in place?

Atrida: There were no injuries on our side. Yes, they completely destroyed the station. They damaged the roof because they threw Molotov cocktails at us. They threw Molotovs. And those distinctive voices could be heard over all the others saying: "Throw Molotov cocktails at them, throw Molotov cocktails at them so that they die burnt alive, sons of whores".

TcS: Atrida, what information do you have about the people who ordered and coordinated the attack?

Atrida: What we understand is that like the attacks on the rest of the delegations, for example the deaths of the four policemen in Morrito, were the result of a direct order from Medardo Mairena... and Francisca Ramírez. They were the ones in charge of the roadblocks. They were here in San Pedro del Lóvago. The people who attacked us also came from the roadblock that was at the entrance to Juigalpa.

Our compañeros even told us that when we were being attacked they were celebrating here with gunshots because they thought that we'd been killed. And they surrounded our station because they thought that we were going to exit out the back. They were all going around with rifles. When the scene was being surveyed, a large amount of rifle shells were found. Only a few from revolvers, 38's.

What we knew was that it was a direct order from Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramírez. They were the ones orchestrating this. A senseless hatred... because we serve the country and the security of its citizens. They had hatred towards us for working for the government, for this institution.

TcS : I imagine that you and your colleagues suffered the consequences of that.

Atrida: Yes. The attack on us was before Morrito's attack. However, when we were attacked, we were already on the alert. We were alert to the news, hearing about our fallen comrades. The month of June was... when the number of police casualties was most. By then we had already heard that police had been shot in the streets of Leon. They had attacked a police unit and had kidnapped a comrade whose remains were found later, just some bones.

The others had been killed. So, we are human and we were afraid. We were afraid because the most valuable thing a person have is their life, and that's what they were looking for. They wanted to kill us. They wanted to kill us and their main purpose was to kill us, to get hold of our guns, which was what they were interested in in order to arm themselves. One or two days earlier they had killed Teodoro Ruiz. A local man was killed on his farm.

TcS: Yes, we interviewed his son.

Atrida: So we had seen that. And we had seen the photos and the images. So they were telling us, "Give up, surrender, give up. And I was thinking, what am I going to give myself up for? They're only going to kill me. They're going to do to me what they did to Teodoro. So, no, let's stay and face the final consequences.

But thank God they couldn't get in to where we were. They made it into the station, entered, trashed it, destroyed. But they didn't get in as far as we were.

TcS: Is there any detail that perhaps you learned after the attack or something before the attack that gives you a good basis to say that it was planned and coordinated by Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena?

Atrida: The people who attacked us were not from the municipality. The people came to attack us were people from the San Pedro de Lóvago road block, from the Lóvago junction, and from the Juigalpa roadblock, they were the ones who attacked us in the unit. They were not people from the municipality. Perhaps they were helped and accompanied because there was a roadblock in the municipality. There were people who were in charge of the roadblocks and at the time they arrived here, there was no one at that road block.

TcS: Anyone opposed, anyone hostile to you, listening to this is going to say “well if you couldn't see who was attacking you, how do you know they came from the roadblocks?”

Atrida: Because they said so themselves. When we were being attacked in Cuapa, at that moment they started in the street of Juigalpa, they began exploding their artisanal bombs, hand held mortars and shooting in the air celebrating that they were killing the Cuapa police.

TcS: And the people here heard that?

Atrida: Yes they did. Then when they come back, the ones who already came back from attacking the police, they thought they left all the police dead. So when they come back, when their vehicles arrived at the Juigalpa roadblock, they continued to celebrate. They were throwing their artisanal bombs, mortars, and firing shots celebrating that they had killed the Cuapa police.

TcS: And they said that?

Atrida: Yes, they were celebrating. There were people who said that. They were celebrating. When all those people set out to attack the Cuapa police, they are celebrating because they were going to kill us. We had no idea When they came back, they thought they had killed us. So, when they came back, they set out to celebrate and start letting off their bombs, hand held mortars and shots into the air celebrating that they had killed the Cuapa police.

Interview with Captain Elvin Gutiérrez Martínez

Juigalpa. August 25th 2020

Armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement attacked Elvin and his comrades in the police station at El Coral.

Tortilla con Sal: Here we are in Juigalpa with Captain Elvin Gutierrez Martinez of the police in Juigalpa. So Captain perhaps you could tell us a little about your experience of the events of the failed coup attempt of 2018. What was your experience at that time?

Captain Elvin Gutiérrez Martínez : Well, we lived for about three months, as they say, of pure sorrow. In the first place, because we were locked inside while outside people were being injured, robbed, tortured, even our own comrades being set on fire.

TcS: Captain, could you explain to the people who are going to read and see this testimony why you were locked up, why you were in your police station?

Elvin: The coup plotters came and stated that the police were the enemy of the people and that they should stay in their stations, for which we were given the order not to go out into the street, that it was for us to be confined here and as I was saying watching what happened to our comrades while unable to do anything. There was no security, there was insecurity in the whole country. As a result of this, there was a lot of confusion. The roadblocks came to be set up using violence and were well equipped with firearms.

TcS: Can you explain to people what the roadblocks were?

Elvin: Well, in the first place the roadblocks were set up across the whole country of Nicaragua. In all Lóvago and in La Curva, which were roadblocks that in fact no citizen could pass through if they... every trader in this area taking his product to other places, really, there they had to pay. They'd go there and sometimes they were stripped of their produce in order to be able to pass.

TcS: ...they were robbed. When we were talking to a colleague who knows the area very well, he knew of the case of a truck driver who came from that part of Nueva Guinea with his cheese to take it to Managua. And they took a thousand pesos, two thousand pesos, from him at each stop until he arrived here in Juigalpa and he no longer had money to pay at the roadblock and they did not let him pass and he lost all his cheese. Were there many cases like that?

Elvin: As you say, they were all like that in all the roadblocks. People coming from elsewhere, not only with cheese. Also cattle dealers. They would say in one roadblock they'd take one of his cows, in another one he'd pay cash, and when he arrived at his destination then he didn't make anything and instead of earning something he made a loss. So the traders came and saw that this business they were in was not feasible, so they ended up deciding some of them not to transport anything because they were not going, as they said, to work for those criminals.



But the trucks of Francisca Ramirez, those did pass. Ten or fifteen trucks came with their loads from the Nueva Guinea side, passing through all of El Coral, Chontales, where I was located. At the checkpoint in La Curva they weren't stopped, nor at Lóvago, until they reached their destination in Managua. So, what was going on? Since all these people who are in this sector of Chontales and the ones from the central zone were also people of Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena Sequeira, then they just did their business, as they say. Yes.

We saw all this. And as the traders themselves say, the cattle ranchers too, while Chica Ramirez is filling her pocket with money, we are in debt and we have debt, but she is working just fine. She's turned the roadblocks into a business, not just controlling produce. We heard about other things too. Because certain trucks also came and these served to strengthen the roadblocks with weapons. So they were well reinforced there and what they wanted was to sow chaos in the country. To sow chaos, and you know, the police were surrounded and could do nothing. But they could do everything there, torturing, stealing, what didn't they do during this time? And with the population always demanding our presence.

But for the countries that are against this government, they didn't look at it that way, they made believe that it was the government doing all these things and it wasn't like that. Those of us who lived through this, who were in Nicaragua, those of us as police who were here and saw the reality, no one can tell us that's how it was. No. Someone who did not live through this cannot say how things were, not to us who lived through it.

And the experience we had was when, if I remember correctly, on June 25th at about 11:50 at night we were attacked in the police station of El Coral, Chontales. And we were attacked by 35 men. And who were they? They were from the so called Rural Workers Movement, they were armed and there was a group that was moving in the sector of El Coral, the sector of Río San Juan, and they attacked us there in the police station. As they say, thank God we got out, all right. Not a single policeman was injured.

TcS: How many of you were there?

Elvin: There were six policemen there. It was the border area with New Guinea. A very dangerous area because we had the ones from La Curva, we had the ones from Lóvago and we had the ones from Guinea. So these roadblocks were very strong. So, as we prayed to God that nothing would happen to us, we knew how to defend ourselves, and so... they couldn't take the police station and they managed to escape.

So, who were they? They were from the movement that Medardo Mairena organized with Francisca Ramirez, who were the same people they had in that whole sector, where Chontales and Río San Juan, Zelaya Central, were located.

They arrived at night. They arrived at night and the first thing they made clear and said was "Long live the Rural Workers Movement!" and they said it in a tone that at the time sounded like "Look...there is no one here...We already achieved our objective", but without knowing that we were there. We were, that is, we were already prepared.

We just waited for them to move forward and when they said "Rural Workers Movement" they started shooting and wanting to get in. That's when we were also, right, also facing up to them, we also opened fire and they didn't have the slightest idea other than to run for it and get out of there. They ran away, because to get in they had to climb a fence and they wanted to climb the fence and when one is already waiting as you might say, we let them come a little closer and we were ready with a sign that we had, so that we could really start... because we were observing.

What we were seeing is that they could surround us and that those who were advancing on us could then advance too on the other side, which is why we realized that they were only coming via one entrance, so we could later on, with the word to attack, so we saw and responded to the attack that they made, which was several shots that they fired and they had shotguns, AKA rifles, and artisan made weapons.

At that moment, when they attacked us, the truth is that we didn't want to fire either, because there were... in front of us we had several houses that could also be damaged. We fired several shots in the air to alert them so people would hide, take cover, and then we proceeded to counterattack these people, which is when they ran away from the place.

TcS: So they identified themselves before starting to shoot?

Elvin: They identified themselves with that mention of "Here is the Rural Workers Movement" and we were there but we didn't respond. Because the truth is that, as you know, six police officers in a police unit with twenty-five or thirty or so assailants who were approaching... we had a strategy too and we proceeded to identify how many of them there really were and whether they were only coming from one direction.

Because you can imagine if they had surrounded us there, it would have been difficult because they would have come at us from four different angles wanting to finish us off. But thank God they only came... and there were six comrades here, among them women, so they said "we have it easy here". But here, regardless of whether we have men or women, we are here to give our lives and to protect our nation from these vandals.

TcS: How would you go about explaining to people abroad that there is a direct connection between Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena and these attacks that you in El Coral, Atrida in Cuapa and the comrades in other places, all had to suffer? How would you prove the relationship between Ramirez and Mairena and the attacks?

Elvin: Well, you know that at the beginning there was an investigation in the country. And thus we are clear about their participation in all these events. There was evidence, there were mobile phone calls, there were videos, there were witnesses, there was, as they say, all the evidence necessary to point to them. The police in Nicaragua are not going to accuse you just like that, without any evidence.

In this we are very objective, very serious about things, because on the spur of the moment you might say it was so-and-so, but how do we prove it was so-and-so? But there is enough evidence and when you have that evidence you come and make a case before the Public Prosecutor and the Public Prosecutor is obliged to present it to the court. And that's what was done.

TcS: And at some point did these people from human rights, from the IACHR for example, or from the United Nations or from some organization like Amnesty International, at some point did they interview you as part of their investigation?

Elvin: Well as regards those international bodies they were not present here. They just listened to the other side as victims. They listened to them. But as regards all of our police brothers who were murdered, all of those relatives who came and came and were interviewed here or reported that they were victims, all those who were painted here on the street, those who were robbed.

These were not listened to by these international organizations. In the reports they made, the fact that they did indeed set up roadblocks and that they stole and tortured, raped and even killed, they don't mention that

And in all these years that Comandante Daniel has been president, the country's economy has grown. It grew. And these people don't like it. Who are they that don't like it? The ones who are against it. And they will go on disliking it. But in spite of all this that happened, we keep going, we keep striving, we keep working for the people.

And we are working people, the men and women in this police force, working for the security of our people, we're going to continue to be that way and we are going to be against any enemy that may want to attack this nation again, this country, and we are going to be here, so that this will never happen again, and there's a slogan that has remained in the minds and hearts of everyone which says, "They couldn't prevail, nor will they".

Interview with Walter Suárez.

Empalme de Lóvago. August 26th 2020

Armed opposition activists threatened and harassed Walter and his family for over two months.

Tortilla con Sal: We have been interviewing several people in Juigalpa about what happened at the time of the failed coup in 2018. What was your experience here in Lovago?

Walter Suárez: Something very sad, bitter, remembering that experience is very painful. To remember how those who were called Anti-Canal protesters came to be installed on May 9th, 2018, led by Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez.

They came here to the community on May 9th, supported by citizens of the municipality of Acoyapa. To remember it is sad, painful.

Everything that we suffered in the family, the adults, the children. Unfortunately, one of the older adults died, because of his emotional state.

Sad to see what they did to the town: theft, looting, death. Promoted by all those people who call themselves Anti-Canal. Remembering all that happened from May 9th on, something you thought would never have happened.

TcS: What happened that 9th of May?

Walter: They showed up. Some people from Nueva Guinea had gone to an anti-canal protest march in Managua. At about 7 at night on May 9th, people from the municipality of Acoyapa were waiting here on the bridge and when the people from Nueva Guinea were approaching in 3 or 4 trucks, they began to burn tires on the bridge.

There were about 7 or 8 vehicles waiting for those people. Two trucks stopped in front of the house and they said they were going to burn the house with the people inside. I guess many of them were drunk, because of their angry and furious attitudes.

This house was singled out by these people for not having the same opinion as them. We had a flag of the Frente Sandinista always on top of the house. At 8.15pm they said that the flag and the house should be burned.

TcS: The flag of the Frente Sandinista?

Walter: The Sandinista flag has always flown on the roof of our house. That's what made them say they'd burn the flag and the house too. They didn't care about the children, and the adults who lived in the house, about 12 people, a multi-family household.

This started a nightmare for a great many of us in our country. There were no peaceful nights to rest. You didn't know what was going to happen, if you were going to live to see the following day.



You had to sit up in bed, not sleeping, trying to get some respite from the noise and commotion, from the shooting in front of the house, or from the stones. We couldn't watch the television news channels. We were besieged every night. They would come banging on the doors. It was sad.

TcS: You were being threatened?

Walter: Yes all the time. Those were three months of threats and imprisonment. We couldn't go out in front or behind the house.

TcS: What did you see on the Lóvago Bridge?

Walter: They closed the traffic, they charged people a toll. That was their point for robbing people. They would pull all kinds of malicious stunts there.

TcS: In this school next door, someone told me that they took it as a base of operations, they held people prisoner, ill-treated them. stored weapons there...

Walter: Yes, the school was the center of operations, the jail, the warehouse, the logistics center, supported by people from the community who shared their way of thinking. In the school, they beat a lot of people. A friend of mine from Acoyapa was grabbed, stripped, painted, made to run, beaten, and mistreated. We felt helpless, just hearing the screams.

Another friend, because he had different political ideas, they took him off a truck where he was going to Managua to deliver cheese, and they also stripped him naked, painted him, made him run while they threw mortars at him.

They also brought the kidnapped police officers from Morrito there. You could hear the screams.

TcS: The police officers they abducted?

Walter: Yes. They brought them here to the school. It was their center of operations. Many kinds of things happened here.

TcS: Many people say that Medardo Mairena was in charge, or that Francisca Ramírez was also in charge. Can you confirm that?

Walter: Yes. They were the leaders. They came here regularly.

TcS: Ramirez also came here?

Walter: Yes, she came to the community before they set up the roadblock. And later, she came repeatedly, her and Medardo Mairena.

TcS: What did they do?

Walter: They were the bosses, they came to give orders to their henchmen.

TcS: Were they handing over money or weapons?

Walter: Everything. They were the ones financing the whole situation. They brought cheese and beans they handed over money, supplies, and made sure of the supply weapons to their people.

I well remember every night the spirit, the anger, the disquiet these people caused us by causing such damage in the country, decrying the government, attacking the Sandinista party, acting against the Nicaraguan people.

This is what I will never forget. There are still nights that my little daughter wakes up scared. that is what has hurt me the most. That my two little girls feeling that they can't get over those memories. Remembering that I have this nightmare deep down that we didn't know if we were going to wake up to see the following day.

TcS: How did you manage to escape so they didn't mistreat you as well?

Walter: In my case I was able to get out under cover. I was able to get away 12 days before they cleared everything. Because I was the target, not so much the family. The siege of the house was because of me, because I am from the Sandinista Front. So it was me who was the target.

I escaped to Juigalpa, wearing an old T-shirt, rubber boots, a hat, a beard. So I got away towards Juigalpa. The rest of the family left for Acoyapa. They didn't want to let them go because they said I was still there, but someone told them I was gone because they kept the house under observation. So my in-laws were able to go to Acoyapa.

The house was no longer under tight siege, because the objective was me, not the whole house. They painted the house, they came in here behind the house.

Around here were the paths they took to the school, to the health center, to the children's dining hall. All the public spaces in the community they took over as their command post.

Interview with Inspector Milena del Rosario Medina

San Carlos. August 26th 2020

Milena presents her experience of the armed violence of the Anti Canal Movement activists at El Tule in 2014 which was the precedent for their armed violence in 2018.

Tortilla con Sal: Here we are with compañera Inspector Milena del Rosario Medina. Compañera Milena participated in the operation of the clearance of the roadblock that had been erected in El Tule in the year 2014 by the so-called anti-Canal movement; Milena can you talk to us about your experience in that action?

Milena del Rosario Medina: At that time we were part of the GIR group, supporting the GIR group and at that moment we had been there for about nine days waiting for the action they were going to take because they had their roadblocks.

At that moment we were unarmed, all we had were our uniforms; we had no weapons.

TcS: Compañera what is the GIR group?

Milena: The Rapid Intervention Group; we did not have a DOE group that could operate here in the urban area; it was the GIR group of rapid intervention; at that time we had no order to act...so we had to wait to see what they were trying to do; we were waiting, at certain hours they allowed vehicles to go through after which they would close the road completely. And we were there for 8 to 9 days, waiting. And on the December 24th 2014 itself, we acted because there was already tankers carrying fuel, they had placed a tanker that they wouldn't allow to go through...

At that moment they already had... at the time we were going to intervene, we were equipped only with our shields and at the moment we intervened all of them were armed not only with the wooden sticks they had with nails all around them on them, they had like about 100 nails each, we call them maces; so if they hit you with them your arm could be badly cut or any part of your body they managed to hit. On that occasion they managed to hit me here in the arm but they didn't hit me with the nails but only with the wooden part of the stick. So, it did not injure me but it caused inflammation.

