Your Excellency:

I write to express grave concern for Amaya Eva Coppens, a fifth-year medical student at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua - León (UNAN-León), who was detained on September 10, 2018, in apparent retaliation for her participation in a nationwide student protest movement. I respectfully urge you to secure Ms. Coppens’ unconditional release and to drop any charges that stem from her nonviolent exercise of the right to freedom of expression and assembly.

According to Scholars at Risk (SAR), Ms. Coppens, a Belgian-Nicaraguan dual citizen, was an active participant in the nationwide protests that began in April 2018 that sought democratic reforms, protested austerity measures, and called for President Daniel Ortega to step down. Over 320 people have been killed and more than 1,870 injured during the protests, including many students. In addition to being one of the leaders of the 19th of April Student Movement in the city of León, Ms. Coppens is also a member of the University Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CUDJ), Civil Alliance, and Social Movements Network.

I understand from SAR that, since the protests began, Ms. Coppens began receiving threats over social media and was subjected to other forms of harassment and intimidation. Due to the threats, Ms. Coppens left her home to temporarily reside in a safe house. On September 10, police and paramilitary officers raided the safe house and detained Ms. Coppens at a prison known as “El Chipote.” On September 19, a court charged Ms. Coppens with kidnapping, terrorism, and illegal possession of firearms. Ms. Coppens had not been permitted to speak to her lawyer or family until that day. I understand from SAR that Ms. Coppens has since been transferred to the women’s prison, La Esperanza, located outside of Managua.

Absent any information that may clarify our understanding of these events, the facts as described above suggest that Ms. Coppens was detained in apparent retaliation for her peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association—conduct that is expressly protected under international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Nicaragua is a signatory. In addition to the harm to Ms. Coppens, such incidents have a chilling effect on academic freedom and undermine democratic society generally.

I therefore respectfully urge you to release Ms. Coppens unconditionally, and drop any charges that stem for her peaceful exercise to the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly; and, pending this, to immediately ensure her well-being while in prison and that her case is addressed in a manner consistent with internationally recognized standards of due process, fair trial, and the humane treatment of prisoners, in accordance with Nicaragua’s obligations under international law.

I thank you for your attention to this important matter, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

This petition can be signed online at: https://bit.ly/2UKZ32Y