News



Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata Isabel Blanco, left, and Cecilia Blanco, in the wheelchair, are welcomed April 12 into Costa Rica by their biological sister Violeta Blanco after crossing from Nicaragua, in this video posted on Facebook by the Diocese of Tilarán-Liberia. (GSR screen capture/Facebook)



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Church officials from a diocese in northern Costa Rica confirmed that they welcomed two women religious, members of the Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata, after they were expelled from neighboring Nicaragua in mid-April.

In a video posted on the Facebook page of the Diocese of Tilarán-Liberia, Deacon Gustavo Wattson said that two women religious — Srs. Isabel and Cecilia Blanco, both Costa Rican nationals and biological sisters — left Nicaragua April 12 at the Peñas Blancas border point.

Nicaraguan government officials have not said why the women religious were expelled. But in October 2020, the country's general assembly passed a controversial "foreign agent" law that requires organizations that receive money from abroad to register with the government, exposing them to large fines, monitoring by the government, and even "canceling" their legal status in the country. The U.S. State Department has decried the move, as has the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

After entering northern Costa Rica, the sisters were welcomed by their sister Violeta Blanco, her husband Carlos Vargas and a local priest representing Bishop Manuel Eugenio Salazar Mora, head of the Diocese of Tilarán-Liberia, Wattson said. The sisters revealed a photo that shows them in good spirits, with one of them in a wheelchair.

The bishop acknowledged the work and sacrifice of the sisters who were part of a community that cared for the elderly in the town of Rivas, Nicaragua, Wattson said, even as they left "under regrettable circumstances." He also asked for prayers for a third member of the order who was allegedly asked to leave but whose whereabouts are unknown.

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"Furthermore, Bishop Salazar asks for prayers for the church in the neighboring country, especially for Bishop Rolando Álvarez," Wattson said, referring to the prelate who was detained by government authorities in August of last year. In February, Álvarez, the bishop of Matagalpa, was sentenced to more than 26 years in

prison after being convicted of treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news, among other charges.



Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, a frequent critic of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, prays at a Catholic church May 20, 2022, in Managua. A Nicaraguan court sentenced Álvarez to more than 26 years in prison Feb. 10 for conspiracy and spreading false information. (OSV News photo/Reuters/Maynor Valenzuela)

Last year, Salazar welcomed another group of women religious also expelled by the Ortega government. More than a dozen Sisters of Charity were expelled from Nicaragua in July, where they, too, operated a home for the elderly, many of them abandoned by family.

The Diocese of Tilarán-Liberia welcomed more than a dozen of the expelled sisters, who are said to be planning to open a home for the elderly in northern Costa Rica.

In late February, a group of Trappist sisters announced that they were leaving Nicaragua "voluntarily," citing the lack of vocations to keep the community going. News reports from Nicaragua said the government has since taken over their property.