

NICARAGUA

DANIEL ORTEGA ORDERS TO START WITH THE CREATION OF NUCLEAR FACILITIES IN NICARAGUA

The decree clearly states that it is for "peaceful" purposes

TODAY NICARAGUA, by RICO – Daniel Ortega decreed this August 29 to create the Nicaraguan Commission for the Development of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes.



In decree 16-2022 published in the Gaceta, Nicaragua's official gazette, the regime took the first step to start a project that aims to build a nuclear energy infrastructure for Nicaragua. Supposedly, the goal of entering the field of atomic energy development is for "peaceful" and "scientific" purposes. The Atomic Commission is "in order to promote the development and use of atomic energy in agriculture, medicine, industry, science and technology," the decree mentions.

The main office of this Commission will be at the headquarters of the Nicaraguan Council for Science and Technology (Conicyt), an institution in charge of the Vice Presidency of Nicaragua, a position held by Rosario Murillo. According to the decree, the functions of the "Atomic Commission will be to promote the design and construction of nuclear facilities, particle accelerators, neutron generators and other sources of ionizing radiation."

The Atomic Commission can receive international funds - paying the bills -

The decree clearly states that Ortega "intends to create an atomic energy infrastructure for Nicaragua," although he insists that it is for "peaceful" purposes. The Atomic Commission will be chaired by other institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Army, among others. The decree establishes that the Commission may summon other institutions if necessary. Said Commission will be assigned a budget item from the General Budget, according to the decree. It also indicates that the Commission may receive funds from "friendly countries, international organizations and similar entities."



Damaged corn in rural Choluteca, where drought, plagues and unpredictable rains caused by climate crisis often affect crops.

Photograph: Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images

El Triunfo lies within the dry corridor – an area of Central America that covers parts of Honduras as well as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Costa Rica. “The dry corridor has big problems in terms of being vulnerable to climate change,” says Danilo Manzanares, coordinator of Mesa Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional, a steering group seeking solutions to drought in the south of Honduras. “Everything floods, or it’s the opposite – it doesn’t rain. It’s terrible, and getting worse.”

In response, more people in the region are pivoting to cashew trees and harvesting the seeds, explains Manzanares. Native to Honduras, alongside traditional crops such as corn, beans and yuca, cashews could be a way for people in this area to build resilience and adapt to the effects of the climate crisis, he adds.

Read more

It is an approach that the World Food Programme (WFP) is advocating for those experiencing high levels of food insecurity in the region, says Gustavo Tábora, field monitor of the WFP in Choluteca. “It’s better to have a mixture of crops because people need diversity. Corn, over time, depletes the soil [of its nutrients]. You have to look for and give alternatives so that people can provide for, and feed, themselves.”

Cashew trees don’t need much water; they improve the condition of the soil and provide a habitat for flora and fauna; the climate is favourable for growing them; and the trees provide wood, fruit and seeds – all of which can be sold. I’ve seen people able to buy their own land and educate their children, who have then gone into professions

Alvarez is one of 38 members of the community cooperative Caja Rural 15 de Enero, formed in 2018, and focusing on cashew trees. The trees were already present in the area but no one knew how to harness their potential, explains cooperative president Hilda Betancourt. “The situation here in 2018 was terrible,” she says. “Poverty comes accompanied by little money but also a lack of knowledge. Even if we had potential, we couldn’t fulfil it without knowing how. We weren’t able to take advantage of the few resources we had.” The previous year, the WFP had begun to work with vulnerable families, teaching them how to make best use of the land and grow various fruit and vegetables. The cooperative, made up mostly of women, saw the potential in cashew trees. They take about three years to bear cashew apples; the nuts, still in their shell, are removed from the ends of the fruits and sold to the cooperative, whose members are then paid to process them. The shells are dried in the sun for three days before being cracked open by hand or using a special tool. They are then dried in the sun briefly again before being soaked in water and baked for three minutes.



Hilda Betancourt, president of Caja Rural 15 de Enero, a community cooperative developing cashew crops in El Triunfo.

Photograph: Sarah Johnson/The Guardian

At this point, the cooperative sells them to an intermediary, which sells the raw nuts on to a more advanced operation with the equipment to process them into ready-to-eat cashews. The cooperative's cashew operation is still in its infancy and far from being a stable source of income for the community. This is the second year they have been able to harvest seeds, but their trees are still vulnerable to the weather. The most recent harvest was affected by strong winds.

Betancourt would like to buy machinery so they can streamline and manage the entire process, but it costs thousands of pounds. This is currently out of reach for the cooperative without outside help.

One company in El Triunfo that manages the whole process in-house is Etramasot. It started in 2003 and now has a network of 92 farmers who grow cashew trees and sell seeds to the company. It has branched out into producing dried cashew fruit and nut-flavoured beverages, including wine.

Almi Martínez, 34, the current president, has seen lives transformed through the company. "I've seen people able to buy their own land, animals, and educate their children who have gone into professions," she says.



Almi Martínez president of Etramasot cashew company in El Triunfo.

Photograph: Sarah Johnson/The Guardian

She wants to start exporting to Europe and so provide employment to young people in the region, many of whom take the perilous migratory route to the US. “Some are lucky and get there, some don’t,” she says. “That’s what motivates us and others to keep going in our fight to help.” Betancourt is constantly thinking about how to expand and provide a better future for her children and community. The cooperative has already changed how others view her. “Women often have fewer opportunities, so when you give us an opportunity, even a small one, we take full advantage of it,” she says. “It’s something really emotional. I feel pleased that people don’t view us women as the weaker sex any more, but as strong people.”