They threw stones at us; because they threw at us sticks, stones and whatever they had in their hands. They were merciless; we were a few and we did not expect they were to have that attitude.

TcS: How many of you were there? 10? 12?

Milena: We were only 18 and they were about 2,000 people. The stones left us some body wounds but nothing serious. At the moment we intervened, we thought it was going to be something quick; that we could talk to them about leaving the area but it was not like that since they had arms.

TcS: Firearms?



Milena: Yes, firearms. There was a colleague of the DOE, because they had already arrived... but when they arrived we were still left with only our shields and there was nothing for it but try and sustain the the shield with our arms. They were smashing the shields up with the force of the blows from their sticks and the stones they threw. So then a colleague did get hurt, one of the DOE with a gunshot wound to the head. They were armed. They fired their guns; at that moment they had knives, firearms stones, sticks, everything. But we were unarmed with nothing but our shields.

TcS: Marta told me that a police colleague from here got a bullet in one of his lungs, that can't be operated...

Milena: And it is still lodged there; doing an operation is very risky. But on that occasion from the beginning they were armed, because they aren't fighting whether the canal is built or not, they fight for interests that we all know about, because the canal interests not of the people who are located in this territory but of other people who do not even live in the area.

TcS: Then you are talking about political interests?

Milena: Exactly, exactly, because at that time most of the people who were taking part there were there because they were paying them and deceiving them; some of them sent their workers in exchange for drink to stay there and some people get paid for the day they are there, not because they have a real interest as people but because they were ordered to be there.

Then in our group, two of us were women, the others were men and at that moment if I remember well our comrade Marta was among the first to be injured with a stone on her shin; she was one of the first to leave, she was sent to San Miguel. The rest of us stayed put, coping with the blows, the stones. We had a wounded colleague but we stayed put and held out until 7.00am when the DOE group arrived to support us has, arrived. Meanwhile we carried on resisting with the little that we had which was no more than a shield and not everybody ended up with their shield

TcS: So in the end you achieved to carry out the clearance?

Milena: Already by 11 am the clearance had taken place and vehicles were able to go through; but it took from 5am until 11 am for us to clear the place definitively, but always without weapons we only had our shields, tear gas, and rubber bullets and nothing else. No one had firearms and we had no firearms.

TcS: Can I ask compañera, why you had no weapons? Did it have to do with the orders you were given?

Milena: Our orders were that we would not intervene with firearms but we would bring about the clearance in a peaceful manner. So no one could carry firearms because that was the guideline we have always followed; and we strictly obeyed the guideline, no firearms because we have to obey the orders and at that moment the order was not to carry firearms. We had to carry out a peaceful eviction.

We stayed in position because there were some who withdrew at the time of the cleared but were still lurking around, putting pressure on the place. I at that moment when the eviction took place already around 10am.

More or less at that time when I was guarding the place we found some 25 knives in the local rural market; the peasants kept food for everyone there during the nine days of the occupation and there they had various kinds of of knives. So our orders were to stay there always guarding the area in case they wanted to come back to take control of the place, so we stayed there for the whole of December; not the whole team, but some of us stayed guarding the area so they wouldn't retake the roadblock.

That first roadblock they set up was a trial run in preparation for what they would do in 2018; already in 2018 they were trained. Because in 2018 the people who passed through the roadblock did so having to hand over anything of value.

Whereas in 2014 they took nothing away from people, who just waited until they were allowed to pass through. As there was no problem, they waited for the time imposed, only being allowed through twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon, they only let ambulances pass but not people. They didn't let people through...

TcS: In 2014?

Milena: That's the way they did in 2014; they did not let anybody through...

TcS: And in 2018?

Milena: In 2018 it was different if they were offered money, they let people through and whoever went through had to pay...

TcS: Did they allow the ambulances through or not?

Milena: In 2018 they let pass the ambulances but they inspected the ambulances, since they inspected everything. That is, they attributed themselves an authority and power they did not have. They inspected the ambulances and made the crew and the paramedics wait. Not only did they do that but also they had to paint the ambulance with messages against the government, against the police against citizens and with that they violated the rights of the patient.

Some patients were experiencing serious problems associated with their ailment or emergency, some with cardiac conditions, pregnant women ready to give birth and there was one case where a pregnant woman died. People who had serious problems which the roadblock gangs never took seriously, namely that when a patient is transferred it is because they face a critical situation and the amount of time they delayed could have been one or two hours, which were crucial for the patient.

Back then in 2014 we had only two colleagues who were badly injured, one with a bullet to his head and the other, as I said, with a bullet lodged in his lung, and thanks be to God all the rest of us suffered only minor injuries that were quick to heal.

Interviews with Inspector Marta Machota Beltran and Senior Sub-Officer Biron Alberto Moreno Navarro

San Carlos. August 26th 2020.

Marta y Biron present their experience of the armed violence of activists of the Anti Canal Movement at El Tule in 2014 as an antecedent to the groups armed violence in 2018.



Tortilla con Sal: Well, here we are with compañera Marta Machota Beltrán, Police Inspector here in Rio San Juan; Inspector, you were present at the incident at the El Tule bridge in 2014 during a protest of the so-called Anti-Canal Movement, can you tell us what happened?

Marta: Well, at that time it was 2014, the truth is that it was a movement that took over what is known as La Entrada del Tule, where there is what's called a rural market. In that year they took over that place and we were waiting for the order from headquarters for about 8 days while observing the activities they were doing there.

It was one of the first roadblocks they set up, they had a lot of activity, like cooking for everyone, so they engaged in many

activities there. They consumed liquor and many, many things. They stopped vehicles that they let pass at times when they arbitrarily allowed vehicles through, but only the ones they wanted.

It was at this point they decided to stop two tankers carrying fuel and not let them continue on to the town of San Carlos. That was when the police took the decision to carry out the clearance because it was by then an extremely necessary action because they were already threatening to set on fire the two fuel tankers they had hijacked at the time

TcS: What if they had carried out their threat?

Marta: Well, that would have affected a lot of things, right? Because they were not merely on the bridge but were at the entrance of El Tule; it's called a trading center, the little market as people call i...

TcS: And then when you received the order to try to clear the roadblock, what happened?

Marta: Well, they were ready, they were ready to receive us, right? Because we were totally unarmed, they even carried machetes, stones, some sticks with nails all around them; they had prepared them just to wait for us because maybe they had firearms, weapons such as knives, machetes, stones and the whole lot. They were prepared to receive us and we were totally unarmed. The eviction was achieved because we also had the support of the DOE, the special operations directorate of the police.

TcS: And the DOE were armed?

Marta: They just had tear gas...

TcS: And what happened? Because, I understand that in this incident, some fellow police officers were wounded by firearms.

Marta: That's right, we have one of our colleagues still affected up to this moment, our information that he was shot in the lung and that it was not possible to operate to remove it. So he is a colleague that has been assigned to other work because of what the wound caused him at that moment.

TcS: How many were injured in El Tule?

Marta: There were several but the rest were wounded with machetes, sticks, stones...

TcS: Who was leading this roadblock, did they have leaders organizing and coordinating?

Marta: That's right, since the start of the Rural Workers Movement, as they call it, the rural workers' movement directed by Medardo, by señora. Francisca Ramírez, they gave orders from their places, right? And here many people, many rural workers were following their line or their orders; well there were many local rural workers but in effect she was the one who was giving them orders and they were carrying out that type of activity.

Tortilla con Sal: So here we are with the senior non-commissioned officer Biron Alberto Moreno Navarro. You were also in the 2014 incident at El Tule during the protest of the so-called Anti-Canal Movement, which is now called the Rural Workers Movement, can you tell us what happened?

Biron: That's right, we were there, the group of officers from the GIR of the San Carlos unit. We were here on the south side of the bridge, where they had control of the area, but their Movement did not let anyone through.

Everone was affected both transport traffic and other people from the whole department, because there was no transport, and we were located on the side of the bridge, on the south side, where this type of activity was taking place.

At that moment, the situation became much more serious because it was complicated by the two fuel tankers they were threatening to set on fire. It was at that moment our group got the task to clear the roadblock.

TcS: And the information that the Inspector gave me was that you were armed only with tear gas

Biron: Yes, with the little material that we had here for crowd dispersal; we had a few tear gas grenades and a few rubber shotgun pellets there. Our order was not to carry firearms, just... just that kind of stuff, just rubber bullets from their guns and tear gas, no weapons were carried there

TcS: And then when you received the order to carry out the clearance, what happened? what was the response of the rural workers?



Biron: When we advanced, with our shock team for dispersal we carried our shields and the tear gas, the shotgun crowd dispersion pellets, but at that moment it had little effect confronting the people who were there, because they were prepared with machetes, they had sticks with nails through them. When the confrontation took place, everyone spread out, but the police units were also dispersed at that time, and the rural workers took advantage of the situation to attack the least protected.

One of our colleagues was wounded and almost had his hand hacked off with a machete, all these fingers were nearly cut off, but they were saved in the hospital. There was one colleague who was from the Managua brigade of the Directorate of Special Operations who was shot in the lung with a bullet in the back. Another was also shot in the leg, at which point police patrol vehicles were used to go in quickly to get them out, and three or four patrol vehicles were affected, also damaged by the rain of stones.

But there with the strength of the entire police unit they were able to clear the roadblock. There were two specific points that they had occupied which were the higher vantage points where there were armed people. Further down there were people with machetes, knives, and sticks with nails, but in the higher part where there were people with AK47s.

After that kind of incident, we have always kept our guard up, we have always gone into those communities so that the population knows that the police can be wherever necessary to provide security for the population regardless of what may have taken place there.

However, there are always acts against the police when we enter into these communities, most affected by this type of organized movement, and yes, there have been confrontations, but with a lower intensity, they are no longer on the scale of 2014 in El Tule.

Interview with Senior Sub-Officer Ana Cecilia Arana and Inspector Javier Antonio Bolaños.

San Carlos. August 26th 2020

Ana Cecilia and Javier survived the massacre of July 12th 2018 when armed activists of the Movimiento Campesivo murdered four police officers and a primary school teacher in El Morrito. They describe the massacre and their subsequent abduction and ill-treatment.



Tortilla con Sal: So we are here in San Carlos, the departmental capital of Río San Juan with National Police Sub-Officer Ana Cecilia Arana and Sub-Inspector Javier Antonio Bolaños. Perhaps you could tell us a little about the events of July 12, 2018, when you were attacked in your police station in Morrito by a large group of activists and militants of the so-called Rural Workers Movement. Could you tell us what happened to you that day?

Ana Cecilia: Well, on July 12, 2018 we were at the police unit in Morrito, where we were working. We were with my colleagues, there were 13 of us, we were in the police station because it was really our home, our work where we were keeping watch, doing our job, as we belong to the institution. At that moment we were in the police station when we were notified by Commissioner Bustos, who is now dead, that there was going to be a march and that they had asked for permission and were going to enter the town of Morrito, but that they were going to enter to carry out their march and that then they were going to leave.

At that moment we said, well, they were given permission, they could do it because it was a peaceful march where they said that children and women were going, but we didn't realize the plot, the ruse they were carrying out at that moment. We, as always when we are guarding the area; we came and put, by orientation of Commissioner Bustos, a yellow band around the police station that said "do not pass- prohibited - National Police," because we thought it was a perimeter where only the police could be, we respected the part beyond that because it was the street. They were going to hold a march, assuming it was "peaceful."

At 2.40 in the afternoon on July 12th 2018, we were at our posts, doing our work, as we did every day, guarding the place. We saw a truck come in, it was a big truck like the ones they put cattle in because it's big, we saw... sorry, this affects me... we saw a truck come in, we saw a little white pick-up truck come in, then we saw a red truck come in. We were, I was at the main door of the police station. My companions were guarding every part, guarding our house, we did not do anything to them, we were guarding the place where we were working...

When that red truck stopped with a bunch of men and I just remember and saw when they said, one of them who is dead now, "you sons of bitches cops" he took out his hand, "you sons of bitches cops will die today". At that moment I said to Commissioner Bustos, 'Chief, talk to San Carlos because these people are armed.' In a matter of seconds I felt a rain of bullets, a real rain of bullets, that began to rip through the station. I stood still and watched the bullets fall, not knowing about my colleagues who were taking shelter on the outside, because I was on the inside, and thanks be to God because I am here.

Then at that moment Commissioner Bustos came out and spoke on the phone, and I came, I grabbed my phone and started calling my chief who at that moment was Captain Heizell and I started telling her what was happening "those people are coming, and I just heard them say 'kill these motherfucking dogs, damn them, they have to be dead, they don't have to be here. Set fire to them, burn the police, and don't leave any of them alive.' "

At that moment the three women officers went to find shelter, Carolina, Yorlenny and me. I didn't know anything about my other colleagues, but I only heard a gang of men coming closer and I heard them kicking one of my colleagues, Singler. They asked him "what is your name, you damn dog?" And he said "My name is Singler, don't beat me!"

Then at that moment I closed my eyes and said "Lord, I'm in your hands, but Lord, do not let them kill me, give me one more chance at life". I felt that that moment was an eternity for me because I really thought that I was not going to live. We didn't do anything to them, we didn't shoot, nevertheless, they came, they got in, they hit us, they kicked us. When... there was a moment that passed...

They found us, some men took us out of the room, and as I went out to the police station corridor, I saw that Commissioner Bustos was lying on the floor. They said to me "damn bitch, get him up, he's asleep, get him up, tell him we're leaving" and I said "No, he's dead" and I came and bent down and grabbed Commissioner Bustos and they said to me "That's what you dogs do, and that's how you're going to die, because you're dogs" they said.

And they took us out and I just looked down at where Lenin and Faustino were, already dead. Then I looked at one of my colleagues, I asked about Bolaños, I asked about the others, but nobody told me anything, I just looked at the ones who were dead. And they said, "You dogs, you sons of bitches, you're all going to die this way; pull out their fingernails, set them on fire, pour gasoline on them." And they had us outside lying on the ground."

TcS: That was in Lóvago?

Ana Cecilia: No, there in Morrito, after we arrived at the Morrito junction. There was Evert, they tied us up. Thank God they tied me by myself, because my friends were tied up in twos and threes. And then a man came, grabbed a shotgun and was about to hit me with it. I don't know, I asked God to save me.

The only thing I did was to hold on and ask him to help me, save me, because I wanted to see my family, the only thing I said to God was "give me one more chance to live." And when that man came over me, I don't know but he turned around and hit Evert, and he hit him in this part here and broke all of that and Evert fell on the floor, after he was on the floor he kicked him, that was in the Morrito junction.

From there they put us in a white pick-up and took us to Lóvago. While we were in Lóvago they beat us, kicked us, and searched me all over. A woman was touching my breast, and touched my private parts and she was telling me that 'I was a damn bitch if I worked for the government,' that we weren't going to live and that many of the men who were there needed women and that's what we were for, we were going to die and we weren't going to live because we were police and they hated the police.

When they put us there in Lóvago, many men came up to tell us vulgarities, vulgarities, that they needed women and that each woman could take on 50 men who were going to rape us. But then at about 8 or 9 o'clock at night Medardo Mairena arrived and he said that he was the president of the peasant people and that he had participated, and that we had to renounce the government, we had to resign from being police because he knew where we lived, he knew what we did and that we had children and that we were going to pay.

If they let us go, we were going to pay with our children, they were going to burn us, and that it was us that killed our colleagues. He told us that if we resigned he would give us a position in the government, but we had to resign, and that if he gave us the opportunity to live he would spare our lives, but we had to be against the government, and that we were the ones who had killed our colleagues.

TcS: He wanted you to say that?

Ana Cecilia: Yes. And they recorded us, tied up, and they told us what we had to say. On the outside there were men who could reach us with their put machetes, we were enclosed, like in a cell, and they would put machetes against us and jab at us. So what we did was lie down on the floor so that they couldn't do anything to us. And they would just ask each other permission to 'rape these bitches, so they wouldn't live.'

And I watched how they beat my colleagues, but thank God he gave us the chance, we didn't do anything to them, at no time did we offend them, at no time did we violate their march, at no time did we do anything, nevertheless, they came, they beat us, they kidnapped us, they offended us, they killed our friends, and it's something you never forget, ever.

TcS: So how did you get out of there?

Ana Cecilia: There came a time when they said they had negotiated with someone. At that time we didn't know who the negotiation was with, because we were there. And at about 11 or 12 at night they let us go, and I was asking about my colleagues because most of the time we spend with our colleagues, the least time is with our family, but we spend more time with our colleagues.

When I was asking about my colleagues, they came and took us out. The people, the women who beat me, they took me out themselves as if nothing had happened, 'look, here we took you out' as if they had not beaten me, as if they had done nothing.

They took us to something like an ambulance, of the Red Cross, they handed us over, and I asked, and there I saw my colleague Bolaños who told me that Marlon was dead, and Lenin, Commissioner Bustos and Don Faustino. I asked for him - knowing that we had shared more than a month together and to know that in a thousandth of a second they took their lives just for fun, just out of hatred, without us having done anything to them.

It is something that remains in the mind, that remains in the heart, that will never be forgotten, that will never end, that hatred, that resentment, that we never really did anything to them, nor do we do anything to them, and they are always...

TcS: So in your case Javier, did something similar happen to you?

Javier Antonio Bolaños: As for me, they grabbed me in the second group, they took them first, they took them out in a truck first, and since I was in the back with another colleague, then they grabbed us last, they surrounded us there. While they grabbed us, they ripped off our shirts and buttons and disarmed us, they hit us with a shotgun, they had AK47 rifles and then they made us run. They told us to 'run to the truck waiting in the street, run to that truck and you're going to leave in it' in the middle of the shooting, because they kept on shooting.

TcS: They kept on shooting?

Javier: Yes, they continued to shoot at the municipal offices, and they made us run in the middle of all the shooting and they pushed us onto the truck and transferred us to the Morrito junction. When we were leaving Morrito, I was hit in the back by a bullet and my partner was also hit. The same people who were with us in the back of the truck, who kidnapped us, they put us in front of them and they were crouched down because the shooting was still going on at the mayor's office. Then on that ride they shot us with a bullet, I was hit in the back, and when they pushed me into the back of the truck they also hit me with a shotgun. I was badly injured.

