

14 September 2018

## Nicaragua: Amaya Eva Coppens in incommunicado detention

On 10 September 2018, around 5 p.m., woman human rights defender **Amaya Eva Coppens** was arbitrarily detained by government paramilitary forces in the city of Leon, Nicaragua. The authorities have confirmed that Amaya Eva Coppens is being held in the prison “El Chipote”. The authorities have also prevented any type of communication between the human rights defender and her family or lawyers since the arrest.

[Amaya Eva Coppens](#) is a Nicaraguan and Belgian woman human rights defender who played an important role during the recent democratization protests in Nicaragua. As a leader of the **19th of April Student Movement** (Movimiento Estudiantil 19 de Abril) she is defending the right to protest and more generally Nicaraguan’s civil and political rights. The medical student is also a member of the student association “Coordinadora Universitaria Democracia y la Justicia”.

On 10 September 2018, Amaya Eva Coppens and another participant of the protests, Sergio Midence Delgadillo, were arbitrarily detained by 20 masked members of paramilitary groups and police officers in a house located in downtown Leon. They were arrested without an arrest warrant and their families and lawyers were only notified of their detention the next day. The human rights defender and Sergio Midence Delgadillo were taken to “El Chipote” prison. Students who have recently been released from that prison, [described](#) having been subjected to physical and psychological torture during their detention. There is a high risk that Amaya Eva Coppens could face similar treatment.

Despite the fact that more than 48 hours have passed since she was arrested, Amaya Eva Coppens has neither been presented in court nor allowed to communicate with her lawyer. Since her family has also been prevented from visiting her, the imprisonment conditions remain unknown. According to local newspapers, Amaya Eva Coppens and Sergio Midence Delgadillo were detained because of their alleged participation in terrorist acts; however, they have not been formally accused of terrorism.

Amaya Eva Coppens was previously attacked, intimidated and harassed for her involvement in the student movement, including a written message outside her house wall, “Plomo, plomo” (“Lead, lead”, an expression referring to bullets). On another occasion, petrol was spilled outside her house. In April, the human rights defender was insulted and beaten by government supporters and police forces during protests and she received death threats on social media. Due to these attacks, Amaya Eva Coppens was forced to move out of her house for three months.

Since April 2018, human rights defenders in [Nicaragua](#) have been particularly targeted by attacks, threats, and smear campaigns against them, hindering their work on the protection of human rights, which are being severely undermined in the context of the crisis engulfing the country. In the past five months there has been a pattern of criminalisation against human rights defenders and student movement leaders.

Some of the student leaders and activists that have been detained are Edwin Carcache Dávila, Yubrank Suazo, Byron Estrada, Luis Quiroz, Nahiroby Olivas, Juan Pablo Alvarado, Levis Rugama, Yaritza Mairena and Victoria Obando. Several of them faced smear campaigns, harassment and death threats on social media before being detained. According to [local NGOs](#), the student leaders were arbitrarily detained and transferred to “El Chipote” prison without informing them, their

lawyers or their families of the motives behind their arrest or the charges they face, evidencing a clear pattern of criminalisation.

In June 2018, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) launched a Special Monitoring Mechanism for Nicaragua (MESENI) and deployed its technical staff to follow up on the recommendations based on the IACHR's visit to Nicaragua, including the Commission's Preliminary Observations and its [report](#) "*Serious human rights violations in the context of social protests in Nicaragua*". [MESENI](#) has expressed concern about the attacks against human rights defenders in Nicaragua and urged the local authorities to refrain from stigmatising their work. MESENI has also noted the existence of a pattern of repression characterised by arbitrary detentions, persecution by the courts and criminalisation of activists who oppose the government, demonstrators, students and human rights defenders.

Moreover, on 29 August 2018, President Ortega [expelled](#) the United Nation's delegation of observers after they published a comprehensive [report](#) on Nicaragua's political crisis which accused the government of serious human rights violations against demonstrators, human rights defenders, journalists, students and social leaders. Nicaraguan authorities have been limiting the space for international observers to monitor and formulate recommendations on the human rights situation in the country.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the criminalisation of Amaya Eva Coppens and other student leaders in Nicaragua, as the organisation believes that this is solely motivated by the HRDs' legitimate and peaceful work. Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Nicaragua to immediately and unconditionally release Amaya Eva Coppens, Sergio Midence Delgadillo and other human rights defenders and student leaders that remain in detention, and to drop all charges against them.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Nicaragua to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Amaya Eva Coppens, other human rights defenders and student leaders that remain in detention, and drop all charges against them;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Amaya Eva Coppens, other human rights defenders and student leaders, while in detention, adhere to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Take all necessary measures, in consultation with Amaya Eva Coppens, other human rights defenders and student leaders that remain in detention, to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and security;
4. Take measures to ensure that public officials refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Nicaragua are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.