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President Aleman Pressured to Drop Granada Case

by LADB Staff

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During his Jan. 10 address to the National Assembly on the state of the nation, President Arnaldo Aleman praised his administration for not having imprisoned anyone on political charges and for carefully guarding absolute freedom of the press. As he spoke about civil rights, Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) Deputies Rita Fletes and Damaso Vargas unfurled a large banner demanding that Aleman end his repressive treatment of US citizen Dorothy Granada, whom the administration is trying to deport on unsupported criminal charges.

Granada, 70, is a retired nurse from California who set up the Maria Luisa Ortiz medical clinic for poor women in the municipality of Mulukuk, 240 km northeast of Managua. She has been running the clinic since 1990. Granada won the International Pfeffer Peace Prize in 1997 for her work. In December, the Aleman administration began deportation proceedings against her, and she went into hiding pending the outcome of a court appeal. Interior Minister Jose Marengo canceled her residence status and issued deportation orders, charging her with providing medical care for members of the leftist paramilitary group Frente Unido Andres Castro (FUAC) and proselytizing on its behalf. He also charged that the clinic performed illegal abortions. Marengo offered no evidence to support the charges.

Besides the attack on Granada, the government ordered the clinic closed. Medical experts of the Instituto Medico Legal (IML) investigated the clinic and found no evidence that any abortions had ever been performed there. Marengo dismissed the IML report but dropped the abortion charge. However, he continued to maintain that abortions had been performed at the clinic. Granada's supporters say the expulsion order came directly from Aleman after PLC members in Mulukuk complained about the clinic.

In late January, the criminal branch of the Tribunal de Apelaciones granted Granada's request for an order shielding her from arrest. At the same time, the court allowed the deportation order to stand. Granada's attorney, Julio Cesar Arias Roque, took the case to the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ), asking for clarification of the ambiguous appeals court ruling. "We don't know how the Interior Ministry can expel Dorothy if it is effectively prevented from detaining her," said Arias Roque. Meanwhile Marengo has interpreted the ruling as permission to continue with the deportation.

On Feb. 5, the civil branch of the same appeals court suspended Marengo's deportation order. Granada's attorney said this means the case goes back to the CSJ to decide on Granada's immigration status and deportation. Case has become international incident The Granada case has become a rallying point for Sandinistas against Aleman as well as an international incident. US Ambassador in Managua Oliver Garza has intervened to insist that Granada receive due process under Nicaraguan law. He said the embassy was carefully following the case.

In early February, a group of 31 US senators and representatives, led by Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA), sent a letter to Aleman asking for an end to the deportation proceedings. The letter noted that the Centro Nicaraguense de Derechos Humanos (CENIDH) and the government's own human rights prosecutor had concluded that Granada had broken no laws and that her civil rights had been violated. Amnesty International (AI) has issued an alert calling for support for Granada, said the letter. The letter also expressed concern that the clinic had been closed, noting that it was located in one of the poorest regions of Nicaragua and that its services "coincided with the priorities of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Nicaragua." The USAID investigated the clinic and found its work "exemplary," said the letter.

Foreign Minister Francisco Aguirre Sacasa dismissed the letter as representing the views of only a handful of members of the US Congress. He said the case was an internal matter in the hands of the Interior Ministry.

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