

2018 Year-end Message from the Commission of Truth, Justice and Peace (Comisión de la Verdad, Justicia y Paz, CVJP, in Spanish)

Not every story has a happy ending, and in our case, we have ended up in dismay in Nicaragua. Recognizing, assuming and sharing it gives us an opportunity to reflect on ourselves.

At the end of 2018, we members of the Commission of Truth, Justice and Peace, Nicaraguan citizens, yearn for long-lasting peace with true reconciliation and justice for everyone.

The reparation of all the deaths, injuries and damages caused during the allegedly civic and peaceful protest, which began on April 18 through the huge destruction of buildings and infrastructure, bloodshed, people who will suffer disabilities for the rest of their lives, and the severe damage inflicted on the mental health of the entire population, constitutes the main challenge of our work for the new year of 2019.

To dignify the victims, the identification of the individual causes that led them to the psychological and physical suffering and death remains our utmost commitment to both the victims themselves and their families.

We must emphasize that what happened could have been avoided if other means had been used to release the discontent of some sectors towards the Central Government and its main authorities. Regrettably and unfortunately, the use of violence was aggravated by feelings of irrational hatred that left hundreds of Nicaraguans victimized and outraged by the kidnapping, torture, murders, rapes, robberies, assaults, undue toll charges and other related crimes, mainly around the so-called "tranques" that were true barricade structures of coercion and terror.

Most of the time we have repeatedly verified the situation of the inmates accused of participating in the acts of violence that we are investigating. With complete certainty, we can inform the Nicaraguan people, and especially the families of these people, that the inmates are not being tortured or being mistreated. From their own voices we have heard that they have not been mistreated by the police or prison guards and that they are in much more favorable conditions than other convicts from unrelated crimes within the detention centers.

It is regrettable that the reparation and justice for the victims continue to be manipulated by some people in social networks and some mass media.

We, as a trustworthy Commission, are still waiting to sit down with other similar organizations, such as local and international human rights organizations, so that we can review together the lists of the dead and injured victims and deliver a unified and verifiable number based on the result of a scientific and technical research work to both the nation and the entire world.

This Commission regrets and rejects the interventionism of other countries in the region and especially the Government of the United States of America, which contrary to the spirit of helping

to find a peaceful solution and reconciliation among Nicaraguans, promote instead an antagonistic political agenda against the legitimate interests of our country in violation of the sovereignty and self-determination of the internal affairs in our motherland.

It draws our attention in the middle of the rhetoric jungle that adorned the last meeting of the OAS the willingness to corroborate figures that contain the different reports of the different organizations about the number of injured and deceased of our country. On this item it is necessary to explicate the following:

1. After Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes called to reconcile the figures published by this Commission and other organizations, we immediately embraced the challenge and invited those involved to share and carry out the desire of Cardinal Brenes.
2. No one answered our invitation assertively.
3. We gathered data from multiple websites of those organizations involved in publishing raw data on the number of victims at different random date ranges. So far none of the organizations has updated a new list of victims, limiting themselves to publish statistical cold figures.
4. We later presented an especial report on the subject matter during a press conference at the Crown Plaza Hotel in September of 2018. Among other things, we asserted that we still lacked filters either to increase or decrease the statistical figures to determine the number of victims.
5. The press conference was covered practically by all the local and foreign press mainstream media accredited in our country to that date and, as at today, we have not yet received any comments about it.

It is questionable that the last report of IACHR did not recognize that the Government of Nicaragua was the object of an attack against its constitutionally legitimized democracy. A little common sense is only required to understand that it was not an attack by conventional weapons but rather through a covert campaign through a network of NGOs opposing the Government of Nicaragua that used the mainstream media and social media networks to manipulate the people to revolt against the Government institutions.

It is important to note the perverse role of the social media networks that, through the manipulation of values, information and misinformation, have been conformed in "a dam to democracy," of which some examples worthy to mention are the political elections in the United States, Brazil and the latest in Andalusia, without forgetting their nefarious contribution to convey hatred and anger in the movements of the yellow vests in France, the independentist movement in Barcelona among others; all of them, likewise in Nicaragua, have been the victims of that virtual reality called postmodernity.

Social media networks during the protests in Nicaragua, *"were crucial to viralize through applications such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, particularly, content created with premeditation and treachery whose objective was to connect with the feelings and emotions of Nicaraguans to generate inflamed and violent behavior against not only the government but also sympathizers of the governing party, and even insistent condemnation of those who hold neutral positions."*

"Other instant messaging applications were used to viralize false information about different aspects, which were then published in a number of accounts belonging to the media outlets, personalities linked to opposition organizations and even fake accounts aiming to further spread the content to position it at the international level on a demand basis. Cases like attacks by the Police that never occurred, the use of a plane to spray cities with Cypermethrin and the invasion of the country by foreign troops among other lies, were used to undermine the emotional stability of hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans and inflamed anti-government and anti-Sandinista sentiments."

As expressed in previous reports of this Commission, as well as by the government authorities, *"the figures presented by certain organizations at the local and international levels escape from the reality. However, the publications of fake news, videos and images that did not correspond to the demonstrations in Nicaragua have created a fertile ground to install matrices of opinion in groups with defined political positions."* [1]

Some findings of our research into the field of mental health have confirmed that *"fear was the most constant and widespread feeling during the most relevant moments of the psychosocial conflict. It took characteristics of reality among the population, intentionally exacerbated by the creation, dissemination and manipulation of fake news such as the news of the intoxication of people by aerial fumigators that was constantly repeated maliciously by some mainstream media and social media networks without scientific proof or reliable sources, managing to maintain fear in the population, forcing at the same time the population to be in constant search of news related to the conflict that could threaten their safety or their own family, and maintaining the vicious circle of fear, search for news, greater fear and anxiety. The fear went from being individual to becoming collective and generalized, creating feelings of helplessness, vulnerability and lack of protection."*

This situation of fear and anxiety was experienced with greater intensity in the cities or areas where there were "tranques."

Symptomatic manifestations that do not necessarily end up as a psychiatric pathology per se are the most frequent, usually masked in various complaints ranging from fear, pain and other expressions as noted above." [2]

It is not necessary to be a subject matter expert to discern that our childhood is severely affected by these events, and that the unity and unanimity of all of us is needed to prevent further negative consequences in it.

This Commission relentlessly laments the erratic behavior of some bishops who are members of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, which is far from the Christian spirit of love, justice, reconciliation and effective peace.

Nicaraguan Brothers and Sisters: Through our distant and recent history, we Nicaraguans have demonstrated wisdom and willingness to overcome our differences of any kind. It is crucial to lay down intransigent and obsessive positions, which undermine our capacity for understanding and true reconciliation. As a Christian people, we also recognize the decisive role that forgiveness plays in us and we accept it to improve our personal quality of life. Forgiveness is an individual and unilateral act that quickly restores our inner healing and frees us from negative emotional burdens that are harmful to our soul.

Our call remains the same, let us together build the bridges of reconciliation for constructive and productive dialogue. Let us seek and follow peace, without which it would be impossible to move forward successfully into the future. Rebuilding our motherland or she will command us.

Let us make 2019 a year of true openness in our hearts, being inclusive, authentic and prudent in search of permanent solutions.

Our best wishes to all and a New Year 2019 in peace, harmony, brotherly love, solidarity, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration.

Commission of Truth, Justice and Peace

Managua, Nicaragua, 28th of December of 2018

[1] Content in the Chapter on the role of social networks in the next report of the CVJP.

[2] Idem.