



Nicaragua: psychological **support** for Confidencial's journalists

Thursday, April 18, 2019

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One year ago today, Nicaragua's biggest social and political crisis since its civil war started. Amid a crackdown on the free press, Confidencial kept up its courageous reporting on human rights violations. Free Press Unlimited helped the outlet build a psychological support system for its journalists who faced threats, harassment and attacks.

Nicaragua's political crisis has put journalists in the country under enormous pressure. Miguel*, 21, is one of them. He works for Confidencial, one of the main independent media outlets in Nicaragua. After the crisis broke out, Miguel started working long hours. He received threats on social media. His interviews were often emotionally taxing, for example with mothers who had just lost their sons due to the violence.

These working conditions affected his well-being. "I became moody. Sometimes I slept badly, also because I could hear shots outside my house at night," Miguel says.

Anti-government protests

Nicaragua's political crisis broke out on April 18, 2018. Demonstrations against a pension reform were violently beaten down by supporters of the presidential couple Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. Thousands of Nicaraguans took to the streets to protest the violence. Police and pro-government groups fired live ammunition at demonstrators, which included many students. Hundreds of people have lost their lives as a result of the violence.

The crisis has had far-reaching consequences for freedom of the press in the Central American country. Journalists who expose human rights violations and criticise the government are threatened, harassed, beaten up and in some cases arrested. One journalist was shot dead while live-streaming demonstrations in Bluefields, on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. The Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation registered 712 violations of press freedom between April and December 2018.

As the publisher of a news website, two television programmes and a weekly print magazine, Confidencial has been reporting extensively on repression in the country since the outbreak of the crisis. It cost the media house dearly. In December, a police force raided their editorial office and TV set, seized hard drives, computers and documents and confiscated the building shortly afterwards.

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Psychological well-being

The psychological support system co-created by Free Press Unlimited and Confidential has helped Miguel and other journalists working for Confidential cope with the pressure they face. Psychotherapy and yoga sessions have helped them process the traumatic events they cover and deal with the stress.

Psychotherapist Maria* treated the Confidential staff members who wanted help. “The crisis has affected all Nicaraguans, and especially our journalists. The government is persecuting them, suddenly they are forbidden to do the job have always done and that they want to do. They feel anger, sadness, desperation, fear and uncertainty,” she says.

“Some of the journalists I treated were isolating themselves, others were having trouble eating, or they were sleeping way too much or too little. The therapy sessions allowed them to talk about things they don’t discuss with anyone else. They could feel relief about expressing emotions like shame or anger. I also gave them tools to identify emotions and have healthier thinking patterns.”

‘The threat is always there’

Miguel was among the journalists who worked with Maria. He says the sessions have helped him channel his emotions. “It has helped me better accept the new situation in Nicaragua ... help from a professional is extremely important to be able to continue,” he says.

One year after the crisis broke out, the worst of the violence seems to have ended in Nicaragua. But many in the country still live in fear. Journalists face arbitrary detention and prosecution, simply for doing their job.

Miguel: “No journalist in Nicaragua now feels 100 percent safe. The threat is always there.”

* Names have been changed for safety reasons.

On April 14, Free Press Unlimited and other media and development organisations signed a declaration to express solidarity with Nicaragua's journalists. The signatories condemn the more than 700 violations of the free press including attacks, raids and arrests and demand the immediate

release of imprisoned journalists Miguel Mora and Lucia Pineda. [You can find the full declaration here](#) (Spanish only).

Photo: Carlos Herrera/Confidencial

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