And they moved us to Lóvago. We were at the Morrito junction for a while waiting for the rest of them who were still there, who were more than 200. They were all armed, some hooded, others without hoods. So we were there, and then they took us and made another stop in a place that they call Cincoyal, which is where one of them lives who was mentioned there as Carlos Zamora, who was a PLC candidate. That's where he lived.

So we stayed there for a while and then they took us to Lóvago. There I asked myself, and my colleagues, what would they do? And they put us in the school but we were surrounded, when we arrived at Lóvago there were a great many people all armed, shooting into the air, and others with machetes, and they took us out of the truck and put us in a school classroom there.

When I entered the classroom I saw that my colleagues were all injured. I didn't see the women officers because they were being held somewhere else. So in the place where we were there was a doctor, I don't know on whose part, but she treated our wounds provisionally.

And I saw all around the school many people threatening us, shouting for them to bring us out, that they were going to set us on fire alive, and we were there until about 11pm when this Medardo Mairena arrived; yes, it was 11pm when he told us to resign, that he would spare our lives but that we had to resign because the president had to go, that it was a form of pressure for the government so that he would leave the country.

While we were there we heard something about a negotiation, we didn't know with whom. Then this was when an ambulance arrived, I'm not sure, from the Red Cross. They took us out and had us get into it, and Medardo told us not to worry, they were going to the hospital in Juigalpa to be treated there, we negotiated.

Then they put us in the ambulance and it was when I saw her and the other women that they brought out of another part of the school and put them in the ambulance. They sent us to the hospital in Juigalpa where we stayed for several days to have our wounds treated.

TcS: In the course of all the horrible things you went through, did you hear about Francisca Ramirez at some point there in the school in Lóvago?

Javier: There they mentioned that she was part of the Rural Workers Movement, she wasn't there but she was represented.

Ana Cecilia: Because Medardo said I am the president of the peasant people, it is not only me, there are many of us here, a majority, even a lawyer from Morrito was there. And he said that we should resign, that he was going to spare our lives, and that everyone was there, that they were really the ones who were going to govern and who were going to give us a chance.

Javier: Yes, they had already divided up power among themselves, they felt that they had already triumphed, because when they put us on the ambulance, all of them were shooting their weapons out of joy that were already in power, they had won.

TcS: Is there anything you want to add?

Ana Cecilia: For me it is something that I lived in my own flesh with my colleagues, I thank the Lord first because this is something that we really lived through, and we tell the truth, we are not lying, we lived it.

And it's a fact that we didn't do anything to these people. However, they were determined to kill our colleagues even though we didn't do anything to them. We were in our house, we say our house because where we are that is our house, we are brothers [and sisters], where we work together.

However, these people came, they came to destroy, to kill with hatred without us having done anything to them. But this doesn't mean that we are going to run or leave, no, here we are, we are working.

TcS: They forced you to say that you had killed your colleagues?

Ana Cecilia: Yes, they tied us up, we were tied up, there are even videos that they uploaded of us getting tied up, and at the same time there were a lot of people; they were not going to put the camera on the rest of them threatening us with weapons. They only focused on us, but around us there were any number of men armed with machetes, with guns, with AK47s, with shotguns, and they were pointing at us, and we didn't know what to do, they were threatening us and we had to say that.

TcS: Yes, that's where Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Mora and Luisa Pineda came out saying, "no, no, it was that the police killing each other", in effect Chamorro, Mora, Pineda were in collusion with Mairena and his people. What do you think?

Javier: Well, for me, when I saw the bullet impacts and my colleagues, they threatened us, they told us 'you say it was those from mayor's office who shot you, and if you don't, you will stay here, you must say this, you're going to say this and this,' trying to get us to blame those who were in the mayor's office.

And it was never like that, because the town hall was a long way from where we were, and the impacts were there from the same men who took us hostage; and we heard when one of them said that they had messed up, that that wasn't what they had planned, and that they had gone too far, they weren't going to kill anyone, but here's the reality: they went in without any mercy and started shooting

Ana Cecilia: At no time did we do anything to them. Never the less, they arrived and began to shoot bullets, to start killing, we never even pointed guns, or what were they doing, that was the march: to come and kill. Because at that moment Medardo said, we are going to let you go but you are going to say that you yourselves killed your colleagues, and say it was the mayor's office that killed you, you yourselves killed yourselves. If you don't say that just the way we told you, you will stay here, but if you say that, you will get to go, there is no problem.

He even told me that 'You are going to resign;' I did not say anything to him, all I say is that I give the honor and glory to my god because until now I am alive. And that's all, there were the ropes we were tied up with, and there were any number of armed people aiming guns at us, threatening us, and he said, you have to say this. He put words in our mouth, that weren't true.

Interview with Mayra Eliseth Vásquez.

San Carlos. August 26th 2020

Compañera Mayra Vasquez is the widowed partner of Lieutenant Marlon José Requenes López who was murdered on July 12th in El Morrito by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement.

Tortilla con Sal: Can you talk a little bit about what happened in the context of that terrible event in El Morrito?

Mayra Eliseth Vasquez: My husband had been a policeman for eight years and nine months. I had two babies with him. At the time of the blockades, he was located here in San Carlos, but he was sent to the El Morrito post to cover that area. When that happened, in the morning we talked. He told me to take care of his children, and that he trusted in God that all this would soon pass, that he would soon return. He had planned to come back on Saturday, but when all that happened...



My sister works for the army, and she sent a message to him. She told him that they were going to hold a march in Morrito, and those people didn't mean well, that he should take care of himself.

TcS: Who was going to do the march?

Mayra: The rural workers had asked for the march that was going to be held in El Morrito and they had asked for peaceful event for it to be allowed . He confirmed and asked if they were going to be allowed and he was told yes and that it was going to be a peaceful march.

When we finished talking around 12 noon, he said he had just finished eating, everything was calm, just waiting for the march. A little after 12 o'clock, an uncle of his arrived and told me that they were attacking Morrito's police station, and that they didn't know how they were doing.

At one o'clock, his mother came to the house and told me that they were attacking the post, and that there were wounded policemen. I wanted to call him but I thought that if he was hiding, the phone would ring, and they would find him. I sent him a text message to take care of himself, and that I had him in my prayers. But he didn't answer me any more.

Then at about 5.00pm, I heard an uproar. I was in the house nervous when I heard a niece scream, grabbing her head. "Aunt, they killed my Uncle Marlon!" I ran desperately along the pavement outside. I called the police but they didn't answer me. I called his chief. He said that they had attacked the police station, but that he didn't know if my husband was one of the wounded. At half past five, I realized the truth when I went to his mother's house because my sisters wouldn't let me out of the house alone.

I saw how they were fixing the curtains, and they confirmed that he was indeed dead. I didn't believe it, I prayed to the Lord that it wasn't true and hoped that he has just been abducted, because they told me that they had abducted several policemen. I went to the morgue and he wasn't there. But the police confirmed that he was one who had died.

Three days before he left, he arrived at the house wearing his police trousers, and his police cap on back-to-front. He arrived with a chicken. "Today we are going to eat well, my old woman." I made the chicken and potato stew and we ate. Then we went to rest in the bedroom.

I will never forget what he said. "Old lady, things are not good, they are bad. You know how many policemen have died. If they kill me here, all I ask is that you take care of my children. I'm thinking about my kids, my mom, and you. Be strong, keep on going, don't leave them alone, they are small."

So I asked him, "How can you say that? What have they told you?"

And he said to me, "I became a police officer, and they are not just my work companions, they are my brothers. I have to defend them. If they come here to attack them, I'm going to die with my boots on, I have to defend our country."

I said, "Don't think like that, think about your family, your mother. The children are little. The boy is only 8 years old, and the girl is 5 years old. Think about them."

He was crying like a child, he was hugging me. "Take care of them, if something happens to me, Don't abandon them. I think of them all the time" he said.

He left, they called him from the police because they were meant to be in their stations, and that was the last time I saw him. When he went off along that pavement. And even now I still expect him to turn up since he had a key to the house. But I still can hear the sound of his footsteps. My children ask about him. The older one says, "What kind of courage did the man have that killed my dad when he never bothered anybody, he didn't hurt anybody. Why did they kill my daddy?"

Interview with Sub-Inspector Yorlenny Avaloz Moreno, Sub-Officer Evert Mairena and Sub Officer José Matamoros

San Carlos. August 26th 2020

Yorlenny, Evert and José survived the massacre of July 12th 2018 when armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement murdered four police officers and a primary school teacher in El Morrito. They describe the massacre in El Morrito and their abduction and ill-treatment.



Tortilla con Sal: We are here in San Carlos, the municipal capital of the Department of Rio San Juan with police officers, Deputy Inspector Yorlenny Aveloz Moreno, Officer Everth Mairena and Officer José Matamoros. Comrades, the reason for this interview is to learn about your experience of that terrible day of July 12th 2018 there at the Morrito police station. You were on guard in your police station and well, supposedly for a peaceful march. And people from the so-called Rural Workers Movement arrived, some people call it the Anti-Canal Movement, and without even an exchange of words they opened fire on you and then they also attacked the town hall.

Sub-Inspector Yorlenny Avaloz Moreno: Right, well, my name is, Yorlenny del Socorro Aveloz Moreno. I currently work in the police here in the municipality of San Carlos in the department of Rio San Juan.

And we were in the municipality of Morrito with Deputy Commissioner Luis Emilio Bustos in the charge of three police units, right.

The three police units there were from different areas, from operational areas like traffic and vehicles, police intelligence and the head of the judicial assistance unit, investigators from the judicial assistance and the supervisor in charge, who was the head of firearms, right, that's is what we had.

We were in the police station where we had orders to stay, to guard the police station. When we learned of a report of a supposedly peaceful march that was going to take place, with people who called themselves the Rural Workers Movement or the road block activists as they called themselves.

At 2.45 pm on Thursday, July 12, a group of people presented themselves at the Morrito municipal police station. Our forces were guarding the area of the police station. When at that moment we hear the first detonation that, it was an explosion like a fireworks bomb, right. But we already had the order given by the commissioner and the higher command that was to stay in readiness until further notice.

How were we going to act when all this happened, when we were surrounded in the police station and the municipal offices in Morrito? Three of us were women, and the three of us stayed in the central area of the police station in the office that was next to the canteen, and our other colleagues were guarding the police station.

At that moment, I was the person who began to film from a window with dark glass, trying to film the peaceful march. But when I heard the detonation I went to where my two companions were. After all this, once they surrounded us, the whole police unit, you could hear the gunshots with live rounds, guns, different types of weapons, pistols and rifles, right...

TcS: Shooting at you?

Yorlenny: Shooting at the persons of all comrades who were there, there in the police station. We heard in an area on the north side, one of our comrades who has since left the police. I come and I look him in the face, watching him, and I ask him, 'what's going on, why don't you shoot?.' 'My gun is jammed, I can't, it won't work', so I told him, 'leave it and come over here. Leave it,' I told him 'if your gun doesn't shoot, then get over here.'

Then on another side was the Commissioner Luis Emilio Bustos, and I told him, 'Chief, but if your gun doesn't fire, come, why are you staying there?' I said. But he came later and took another gun to try it and it didn't, that weapon also jammed.

And you heard constantly all this, these gunshots one after another, after another, and the people were taking positions, getting closer to us, and they could see what we had and our other comrades, I could not see them because they were not nearby, they were on the perimeter at an angle from the police station, right.

The only once close to me were the two comrades there on the side of the door and on the side where the other comrade is, my chief. All of this happened, all those moments passed, all the rain of bullets lasted maybe 10 to 15 minutes, it lasted, all this rain of fire coming from different sides where we were located, the bullets... They were hitting the wall, they were hitting where we were, a bullet even hit where we were crouched under a desk, it impacted, it passed through the wall and went to hit in the corner, against a pillar.

TcS: And you couldn't defend yourselves, you couldn't open fire?

Yorlenny: I had a short, right, a pistol, but I didn't have anything I could see to be able to shoot at anything, right, because I was in the middle, in front of a wall, the wall that encloses the police station, where we had...

I couldn't shoot because I wasn't going to waste bullets, right, so I couldn't shoot and I couldn't get out because those people had already taken up position.

TcS: And you comrades were in the same situation

Sub-Oficial Evert Mairena: We were in circular defense, we were together at the moment that the shooting started. We were on a corner and the first thing my partner told me was that they had killed Lenin. They opened fire from more than one side, they killed Marlon and Lenin, Faustino, I didn't know anything about Bustos, because he was inside, but when they killed our comrades at that moment I was on the perimeter with Matamoros, my comrade was hit in the knee, and it was a rain of bullets without stopping, not a minute went by that they were not firing from very close range.

TcS: How many were there? 200?

Evert: Yes. Around 200 people approximately.

TcS: Were all of them armed?

Sub Oficial José Matamoros: Everyone was armed

TcS: At what point did they manage to take over the station and take you out?

Evert: When the comrades on the side that she was telling you about were killed, they got into the police station, our comrades were inside, I don't know what happened to Commissioner Bustos, he died there too. We two were left on the other side alone and we had to disable our weapons gun and go out. They grabbed us from there and took us to Morrito's main street.

TcS: There in the town?

Evert: Yes, they took us all there, when they took the two of us we were last ones. All of the comrades were on the floor there. They had them surrounded and from there they took us in a vehicle to the Morrito intersection.

TcS: And you Yorlenny, they took you at that moment?

Yorlenny: No, since I was on the side of the police station without protection from the officers, who are the officers who died on that side, three of them died, then they took us out. They took us out to the main street and they lined us up and they told us, before we get there I walked by our chief and one of them told me, 'Pick him up and carry him on your back' and I said 'Why if he is already dead?'

They told me to carry him on my shoulder always with the gun like this, behind me, where they were leading me, pointing and I say, 'But why if he is already dead?' And another one of the women also said 'But why if our chief is already dead?'

When we got out a little further to where Faustino is with Lenin, they come and tell me to get over to where my comrades are, the rain of bullets continued and I kept down crawling, so they come and tell me to pick him up and drag him away. And there, at this moment, there was just Lenin, and I saw that he was still drowning in blood. And they told me to throw him on my shoulder, so I tried to grab his foot and pull, so I left him more stretched out. Then they told me 'if you can't move him then get over there because your death is coming'.

To where our comrades were which was the way out onto the highway, they told us to line up because now comes our time of judgment.

So there we were all at once and we looked and I saw the other comrades who have already been injured, however I came to Evert and I assisted him and I cut part of his hair and put part of the hair on his wound, but it was still like that...

We were all were stunned by what was happening and at this time those of us who had left the police station were seven. Seven of us were outside. Seven

José: Yes, there were seven of us

Yorlenny: Seven. We didn't know because we didn't know about two colleagues who were Javier, Greg and Davy Oporta. We thought they were dead, but until we were on our way we were just stunned that they were all dead and only we were left.

TcS: So where did they take you first?

Yorlenny: So once we were told that they are not going to kill us there because they are going to take us away then they put us into another truck from their trucks, the exact same truck, because I was able to see it on the video, that the actual leaders were in. And that they said, and they said, 'we need to find the chief from Punta Gorda'.

So in this truck in which they took us, cream, a cream colored truck, on top of the one we were in there was also a dead one of theirs, a peasant. So they took us, and where they took us was to they leave us in the market, near the garbage dump there in the municipality of the Morrito.

There they held us and said they were going to exchange us, they had us there, and later they took us to the Morrito intersection.

TcS: And so you were some time at the Morrito junction and then they took you to Lóvago, right?

Yorlenny: That's right.

TcS: How long were you at the Morrito junction? You weren't abused there?

Evert: There I was injured in the head with a shotgun, right there and began to bleed uncontrollably where I was hit and it was an incessant wound from the blood, from then until the time they handed me over, almost at midnight

TcS: Then they took you to Lóvago and what happened there? Ana Cecilia and Javier They told me that Medardo Mairena arrived in Lóvago, but that they had been mistreated a lot before that.

Yorlenny: Once we arrived at the junction in Lóvago, there, we arrived there in another vehicle, we arrived and they transferred us. And they told us it was the end for us. They seemed angry, very angry, people who had a determined look that for us we were meant to die, at least for me it was death.

I got out, but they told me, 'because they're wounded, they can't move all right', nobody wanted to get out, we knew that, we saw the number of people who were there, and so many weapons, well, we were looking at many weapons and a lot that were special, the ones that were there.

Then they grabbed me, and I was still hesitant, whether to get out or not. But seeing the fact that there were so many people, they were going to get me out. One of them grabbed me and threw me on the ground, they grabbed me first and they said I was one of the infiltrators who carried information, since I am an intelligence officer and I was in civilian clothes.

They grabbed me and pulled me on ahead, about 8 men and 1 woman about my height grabbed me. And they began to tell me hateful things, the woman and the men, and they said, 'Leave her to me.' They played with me like a ball from one side to the other.

I didn't know anything about my companions, and then I just saw one of them who came and said, 'now you're gone - pra, pra'. I have a scar where they put the tube they use to set off mortars, so here I have a small crescent on the part of my stomach where they burnt me with it. I have a burn, like a crescent.

I thought, of course with the same fear, I thought they'd kill me so I didn't say anything. Then they took out, then they started to take out my breasts, they took out my breasts from my blouse and left them out. Then they began to put their hands inside me, and since we were tied up, we were tied up, they began to touch my parts, they touched my parts, and one of them grabbed me, another one touched me, another one touched my part, and another one put their gun playing around.

They were people who were like drug addicts, like dope heads, drinking liquor, who knows what. From there, they kept me aside, they played with me and did whatever they wanted. Then I later observed that they had put a knife and a machete on Cecilia, it looked like a big machete.

Another comrade, who also has since resigned from the police, her name is Carolina, they put a double edged knife, that was sharp on both sides, and they put in on her like this. And later, they put it over her ears as if they might cut them off. 'Here you die orteguista.' That's is what they told her.

I don't know anything about my other comrade because they had me to one side and they took the others near where I was, I saw them, but I don't know what they did to them. But they said, 'give me her shoes, give me the shoes.'

They took off my shoes and left my pants halfway down where they had been taking them off. I was practically left naked and this is what happened. At this point, my companions were some way from where they had taken me.

