

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Nicaragua

CAPITAL: Managua

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Unitary Multiparty Republic

AREA: 148,000 Sq Km (57,143 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 5,086,500



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Nicaragua is located in Central America. It is bound by Honduras to the north, Costa Rica to the south, the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The country can be divided into four main topographical regions. (1.) the Coastal or Diriamba Highlands which are a continuation of the Costa Rica Highlands and fall off to the south into the low Rivas Isthmus. (2.) The Great Rift or Central Lowlands which is partially occupied by the two large fresh water lakes of Lake Managua and Lake Nicaragua. (3.) The Central Highlands which lie to the north and east of the Great Rift. The Central Highlands form part of the volcanic ranges that begin in the Alaskan Mountains and continue through the Rocky Mountains, the islands of the West Indies and the Andes to Cape Horn. (4.) The Caribbean Lowlands east of the highlands, which are comprised of alluvial plains, valleys with shallow bays, lagoons and salt marshes. The country has two drainage systems with numerous rivers, one system flows into the Pacific Ocean and the other into Caribbean Sea. Major Cities (pop. est.); Managua 973,800, Leon 172,000, Masaya 101,900, Chinandega 101,600, Matagalpa 95,300, Granada 91,900 (1992). Land Use; forested 27%, pastures 46%, agricultural-cultivated 11%, other 16% (1993).

CLIMATE: Nicaragua has a tropical climate with two seasons. A wet season from May to January and a dry season from January to mid May, combined with three climatic zones. (1.) A wet tropical, (2.) a wet and dry tropical and (3.) a mild highland. Average annual precipitation in Managua is 1,140 mm (35 inches) and average temperature ranges are from 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) to 44 degrees Celsius (93 degrees Fahrenheit) all year.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Mestizos who account for around 77% of the population and are of mixed Spanish and AmerIndian descent. Around 10% of the population are Whites while 9% are Black Africans and AmerIndians represent the remaining 4%. The AmerIndians include the Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Black Carib, Matagalpa, Subtiaba and Monimbo tribes.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 33 persons per sq km (86 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 59.8% urban, 40.2% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 50.1% male, 49.9% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 61.0 years male, 63.0 years female (1989). Age Breakdown; 46% under 15, 28% 15 to 29, 15% 30 to 44, 7% 45 to 59, 3% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and

over (1990). Birth Rate; 37.0 per 1,000 (1991). Death Rate; 7.0 per 1,000 (1991). Increase Rate; 30.0 per 1,000 (1991). Infant Mortality Rate; 60.0 per 1,000 live births (1991).

RELIGIONS: Mostly Christians with nearly 94% of the population Roman Catholic while the remainder are mostly Baptist, Moravian and Pentecostal.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Spanish which is spoken by nearly 96% of the population while English is spoken by the Creoles and Black Africans along the Atlantic coast. AmerIndian languages are also spoken by a minority.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 53.9%, incomplete and complete primary 41.7%, incomplete and complete secondary 4.4% (1971). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 74.0% (1986).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: For 45 years from 1934 Gen. Anastasio Somoza Garcia, his family and the National Guard he formed, controlled the country through a dictatorship. In 1956 Gen. Somoza was shot and his son, Col. Luis Somoza Debayle succeeded him as President. In 1967 Pres. Luis died and Gen. Somoza's second son became President. In 1972 an earthquake destroyed Managua and killed around 5,000 people. As chairman of the National Emergency Committee, Somoza's control was extended. In 1974 the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) launched its first guerrilla attacks and by 1978 the conflict between the rebels and the government had become a full scale civil war. The rebels finally succeeded in ousting the President in July 1979 and a provisional Junta was established. By 1981 many opposition leaders fled to Costa Rica or Honduras to establish guerrilla groups known as "counterrevolutionaries or Contras". In 1982 the Contras began to launch attacks supported by the US government who were actively promoting anti-Sandinista activities. In 1984 general elections were held to replace the Junta and Daniel Ortega Saavedra was elected President. In Oct. 1985 the government declared another State of Emergency and suspended the constitution. In Aug. 1987 the Sandinista government signed a regional peace plan which declared a cease-fire with all rebel groups, free elections, the restoration of civil rights and a ban on all terrorist acts. In Feb. 1990 elections were held and Violetta Chamorro of the National Opposition Union (UNO) was elected President. In March 1990 the Contras agreed to abandon their bases in Honduras and the Sandinistas formally recognized Chamorro's government. In Apr. 1990 the Contras signed a cease-fire with the Sandinista and Chamorro governments. In March 1991 the Contras began further guerrilla attacks claiming abuses by Sandinista army officers and that they had not received any land or compensation under a resettlement plan administered by the Organization of American States (OAS). In the same month the government launched an economic austerity program in an attempt to halt hyper inflation that included the devaluation of its currency by 80% and a 260% wage increase. In June 1991 the National Assembly passed legislation to annul

