



Regarding the [announcements](#) made following U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's February 3 visit to El Salvador that El Salvador will "accept and incarcerate ... criminal illegal migrants from any country" who are deported from the U.S.:

First, we affirm our commitment to upholding universal human rights and dignity for all and we echo the communities and organizations in El Salvador and the diaspora who oppose Bukele's acquiescence to the U.S. to further criminalize and endanger Salvadoran and other migrants.

Second, we denounce any agreement that the U.S. is negotiating in the region that violates the internationally protected right to asylum and the notion that El Salvador is a reliably "safe" destination for asylum seekers or migrants of any status. The world's leading human rights organizations and institutions have [decried](#) the Bukele government's widespread abuses, including as a result of suspension of due process and militarization of communities. The U.S. State Department's own [2023 human rights](#) report described "significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention."

Feminist and human rights groups continue to report high numbers of disappearances, [femicides](#), and [violence](#) against women and the [LGBTQ population](#). Under Bukele's State of Exception, foreign nationals, including [citizens of the United States](#), [Colombia](#), and elsewhere have also been subject to arbitrary arrest and remain in pretrial detention for years without due process.

Meanwhile, Salvadoran citizens continue to leave their country due to unemployment, fear of arbitrary arrest, and political persecution. Human rights organizations like Cristosal, Servicio Social Pasionista (SSPAS) and the Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la UCA (IDHUCA) have documented a troubling increase in cases of forced displacement related to state violence. In 2020 and 2022, 12.8% of the cases of internal forced displacement SSPAS attended [cited the National Civil Police as the reason for their displacement](#). In their [2024 report](#) "Silence is not an Option," Cristosal reported that an astounding 42.7% of forced internal displacement cases attended cited the National Civil Police as the cause, compared to only 36.4% that cited the gangs.

According to [UNHCR Refugee Data Finder](#), the number of displaced Salvadorans assisted by UNHCR in 2023 totalled 405,464, up from 332,383 in 2022 and 250,619 in 2018. This increase in the number of Salvadoran asylum seekers and refugees casts serious doubt on the Salvadoran government's ability or willingness to protect foreign nationals who may be sent there.

Third, we reject the extreme cruelty, dehumanization, and injustice exemplified by El Salvador's prisons, conditions to which neither citizens of El Salvador nor any other country should be subjected. We reject any suggestion that El Salvador's is a model to be emulated, as right-wing voices close to Trump have claimed. Since March 2022, when the Bukele regime suspended constitutional rights under the State of Exception, the prison population has skyrocketed; El Salvador now has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Under this emergency measure, which remains in place in violation of El Salvador's constitution, the vast majority of the more than 85,000 people arrested without warrants have languished in inhumane prisons for years without trial, let alone conviction, and without access to attorneys or communication with relatives. Salvadoran human rights organizations have documented between [261](#) and [366](#) deaths in prison during this period, many showing signs of torture, physical abuse, lack of medical care, and/or malnourishment.

The proposed Trump-Bukele agreements are driven by racist logic and aim to further the dehumanization, vilification, and criminalization of migrants. Since Trump's first presidential run, he has used gangs to justify anti-immigrant policies. His latest boogeyman is Venezuela's Tren de Aragua, much as the MS-13 gang has been employed in the public imagination for decades. Bukele's authoritarian and anti-democratic regime follows a tradition of right wing leaders in El Salvador being complicit in the constant association of Salvadorans with criminality and violence.

The implications go far beyond the real danger posed to migrants. Bukele's frequent deployment of images of tattooed gang members on social media, for example, aims not only to justify state violence against them but against the entire population as a part of a broader project of social control and criminalization of poverty. Bukele's announcement that El Salvador would incarcerate U.S. citizens illustrates how anti-immigrant rhetoric serves to expand state violence to non-migrants, especially people of color and other marginalized and targeted groups, and how migrants are being used as a political tool to further the militarization of communities across the Americas. This alarming escalation confirms that defending immigrants' rights is a fight for everyone's rights.

Lastly, we reject the growing Trump-Bukele alliance, which only promises to escalate and institutionalize punitive carceral states in both countries, and oppose the long-standing U.S. financial and political support for militarization, repressive policing, and prison infrastructure in El Salvador and throughout the region.

Alliance for Global Justice
American Friends Service Committee
Centro de Relaciones Internacionales Mira: Feminismos y Democracias, CDMX
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador
Friendship Office of the Americas
Latin America Working Group
Nación Salvadoreña en el Exterior
Network in Solidarity with Guatemala
Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team
U.S.- El Salvador Sister Cities

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