TcS: What did they do to you, did they mistreat you very much or not so much

José: Yes, we arrived at the junction in Lóvago and they grabbed us, kicked us, and punched us all over and then they put us all in a classroom and there they told us that they were going to kill us, that it was the last day for us. And then we were treated there by a supposed doctor.

TcS: So she treated your wounds there?

José: There they put stuff like gauze on our wounds

TcS: To what do you attribute this sudden change from treating you so badly and then sending you a doctor, to what do you attribute this

Yorlenny: When she came to us, she said to us, 'How do you feel?' Because I in fact, on the way, I was telling my comrades, 'I think this is God's doing, here the only thing left is to give ourselves to God.' I would talk to them and tell them.

When we got there, she tells me--they put us in a classroom and we are put in something that was surrounded by plastic like a small house, or a shack, and she said, 'Here I am sent really by God'. She said that. 'I am some one who is going to heal people, because I am a paramedic.' She identified herself and told us what her name was and she said that they were going to be OK. I know, she says, I know you will leave here OK.

Because even, when they grabbed me, she came and she said, "Leave her alone," and they said, 'Don't come here and deny us our work', because she came along when they were undressing me, and she said, "Leave her alone, remember that you have this one, and she is fundamental for you to make the exchange", because of someone they supposedly had in Juigalpa.'

TcS: So they didn't want to continue mistreating you because you were going to make an exchange.

Yorlenny: Because she told us about someone who was very important to them the road block activists, the Rural Workers Movement, and that's why she tells me it's God's work. "What happened to you, love? What happened to you?", she said. I told her, when I arrived in Morrito, I was hit with a rifle butt, I was beaten up, and when I was getting back up, one of the men told me, "You're going to stay here, bitch, you're going to die here, and you're going to shit yourself". Those are the words he used.

So when I'm like this and I tried to straighten up, she came and assisted me, injecting medication, she did everything. She told my partner, read the medicine to Ana Cecilia and she said she was going to give my comrades diclofenac. She gave me two intravenous diclofenacs at the same time and I wanted to convulse so I was babbling, but I don't know if the medicine they were giving me came with another treatment because I haven't been allergic to these medications.

TcS: You didn't know what she was giving you?

Yorlenny: That is what she said to me, she said that I was limping. She said that when she was in Managua the police beat her, but she said I admire the police and she said she has a Sandinista family. She chatted to us, and she herself said, "I am here as part of God's work," she said, "God will enlighten us, he enlightened me so that I could come and heal you.'

TcS: In your case you were bleeding badly, how did you manage to survive this?

Evert: We got to where the trucks were taking us in Lóvago to the school that was there, I fell because the rope broke where they had me tied up and there they beat us and kicked us.

Stephen: There in Lóvago

Evert: Yes, in Lóvago. This one guy jumped on me putting a knife to the neck, they made me vomit blood. There this lady was called, they called her a private doctor, and she grabbed the man who was going to cut my throat and told him, 'We all have the right to live, we all have the right to do what we like'. So they took me to the school and they started to put me on saline because I was bleeding a lot. And she assisted me and helped me all those hours that we were there. And, but they couldn't stop the bleeding, they just couldn't.

TcS: I imagine that you were still surrounded by thugs, by these armed people. Did they keep threatening you or had they stopped threatening you?

Yorlenny: We women, when we were there, all 3 of us, and even our partner Cecilia, I think I see it as a trauma that stayed with her, because when her period comes, she hemorrhages and she has never had this problem seen to. It was a trauma she went through. The torture affected her most in her hands. And she said to me, 'Yorlenny, I have a problem, look at the blood coming through, so I asked the doctor, "Doctor, do you have sanitary towels or something to put on my partner.' She said 'Yes I do'.

So, at that time I pulled down her pants, since I had more mobility in my hands, my hands were freer, I put on a towel, about four one on top of the other. I was able to put one there for her. Then, one of them says, they're moving, the orteguistas are getting loose, we have to kill them,' the said. We have to put bullets in them, and he goes pra, pra pra. We were always surrounded by them.

And there was an angle y which we could watch them pass by where our comrades were, which was in the school. So, they were like, 'Look, one of them is already moving and this is the one in civilian clothes.'" So I was the one who wanted to see if the other two were still alive. We didn't know anything about how they were. So they started to aim their weapons at us so that we would stay put.

TcS: Then, at what point did you begin to realize that the danger for your life had passed and there was going to be some kind of negotiation. Was that when Medardo turned up or before?

Evert: When he arrived and came to school, he said he came from negotiations, they were negotiating and that we shouldn't be afraid.

TcS: Mairena said that?

Yorlenny: At this moment that we were there, we, Medardo Mairena arrived, I had my back to him, but I know his voice and I looked at him and he identified himself.

And he said 'Good evening, I am Medardo Mairena from the Rural Workers Movement. Here what we want is peace and what we ask is that you tell your president to surrender and that he hand over the presidency now. And that he surrenders the weapons, that what we want is peace. And you are going to leave peacefully. But if he refuses to surrender the presidency, we will not surrender you?', he said. 'We are not going to hand over the nine of you that we have'.

So, there we realized that the two other comrades are alive. So he begins to talk to us about politics. That all this was because Daniel has a deal with the devil, that his wife . who knows what? he said things like that. Yes, let's negotiate, let's negotiate, tell him to negotiate or else leave the police.

TcS: At what point could you get out of there, Cecilia and Javier told me that an apparently private Red Cross or some kind of ambulance came by. What happened then?

Yorlenny: I think that at this time it could have been before 12 at night, like 11:30 at night when we see the first one come, first were the men, and after a while they tell us women to leave, that they will deliver us, piece by piece. So we had the psychosis that piece by piece meant each of our hands and feet.

And we looked and could identify there a white vehicle, a Red Cross, like an ambulance that would take us, the nurses dressed in white. Medardo Mairena was still there on one side, he was wearing his shirt with a logo on it, it had an emblem on it, I could see that it was a cream colored shirt. But I still didn't trust that we could have been released because all the way from Rio San Juan to Juigalpa the road was controlled by the Rural Workers Movement.

So for us, for me, I could not say that we were free, until we had passed to the other side. And this is what they were telling us. 'Let's not hand them over, We should kill them here.' Even when we were climbing into the ambulance, they told us that they should kill us, and even the nurses who arrived, we could tell that they were afraid, that they were in a panic, because seeing how many people were armed, they were very afraid.

Interview with Salvadora Antonia Gutiérrez López.

San Carlos. August 26th 2020

Salvadora is the mother of Lieutenant Marlon José Requeses López murdered in El Morrito on July 12th 2018 by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement.

Tortilla con Sal: Salvadora, perhaps you can tell us a little about your experience on that terrible day, July 12th 2018.

That was a painful experience because it took us by surprise. We knew he was there, but we didn't know that this was going to happen. Every mother always prays to God for her children, but that day was a shock.

How am I going to forget that pain? We never thought that they would do that great barbarism, because what they did was barbaric.

That day, they told me that they were going to go to Morrito for that march, that there was going to be a march. Because we mother are always asking about our children. He spoke to me about 20 minutes before, but he didn't want to tell me that the march was going there. I found out about it another way, and I started thinking.

And I heard something in the house across the way and I sent someone to find out what they were saying. They said "Yes, they got into Morrito and there are gunshots." I said "What? But my son is there!" I began to pray to God that nothing would happen to him. But it happened. A great many people were involved.

TcS: What time did you find out about the attack?

Salvadora: At three o'clock in the afternoon

TcS: You heard about the attack or...?

Salvadora: ...the attack. We learned that trucks and pickups had arrived, and the news was going out on the social media. I don't know how, but practically straight away there was news. I'm suppose someone was there watching. They didn't want to tell me. They told me it wasn't Marlon, that he wasn't one of them. They didn't want to tell me but I knew he was dead. I had a mother's presentiment.

TcS: That's what Claudia said too...

Salvadora: I sensed it. And my daughters said, "No mama. No it isn't him. he's only wounded." But I told them "No, my son is already dead". Because as a mother one senses it. One has a feeling, and that was something I had foreseen for a long time, even though I asked God to protect him, to keep him safe. But that intuition was always there.



And I think he had the presentiment too that something would happen to him. Because he told me “Look mama, no matter what happens, don't get upset if something happens, don't get upset”. And he said to his wife that if something happened to him, to carry on loving his children and me and to keep on visiting my house, and not to leave me alone.

And I'm sure he sensed that because he sent me many prayers over the phone. He talked to me about God. He told me of a prayer that says “The Lord will make a way and there will be water in the wilderness”. And I say that when they died, they opened the way for clearing the roadblocks. When they were burying them at that moment the last roadblocks were already cleared. They only waited for that to remove the roadblocks.

We know it was them... we know who it was and all I say to the ones who arrived and did what they did is that God will ensure they get what they deserve. As my son himself said, God delays, but does not forget. Only by holding God's hand can we assimilate this grief. My son is in my heart.

Always every 12th of the month, I am remembering. And that has helped me, to follow in God's ways, to seek peace with God. May God remove all resentment from my heart. What I can say to all those people who came to kill my son is that I don't know who they all are I only know that this crowd of people came. I can say to them, I can look at them and say to them them to repent and seek God and they will know with God there is salvation.

TcS: Do you feel that the process of reconciliation that began in large part with the amnesty law has helped you to assimilate the murder of your son?

Salvadora: Yes. yes. When we talk about reconciliation we need to talk about reconciling ourselves with God. We have to reconcile ourselves with God, because God is in the process with you. Without God we are nothing. We always have to put everything in His hand and from God we see the reward.

I don't like to say who they were, I prefer to be reserved about that but I know, who they were and there are key witnesses who know who they were. At the moment one feels indignant, but in the process, God manages our hearts and helps us keep going.

I wanted to grab a gun and go, because it is painful to have your child taken away from you. My son was my only son, I don't have any more. It is a great pain, like my heart is being torn out. Even if they may not have a heart, we do, we are human.

All the human rights talk, all the talk about human rights, and there are no human rights for us . We too are mothers who have had our children taken from us. They never remember us. Human rights...They say they are for human rights, but they were not there for all everyone when they needed them.

I just want to say to those people, they should repent, seek God. Let them set aside their hatred, remove all that hatred in their hearts, and let them seek peace, because with God everything is easier.

Interview with Juana Cruz Bravo

San Carlos. August 26th 2020.

Juana talks about the armed violence of the Rural Workers Movement and the murder of her partner Commissioner Luis Emilio Bustos Lopez by the armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement during the massacre at El Morrito.

Tortilla con Sal: So we're here in San Carlos with compañera Juana Cruz Bravo, and Juana it would be good if you could explain to us what your experience was during the events of the failed coup attempt in 2018.

Juana Cruz Bravo: My experience was the day I was told that those comrades were killed in the massacre they carried out in the municipality of Morrito. One of the fallen comrades was Luis Emilio Bustos López who was my life partner.

My experience was tremendously difficult because it was very hard for us because...because of his death. So it was a very difficult experience because that day was a hard blow for all the people of San Carlos and Rio San Juan because

they were police officer comrades that people loved very much. And we felt very threatened by those criminals. I don't know why they are like that, but they are criminals, Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez.

TcS: What specifically happened that day? I imagine that you were working... How did you find out what had happened there in the attack on the police post in El Morrito?

Juana: So that day in July 2018, Luis called me at about one o'clock in the afternoon, "Negrita" he said to me "There is a march of about 200 people coming". So I told him "Take care", I said, "because those people are bad, they are criminals". But later, at about 2:00 in the afternoon, they announced that they were attacking the municipal offices and the police there in El Morrito.

And later they told us that four police colleagues had been killed and that one of them was Luis Emilio Bustos López, my life partner.

And it was a tremendous blow because nobody really expected that in San Carlos, because... and the order for it was given by Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez and others who were at the roadblock in El Morrito. That's what I found out that day when I was working.

TcS: On what do you base your assertion that the people who ordered the attack were Mairena and Ramirez?



Juana: Because there is evidence, because some police officers had been kidnapped and those police officers identified them when they were being taken to the roadblock in Lóvago. There the police identified Medardo Mairena and that he had given the order for the attack on El Morrito. So there is evidence. Strong evidence that he was the author of that attack on Morrito. And they were talking about a peaceful march. But in reality it wasn't peaceful because the order they were carrying out was to attack and kill the police.

TcS: And Juana, before that attack I imagine that Commissioner Luis told you about what was happening?

Juana: Yes, he told me about what was happening and about that march so I told him to be careful because they... they were not doing anything peaceful because even here in San Carlos we had that experience, that they wanted to attack us several times here in the municipal offices in San Carlos. They wanted to attack us with various weapons, threatening us... yes, here in San Carlos, they threatened us here at the municipal offices in San Carlos.

TcS: Did they fire shots?

Juana: Yes, they fired shots. They shot in the air and threatened that they wanted to enter the municipal offices, that they wanted to take over the municipal offices here in San Carlos. And so I told Luis on the phone to be careful. Because they came with the story that they wanted permission for a peaceful march. But it wasn't peaceful which they demonstrated with the massacre they carried out in Morrito of four policemen, four policemen and a teacher who was in the municipal offices in Morrito

TcS: And before the attack, were there other incidents, apart from the threatening incidents you mentioned here in San Carlos...?

Juana: Yes here in San Carlos there were three threats of... They came from... they came to hold marches. They even came in here and took over the lakeside promenade, threatening people. In the barrios they rode around on motorcycles threatening people here in San Carlos.

TcS: Here in San Carlos?

Juana: Here in San Carlos...

TcS: Because most people don't know that. They only know about what happened in Morrito and we haven't heard about that other harassment...

Juana: I am a witness because we gathered there to protect the municipal offices because several times they wanted to take over the municipal offices here in San Carlos.

TcS: When was the first threat, for example, against the municipal offices?

Juana: The first threat was before the attack on Morrito, in June.

TcS: And when did they take over the lakeside promenade, in the same month of June?

Juana: In that same month. In one of those marches the parish priest from here even came and took part, the priest from the Catholic Church, he was at the head of their march, which he was supposed to be protecting. The church priest here. Father Paul.

TcS: Are you aware of other threats and harassment outside of San Carlos in these communities?

Juana: In El Tule and they had a roadblock there in Argentina, at the Argentina roundabout.

TcS: And in these actions of blockade and harassment, did you see, or did your colleagues, your friends note that they were armed?

Juana: Oh yes... they fired shots... They came in to do their marches, they were harassing the town, and when they went by, they fired shots at the town hall.

TcS: Here in San Carlos?

Juana: There in the town hall, yes. They went by shooting in the air. They even tried shooting at the electricity cables.

TcS: I don't know if you want to talk about the emotional and personal consequences. I know it is difficult but it could be important that people understand that you are human beings who have been the victims of ...

Juana: Yes, we are victims, we are victims of the people that we here called blockaders because they go about well armed . I don't know how they can do so, but they assume the role of victims, but here it was ordinary people who were threatened by those people who tried to stage the coup, the blockaders, led by Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramirez.

Interview with Claudia Carolina Alaníz and Pedro Olivas Alaníz.

San Carlos. August 26th 2020.

Claudia is the mother of police officer Lenin Ernesto Vivas Alaníz murdered in El Morrito on July 12th 2018 by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement. Pedro is Lenin's brother.



Tortilla con Sal: Well, here we are in San Carlos, the departmental capital of Rio San Juan with compañera Claudia Carolina Alaniz and compañero Pedro Olivas Alaniz. We want to talk a little bit about the terrible event in which the activists of the Rural Workers Movement, the Anti-Canal Movement, murdered Lenin Alaniz.

Claudia Carolina Alaniz: Lenin Ernesto Vivas Alaniz

TcS: Perhaps Claudia and Pedro, you could tell us what happened that day...

Claudia: That day was a terrible experience because of the pain they caused us. This day, July 12th, Lenin was in Morrito, Rio San Juan department in the police station. They'd been ordered there. At one point I called him, at about 2:15 in the afternoon we were talking because here in the department of Rio San Juan there had been some of these demonstrations by these so called rural workers' leaders, the Anti-Canal people. They were going about, always arriving at the municipalities spreading fear.

Because on several occasions here in San Carlos they came and on one occasion they fired bullets and so on. That day in Morrito I was talking to Lenin and he asked me if there was a march here and I said no and he told me about how things were there.

Then he said, "Yes, mama, they're coming in", and I heard it, and then I lost communication with him. But I understand that they were already arriving there and were already doing their mischief, but I didn't know.

Pedro was here in the house and suddenly, at about a quarter to three, three thirty or thereabouts, Pedro said to me, "Mama, they're attacking Morrito". My reaction was, well, surprise. "They are attacking Morrito, yes". And I told him, nobody should call Lenin because they're mustn't have the chance to kill him just because he answers answer the phone. And in that instant, of course, one becomes desperate. Desperate as a mother, then, to know what was going on. I began to want to call him, but all I got was the voicemail, just the voicemail.

But I said to Peter, "Peter, what do you know?" So, Pedro, "Mom, I don't know anything," he says. I said, "But Pedro, you have friends, look, with the internet, with these connections you can find out what's going on, I don't know. And then at about five or six in the afternoon Pedro told me "Mama, there are four police officers dead." But before Pedro gave me this news, I called the police here, to ask what was going on, to inform me. The police tell me, "There are reinforcements on their way there, Claudia, don't worry, rather pray for your son." Yes. But, logically, one as a mother has premonitions, right? I was in the courtyard.

I went to the courtyard because I had his child here and so that the child would not see me cry I went to the courtyard and I said "Lord, what's happening?" I already had a feeling that he had been killed and I fell to my knees and prayed "Lord, this thing I'm feeling, tell me it's a lie, tell me it's not true that they killed my son.

And just then someone called me and I said "I want you to tell me the truth. Tell me" "Yes Claudia" they said to me, "They killed Lenin". I felt that way since he was my son... and I say yes, beyond the pain that one feels, the helplessness that one sometimes feels... but already... he, I just went back to...

I cast my mind back and I remember with what emotion my son joined the police, how he went to the academy to study... and since he couldn't come when there were those blessed roadblocks when there were the blessed negotiations of those people from the Cynical Alliance, they are cynical, shameless... because they were plotting the coup attempt.

And when it happened that the police were kept in their stations, my son did not come because they had them in their station, they could not leave the police station and yet it was like that... the viciousness, the cruelty, how they could do this shameful act, I say this, yes terrorist, condemnable thing, because my son was killed and mercilessly approached as if they were deliberately finishing him off...

