



Coimbra Group Statement on Universities in Nicaragua

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are universal, fundamental values that ought to be upheld everywhere in the world.

With all of its member universities being signatories of the [Magna Charta Universitatum](#), the Coimbra Group recalls that “intellectual and moral autonomy is the hallmark of any university and a precondition for the fulfilment of its responsibilities to society. That independence needs to be recognised and protected by governments and society at large, and defended vigorously by institutions themselves”.¹

The Coimbra Group wishes to express its utmost concern for the many attacks on academic freedom at higher education institutions in Nicaragua, as well as the restrictions put on research integrity and the right to a critical education.

In August 2023, the Nicaraguan government closed down the private Jesuit-run University of Central America (UCA) and confiscated all its assets and infrastructure. The closure was followed by the arbitrary arrest of academics and students by the police. Established in 1960, UCA has consistently delivered vital critical research and high-quality education, earning a prominent status as one of Central America’s most prestigious research and higher education institutions.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Nicaraguan government has closed 28 universities in the country since 2018 as part of the crackdown on organisations created by and representing civil society. Since 2021, over 3,000 civil society organisations in Nicaragua have been shut down.

We hereby evoke the [1988 Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education](#) which states that “Institutions of higher education should be critical of conditions of political repression and violations of human rights within their own society.”²

The Coimbra Group asks the government of Nicaragua, and all governments in the world, to do everything to protect, safeguard, or immediately restore academic freedom and the autonomy of higher education in their own countries. Further, we call upon the competent authorities to ensure the protection of human rights and the safety of students, teachers, and staff at all former, and present, higher education institutions in Nicaragua.

We also call on the good will of all institutions of higher education across the world to stand in solidarity with students, teachers, and staff at universities in Nicaragua, and where possible to offer them opportunities to finish their studies and continue work either by way of online arrangements, special rules of admission, or other forms of support.

¹ <https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum>

² <https://www.wusgermany.de/sites/wusgermany.de/files/userfiles/WUS-Internationales/wus-lima-englisch.pdf>



The Coimbra Group stands with independent institutions of higher education in Nicaragua in these difficult times and calls on upon all university networks worldwide to firmly support academic freedom and university autonomy in Nicaragua and everywhere in the world.

Brussels 24 April 2024

