

Gioconda Belli – 8. Juni 2018

Open letter to the OAS Secretary General - Luis Almagro



Dear Luis Almagro:

I understand that it's difficult for you to assimilate the fact that Daniel Ortega, one of the nine leaders of the Sandinista Revolution, has become a dictator.

The beautiful feat of our Nicaraguan revolution obscures the eyes of those who still think that the FSLN that assumed power anew in 2007 is the same party they supported in the seventies and eighties.

Unfortunately, this illusion confounds all those who imagine that in Nicaragua there's a leftist group that deserves their support. The partition of our symbols has caused you to ignore in the name of ideology the indicators that reveal Daniel Ortega's true nature. This is a man who has abandoned his principles in his burning desire to hold onto the absolute power he enjoys.

Without a doubt, his government has been very skillful about disguising the maneuvering that has allowed him to totally dominate the Nicaraguan state and its institutions. So much so, that even you seem to refuse to believe the evidence of his misrule. I believe, Secretary Luis, that your calls for the democratic legitimacy of elections shouldn't be disparaged. As OAS secretary general, you're right to defend those civilized mechanisms and to desire that this crisis be resolved through elections. But you must also stretch your understanding a little to see who you're dealing with.

I want to draw your attention, Mr. Almagro, to some facts that reveal Daniel Ortega's nature, a leader who has been capable, from April 18th forward, of ordering live fire against unarmed demonstrators, causing the death of over 120 people in more than 48 days of peaceful protests in our country.

Ortega and Murillo have unleashed a hate campaign: paramilitaries, police forces and riot squads are sent out every night with a license to kill, to seed chaos. This isn't the first time this has happened. Since 2008, many of us Nicaraguans have seen with our own eyes this tactic of sending out gang members to confront demonstrations of citizen discontent. We've been beaten up while the police observed and guaranteed the impunity of these violent attacks. In this way, through fear, our government leaders exerted control of the streets of the country for eleven years.

Now they want to take them back by doing the same. Except that this time the people have lost their fear. The protracted and constant presence of the people in the streets despite these punishments and daily killings, have brought Ortega and his followers to lose all measure of control and resort to falsehoods to cover up their responsibility. In a country that's been at peace, the safest in Central America, the euphemism of calling those who protest "delinquent gangs" is his way of awarding himself license to attack them and treat them as criminals. People are defending themselves with rocks and homemade mortars. Meanwhile they are under attack from paid hit men and skilled personnel carrying military weapons, including the Dragonov rifles of the snipers who kill in cold blood.

Could you perhaps see in this a replay of the Venezuelan script, where they send groups of hit men to loot and commit outrages in order to later accuse those who demand democracy? That same thing is occurring in Nicaragua. It's not for nothing that Daniel Ortega is an unconditional ally of Venezuela and also of Cuba, two countries that you classify as dictatorships.

Daniel Ortega and his wife are fans of the doctrine that "the end justifies the means". We Nicaraguans have learned this the hard way. He and his wife have distorted and manipulated our history and our values.

Daniel Ortega is a man whose stepdaughter accused him of sexually abusing her from the age of eleven; a married man with a woman who made a pact with him and took action against her daughter in exchange for a quota of power. Daniel Ortega is a man who was capable of accusing his own companions of treason and then inciting hatred of them among the Sandinista grassroots. Honest people, revolutionary heroes, have been slandered and persecuted. Whoever opposes Ortega is reviled and accused of all kinds of lies. I myself appear as a terrorist in a video they've recently distributed.

Daniel Ortega is a man who made a pact with former President Arnaldo Aleman, imprisoned for corruption and looting of the State, in order to win the elections in the first round with 35% of the vote, instead of the 45% that had been established. To win over the Catholic Church, he went from being an atheist to a fervent Christian and wooed his nemesis, Monsignor Obando y Bravo, by promising the absolute prohibition of therapeutic abortions in our country, a right that had existed since the nineteenth century for women whose pregnancies represented a risk to their lives. The law was then reformed and passed in the National Assembly, with the votes of the FSLN deputies.

Senor Almagro, how can you term a democracy a system where there's no separation between state and party, where an FSLN deputy, elected by popular vote, is removed for abstaining from a vote in favor of conceding to a Chinese businessman the right to construct an inter-oceanic canal across our territory – a surrender of the national sovereignty with multiple repercussions that the Ortega-controlled National Assembly approved in five days?

And what can be said about the electoral frauds in the 2008 municipal elections and in the 2011 unconstitutional reelection, the result of a corrupt process as confirmed by international organizations? This maneuver allowed Ortega to obtain a sufficient majority in the National Assembly to change the Constitution and be reelected indefinitely. Behind this is the fact that the Assembly, the Supreme Court and the Electoral Council function as party instruments and do as they're ordered. They completely lack independence, as do the Police, whose statues – like those of the army – were changed so that those unconditionally loyal to Ortega could be reelected as chiefs time and time again.

It would take a long time, Mr. Almagro, to name the many stunts and maneuvers with which the Ortega-Murillo couple have exercised in an ever more absolute and concentrated power. The unconstitutional naming of Rosario Murillo as vice president is yet another instance of this couple's disrespect for legality and intention to establish a dynasty in power.

True – I can say this and publish this letter in the few independent media outlets; but neither this letter nor the report from the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights will come to be known by the majority of Nicaraguans, since the presidential couple and his children control most of the television and radio stations with national coverage. It's true that they received the IACHR, but ask them to publish the report with its conclusions and recommendations and you'll see how little attention they give your request.

Somoza also received the IACHR after the genocide perpetrated in 1978. Yesterday, like today, popular pressure and the wish to have you believe in them obliged them to do so. You know first-hand that in 2015 Ortega announced that he wouldn't allow international observation of the elections. The accompaniment that he did allow the OAS didn't hinder the scheme that annulled the only opposing party coalition that was in fact competitive. In 2016, during the second consecutive reelection of Ortega, you were present at an election where only Ortega could win, since he had no competition; the electorate responded with massive abstention. They did their trickery, and you merely witnessed a process that had been previously emptied of all content.

Under these circumstances, how can you ask us, Mr. Almagro, to accept the accord that you've signed with the government, behind the backs of Nicaraguan society, to “strengthen the democratic institutions” of the Ortega dictatorship?

How can you ask us not to demand a freedom that was won in a long and painful war that cost more than 50,000 deaths in the 70s and 80s? A demand for freedom backed up by the heroism of all those who've died during our new, non-violent revolution.

I don't doubt, Senor Almagro, that you love democracy and that your position is guided by good intentions. But, in this case, you've made a mistake. What Nicaragua demands is that the OAS condemn the killings Ortega is carrying out and support the majority of the Nicaraguan people in their demand to bring about the resignation of Ortega and Murillo in order to facilitate, through a Constitutional transition, a government that – with your help –

can organize a trustworthy and transparent electoral process to elect new authorities as soon as possible.

As a woman, as a Nicaraguan mother, united with the grief of so many mothers who have lost their children in this wave of repression that hasn't ended, I write you this open letter. I beg you to stop giving oxygen to this government which, encircled by its own people, is utilizing your recommendation to continue with its outrages and cause the death of more Nicaraguans.

I hope that you reflect, that you remove the blindfold from your eyes and allow the Nicaraguan people to fulfill their commitment with the future and with the thousands of dead that urge us not to let another dictatorship enthrone itself in our country.

Yours truly,
Gioconda Belli