Yes, I say, perhaps with grace, because he gave his life, his effort, his sweat, his concern for this people ... and I can say I say it so, he gave his life with love. And I say these people do not see beyond their own interests because here the history speaks for itself... How many years they were in power and never did anything for the people.

We who feel the pain, we who live the pain, it is ... because they were cruel to Lenin ... because Lenin was shot more than eighteen times in his body and they were not just one caliber of shot but several calibers, several weapons, not just one shot, they fired many more. Lenin lost an eye ... there are the photographs, you can see how they left Lenin ... the arm broken ... in his body quantities of bullets .

TcS: People like Carlos Fernando Chamorro alleged that it was the same police who had shot their own comrades. What do you respond to Carlos Fernando Chamorro?

Pedro Olivas Alaníz: Everything the members of the Alianza Cívica have done has been accompanied by lies to distort all the events that occurred during 2018. And one of the events was what happened on July 12th in Morrito. Medardo Mairena together with Francisca Ramirez, their only objective has always been to destabilize the State and the government and they did not miss taking advantage of what was happening in 2018. So much so that it was not the first time they came to Morrito. They came on several occasions, as they did here in San Carlos, to threaten the population. They brandished firearms.

The opposition in Nicaragua always said that their struggles were peaceful and that they did not use firearms. A total lie. Because they always handled weapons, of all kinds of caliber. They came to Morrito and threatened the mayor's office, threatened the people, threatened the national police.

What did the opposition do when they had the chance? When the police were in their stations during that time the opposition took advantage of it to commit their misdeeds. On July 12th more than two hundred peasants, who came from the roadblocks of San Carlos, Morrito and Lóvago, arrived in Morrito. They arrived with the sole intention of murdering.

Because on the morning of July 12th the national opposition held a march called "Together we are a volcano" and they threatened via all their opposition news media to replicate that march in the different departments and they kept their word fully, because more than two hundred murderers arrived and attacked the police station.

Their only objective was to take advantage of and take over the weapons that the National Police had. They also arrived seeking to murder the mayor of Morrito.

Claudia: Here in San Carlos they came on several occasions and on several occasions they came with those notorious marches of theirs, and on the marches they carried weapons. And not only in San Carlos, in other municipalities too.

In San Miguelito they came and wanted to do the same but the people of San Miguel turned out and didn't let them, they drove them out and they also came to Morrito...

TcS: Before July 12th?

Claudia: Before July 12th. They did several marches before the 12th of July. And I remember that there in Morrito they told me that they had arrived several times before and they always shot in the air, they shot in the air.

TcS: On those peaceful marches...

Claudia: On those supposedly peaceful marches but obviously there was nothing peaceful about them. So that day, July 12th they arrived and the police were well intentioned, I say that they were well intentioned in that they did not have the malice that the marchers had, who had their plan worked out.

Pedro: One of the things that has always characterized the government of Comandante Daniel is to guide things, situations like these on the right path, always to promote the peace of Nicaragua families and in the face of this situation the National Police always acted in accordance with the law in defense of peace and for tranquility of the country's families.

For this reason, the opposition took advantage of this to commit their crimes. Because not only in Rio San Juan were there murders of fellow Sandinistas and police officers. There have been practically more than twenty police comrades who were murdered by the opposition during the attempted coup against the Sandinista government.

Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena were arriving at the different roadblocks that were set up in the national territory and one of them was the roadblock they installed here in Rio San Juan. Francisca Ramirez did not always participate in a direct way, but she is one of the architects of all the murders that were carried out or that took place at the roadblocks of death

Because people generally, Nicaraguans were threatened at the roadblocks, there were rapes, tolls were extorted from all those people who wanted to get through in order to get to their houses, to their homes, but they had to go through those roadblocks and were forced to pay.

The rural workers who were managed these roadblocks, they had weapons, it's just that when their opposition news media arrived they simply hid the weapons because of course it was not in their interest for people to see the different weapons they had.

Carlos Fernando Chamorro knows this very well and all the opposition know very well that they were using firearms. They were financed by different non-governmental organizations, they were funded by them and they got hold weapons, apart from all the weapons they also stole from police officer comrades when they were killed.

Interview with Dr. Odanel Casco Villalobos.

Nueva Guinea. August 27th 2020

Dr. Casco explains how the roadblocks controlled by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement destroyed the national and local economy.



Tortilla con Sal: So here we are with Dr. Odanel Casco Villalobos; Dr. Casco is a surgeon and the doctor is going to explain a little of his experience during 2018.

What was your experience like during that period, because I understand that you were a victim of the roadblocks here in New Guinea?

Dr. Odanel Casco Villalobos: For us it is uncomfortable even today to remember that time; those dark days we call it here, during 2018, the time of the roadblocks, the dark days where we were cut off from everything.

Where we had no right to anything because the roadblocks did not allow us to circulate neither people, nor production, so from there the situation became super difficult.

In our particular case as a family, I work in medicine, but I also work in agriculture and livestock. Within the agricultural sector, we were specifically affected in the production of pineapple; we have pineapple production and it was a catastrophe because all the pineapple production that there was - we had designed production staggered in blocks per month, so that every month of the year there would be pineapple production, so that the market would be well supplied. That cycle takes a good two or three years to establish and we had already scheduled monthly production exactly for the year when the blockades started, which was in April.

The complete production had already begun with the pineapples for those months already in the process of ripening, and all we could do at the time was give it to our cows. And the moment came when neither our cows nor our cattle wanted to eat pineapple because they were fed up with pineapple. Yes, it was dreadful. The loss ran to millions - it was about three million córdobas lost in pineapple alone. Right, so then from there on it became super difficult for us, the economy became difficult, right, but apart from this important item that is pineapple, we also have the area of the livestock because we also devote ourselves to producing milk and beef.

Obviously, there are some companies here, one that is Honduran, which is in El Triunfo, and a dairy company here in El Zapote that is Salvadoran. These two companies take responsibility for collecting all the milk in the region and that is the main product of the farmers - the milk. They get by on that, they generate earnings to eat, their food, comes from selling milk mainly, that is the main item of the region, cattle ranching.

Since the roadblocks were set up, obviously nothing could be done with the milk, cheese, cream or anything else, that is, the dairy companies were forced to close down, because there was no milk coming to the plant and the plant was not exporting its product - in this case, they had exported to El Salvador, but there was none.

There were thousands of roadblocks, there was no way to get through, so the economy became more difficult, not only for us as a family, but for the entire population, because the population's main source of food is in the countryside, and that's what was blocked by the roadblocks. They let nothing pass, no crops, no food, nothing, neither rice, beans, meat, milk, cheese, nothing, there was a total blockade of everything.

TcS: That started in April 2018, at the end of the month?

Odanel: That's exactly how it was during the time of the roadblocks. Then, the cows had milk, right, and we put the calves to suckle they began to suck the, because the milk, because the milk – we didn't know what else to do, because if you made cheese nobody bought it. They wouldn't let cheese through, no cheese got through at all.

So what happened? It created another problem: when the calves were with the cows. The calves would get sick because they would get diarrhea, and that was another expense because the calf, if it had diarrhea, would have to be given vitamins, it would have to be medicated, and medicine is expensive, right, and it was another expense, another expense the medicine to cure the cattle.

TcS: Which affected everyone, big and small?

Odanel: It affected all of us, big, medium and small – everyone. Yes, and in this case it was difficult because, for example, it meant that we had to go east toward San Francisco, toward Bluefields, in order to go to our farm, we had to pass two roadblocks and the main roadblock was that of El Zapote. So if the cattle are sick, there is no way to take the medicine to cure them.

So there were losses too, part of the cattle, calves, died, right, and cattle that died due to lack of attention, so to speak, veterinary medicine, right, it was a chaotic situation. We were blockaded anyway, blockaded as I said, and people were blockaded, they did not let anything pass, the economy and transport fell apart. That's in the productive sphere, so to speak, of the countryside, of our main activity.

Now, in my particular case as a professional, as a doctor, the same thing happened, totally blockaded, as they say, because the sick were not allowed to pass through. Since there was no transportation either, there was no bus transportation because since all the transport people were out of action, there were no buses, and in that case obviously people could not move around either; nor could family members get their sick relatives out because there was no way to transport them. And in those circumstances, obviously, there were also deaths due to lack of medical care.

Pregnant women - pregnancy - when a woman is going to give birth - there is no waiting, holding on, waiting. There is no way to stop it, but rather, it has to be taken care of so that the child is born. And there were women who had to give birth in transit. In some very isolated cases, an isolated case, they would let it someone through in some emergency, which happened in this case rural workers like themselves they did let some women pass. And on one occasion they let the ambulance pass right at the beginning.

TcS: Did they prevent ambulances from getting through?

Odanel: They prevented the ambulances from getting through, which in the end became another major problem, because not only were the ambulances prevented, but they were stolen, they hijacked the ambulances from the hospital here, they kidnapped them, the people came, the mobs, these people went into the hospital and stole the state vehicles, right, from MINSA, and the ambulances they used to go around committing their crimes

They used them as a means of transport, but that limited the people even more, since the hospital was totally dismantled, there was no way to even transport an emergency anywhere because the ambulances and the pick-up trucks had been stolen. That is the word that fits, they were hijacked by them and there was no circulation of vehicles.

TcS: So there are some points that have come up in what you have said. Why did they decide to collapse their own economy, to what extent was there political manipulation by the opposition here?

Odanel: Logically, their main objective was to destabilize the government, that is, to put the government in a bad situation, because in this case, since there are no communications, in other words, the country is in chaos, because there is no food.

The people were beginning to suffer from great need, and the people who we are talking about, come from the same people that they are affecting, the people at the roadblocks come from the people themselves, right, and the roadblocks are affecting everyone.

Obviously you see how paradoxical things are, obviously these roadblocks initially, they had an objective which was to create, to destabilize our government. That was their main objective.

But in the end, it turned out that the roadblocks became a business, a sinister business. I remember that in order to go to the farm near the pineapple, we had to pay in order to pass through. And what was the payment?

Well, you can go there to bring us milk on your return. It turned out that they were saying: you're going to pass and you're going to pay us so much, right, 500 córdobas. But when you come back from the farm, you have to bring your production. Well, you brought the milk, you had to bring the milk, in other words, you were forced to feed those at the roadblocks otherwise you wouldn't get through.

You would go to the roadblocks that you had to pass and I wanted to meet with the leaders - who was in charge? No one would ever show their face, all the people there would say - there is no getting through here. If you want to pass, you have to pay so much and you have to contribute, cooperate with us, so that you can get through.

You see, it was a very sinister thing because you didn't know who to go to. When you saw how complicated things were getting, you asked, "Who's leading this?"

Obviously, they fed themselves, they prepared their food in the Catholic Church, serving as their command post, since the Catholic Church helped control the roadblocks. There, they cooked, did their activities, held private meetings, in fact, to plan future actions. There came a time when the church, in this case the priest, was the one who signed and authorized the passes.

Even once, when I was at the farm, I have my gun, and they took away my pistol, they just took it away from me, they took it away from me and there I was, I made the mistake, right, of having gone out with the gun. But I had it on the farm and I was returning, and I thought, they weren't going to see it or take it away. But they were checking the cars, checking everything, and that's when they found my gun and took it away.

And in the end, because it was theft, it was illegal, right, I asked who the leader was, and I ended up finding out I had to go to the priest, it was the church, they were the firearm and they were the sharpshooter, they were the conductors of the orchestra. So, through the priest, I was able to recover the weapon. We realized that the church was the one who directly managed the actions and the main activities, the priest, because in this case, in this area the rural workers had weapons and we knew that they were armed, because obviously all the peasants had firearms and all those weapons were maintained at the roadblocks.

There was an incident here at INTA, where they went to loot that state institution, they came to loot it; they robbed it. They made a mess, they just broke everything, took everything out, looted and left. Well, it was a further setback to the economy because by damaging the equipment, by damaging the entire structure that serves the rural workers themselves, well, obviously to recover has taken some time, and that leads us to economic retrogression and total retrogression of everything because there was nothing could move, and so things became even more complicated for the region. And for the rural workers families themselves the chaotic situation in this case, economically, was mainly affecting the people themselves, the rural workers themselves.

TcS: What impact did it have on, for example, your cattle, pineapple, and milk business? I guess when you were affected you had to lay off your people?

Odanel: Exactly, that's what everyone did: all the workers were fired, they were laid off, and we collapsed, the families, well, in particular the families, because every worker has a family, fell into economic disaster, into uncertainty, and into poverty, increasingly more poverty.

TcS: And I imagine that after the month of May, of June, the self-same people were anxious to end the blockades, and people allowed the development of conditions so the government could re-impose order, is that a correct or a mistaken interpretation?

Odanel: It is totally correct. And if this country had not been like that, who knows where we would be, because the truth is that the government was very benevolent, very good to those people, to allow them to do their misdeeds, because, to the extent that there were negotiations, the famous dialogue, right, that the government did with these people, and where they asked, I remember, one of the requests they made was that the police stay in their stations, in their barracks. Then, very nobly, the Comandante, our President, ordered the police to go to their stations and the army to their barracks, to show that they really wanted to negotiate, they wanted things to improve, right.

But of course, the objective of these people was, as they saw it, then if the police are out of the picture, they saw this as the moment to advance their attempt at a coup. Imagine, if the public forces of this country are not around, the authority that puts order in place is left locked up then, what are the bad people not going to do, what are all the people going to do, they are going to take advantage of it, as they say, in running waters the fisherman wins, and that is exactly what happened along the way.

And it got to the point that the people couldn't stand it anymore, they couldn't tolerate that the roadblocks had us all so fed up, so much so that when the government decided, I know that people requested that they remove the roadblocks, that they remove them because they wanted to work, they couldn't stand the hunger because nothing was moving.

TcS: After the Lóvago roadblock was removed, did things go like a domino effect after the one at Lóvago was removed, and did all the other roadblocks disappear?

Odanel: That's exactly how it was. For me, it was like there were two roadblocks at the national level, or, to put it this way, the departmental command posts, the main command posts were at Lóvago and one at Rio Blanco, and the first one they dismantled was at Rio Blanco. When they dismantled the one at Rio Blanco, which was the biggest one blockading the whole Caribbean area on the way to Bilwi and all of the eastern part, the people on this side of the country began to say, "Watch out, we'd better go too, because if they cleared those, they'll clear us too."

I remember when the Lóvago roadblock was removed, the people at the roadblock began to leave, to run away. Many of the rural workers began leaving the roadblock to be able to stay free while they could. I remember the Catholic Church itself began negotiating with the authorities, with the police to negotiate the withdrawal of the rural workers from the roadblock, but under certain conditions, which were that they would not be arrested. They set their own conditions and the police were also benevolent and accepted them. The government accepted them for the sake of doing things in a harmonious way, despite all the damage those people had caused.

The people at the roadblocks wanted to go home quietly like nothing had happened, as if nothing had happened. And that's what happened here, that is to say, that the authorities, were, to use in the Nicaraguan saying, very good people - they did not persecute nor were they taken to court, which they did deserve because whoever causes damage has to pay, and more. However, it was not done, as a citizen of this municipality I am grateful to the government, right, the national and municipal government, to the authorities, the national police, that order was restored. And thanks to them we were able to return to normality to be able to get our milk production and agriculture back to normal.

TcS: How long did it take you to get back to what you could call normal?

Odanel: In the case of pineapple cultivation, the order in which I would expect production to develop over the year has not yet been established, right. So that means that now two years later we still haven't been able to stabilize economically like we were before April 2018.

TcS: Has dairy production and cattle rearing stabilized yet?

Odanel: Milk and livestock production has stabilized for all the local businesses, after the end of the roadblocks, and livestock and milk production began operating normally

Interview with Wilberto Vargas García.

Nueva Guinea. August 27th 2020

Wilberto explains the effects of the roadblocks on his business and on the local economy.

Tortilla con Sal: Here we are with comrade Wilberto Vargas, in the city of Nueva Guinea, of the Southern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region. Wilberto, can you tell us a little bit about your experience and that of your company during 2018?

Wilberto Vargas García: We are a company that has been exporting tubers to Puerto Rico and the United States for more than 15 years.

Everything was going well, but after 2018 because of everything that happened in Nicaragua... We as a company worked partly with our own capital but also with credit.

We stopped working because of the problem that occurred here in Nicaragua, and all our exports collapsed. We had to make staff cuts of people whom we couldn't manage to pay.

There was no way out for exports because the road blocks wouldn't let the containers through. So production was cut back and the products no longer reached the company for processing.

For that reason, we had to close the company. Logically, we fell into default with the lines of credit with the bank. I fell into arrears and I could not continue paying because when I stopped exporting, there was no income, no income to continue working. And so I had to fall into arrears with the bank.

TcS: And what was the bank's policy at that time, were they sympathetic?

Wilberto: At that time the bank... they restructured my loans, but it wasn't the best, not what I wanted. They practically shut the door on me.

TcS: So at that time you were running the risk that they were going to take possession of the collateral for the loan?

Wilberto: At the time we came to an agreement because I told them I really couldn't continue paying because I didn't have a job.

I had always been a customer who was always up to date with my payments, but since I didn't have a job, in the end, the bank accepted a credit restructuring.

And that's how we've been paying, thank God, we're paying, but it did affect the company quite a bit. The growth that we have been experiencing has slowed down.



TcS: In terms of years of development, how many years did that period cost you?

Wilberto: We grew quite rapidly before that situation arose. After that we had a downturn. We had a payroll of 70 employees and we cut back to barely 30 because we were out of work there and couldn't afford to pay for the staff. We had to make a forced cut in personnel, not because we wanted to cut back but because we couldn't continue working.

TcS: And how long has it taken you to return to what could be called normality?

Wilberto: The truth is that we haven't been able to get back to normal.

TcS: You still have to get back to where you were?

Wilberto: Yes of course, we have lowered our export volume quite a lot, we have dropped by 60%.

TcS: I suppose that you were on your way back to what might be called normality, but at that moment that virus came.

Wilberto: The virus, yes, also, of course, again, since it began in the United States, and it was there that we exported, although here the problem had not yet arrived, but we were already feeling it, because in our market it was there and demand was beginning to fall.

