

70 International Groups Demand Immediate Release of the National Alliance El Salvador in Peace Political Prisoners

As international human rights, faith, environmental, and Salvadoran diaspora groups from 13 countries, we join the call for the immediate release of leaders and members of the Alliance for a Peaceful El Salvador arrested on May 30 and 31, 2024. Given their delicate and declining health, remaining in pre-trial detention poses an immediate threat to their lives.

Starting in 2021, the Alliance coordinated peaceful activities to protest abuses of power committed by the current government and to promote democracy, justice, and peace. Their unjust arrests – on the eve of Bukele’s inauguration for an unconstitutional second term – are another disturbing instance of political persecution that continues to rise, curtailing fundamental democratic freedoms in El Salvador.

We denounce gross violations of due process that the State has committed, including their arrests without judicial orders and under false pretexts. The State has violated their right to the presumption of innocence, made false accusations against them and violated the chain of custody of their purported evidence. We are alarmed that the government is charging them with terrorism, essentially criminalizing the work of civil society and popular movements.

If the State insists on pursuing criminal charges against them, providing alternatives to pre-trial detention is urgent. The defendants, many of them senior citizens, were already facing complex medical issues prior to the arrests. The risk to their lives grows with each day they remain in inhumane conditions in El Salvador’s prisons. For example:

- **Atilio Montalvo** suffered a stroke in November 2023 and a heart attack in April 2024. He has stage five chronic kidney disease and was recovering from a May 27 operation when he was arrested on May 31.
- **José (Pepe) Santos Melara** suffers from hypertension, diabetes, and hypertriglyceridemia, and was also recovering from a recent surgery when he was captured. His lawyer has reported the worsening of diabetic ulcers on both of his feet since his detention.
- **Luis Menjivar** suffers from hypertension and a court-ordered medical check-up revealed multiple new health conditions. His lawyer reported in early July that those conditions were not being treated.

The safety and physical integrity of these political prisoners is the responsibility of the government. If the Director of Prisons and other representatives of the Bukele administration fail to uphold their obligations under international law to provide necessary medical care, they will be committing crimes against humanity.

The Bukele government has left Salvadoran human rights defenders with few if any avenues to pursue justice in the national arena. Thus, it is critical that the international community insist that national and international human rights be upheld. We therefore call for:

- The immediate release of Atilio Montalvo, Jose (Pepe) Santos Melara, Eliseo Alvarado, Orlando Cartagena, Wilfredo Parada, Douglas Recinos, Pedro Alfonso Mira, Jose Ismael Santos, Roberto Antonio Esquivel, and Luis Menjivar;
- The guarantee of their physical well-being and full respect for their human rights, which have been violated since their capture, as their health is not being properly cared for;
- The full restoration of their rights to due process, defense, the presumption of innocence, and a fair trial;
- A United Nations investigation into the arrests, as requested by the Human and Community Rights Defense Unit of El Salvador (UNIDEHC); and
- An end to the persecution of community, social, and political leaders and imprisonment on false or spurious charges.

Social movement organizations have denounced the arrests as attempts by the Bukele government to silence dissent and, even more concerning, convince the population that opposition groups pose a danger to them, a tactic reminiscent of military dictatorships in El Salvador and others around the world.

As Salvadorans and allied organizations abroad, we remain firm in our solidarity with communities organizing against authoritarianism and militarism in El Salvador. We will continue to raise our voices against the criminalization of human rights defenders, grassroots organizers, and others who exercise their rights to freedom of speech and association.

San Salvador, August 13, 2024

Organizational signers,



United States

1. Alliance for Global Justice
2. Alliance for Social and Economic Justice
3. Alma de Izote Chicago
4. Arlington Teosinte Sister City Project
5. Cambridge United for Justice with Peace
6. Cambridge, MA-El Salvador Sister City Committee
7. Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
8. Church of St. Philip
9. Comité de Base FMLN N.Y.
10. Colectivo La Chiltota
11. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, CISPES
12. Companion Community Development Alternatives (CoCoDA)
13. Denver Justice and Peace Committee
14. Doctors for Global Health
15. Dorothy Day Catholic Worker
16. Eko Social Justice
17. Friendship Office
18. Global Exchange
19. Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
20. Institute for Policy Studies - Global Economy Project
21. InterReligious Task Force on Central America
22. Isthmic Solidarity Project
23. Kickapoo Peace Circle
24. La F.U.E.R.Z.A. Student Association
25. Latin America Task Force of Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice
26. Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
27. Los Siempre Sospechosos de Todo
28. MADRE
29. Migrant Roots Media // Raíces Migrantes
30. Nación Salvadoreña en el Exterior
31. National Lawyers Guild, Mesoamerica Subcommittee
32. Pax Christi New York State
33. Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness
34. Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator
35. Resistencia Comunitaria
36. Rochester Committee on Latin America
37. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
38. Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston
39. Solidarity
40. Solidarity Committee, Capital District
41. South Bay Sanctuary Covenant
42. Unite North Metro Denver
43. US-El Salvador Sister Cities
44. Washington Ethical Society

Canada

45. Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network
46. MAWO
47. FMLN-ALCADES Alianza Canadiense contra la Dictadura

Latin America

48. Federación Rural para la Producción y el Arraigo, Argentina
49. Coalición De Movimientos Y Organizaciones Sociales De Colombia (COMOSOC), Colombia
50. Mesa Ecuánica Por La Paz (MEP), Colombia
51. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo SJ" (CSMM), Ecuador
52. Los Necios, Honduras
53. Casa Tecmilco, México
54. Comité de Solidaridad con El Salvador en México, México
55. Pastoral Social, Iglesia Anglicana de México, México
56. Madres del Mundo por la Paz de los Pueblos, Venezuela

Europe, Australia

57. Oficina Ecuánica por la Paz y la Justicia, Germany
58. Ventana al Sur, Germany
59. Community and Public Sector Union, Australia
60. Robert Graham and The Landing, Australia
61. Sydney peace and Justice Coalition, Australia
62. Informationsgruppe Lateinamerika (IGLA), Austria
63. Ongd AFRICANDO, Spain
64. Izquierda Castellana, Spain
65. Fundación Paz y Solidaridad de Euskadi, Basque Country
66. Lumaltik Herriak, Basque Country
67. Alternatiba, Basque Country (Spanish state)
68. Medico International Schweiz, Suiza

Regional

69. Diáspora Pa'lante Collective, Puerto Rico y los EEUU
70. Asociación Americana de Juristas, Regional/Continental