



UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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December 26, 1985

Ricardo Pais Castillo et al.
Comision Permanente de Derechos Humanos
de Montoya 2C. al Lago
Apartado 563
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mr. Pais:

This is to acknowledge your letter of November 12 addressed to me and to several bishops in the United States concerning recent events affecting the Church in Nicaragua and the use apparently made of USCC statements by certain sectors in Nicaragua.

The numerous instances of conflict affecting the Church in your country are well known here. We are in profound sympathy and solidarity with the bishops of Nicaragua and with those priests, religious and lay people who have suffered because of their conscientious opposition to policies of your government. We also sympathize and mourn with those many families whose loved ones have been maimed or killed by the insurgency; our sorrow is the more intense because of our government's direct role in the matter.

With you, we are convinced that only a political settlement, not further blood-letting, can open the way to peace and reconciliation. With you, we believe that the "dialogue of national reconciliation" which you espouse and which the bishops of Nicaragua called for in their Easter Pastoral of 1984 represents the best hope for true peace. Because of the role played by the United States government in relation to Nicaragua, we believe that a resumption of the bilateral talks between our two governments is also necessary. At present, our government is unwilling to resume such a dialogue, while yours is unwilling to engage in a broader national dialogue while the war continues. Both stands are to be regretted.

Regarding the main point of your letter, that statements by our episcopal conference, and specifically statements by me, have been used by certain sectors to oppose "the position of the Nicaraguan Catholic Hierarchy," let me make the following observations:

1. It is not a "new element," as you suggest, that various groups have sought to use statements of the USCC for partisan purposes. This has been occurring for several years. Both opponents and supporters of the present Nicaraguan government have engaged in this practice.

2. The fact that persons with radically opposed viewpoints can cite different parts of our statements, usually out of context, indicates the careful balance we have always sought to maintain in discussing highly complex matters. Such use, or misuse, of statements is a commonplace of modern political debate and cannot be avoided.

3. You must be aware, because it has been widely commented on in Nicaragua and elsewhere, that the USCC has criticized policies of the present Nicaraguan government more frequently, publicly and firmly than it has protested comparable excesses in some other countries. Our expressions of support for and solidarity with the bishops of Nicaragua have also been comparably more frequent. Bishop Malone's July 18 message of support to the Nicaraguan bishops and my October 16 protest to President Ortega concerning the State of Emergency and the closing of Iglesia are but the most recent instances.

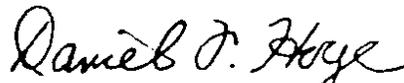
4. Nevertheless the bishops of the United States have a primary responsibility to address the policies of our own government. We have sought over several years to play an active and constructive role in the U.S. public debate on Central America policy. Our basic position, adopted by vote of our entire conference in 1981, has been modified and expanded because of subsequent developments, but it remains fundamentally unchanged in its central recommendations. Among those central concerns have been to urge political rather than military means to resolve conflict, to favor dialogue and negotiations between conflicting groups, and specifically to oppose actions of our government that appear to violate such principles.

With many others in the U.S. Congress and the foreign policy community, as well as much of the Christian community here, we have clearly opposed the provision of U.S. military aid to insurgent forces anywhere in Central America. This necessarily extends to the situation in Nicaragua.

That others choose to describe this particular position as "support of the American bishops for the policy of the Sandinista government" and in supposed conflict with "the position of the Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy" is both inaccurate and regrettable. While rejecting such misrepresentations, however, it is not within our power to prevent them.

I hope this response is of help in clarifying the unfortunate confusion which generated your communication.

Sincerely,



Reverend Msgr. Daniel F. Hoye
General Secretary

cc: Conferencia Episcopal de Nicaragua
