

Pope Francis calls for end to violence in Nicaragua



Vatican City, June 4 (RHC)-- Pope Francis has called for an end to violence in Nicaragua as renewed violent protests were sparked in the Central American country.

Speaking to thousands of people in St. Peter's Square for his Sunday address, Francis expressed his "sorrow for the serious violence," saying that he would pray for the victims and their families.

Pope Francis, the first Latin American pontiff in history, said the Church was always for dialogue "but this requires an active commitment to respect freedom and above all life." He said: "I pray that all the violence ceases and conditions are put in place to resume talks as soon as possible."

The protests began in mid-April against the changes to the social security system which included pay hikes on both employers and employees. But the protests quickly turned violent and were infiltrated by right-wing armed groups that began calling for the removal of President Daniel Ortega.

The proposal was later withdrawn by the government and a dialogue was called between the opposition and the Ortega government to reach a peaceful solution. A first round of talks was suspended before the Central American country's Episcopal conference of Catholic bishops called for a second round of peace talks that would include a mixed commission of representatives from the country's different social and political sectors.

However, despite the ongoing second round of dialogue, violent protests resumed earlier this week with scores of people killed and injured as part of clashes between police forces and armed protesters, who have also been attacking families, businesses and public buildings around the country.

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