

Statement in Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders in El Salvador

As human rights, faith, environmental, solidarity and Salvadoran diaspora groups in the United States and internationally, we express our solidarity with human rights organizations in El Salvador advocating on behalf of people unjustly detained under the State of Exception, and denounce the police harassment and surveillance against them which has markedly increased in the two years since the start of the State of Exception.

At a joint press conference on April 18, the Movement of Victims of the Regime (MOVIR), the Committee of Families of Political Prisoners in El Salvador (COFAPPES), Humanitarian Legal Aid (*Socorro Jurídico Humanitario*), the “Herbert Anaya Sanabria” Human Rights Collective, and the Committee of Relatives of Victims of the State of Exception of the Bajo Lempa detailed an alarming pattern of surveillance and police interference into their participation in street marches, protests, and rallies, as well as online harassment.

- In February 2024, Ivania Cruz, the spokesperson for COFAPPES, obtained a report from the Office of the Attorney General that details surveillance against her and her participation in human rights defense groups. The surveillance file included photos from her personal Facebook page and of marches in which she participated.
- Human rights defenders with MOVIR described having their events infiltrated and surveilled by government intelligence officers posing as journalists from fabricated news services, including at a press conference they held on July 7, 2023, after which they were followed and pulled over by police. Group leaders were threatened with arrest until legitimate journalists arrived to document the harassment.
- Members of the Committee of Relatives of Victims of the State of Exception of the Bajo Lempa denounced the arbitrary arrest and torture of 8 underage youth on November 5, 2022 following their participation in a community theater that warned of the dangers of repeating El Salvador’s history of militarized repression.
- The Bajo Lempa Committee of Victims’ Relatives also described having their buses stopped and identification cards confiscated by police while *en route* to a march on May 1, 2023.
- Socorro Juridico Humanitario denounced multiple police attempts to enter the building where they share offices with unions that are critical of the government and condemned the constant social media campaign, directed by the government, to defame their leaders and organization.

We strongly condemn these violations of the democratic rights of these human rights defenders, legal advocates and community organizers, whose work is essential to a free and just society, and of the use of state funds to surveil and intimidate them and to attempt to circumscribe the exercise of their political rights.

Since the Bukele government implemented the State of Exception in March 2022, suspending basic constitutional protections and civil liberties, nearly 80,000 people have been detained and close to 250 people have died in state custody. Pre-trial detention limits have been extended - initially from six months to two years and subsequently an additional two years - forcing prisoners to languish for years under inhumane prison conditions with no opportunity to prove their innocence. Most detainees are denied contact with lawyers or family members, in violation of the American Convention on Human Rights, to which El Salvador is a signatory. The continuation of this policy is illegal and

violates the Salvadoran constitution. The Bukele regime has also unjustly jailed political rivals, prominent environmentalists, over a dozen unionists, and other activists.

We cannot normalize the Bukele administration's attempts to criminalize human rights defenders who advocate for the rights of those unjustly detained under the State of Exception which intends to silence criticism of the inhumane and deadly policy.

Therefore, the undersigned human rights, faith, environmental and Salvadorans diaspora groups accompany the demands of these human rights defenders and call on:

1. the office of the Attorney General to ensure that its announced investigation into the targeted surveillance of human rights attorney Ivania Cruz be thorough and transparent;
2. the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to grant protective measures to spokespeople from Movement of Victims of the Regime (MOVIR), the Committee of Families of Political Prisoners in El Salvador (COFAPPES), Socorro Jurídico Legal, and the Committee of Relatives of Victims of the State of Exception of the Bajo Lempa in order to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders and their rights to free speech and freedom of association;
3. the United States government to halt security assistance to El Salvador, which is being used to target human rights defenders and perpetuate the erosion of democracy in the country.

