

MANAGUA, Nicaragua -- Reporters for an online news site are writing their stories in secret locations. Editors of the country's only 24-hour news network have been jailed. And employees of a major human rights organization have escaped into the mountains. # Except one. # " I am 80 years old, and I am in no condition to go up into the mountains, not even to save my life, " said Vilma N?? ez, a well-known lawyer who founded the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights. # In the past few weeks, President Daniel Ortega's forces have launched a wave of repression against civil society groups and journalism outlets that is choking off what little remains of democracy in this Central American country. # The government recently stripped nine civil society groups of their legal standing and seized their assets. News organizations critical of the Ortega administration have been closed, and some editors have been charged with crimes including conspiracy to commit terrorist acts. # " The government is trying to shut down all political dissidence and impose a reign of fear and terror, targeting its opponents, " said Paulo Abr? o, director of the human rights commission of the Organization of American States (OAS). # The crackdown marks a new stage in the government's efforts to destroy a protest movement that emerged in April and swelled into giant demonstrations demanding Ortega's resignation. Police and paramilitary forces responded by opening fire on protesters. According to the OAS commission, 324 people have been killed in the uprising. The government puts the toll at 198, including 21 police deaths. # In December, a panel of independent investigators named by the OAS concluded that the actions by Nicaragua's security forces