TcS: And are you recovering now?

Wilberto: At the moment we are beginning to recover but we are still in the process.

TcS: How many people do you have on your payroll now?

Wilberto: What we have is about 40 people.

TcS: And there were 70?

Wilberto: Yes, 70.

TcS: Can you give us an idea, Wilberto, to help people understand the impact, how many containers or tons of product did you export before April 2018?

Wilberto: Before that, we were sending out 4 containers a week which is what?... A container carries 500 hundred pound sacks so if we round that up we were shipping about 20 tons a week so we were sending out 80 tons of yucca, quequisque and malanga.

TcS: So what is production now?

Wilberto: Now what we are moving... if before we were moving four now it is only two containers,

TcS: Half...

Wilberto: Half.

TcS: One thing that other people we have interviewed have explained to me is that at the roadblocks, they were extorting a toll. For example, a cattle truck full of cattle could have to pay as much as 15,000 córdobas.

Wilberto: Yes, as regards the roadblocks for a time we wanted to risk working, and having to pay to send product out of the country.

TcS: And how much did they charge you to let a container through?

Wilberto: The thing is, what they charged there, it wasn't something... because sometimes there was one person, sometimes another, so one charged US\$100 and another 2000 córdobas. But that's at every roadblock, but wherever you were stopped you had to pay... I mean, I don't know how to tell you. I don't know how to explain. It wasn't like... because sometimes people here think that you were supporting the roadblocks, but it wasn't that I was supporting them rather that in order to ship our product I had to pay something in order to it get out.

TcS: I imagine that was the case for many people.

Wilberto: For a great many people, all those who were in that situation and were trying to do business, because they needed to do something.

TcS: How long did you try to work like that? For a short while? Or for all three months of the coup?

Wilberto: We spent two months practically doing nothing, in the end it had nothing to do with politics but was more a way of making money. Then the groups at the roadblocks doubled and began to let people through maybe even for liquor. In the end I viewed the people at the roadblocks as people who were no good, people who didn't want to work.

TcS: Commissioner Castro explained to me that there were 17 roadblocks here. I suppose it was impossible to move around without having to go through one or another of the roadblocks.

Wilberto: I was careful not to move around, because the thing is that if you decided to travel, you had to give them money. If you didn't want to, they said you were against them. So in the end I preferred to stay put and wait for everything to blow over. My only wish is that this doesn't happen again, because this has affected from the smallest business to the biggest.

We live in a country of opportunities, where we all have the right to work, a country that wants to work can make progress. In my case, with regard to company we have here, I am one of those people who started working from scratch.

Thank God we are where we are, because we are in a free country, where we are able to work and do what is within our reach as long as we are respecting the laws of the country.

Interview with Heyder Omar Candray.

Nueva Guinea: August 27th 2020

Heyder talks about his illegal detention and ill-treatment at the hands of armed opposition activists in Nueva Guinea and about the abuses and attacks affecting the local population.



Tortilla con Sal: We're here in Nueva Guinea with compañero Heyder Omar Candray who works for the Zero Usury credit program. Heyder, you were here during the period of the failed coup attempt in 2018. Can you explain to me a bit about your experience during that time?

Heyder Omar Candray: This period was in 2018 and movements started to intensify on April 19th.

The first marches they did were led by Francisca Ramirez, whom we know here known as "La Chica". She was at the head, leading all the organizations taking part in the marches.

At one point, as government workers and also Sandinista supporters, we were at a Sandinista Front activity in front of the INSS, a joyful activity with cultural numbers and dances, on the main street. On that same date they organized a march along the principal streets of the city. We were located in front of the INSS in District 4 on the city's main street. Their march was along the principal streets, they were marching along here in Nueva Guinea and when they arrived at the INSS, they approached our designated area, at about 5 meters from where our activity was cordoned off. They came right up to us first 2 meters then 1 meters. They were prepared to attack us.

TcS: But it was supposed to be a peaceful march and they didn't have to come near you.

Heyder: At no time were their marches peaceful. Because immediately they attacked us with stones. Mostly they attacked us with stones and many comrades were injured in that attack with stones. They were attacking us throwing stones. I have a fracture in my skull, because a stone hit my head. Lots of comrades were hurt. So what we did was withdraw from the place on the east side. We withdrew towards the market. We went back carefully, distancing ourselves. And the incident passed and it seemed that only on our side were people injured, because for our part we never had any intention of being aggressive

TcS: But it was a cultural event...

Heyder: But the problem got much more serious when the roadblocks started. And the roadblocks too were led by Francisca Ramirez. It was complicated to pass through these roadblocks, even for people who had no political opinion. It was hard to get through those roadblocks and in Nueva Guinea we were surrounded.

On all the ways out of town we had roadblocks, in Los Angeles, at La Lechera which leads out to many communities, in San Juan. We practically couldn't leave New Guinea. We were drove around, in great fear, only in Nueva Guinea.

TcS: Only in the urban area?

Heyder: Only in the urban area because no one wanted to get in trouble. At the roadblocks, there were people with masks and military grade firearms. There were people who were inebriated and people who are drunk can be very dangerous.

In my case of an emergency, while I had to go urgently was on an errand to San Francisco. I had an emergency and had to go on a personal matter which meant going through the roadblock there. As I was going through the roadblock with my wife, it was a matter for which my wife was with me, someone recognized me at a roadblock, that I work for Zero Usury and that I am a Sandinista militant.

That was enough for them to take me off my motorcycle, which was my own bike not a work motorbike of the government, and they wanted to burn it. But they didn't burn it because I defended it since I have worked hard for what I have, and I defended myself. So there I was and they were just like thugs. One of them put a knife to my neck, in a drunken state, threatening me and I thought that was the end of me.

And I thought, these people have no idea what they are doing. Well maybe they did. But in the end they didn't burn my motorbike. They tied my hands and feet and took me to a private house. The house was uninhabited then. They took over houses in the most shameless way. If no family was in a house then they broke the locks and they took the house over. And in that place they had control of two houses.

While I was there, I was held hostage for three or four hours, beaten and kicked, held at gunpoint by masked men. It was hard and all for the sole reason that I work for the state. And no one can tell me I'd hurt anybody. We Sandinista militants were under instructions was to guard the offices of our institutions. Sandinista activists never tied anybody up and never beat anybody. For practical purposes we were on the defensive, but we have courage and character and we have to defend ourselves too and that's what happened in 2018.

TcS: So why did they let you go?

Heyder: Someone at the roadblock knew me, a person who knew my behavior. He took the initiative to talk to the people running the roadblock and set me free. If it hadn't been for him I don't know what would have happened.

They took hostage a comrade from Los Angeles. This comrade was shot with two bullets, one in the neck and one in the hip. He is retired from the army. He was walking in to Nueva Guinea from Los Angeles and had to pass the roadblock where I was held hostage, and they identified him and held him hostage too. There were even female comrades, who were chased near the hospital, there by the hospital and their salvation was that they entered the hospital and were able to move between the different consulting areas in the hospital so as to confuse the people who were after them.

TcS: Or in other words, a group of men?

Heyder: Masked up, with firearms

TcS: Armed?

Heyder: Armed...

TcS: ¿They chased her and to save herself she entered the hospital and mingled with the people there...?

Heyder: ...with the people with the patients. They entered the hospital, and laid down on the hospital beds as if they were patients. That's how they saved themselves.

TcS: The men didn't respect...?

Heyder: They didn't respect the hospital. They entered looking for her and couldn't find her...

Also on one occasion we had a cultural activity in the middle of the roadblocks because for our institution everything was very tense.

Everyone was very stressed and worried because the roadblocks implied the threat of death and death seemed to follow us.

When they set me free they threatened me in my house.

They told me that if they saw me at work, or in the FSLN offices or in the municipal offices, they would burn my house down.

Obviously as a human being one is afraid, but nor did I take notice of them. I continued my activities because I hadn't done anything wrong and thanks be to God here I am still.

There are many experiences...over the three months, there were shootings. They threatened to burn down the municipal offices, the offices of the FSLN, of government institutions. They burned the IPSA, they burned documentation.

TcS: IPSA?

Heyder: IPSA

TcS: IPSA is part of INTA or separate?

Heyder: Separate

TcS: So not only did they destroy INTA but they also destroyed IPSA...?

Heyder: In IPSA they burned all the documents, of the work they were doing following up things for local farmers, which is what they do. The official responsible for IPSA stated that vials with samples of different disease tests in the lab were destroyed

TcS: In the laboratory?

Heyder: Yes in the laboratory. They destroyed everything that was equipment, tests, samples, so the IPSA staff were worried there may be an outbreak of disease.

TcS: Within the town, apart from controlling the ways out of town, did they also have roadblocks inside the town itself?

Heyder: Yes. That's right. What happened was... The main roadblock here in Nueva Guinea was at La Lechera. Then they progressively came into the urban area, reducing the perimeter and the ability of people to move about. After La Lechera they moved further down to the bridge at El Zapote. They lifted up the paving blocks to make barricades, reducing traffic.

Wherever they set up a barricade they destroyed the highway. Then they were there by the El Bombazo store and then by the Red Cross, and that's how they came on until we had them just two blocks from us. They were just two blocks from us with their masks and their guns. It was complete chaos.

TcS: And how do you interpret their motives? Why were they doing all that?

Heyder: Obviously it was all organized by the leaders. In this area the leader we know very well was doña Francisca also known as "La Chica" Ramirez. She was always at the head of all the activities. In what I've been telling you she was always involved in them, she was always there.

TcS: Directing things?

Heyder: Directing, giving orders...

TcS: And in your experience Heyder, what was the role of the Catholic church, of the priests?

Heyder: Well the truth is they left a lot to be desired as people who are familiar with the Word of God. Instead of pacifying and promoting peace, they supported the roadblocks. So much so that at the former parish where the La Salle college is sited, they cooked food for the people on the roadblocks and transported it in the parish vehicle, food, hand-held mortar rounds, ammunition, they had everything there. It was their headquarters, masked men used to leave from there ...

TcS: ...the church?

Heyder: ...the church...

TcS: Were they armed?

Heyder: Armed. The hand held mortars were stored there. The rounds for the mortars, firearms were there. They used to go in and out. It was their headquarters.

TcS: Has everything returned to what might be called normal now? And if it has, how long has that taken?

Heyder: We're moving forward. As far as the economy goes, because the economy was destroyed. Many goods lost value. Prices of basic goods were disrupted. There was unemployment. There was no production. We were coming out of that difficult time and people were reopening their businesses after many people closed them because they used to patrol the urban area in pick-up trucks and if they came across you on foot and they saw you then they got you in the pick-up and beat you and carried out all kinds of misdeeds. They set fire to the house of one of our female comrades.

TcS: They set fire to it?

Heyder: They set fire to two houses here in Nueva Guinea. They burned two houses.

TcS: And what happened on the days when COSEP called the national strike that was supposedly going to bring the country to a halt?

Heyder: At no time did people want to close their businesses because their family's economy depended on them. As regards small businesses, in our case the small corner stores never closed. Some like the stores supplying scholastic and office materials closed down, out of fear that people from the roadblocks would set them on fire. The intimidation was always there, they were always sowing fear and some places closed out of fear but most people didn't want to close.

The proof can be seen now with the pandemic, here no one has stopped working. Because we are people who persevere. 70 to 80% of us work from one day to the next. We work from one day to the next in order to eat.

So at no point did people heed the call for a national strike. Some private sector businesses had to obey but, if you ask them, none of them wanted to. Nobody wanted to close because it stopped production.

Interview with police officer Carla Vanessa Guzman Centeno.

Nueva Guinea. August 27th 2020

Carla talks about the violent attack in Nueva Guinea by armed members of the Rural Workers Movement led by Francisca Ramírez on April 19th 2018

Tortilla con Sal: So we are with police officer compañera Carla Vanessa Guzman Centeno. Carla, you were guarding the premises of the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute on April 19, 2018. Can you explain to us what happened

Carla Vanessa Guzman Centeno: Yes, we were there, as has always been the case with duty at the INSS facilities, because there was a cultural event with folk dancing among other activities.

We were there in front of the offices, a group of comrades keeping watch.

And just then, the so-called peaceful march happened.



TcS: Yes, and who was on that march...?

Carla: It was led by Chica Ramírez, Francisca Ramírez. There were about 1500 people in the march and they were out to attack us, they carried machetes...

TcS: At that moment did you provoke them? Did you insult them or did you say something to provoke them?

Carla: No. Not at all. We were guarding the installations, we were at the activity.

TcS: The cultural activity...

Carla: Yes, we were keeping watch there in front of the INSS which was exactly where the event was in front of the INSS offices. We were there and suddenly they arrived, they carried machetes, they had sticks...

TcS: Were you armed... the police?

Carla: We, when we cover activities, we don't go armed. We are citizen security. We give the people confidence. And we were like that at that time. Suddenly they started to shout insults and they started to attack us.

TcS : And what form did the aggression take?

Carla: They began to throw stones at the people in the activity...

TcS : At the people who were...?

Carla: Exactly, at the people who were there... until, just then, where they came out and started throwing stones and attacking people with sticks.

TcS: Attacking people with their sticks... but why would they want to attack a cultural activity?

Carla: Because it was the government's.

TcS: Who was organizing the activity? Was there a political party or some instance of the party?

Carla: The Sandinista Youth...it was a cultural activity where they danced folklore numbers, Nicaraguan music...

TcS: So it was an activity of the Sandinista Youth... What were they celebrating?

Carla: We were celebrating... here they do activities on the weekends for local families' recreation of the families, yes, for the recreation of the families, of the people...

TcS: So if I understand correctly what you are explaining to me, those people from the Rural Workers Movement attacked this activity just because it was an activity organized by the Sandinista Youth,

Carla: Yes

TcS: Have I got that right?

Carla: And after starting all that, they came towards us. We were there guarding the INSS. They advanced on us, attacking us, we suffered four injured comrades.

TcS: What kind of injuries did they suffer?

Carla: A comrade suffered an injury here (*indicating the left side of the forehead*)

TcS: With a stone?

Carla: Yes, with a stone... it was in the temple that they got hit. In my case a fairly large stone hit my foot which was instantly inflamed. And other colleagues suffered similar injuries.

TcS: And how did you manage to save yourself from that attack?

Carla: Where we were already inside, we took refuge inside the INSS. Where the police Commissioner was. To try and ... He asked for directions, but only later, later after the attacks where they wanted to burn the offices, where we ... took shelter. In other words, we went to a corner where they forced our police officers throwing rocks, sticks, and until after the Commissioner received directions, the riot force came out...

TcS: To control?

Carla: To control...

TcS: With tear gas?

Carla: Yes

TcS: And at some point did you hear or experience that they were shooting with firearms?

Carla: No.

TcS: Only with stones?

Carla: No... They were.

TcS: They were shooting at you? Could you identify what type of weapon? Pistols? Shotguns?

Carla: Pistols and hunting weapons, you could hear

TcS: And were they shooting in the air or were they shooting at you?

Carla: At us...

TcS: At you? Or in the air?

Carla: At us...

TcS: To attack you?

Carla: To attack us...

TcS: So it was pure luck that you didn't receive a bullet wound?

Carla: Thank God, yes...

TcS: So how long did that attack last?

Carla: It lasted about... six hours... five hours...

TcS: Six hours?

Carla: Yes because it was from the afternoon, about four o'clock in the afternoon

TcS: And how could you resist if they were fifteen hundred and you were six?

Carla: No, because there was the population. There were people. And they also suffered injuries. Yes... because the people were still guarding, as well the INSS workers, the population in the event and us.

TcS: So they managed to keep...

Carla: They did manage to protect us while our chief was receiving guidance, but it did take a while...

TcS: Yes, it was six hours... The injury you suffered from the stone, how long did it take to recover?

Carla: To recover definitively, I haven't recovered because I couldn't use the higher heels because I had a lump left, so I can't use...sometimes the boot hurts me...

TcS: So you still have difficulty walking?

Carla: Sometimes. Sometimes... it depends.

TcS: Because of where you were hit?

Carla: Yes. And there was also a moment when they burned a motorcycle from the institution...

TcS: Of the INSS?

Carla: Of the police...

TcS: Of the police?

Carla: Yes it was the police... that... they were attacking, quite a lot of people headed towards us...

Interview with Sub-Inspector Oscar Ismael Luna Mairena.

Nueva Guinea. August 27th 2020

Oscar explains what happened in relation to the burning down of the police post at Puerto Príncipe and the intimidation of Sandinista and other families in the area by armed activists of the Rural Workers Movement



Tortilla con Sal: Well, here we are with compañero Sub-Inspector Oscar Ismael Luna Mairena.

Oscar, we are trying to understand more about the different events during the failed coup attempt in 2018. What was your experience during that period? Because we understand that there was an incident there where you were working at that time in Port-au-Prince.

Sub Inspector Oscar Ismael Luna

Mairena: Those were moments of tension, of keeping us together on the part of the national leadership, given what was happening in the country. As it happens, we had orders from

the departmental headquarters of Chief Commissioner Denis Castro who, a few days earlier, due to information received, withdrew us from the police post as an operational measure at night.

It was difficult because we had to cross some rivers and we had some motorcycles that we used to get around, but we managed to get out. A few days later, on July 7th there was information that the police post had been burned down, all the furniture inside, all the equipment that was there, and also a pick-up truck that was there, a motorcycle as well.

Up until then, they were people who lived there. In the case of Medardo Mairena, Medardo Mairena has his home in the Polo de Desarrollo, as it is known, and they have been workers, producers... up until then, up to that time, right, but we do not have more details about them, we only know that they live in remote rural areas.

TcS: And why do you think Oscar that they'd attack a police post, even one where there is nobody there?

Oscar: Well, that's the situation... These are situations we are not authorized to discuss and... this situation was being promoted at a national level, this... of the roadblocks and the whole population here is aware that... it was a matter of generating chaos in the population, fear... for them to demonstrate authority over everything and equally to demonstrate to the population that they had dominion even over the maximum authority that is the National Police,. I imagine that this was a clear message that these groups were sending to intimidate the population.

TcS: And these groups, did they belong to some political movement that had differences with the government or that wanted to...?

Oscar: Yes, logically they are opposed, they are adverse to the government, to the government party and that's where the situation comes from... So they abused human rights to carry out those actions.