San Salvador, 21 de Mayo, 2024

Signing organizations

United States

1. 1199 UHW SEIU, New York
2. Alma de Izote Chicago
3. Baltimore Nonviolence Center
4. Cambridge United for Justice with Peace
5. Casa Rutilio Grande
6. Centro Latino Cuscatlán
7. Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)
8. Colectivo La Chiltota Rebelde
9. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
10. Denver Peace and Justice Committee
11. Dorothy Day Catholic Worker
12. Friendship Office of the Americas
13. Fuerza Mundial (Mujeres de las Américas, Maria 'Lenchita' Guardado Archive Collection)
14. Global Exchange
15. Grupo primero de abril
16. Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
17. Hope Border Institute
18. InterReligious Task Force on Central America
19. Institute for Policy Studies, Global Economy Project
20. Kickapoo Peace Circle
21. Latin America Task Force of Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice
22. Latin American Working Group (LAWG)

23. Loretto Community Latin America/Caribbean Committee
24. MELA de San Pancho
25. Movimiento de Víctimas de Régimen (MOVIR) - USA
26. Nicaragua Center for Community Action
27. Nikkei Resisters
28. Raices Migrants (Migrant Roots Media)
29. Resistencia Comunitaria
30. Salvadorans4Democracy
31. San Carlos Foundation
32. San Francisco Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines
33. SHARE Foundation
34. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
35. Unite North Metro Denver
36. US-El Salvador Sister Cities
37. Voices on the Border
38. Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
39. Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective

Latin America, Europe, Canada

40. Asociación Campesina San Jose de Miranda Santander (ASTRACASMI), Colombia
41. Asociación de Ayuda para Refugiados Centroamericanos, Germany
42. Asociación EINE WELT e. V. i. L., Germany
43. Centralamerica-Secretariate /Secretariado de Centroamérica, Switzerland
44. Centro de Documentación y Solidaridad con América Latina y África (CEDSALA), Spain
45. Centro de Investigación y Documentación LIBERARTE, Peru
46. Ciranda Comunicação Compartilhada, Brazil
47. Coalición de Movimientos y Organizaciones Sociales de Colombia (Comosoc), Colombia
48. CODECAM, Colombia
49. Colectivo del periódico El Zenzontle, Mexico
50. Comité de DDHH y Ecológicos de Quilpue, Chile
51. Comité de Solidaridad con los Pueblos - Interpueblos, Spain
52. Comite de Solidaridad Monseñor Romero, Madrid, Spain
53. Comité de Solidaridad Óscar Romero -SICSAL, Chile
54. Comité de Solidaridad con El Salvador en México, Mexico
55. Congreso de los pueblos, Colombia
56. Festivales Solidarios, Mexico
57. FMLN colectivo de Gatineau, Canada
58. Grupo America Latina Filosofia Social y Axiologia, Cuba
59. Grupo Belga Solidair met Guatemala, Belgium
60. Informationsgruppe Laeinamerika (IGLA), Austria
61. Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI), Mexico
62. La Monche, Chile
63. Kindermissionswerk (KMW), Germany
64. Liga Argentina por los Derechos Humanos de Mendoza-Argentina, Argentina
65. Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Limeddh), Mexico
66. Lumaltik Herriak, Basque Country
67. Medico international schweiz, Switzerland
68. Mesa Ecuémica por la Paz (MEP), Colombia

69. Mobilization against War and Occupation (MAWO), Canada
70. Observatorio Dominicano de Políticas Públicas, Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
71. Observatorio por el Cierre de la Escuela de las Américas, Chile
72. Oficina Ecumenica por la Paz y la Justicia, Germany
73. Ongd AFRICANDO, Spain
74. Organización de comunicadores populares, Colombia
75. Red de Hermandad y Solidaridad con Colombia, Colombia
76. Red de Intelectuales y Artistas de Defensa de La Humanidad (BEL-REDH), Belgium
77. Red Europea de Comités Oscar Romero (SICSAL-Europa), Belgium
78. Servicio Internacional Cristiano de Solidaridad con los pueblos de América Latina (SICSAL) “Óscar Arnulfo Romero,” Colombia
79. Sindicato Unitario De Trabajadores del Periodismo y la Comunicación Social Del Perú, Peru
80. Territorios Democráticos, Chile
81. Ventana al Sur, Germany
82. VOCES de Guatemala en Berlín, Germany

International

83. Asociación Americana de Juristas Regional, International
84. Alianza Global Convida 20 - Comisión de Construcción de Paz, Noviolencia y Antimilitarismo (México, Chile, Colombia & El Salvador)