property transfers made by the former Sandinista government, although sections were later vetoed by Pres. Chamorro. In Sept. 1991 the government withdrew its compensation claim for US\$17 billion against the US in the World Court over mining of its harbors and the arming of the Contras. In April 1992 the Cerro Negro volcano erupted causing considerable property damage in the province of Leon and in Sept. 1992 an offshore earthquake unleashed 13.75m (45ft) tidal waves that caused severe destruction along the Pacific coast with 105 people losing their lives and 4,200 left homeless. In June 1992 the US Senate froze US \$116 million in aid insisting that the government remove Gen. Humberto Ortega as army commander as well as other Sandinista army officers and return property appropriated by the former Sandinista government. In response Pres. Chamorro announced measures to speed up the 5,000 property claims which included unoccupied land or compensation in the form of shares of state enterprises to be privatised. On Dec. 30, 1992 Pres. Chamorro ordered police to occupy the National Assembly and seize its documents for safe keeping following increasing conflict between the two legislatures. In 1993 fighting between groups of Contras and Sandinistas occurred intermittently and in May 1993 Pres. Chamorro declared a 30-day suspension of constitutional guarantees in the northern and central provinces. On July 21, 1993 a group of mostly Sandinistas and some Contras, called the Revolutionary Workers and Campesinos Front (FROC), attacked the town of Esteli killing 45 people. On August 19, 1993 another group, the 3-80 Front, calling for the dismissal of Gen. Ortega took a delegation including two Sandinista deputies hostage. On Aug. 20, 1993 and in response the National Dignity Command took control of the UNO coalition headquarters, following which an agreement was negotiated between the FSLN and UNO for the simultaneous release of all hostages and Pres. Chamorro announce Gen. Ortega would be replaced in 1994. On Sept. 20, 1993 a nationwide strike by private bus, truck and taxi drivers in protest to increasing petrol prices and new taxes resulted in the death of two people as police attempted to remove the armed strikers from blocking traffic in the capital. On Sept. 22, 1993 the government agreed to suspend the new taxes and open negotiations with the National Transport Commission.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Cordoba Oro (CO) divided into 100 Centavos.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$1,421,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$8,773,000,000 (1993). Imports; USD \$727,700,000 (1993). Exports; USD \$266,900,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$30,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; USD -\$350,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 1,386,300 or 34.7% of total population (1991). Unemployed; 60.0% (1994).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are Japan, CACM (Central American Common Market) countries and the EU.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Bananas, Cattle, Coffee, Copper, Cotton, Gold, Maize, Rice,

Silver, Sugar, Timber.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Beverages, Cement, Chemicals, Food Processing, Forestry, Mining, Petroleum, Textiles.

MAIN EXPORTS: Bananas, Chemicals, Coffee, Cotton, Gold, Meat, Shellfish, Sugar.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 300 km (186 mi) (1990), passenger-km 25,400,000 (15,783,000 passenger-mi) (1988), cargo ton-km 68,000,000 (46,573,000 short ton-mi) (1988). Roads; length 15,997 km (9,940 mi) (1988). Vehicles; cars 48,000 (1989), trucks and buses 32,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 25 (1990), deadweight tonnage 3,013 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 68,800,000 (42,750,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 3,579,000 (2,451,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 3 with a total circulation of 98,602 (1993). Radio; receivers 925,000 (1994). Television; receivers 210,000 (1994). Telephones; units 66,800 (1993).

MILITARY: 15,200 (1994) total active duty personnel with 88.8% army, 3.3% navy and 7.9% air force while military expenditure accounts for 2.6% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).