TcS: And can you identify which movement all these people belong to?

Oscar: Yes, Chica Ramirez is the main leader with Medardo Mairena, they are the ones who were there at the roadblocks, organizing against the construction of the canal in Nicaragua. Later they called it the Rural Workers Movement, but from earlier on the organization remained, and by the time the situation of the roadblocks came, part of the people who were organized had participated directly in them...

TcS: And before you had to withdraw from your police post there in Puerto Príncipe, were you receiving threats or did you have some other kind of problem before?

Oscar: Well, not directly, that is to say... but information was heard, we had local people organized, we had information at that time from various... from different communities, who provided us with information about groups, armed groups that were there in different communities and that were advancing, advancing to approach the police post.

According to our information, it was to eliminate the police and also to obtain weapons and use them to support the roadblocks. That was the alert we had from our headquarters, which acted to protect our lives, to move us to the municipal station here in Nueva Guinea. So we moved before those people fell on us.

TcS: And why did you have to move at night, under cover?

Oscar: Because the roadblocks were already advancing. There was one here near Nueva Guinea, and further on they were setting up roadblocks to avoid transit of vehicles and people, in other words, the municipality here was blockaded for several days.

TcS: And if you hadn't withdrawn...

Oscar: The same thing would have happened to us as happened in Morrito, Rio San Juan. That would have been our story.

TcS: In the period you are talking about, the period before your withdrawal from the police post there, did you notice any incidents where that these same armed groups, were threatening or intimidating the local population? Did you in the police force, for example, receive information from neighbors in the area that they were being intimidated? Was there such a situation?

Oscar: There were comments from local people who said, "I have to support them. I have to lend them my truck because if I don't, they told me there would be consequences and that the truck might catch fire". I mean, there were people who were supportive because they were under pressure. They said "You have to support financially because if not your house could catch fire tonight". People were already thereabouts, they were already afraid. Even friends said, "We don't know what to do" ... At that time, no names were mentioned, only "the road block activists". Only that...

TcS: And you and your colleagues in the police force, I imagine that you have returned to work in those areas.

Oscar: Yes.

TcS: And how is the relationship now with the population? Is there hostility towards you from the population? Or do you get on in a normal, friendly way?

Oscar: At the beginning there was a kind of rejection and stigmatization of the police because... of the same misinformation and everyone blaming the government, the police for murder, blaming the government for murder and all those things and some opposition leaders were going around town in vehicles...

TcS: There in Puerto Príncipe?

Oscar: Yes in Puerto Príncipe... but now we have been slowly getting closer again. Logically it's not the same relation anymore. There's no longer the same empathy that there was with the population, or at least with some part of it. But the people are already participating, getting engaged. But not everyone.

TcS: So you feel that there is still a tension in the area? or not?

Oscar: Everyone who was a political leaders from the government party had to leave their community and now they don't live in the same place, because they were also threatened, So they took precautions, some went elsewhere, others live here in Guinea, others have sold up.

TcS: Please could you to explain to me again why those Sandinista people left the area where they lived? Why did they?

Oscar: The reason was, I think, the same reason that we left. We had information from people who support us in other communities near Puerto Príncipe about the people who were in these armed groups and who were declaring that they were going to eliminate all those who were Sandinista and that they were also going to kill the police. That was the information that was being manipulated locally. And they were also looking for anyone who was a Sandinista. In other words, there was a kind of harassment, a surveillance, which scared people into leaving, forcing them to leave for safety's sake.

Interview with Santos Romero Reyes and members of his family

Nueva Guinea. 24 de septiembre 2020

Santos explains how his family has abandoned their land because of the murder of his son by armed members of the Peasant Movement. For reasons of personal safety Santos and his family did not want to be filmed.

Tortilla con Sal: Well, we are here with some comrades from the Nueva Guinea area, and perhaps you could explain to us, sir, what your name is?

Santos Romero Reyes: Santos Romero Reyes

TcS: And where do you come from, sir?

Santos: Comarca de Pijagua there, from Puerto Príncipe one hour

TcS: Pijagua, and that's one hour from Port-au-Prince...?

Santos: Yes, one hour from there.

TcS: And that place is in the municipality of Nueva Guinea or in the municipality of Bluefields...?

Santos: Here in Guinea, it belongs to Nueva Guinea...

TcS: So, I understand comrade that you and your family had some problems there in the area where you live... Can you tell us what happened?

Santos: Of course I can. Look, the problem was that they started the roadblocks. The roadblock activists wanted us to go to support the roadblocks and since I didn't like that, they spread hatred for all of us. They spread hatred about us to the point where they even killed one of my sons.

Then they were coming after me to kill me with all my family and all my children. Here they came looking for me there, namely Medardo Mairena, Francisca Castillo, others from the area...

TcS: When you say Francisca Castillo, is that Chica Ramirez?

Santos: Yes that's right. I get things wrong sometimes... Francisca Ramirez. Medardo Mairena and other road block activists from there, Reynaldo Flores, the Chavarrias from Santa Isabel, the Tellez, they spread hatred about us, that they didn't even want to see us and at the same time they came after us and set people on us to kill us themselves.

TcS: Are you a farmer there?

Santos: I am a farmer. All of us are farmers. So you know, we are not from any party. We are rural workers, rural workers who just like to work to make a living.

TcS: And they weren't threatening you because you were a Sandinista?

Santos: That's what they have put about, but as I was saying, I am neither a Sandinista or a Liberal, my vote is to work for a living.

I don't get involved with any party, none of my family. That's why they didn't like us, just imagine that they were after us to kill us. Even now they are looking for us.

TcS: And how much land did you have to work on there?

Santos: Land? It was not much. There were 70 acres of my son-in-law, who has already given up on them. I had a bit of land there in Pijagua, there were five acres there. We made a living there, and we had to give it all up.

TcS: What did you grow?

Santos: Corn there at my sister's place. There she gave me land to work. Yucca. Beans. Everything. Everything.

TcS: And you didn't have any cattle?

Santos: No. I didn't. A few mules that we left there.

TcS: So, at that time... more or less when? was it in April, or May?

Santos: When the roadblocks started... We had been moving around for fourteen months now, just imagine... Because I was there in Costa Rica working. Then I came here. I thank God that these friends here got me a little house to live in while I get my own place to live, because I thought that... we don't have a place to go....

TcS: How many are there in your family?

Santos: There are five of us because they are my children, but each one of us is a separate family. The women and the children already have their own... we are five families...

TcS: There are five families?

Santos: Yes, yes...

TcS: And among these five families, how many people would they be?

Santos: We are about.... fourteen...

TcS: Fourteen people?

Santos: So, listen to me... After that they came to my son-in-law, Abel Vevilla, to tell him that since we didn't support them, some people came. They took him out. They beat him up. They almost killed him... The road block activists. It was them They set people at him, armed people, and they took him out and almost killed him. They put him in a lake. That's the kind of outrage they were doing.

TcS: What's that comrade's name?

Santos: Francisco Rocha, he is my son-in-law.

TcS: So Francisco was attacked?

Santos: From his house... they took him to a lake and held his head down in the lake water and they almost killed my son-in-law

TcS: And Francisco came with you?

Santos: Yes here he is but...

TcS: Is he out milking? Out with the cows?

Santos: He's gone to look after a mule that is about to give birth, he said, and let's see if he can get the little colt out, I thought he would be back today... maybe they won't kill him there...

TcS: There? That's where he went?

Santos: Yes, yes, yes...

TcS: So do you have friends there who are looking after your property?

Santos: Well not me... He has a friend of his there who kind of takes care the land now and then but he does so with fear. Francisco was told that the little animal was there, so he went there. I thought he'd be back today. Maybe they won't do anything to him...

TcS: So you were all there...

Santos: All of us...

TcS: What's the place called?

Santos: Look, I coming from Pijagua Hill. He was living in Las Delicias de Masayovo, my son-in-law with them.

Marlene: I am his wife...

TcS: Francisco's?

Santos: Yes, yes.... But when we left there and he stayed because he did not want to leave, people came, took him out and almost killed him in the house where he was living... in Las Delicias de Masayovo.

TcS: And among all of you then, you took the decision to come?

Santos: That's right, yes yes... to move away, because if we had not, they would have killed us all.

TcS: And apart from what they did to Francisco, you... among the family, did you suffer any other type of aggression? Or just that?

Santos: That's what they did to my son-in-law and in my case they killed my son.

TcS: Your son? You killed him?

Santos: Yes, they killed him...

TcS: And what is his name?

Santos: The dead one?

TcS: Yes.

Santos: Roberto Romero Morales

TcS: And how old was he?

Santos: 26

TcS: 26? And how old is your husband Francisco, señora?

Marlene: 56

TcS: And how was he killed?

Santos: My son? They shot him.

TcS: With a rifle?

Santos: Yes, yes... he was shot.

TcS: Do you remember the date?

Marlene: August 10.

TcS: The 10th of August... Of 2018?

Various people: 19

TcS: From last year?

Various people: Yes

TcS: Sorry, I find it difficult to... So, you came, you left there in April or May of the eighteenth...

Various people: Nineteen...

TcS: Last year?

Various people: Yes.

TcS: So you endured that whole period of the blockades there, you stuck it out...?

Santos: Yes we put up with it there we had to ... but there are many, a lot of people who suffered all kinds of outrages and we had to leave because otherwise they would have killed us all.

TcS: So it was the murder of your son that caused you to come here?

Santos: Yes. And afterwards they came for us to kill us because we wouldn't help them on the roadblocks. Because I used to tell them that I wouldn't help the roadblocks or anything else because, as I told them, we are all farmers, we work to make a living. So they told me, "So you don't support either the Liberals or the Sandinistas". No. I don't support any side because I insist that we work to make a living... I don't bother anyone...

TcS: And were you the only ones who were attacked? Or were they harassing other people as well?

Santos: There were several people there, my friend. There were several people getting harassed there...

What happens is that out of fear they don't file a complaint or I don't know what happens in their case because they put the word out on you, if you go around talking against them, then they send people to kill you. That's why they don't complain, because of the same fear, that very same fear that they have.

They're a lot of people. They've affected a lot of people there, but because they're make threats to say that if you say what we do, we'll send people to kill you or we'll arrive to kill you, and so everyone, out of fear, won't say what those others are doing.

TcS: So how have you managed to survive? If you have had to leave their land and you are people live working the land...

Santos: Of course. From those little jobs there are, you get your corn, your beans, you harvest what you can and from there you eat...

TcS: So how have you managed after leaving your land?

Santos: The people in these hamlets here in the region have helped us here, man. They've given us a place to stay, they've given us little jobs like this, day work. We work for them and make a living.

TcS: You haven't sold your land there, have you?

Santos: No, no, no, no

TcS: Are you going to sell it?

Santos: Let's see and keep an eye out. I'm may not even bother because I'd have to go and sign documents or try and find a buyer and they might well kill me and there'd be no coming back.

TcS: So you run the risk that other people will settle on your land

Santos: Yes... they do take over land there, that and the animals, they do that there.

TcS: One thing they have said to me. I don't know if it's true. It's that what those people from the so-called Rural Workers Movement do there... in that movement what some of them do is... they harass the peasants to make them sell their land cheap...

Santos: Those roadblock activists? Of course they do, they just want to get hold of everything they can. Yes, because those who don't support them they want them to leave... and with this constant harassment they want to make them sell cheaply or else leave

TcS: And you think that's what happened to you? That you were harassed because you wanted to take over your land, is that right?

Santos: Yes, because as far as I'm concerned, first of all because we don't support them with the roadblocks, and secondly because they want to take over our land, and if other people allow it, that's how it will be... and fear, and fear of whoever may be the next there, my friend, because people have to move away, otherwise they will kill them... one cannot even sleep peacefully there.

TcS: And for you, as women of the family, what has the experience been for you?

Marlene: Well, that's why we left there too. And why we are here. For the same reason, I am here with my husband.

TcS: Excuse me, señora, can you tell me your name?

Marlene: I can't read...

Various people: You only have to say it

Marlene: Ah...Marlene, my name is Marlene Romero Morales...

TcS: Marlene, so what has it meant for your children to have to abandon their land...?

Marlene: Abandonment... because I am very afraid to return to my village so I don't go there and nor does my husband because they spread hatred for us threatening our lives.

So I say I don't go and I don't go and what we left there, there it's left...

TcS: How has this affected the children?

Marlene: Since there are people who help us... we are working, there are days when my husband finds work. There are days that I also do laundry. I go out to do laundry in the other places, and they pay me so as to take food for my child.

TcS: Can you tell us as a family what has been the most serious effect on you? What else affects you? I don't know if I'm explaining myself...

Santos: Just ever since the roadblocks happened that has been the most serious effect for us ever since the roadblocks, that has been the most serious effect that has happened because many people have been affected by these roadblocks.

TcS: What is your name, señora?

Ana: Ana Morales

TcS: Ana Morales? And señora, can you tell us a little bit about how this whole problem has affected you?

Ana: Yes. The same thing. We left out of fear. Because since we are afraid and my son was killed... so then... we moved away.

TcS: And how have you managed to take care of the children?

Ana: Here we help my children the best we can. My children help me and Santos also... they find odd jobs and people who have befriended us help too.

TcS: Thank you... What is your name?

Nelson: My name is Nelson Ramiro Romero Morales

TcS: And Nelson, when you left the land how have you manage to work, because...?

Nelson: Now and then they give us odd jobs, looking to manage to make a living, to buy even if only a few beans to eat and here and there we go looking for day work... and here we are staying temporarily because we cannot go back home because they make us...

We are afraid that they will kill us, you see, well... and that is why we staying temporarily here... they got us some houses to stay in while we see what we can do

TcS: Anyone else? What's your name, comrade?

Melvin: Melvin Romero Morales.

TcS: And Melvin, what has this problem meant for you?

Melvin: Goodness... we left You know, out of fear, and we have been moving around ever since my brother was killed and we were threatened, but you know it's better... it's better to leave the house where we were, because it's better to move... we are living here temporarily, but we are out looking to finding the odd day's work here there, earning enough for food.

TcS: And how do the children go to school? Do they continue to study?

Melvin: My child is small. He's not in school yet. They won't accept him.

TcS: Excuse me... What is your name?

Arelys: Arelys.

TcS: Arelys, are you studying or have you had to stop studying?

Arelys: I've had to stop studying because of what happened there.

TcS: And how has it affected you emotionally? Has it affected you a lot?

Arelys: Goodness... the effect is that you don't have the same facilities that you have at home, living temporarily in other places

TcS: Well, thank you very much.... excuse me sir. So one last question I have is, what future do you see for solving this problem? How are you going to solve it?

Santos: Well as far as I'm concerned we hope that maybe things will get sorted out so we can continue working in peace.

TcS: There...?

Santos: No... anywhere we can find a place to settle down so we can continue to work in peace and continue to strive to make a living.

TcS: Do you think it will be possible to return to your land?

Santos: Not at all... and I say not with those people... those people don't leave you in peace... did they leave us in peace there? Because, as I told you, there are several roadblock activists there, and I know all the roadblock activists in that area...

Appendix

*Interview with Dr. Javier Morazán *, prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Nicaragua*



Tortilla con Sal: What has been the role of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the context of the failed coup attempt last April?

Dr. Javier Morazán: Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Office, in accordance with Article 138, part 9 paragraph b) of our Political Constitution and Article One of Law 346, the law governing our body, represents society in general and the victims of crime in criminal trials.

The Public Prosecutor's Office also gives legal guidance to criminal investigations and carries out criminal proceedings when the investigations produce enough evidence to be able to achieve a conviction in court. The Public Prosecutor's Office is an institution of service and receives without discrimination or distinction everyone who comes here to the Public Prosecutor's Office to present accusations or seek other help .

In that regard the Public Prosecutor's Office received and attended around 80 mothers of victims who died resulting from the context of these events, Furthermore we have carried out a series of formal investigations which we are enabled to do by law.

The Public Prosecutor's Office from the start carried out all these events, supported by specialist bodies like forensic medicine and the expert laboratory analysts of the Institute of Crime Studies and Forensic Sciences. We are working to exhaust all lines of investigation and we work to ensure that all the lines of investigation are exhausted with professionalism and objectivity sticking strictly to legality which are the principles that govern the conduct of the OPP.

Once the Public Prosecutor's Office has carried out an investigation and managed to clarify the facts via legal guidance and sufficient, concrete investigative action, the Public Prosecutor's Office proceeds to present a formal indictment against the people responsible for the events. The accused people are presented to the country's judicial authorities, they hold a preliminary hearing in which, in the first place, the right to defense is guaranteed.

The people accused can either have a defense lawyer of their choice or if they cannot then a defense lawyer can be named by the State. The court also guarantees the remaining rights of the accused. These include, the court hearings and the right of their relatives to be present during the trial. In that preliminary hearing the accused person is told what they are accused of, the crimes imputed to them by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Public Prosecutor's Office gives a summary of the evidence it has to prove the indictment.

The judge in that preliminary hearing reviews whether the indictment complies with the elements or requirements established by law as set out in Article 77 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to make the accusation. If they consider the requirements are met, the judge accepts the indictment and sets a date for an initial hearing which is the second hearing contemplated in our criminal procedure.

Then that initial hearing has to be held within the ten days following the preliminary hearing or twenty days if the case involves complicated details. Then in that initial hearing the Public Prosecutor's Office present the evidence for conviction it has collected during the investigation that supports the criminal accusation.

An in that hearing the judge appraises whether or not the evidence for conviction presented by the Public Prosecutor's Office are enough to send the case against the person accused to trial . In all the cases the Public Prosecutor's Office has investigated and made an accusation, it has presented abundant proof collected during the investigations consisting of witness testimony, expert analytical proof, physical evidence, documentary evidence, videos, audio recordings and scientific evidence that support the deeds the Public Prosecutor's Office has alleged. That is why these indictments have been accepted and sent to trial.

Every accusation by the Public Prosecutor's Office is supported by proof because we cannot make an indictment without the evidence to back it up, for every one of the persons accused and for every crime they are accused of. And that is why the judges have made their review and confirmed the indictments and even the defense lawyers have accepted there is evidence to support the accusations.

The cases that have already gone to trial have obtained excellent results because the proofs made available at the initial hearing and then at trial have been presented have been able to demonstrate convincingly the guilt of the people accused. And so the judges have evaluated the evidence the Public Prosecutor's Office has presented and evaluated also the evidence presented by the defense and the the judge has taken these into account.

