



# Serious affectations on Civic Space and Academic Freedom in Nicaragua

## The closure of universities continues

On February 2, 2022, it was known that the National Assembly of Nicaragua canceled the legal personality of 5 universities in that country. On February 3, 2023, it was known that the Ministry of the Interior announced through Official Gazette No.22, the cancellation of the legal personality of 7 more universities, for a total of at least 12 higher education institutions illegalized in 24 hours.

Unfortunately, the practice of cancelling the legal personality of universities has been increasing. As of July 30, 2023, at least 26 universities have had their legal personality affected, namely:

- 1 Florida International University
- 2 Michigan State University
- 3 Wake Forest University
- 4 Thomas More University Association (UTM)
- 5 Central American University of Business Sciences Association (UCEM)
- 6 Private University Foundation in Market Sciences
- 7 Universidad Hispanoamericana (UHISPAM)
- 8 Fundación Universidad de Mobile Latinoamérica Campus (FUMILAC)
- 9 Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (UPOLI)
- 10 Catholic University of the Dry Tropics (UCATSE)
- 11 Popular University of Nicaragua (UPONIC)
- 12 Nicaraguan University of Humanistic Studies (UNEH)
- 13 Paulo Freire University (UPF)



It should be considered that the greatest concern is that several of these institutions of the higher education system were the epicenter of anti-government protests since 2018, or whose students actively participated in them. At least 2 of these universities are run by religious entities.

A characteristic within this practice has been the absorption of the universities' assets by the State, creating on the basis of the old campuses universities without university autonomy, without academic freedom and respect for human rights. Thus, there are serious concerns regarding the quality of education and the use of universities as centers of political propaganda and indoctrination in favor of the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

#### Student testimony about the situation

“On February 4, 2022, Aula Abierta received complaints of alleged acts of political proselytism by the UNEN, on the university campus of the already extinct UPOLI, who in the context of its illegalization, toured the university facilities carrying red-and-black flags, considered as pro-government propaganda, carrying objects to make noise and chanting slogans that said “Daniel, Daniel, the people are with him,” according to members of the CUDJ denounced to Aula Abierta.”

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Mobile University Corporation

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International University of Latin American Integration (UNIVAL)

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Asociación Universidad Panamericana de Nicaragua (UPAN)

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University of the Pacific Association (UNIP)

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John Paul II University

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Association of the Autonomous Christian University of Nicaragua

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Ruben Dario University (URD)

21

Fundación Prouniversidad Metropolitana (UNIMET)

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Asociación Universidad del Norte de Nicaragua (UNN)

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Asociación Universidad Adventista de Nicaragua (UNADENIC)

24

Universidad Evangélica Nicaragüense Martín Luther King Jr (UENIC)

25

University of the West (UDO)



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The Ministry of the Interior, following a resolution of the CNU and the National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation, ordered the cancellation of the legal status of the Martín Luther King Jr. Evangelical Nicaraguan University Association and the University of the East Association (UDO).



# Aftermath

## Number of students affected

There is no total consolidated number as of July 2023, according to the “Confidential” would be 18 thousand students affected only with the first 6 six universities canceled until February 2, 2022 (Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (Upoli), Catholic Agricultural University of the Dry Tropics (Ucatse), the Popular University of Nicaragua (Uponic), the Nicaraguan University of Humanistic Studies (UNEH), and Paulo Freire University). Subsequently, up to 20 universities were closed, suggesting that the number is dramatically higher.

## Need to leave Nicaragua to continue studies

The aforementioned has resulted in situations such as the need to leave Nicaragua by university students. In general, due to the opacity of official information by the State and its control over the higher education system, there is no official figure of students forced into exile. However, different actors in the university sector have articulated to help the known cases. The rector Adrian Meza of the Pablo Freire University, indicated in an interview for Aula Abierta that the UPF initiated a program to help the continuity of studies of exiled students. In this sense, until December 2022, at least 80 exiled students had benefited (without prejudice to the students that this program has not known).

The information displayed shows some of the implications of the cancelation of the legal personality of the universities in Nicaragua on the students and, at the same time, evidences the lack of information on the topic and the need to continue researching further about it.



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