The victims and the population in general that have seen the court hearings on the television news have accepted with satisfaction the work of the Public Prosecutor's Office and results of the trials. Any impartial observer can warrant that. The only people who do not are people paid to ignore the evidence since their business and way of making a living depends on criticizing the actions of the State.

For example in the case of the journalist Angel Gahona in Bluefields the expectations of Nicaraguan society and above all the people of Bluefields were satisfied on seeing how the Public Prosecutor's Office clarified and established the facts of that crime during the investigation with a large quantity of scientific evidence, testimony, documents, videos and physical evidence that supported with complete clarity that those who were responsible were the two people accused by the Public Prosecutor's Office

This is why the Public Prosecutor's Office has a high level of credibility in Nicaraguan society. The Public Prosecutor's Office has had that high level of satisfaction on the part of the population since before the events of April 18th. It maintains that credibility and will maintain that credibility because the Public Prosecutor's Office is committed to acting in accordance with the law with strict respect for the rights and guarantees of the people accused. The Public Prosecutor's Office has made known all the evidence at trial and will continue doing so in accordance with the law, guaranteeing always due criminal process so as to respect the rights of both the victims of crime and of those accused and of everyone involved in the criminal trial process. Because we as the Public Prosecutor's Office owe it to the victims of crime to represent society in general as well as the victim of the crime based on the principles of legality and objectivity.

TcS : Is it correct to say that all the accused who are being portrayed as political prisoners have been accused of criminal offenses?

Dr. Javier Morazán: Impunity does not exist in Nicaragua. Our justice system stands out for the access to justice, for being effective, for professional and objective investigations, for a high level of clarification of events, for having a transparent and expeditious criminal justice system in which there is hardly any delay in justice being done, which has been recognized internationally.

Whereas on the other hand, we know of countries where impunity runs at 90%. Our investigations suggest that the authors of the events in the context of the months of April to June this year, calculated all aspects, including the deaths that needed to happen.

These people were and are anxious for their to be deaths so as to use them as a figure, as a number, as a fact, as a destructive proof, as a form of grabbing attention and justifying the intervention of other interests.

That is why they they organized a strategy of social manipulation, they incited, directed and financed the violence, the hatred, the terror, the chaos, the destruction and the deaths of many innocent people.

And after having obtained the deaths, the material authors seek to secure their impunity and the underhand way of seeking impunity is to attribute to the material authors of the murders, kidnappings, tortures and arson the category of political prisoners, ignoring the grief of the victims, naturally, because in the thinking of terrorists human lives have no value.

The radical extremism of some people using the smokescreen of “criminalizing protest” seeks impunity for these crimes. They fear the progress of clarification of the events. Those who seek impunity are trying to turn upside down the deepest values that we all share in the global village.

They want our society to accept as political prisoners people who have murdered, tortured, kidnapped, committed arson, terrorized and destroyed the country and the future of our children. These deeds are not political. They are serious crimes.

The Public Prosecutor's Office as our society's representative and also that of the victims of crime will continue to defend those universal values, the right to life, the right to physical and psychological integrity, to security, to health, to education, to development, bring to face justice based on evidence those who harm or put in danger our society's most important legal goods, doing so with independence, autonomy and without any type of discrimination against victims of crime, people accused or other people involved in the criminal justice process.

The crimes for which the Public Prosecutor's Office has presented indictments are common crimes, crimes that threaten life, physical integrity, security, public calm, people's freedom, or public and private property. They have to do with people who have murdered other people via arson, via asphyxiation or using firearms.

These crimes of murder of victims have been accompanied by torture, by torture with physical bodily harm, psychological harm, people have been kidnapped, people have been burned, people whose houses have also been set on fire, or their businesses have been damaged and set on fire, people who have been victims of robbery with violence, robbery with intimidation.

The people accused are charged with obstructing access to basic services like health care, like education and to food which are rights of the population. All these rights have been infringed and violated by the people accused.

The actions of the State to obtain justice for the victims and for society are legitimate. No one can argue for the impunity of serious criminal acts in a Social State based on Law. In practice only those who sympathize with such acts would dare to obstruct justice and truth by asking for the freedom of those who have murdered so many people using as a diversion of excuse the very same fundamental values of the State of Law, like liberty, democracy and human rights, values that have been abused by these criminal acts.

These deeds for which the Public Prosecutor's Office is bringing charges have nothing to do with political matters. Because setting out to murder someone has nothing to do with politics. One is dealing with depriving someone of their life. And that is a fundamental human right. And anyone who deprives another person of their life, everyone who kidnaps another person, anyone who causes bodily harm to another person, or who sets out to set a house on fire, the person who sets up obstacles and finances or puts a roadblock on the public highway which impedes someone else from realizing their right to health care, to education and their rights as a whole, that has nothing to do with politics.

Whoever occupies or organizes the occupation of universities to turn them into bases for criminal activities in no way is doing politics. The population knows this. These are a common crimes that clearly and directly affect the people's fundamental rights and faced with that the Public Prosecutor's Office is fulfilling its constitutional mission of investigating and bringing indictments based on the cases' evidence.

The Public Prosecutor's Office does not evaluate political matters. What it evaluates are the proofs for convictions that exist against each person who committed any act prohibited by criminal justice norms and which significantly damage a protected legal good. And if the available proof is sufficient to establish who the authors are then it is our responsibility to ensure that they face justice for those acts. These are the criteria the Public Prosecutor's Office evaluates to decide on bringing a criminal case.

Here we don't have political prisoners nor have we accused anyone for their political opinions. One can review all the case files the Public Prosecutor's Office has presented and in not one of them have we accused anyone for their political opinions, nor for their religious opinion or belief, nor for organizing as part of a political party or not, nor for being in favor of or against some political party.

Nor have we accused anyone for being for or against the government. We have accused people who have committed serious crimes against other people like murders, woundings, tortures, kidnappings, arson, damage. And the people accused, by these crimes, have induced fear and terror among the population.

Every person who has come here has been attended with no kind of discrimination and we have investigated and we have indicted and we have presented evidence at trial. The Prosecutor General has even invited the human rights organizations to come to the Public Prosecutor's Office and share their list of victims or any other information they want to present on the events we are investigating or on events they say we should be litigating or to reconcile the lists.

They have been invited in writing and none of them, not one of those bodies has come here. And when the lists these organizations present are reviewed what we can see is a really large number of errors and technical inconsistencies without even minimum verification of the information presented. These are lists put together in a hurry.

How is it possible that in a list appear repeated fifteen people. In one place you put one surname and later in the list with another first name and the surnames reversed or with only one surname, but they are the same person, or people who are alive appear there. or someone appears in the list based on an anonymous phone call. The organizations themselves accept that this is information they have yet to verify. However they sell a the most elevated number of deaths possible which implies a deliberate agenda. And then those numbers are taken as if verified by international organizations forming a vicious circle of disinformation or manipulated information intended to make less likely achieving the right to truth and justice.

TcS: How important is the figure of terrorism?

Dr. Javier Morazán: Terrorism is one of the greatest scourges of our time, as much at a national level as at an international level. The profile of people who engage in radical extremist conduct with no respect for universal values or the rights of other people in order to secure their destructive objective or the imposition of their intolerant, fanatical ideas of hatred. They seek to procure their ends at any price and any means justifies the end, all means are valid. Some of them induce the commission of crimes from any platform and take part in the planning, direction, financing and execution of violence.

They call for and finance criminal acts and justify any atrocious crime by its result and those who die thanks to their manipulation they consider a calculated win for their terror-based cause. Valuing life at little or nothing, for the terrorist deaths are a number they need to increase as much as they can. These people are egocentric, irresponsible who find convenient, are interested in and believe favorable to them producing the greatest number of deaths. To do so they continue generating the actions that produce them.

These are people who need to demonstrate ungovernability, destabilization, terror, insecurity, hate, destruction and poverty at the cost of human lives. . They take satisfaction from the suffering or terror of the population. They seek to recruit people to radicalize and use in the attacks that they plan. They are being investigated and with the available evidence they are being brought to the justice they deserve for each dead person, for each person they wounded, for every person who was affected by their crimes.

The characteristics that best identify terrorism are its indiscriminate violence, it extends its effects to the totality of the population; its unpredictability, it acts by surprise mixed with terror. Its immorality produces unnecessary suffering, striking the most vulnerable areas; its disruption of public order (for example, creating uproar, killing people, mass intimidation); its threats against people's lives or those of their families or of destroying where people live; the trails of death produced in the streets; the taking of hostages or kidnapping of people. It is indirect too diverting the populations gaze to a point that is not their real target.

Terrorism is able to get legitimacy so as to give it solidity, so it seeks broader social support so as to present an increasingly bigger challenge, trying to legitimize its violence which explains the importance of manipulating public opinion and getting the news media on its side. getting legitimacy for its actions via propaganda gives importance to the propaganda fronts these terrorist organizations create. Within the means used to carry out terrorist actions figure various forms of physical violence against people, like kidnapping, torture, murders; various forms of moral violence, like threats or social pressure; various forms of violence against private or public goods, like their destruction using explosive or incendiary materials.

From the methodological point of view, a group can be considered terrorist that carries out kidnappings, attacks with bombs, murders, threats or systematic coercion. Technically these acts are designed to produce terror in the opposing population and there is no doubt in defining them as terrorist acts. Many of these circumstances have figured in the events where the Public Prosecutor's Office has made indictments. When a person or a group of people organize to install a roadblock that obstructs people's free transit, or the free exercise of people's rights, and on top of that it turns into a center of operations to commit crimes, from which they set out to kidnap people or else kidnap and torture people who arrive there, beat them up, rob them and then finish them off by killing them.

When there are people promoting, financing or carrying out this behavior intended to cause serious bodily harm, intended to kill other people using weapons and with the purpose of instilling fear in the population, causing terror and intimidation and leaving the population intimidated, and taking matters to the extreme of maintaining sequestered and under their criminal control a whole community or city and trying to do the same with an entire country, that enters into the definition of the crime of terrorism as contemplated in the United Nations Convention against financing, precisely, terrorist activity.

This Convention was adopted by the United Nations Organization in December 1999 and ratified by Nicaragua in April 2002 under the government of President Bolaños, via Presidential decree 3287 generating as a commitment for our country precisely those international commitments supervised by the International Financial Action Group and specifically the Latin American Financial Action Group which in 2017 in its evaluation of Nicaragua recommended legislative reforms to make more effective its actions against money laundering, against financing of terrorism, against terrorism itself and against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Nicaragua, precisely so as to comply with those international standards approved this law against asset laundering, Law 977, on July 20th this year. This law was approved after all these criminal events. So it is a law that the Public Prosecutor's Office has not applied nor have we invoked it in relation to events that took place between April 18th and May, June July of this year based on the principle of the non-retroactive nature of criminal law. The applicable law is the anti-terrorist legislation active since 2008.

Even so with the intention of manipulating the population it has been said that this law was passed with the aim of criminalizing certain actions in spite of the fact that this law was being worked on a long time before April 18th. And once the events of April took place the legislative process was suspended.

Rather it was left to wait and the law was not approved until July 20th because a GAFILAT evaluation meeting was scheduled for the end of that month. That means this law is not applicable to the events prior to July 20th. Nor in the future can it be applied to any protest since it applies to terrorist acts and if they were considered to criminalize protest no country would have adopted the United Nations definition of terrorism or else every country in the world would be criminalizing it on the basis of that Convention.

The people interested in promoting conflict and thus more violence and deaths to justify more funding for their radical actions try to discredit the work of the Public Prosecutor's Office against people who have committed serious crimes, hurting people and Nicaraguan society alleging criminalization of protest.

It's common that those who are behind the material authors of terrorism structure their media campaigns so as to demand the freedom and the impunity of those who under their manipulation committed serious crimes and to do so they demand their recognition as political prisoners. That manipulation is a kind of motivation to recruit and radicalize people so as to continue their wave of violence and at the same time ensure that the people accused don't cooperate with the justice system so as to lessen the chances of those behind the terrorism being exposed

In these kinds of events, the same people calling for violence subsequently seek impunity alleging criminalization of peaceful protest. But it's important to emphasize categorically that the Public Prosecutor's Office has not accused anyone for participating in a peaceful march. The Public Prosecutor's Office has not indicted anyone for demonstrating peacefully. It has not accused anyone here for politics nor for having a political belief or for their political feelings nor for being for or against the government or for or against a given political party. The Public Prosecutor's Office has accused people who have committed serious crimes and who on top of that want to cover themselves by manipulating public opinion in favor of the people who committed those crimes. But the proof of their actions has been uncovered by our investigations, by the criminal justice process and in the community that they terrorized and destroyed.

The Public Prosecutor's Office has accused people who have committed serious crimes against other people, against the population and Nicaraguan society. The deeds and crimes committed are murder, arson, homicide, serious bodily harm, damage to property and terrorism. Why? Precisely because they committed all that large number of criminal acts with the purpose of intimidating the population, self-evidently greatly disturbing public order. So then those elements are treated under our criminal norms as crimes and we are obliged as the Public Prosecutor's Office to bring charges against the people concerned because that is our job. Our job is to represent the victims of crime and in all the indictments we have made there are victims of crime. There we identify the victims of robbery, the victims of homicide, the victims of murder, the victims of terrorism, the victims of arson, the victims of criminal damage. The victims are there. But a great manipulation has happened and the victims are kept out of sight. But we as the Public Prosecutor's Office are obliged to see the victims of the crimes committed and represent them in criminal trials and we have received the denunciations of crimes from everyone who has come to us, making no distinction.

The more than 13 international instruments our country has signed and the protection of our population against this outrageous crime obliges us to prosecute this crime of terrorism with the legislation active at the moment the acts were committed as the self-same international convention for the suppression of the financing of terrorism states in its article 6:

“Each State party will adopt the measures that are necessary, including, when it is relevant, the adoption of internal legislation to ensure the criminal acts contemplated in the ambit of this Convention may not be justified under any circumstances by considerations of a political, philosophic, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar kind.”

The Public Prosecutor's Office fulfils its constitutional function and each case if subject not only to verification but to rigorous investigation. When we take the decision to accuse someone we do so because we have done an investigation and have support for the accusation with clear evidence, with witnesses, with scientific proof and with the sole concern of ensuring justice for the victims of crime and for society.

TcS: Can you discuss the case of Amaya Coppens Zamora in this context?

Dr. Javier Morazán: We in the Public Prosecutor's Office brought charges against Amaya Eva Coppens Zamora and six other people for the crime of terrorism, illegal possession and carrying of firearms, simple kidnapping, armed robbery, serious bodily harm and obstruction of access to public services. This accusation presented by the Public Prosecutor's Office is based on witness testimony, expert proof and material evidence that establishes that this person Amaya Eva Coppens Zamora and the other six accused between April 20th and the end of June organized to set up a roadblock at a place known as San Benito on the road leading to Managua, near a gas station. They turned that roadblock into a center of criminal activity where they detained people arriving there, they kidnapped them, they robbed them and also beat them up.

The same thing happened on April 20th in Leon on this occasion when this same group of people under the orders also of this same Amaya Coppens intercepted, detained, beat with stones and steel mortar tubes three police officers from León. Likewise, on May 23rd two individuals detained a civilian victim, Luis David Arias at a roadblock also in San Benito. They detained the victim, these individuals under orders from Amaya Eva Coppens according to our investigation. These people detained people and took them to Amaya Eva and she was the one who took decisions and she ordered the others to beat him up, to steal his belongings and that was done on her orders. There is the testimony of the victim Luis David Arias.

The same is the testimony of Jose María Vanegas who in the same way was trying to pass through one of the roadblocks directed by Amaya Eva Coppens according to the police investigation and they detained this victim with his motorbike. He tried to escape on his motorbike. They pursued him, caught him and took him to Amaya Eva Coppens at the roadblock. They take him to her and she along with the others took his belongings from him, his mobile phone, his money, a ring and the keys to the motorbike. Then they kept him kidnapped for several hours. They beat him up. They blindfolded him. Beat him up and then let him go.

So we can see that these actions by Amaya Eva Coppens based on the investigation set out in the police file and in the prosecution file that we have presented to the judge and to the judicial authorities, all this evidence backs up these events that the victims have come and denounced.

According to our investigation Amaya Eva Coppens organized and set up the roadblock and that at that roadblock blocked people's freedom of movement and also detained people who were traveling near the roadblock, they blindfolded them, they kidnapped them, they beat them and stole from them for the purpose of causing intimidation in the population, causing terror and fear. Because that is what these kinds of actions provoke. If you live in a city and know there are a series of places like these roadblocks where there are people determined to detain you and block your way, to beat you up, to cause you bodily harm, to rob you and keep you kidnapped and murdering people there and also setting out at night to commit all kinds of crimes, all that obviously causes anguish, it causes fear, it causes intimidation.

In this case of Amaya Eva Coppens, for example, when they detained one of the victims, they beat him with metal tubes and even dropped paving blocks on his head and that put the life of the victim in grave danger. All these acts by these people who were committing these kinds of serious crimes there with weapons, which were taken from them when they were arrested, caused fear and terror in the population. All this evidence, the denunciations of the victims, the available proof that supports them, we presented to the judicial authority against these people. As you can see these people have nothing to do with political concerns. They have nothing to do with peaceful marches.

Whoever sets up a roadblock infringes the criminal norms, commits a crime and every such action against other people has a criminal penalty established by law. Such actions are not of a political nature but a criminal act. They have nothing to do with peaceful marches or demonstrations. They have to do with serious crimes, with acts of delinquency, with actions that gravely threaten the public order of Nicaraguan society. And that is why the Public Prosecutor's Office is obliged to indict them and present them to the courts and that is what the Public Prosecutor's Office has done.

It is important to call on the population not to fall into criminal behavior, not to let themselves be used to commit crimes, because such actions wound the fundamental rights and as such we are called on to investigate them, prosecute them and punish them. Those who direct the terror always seek to manipulate opinion radicalizing vulnerable groups, people on low incomes, people at odds with the criminal law, among others, so as to use them in attacks on the vulnerable population and that gives rise to the need to be alert to these terrorist threats that can disguise or seek to excuse their extreme violence using the values of democracy, liberty and human rights.

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