

## **More than 60 Civil society organisations denounce the alarming deterioration of human rights situation in El Salvador**

Human rights organisations express concern regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation, consolidation of authoritarian rule and hate speech against human rights defenders, organisations and media in El Salvador. The deteriorating human rights situation is a result of President Nayib Bukele and his party's abuse of power, as well as the ongoing dismantling of public entities and national controls that would be in positions to prevent internal abuses of power.

The attempted [takeover of the Legislative Assembly by the President and the armed forces in 2020](#), the irregular dismissal of members of the Constitutional Chamber and the Attorney General of the Republic on 1 May 2021 and the repeated use of the pandemic to control and restrict rights and freedoms, which has kept thousands of people in detention in "containment centres," have raised concerns. In addition, there is the persecution and harassment from government officials against opponents, human rights defenders and journalists that has raised concerns at the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\)](#) and the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#).

The government misuses public institutions and manipulates public discourse in favour of the interests of particular groups of society at the same time that it delegitimises and silences those who denounce systematic human rights violations. The attacks on women's and feminist organisations are particularly troubling. Meanwhile, thousands of people continue to flee the country, escaping poverty and the fear of organised crime groups and security forces. Rates of femicides and violations of women's sexual and reproductive rights remain among the highest in Latin America, and corruption deepens inequality.

In this context, any person, organisation or media outlet that denounces abuse of power is branded as an enemy of the state, threatened, harassed and hounded. Organisations operate under abusive fiscal measures and restrictions to the right to peaceful assembly under the excuse of the pandemic. Women human rights defenders and journalists face hate speech, stigmatisation and prosecution with sexist connotations, sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence as a means of repression. Discrimination is legitimised and the gains that women have made for equality are being rolled back.

[The Salvadoran Network of Women Human Rights Defenders, the Association of Journalists of El Salvador \(APES\) and the Passionist Social Service \(SSPAS\)](#) have reported that in recent years there has been a significant increase on digital attacks perpetrated against journalists and human rights defenders working on sexual and reproductive rights, the right to a life free of violence and the rights of LGBTIQ people.

[Between February and May 2021](#), at least 370 digital attacks were perpetrated by public officials or individuals close to the President and his inner circle on social networks. Human rights defender and feminist lawyer Bertha Deleón has been a victim of a strong stigmatisation campaign and faces a criminalisation process that led to her [requesting precautionary measures to the IACHR](#) in order to protect the lives of her and her family.

As a sign of the lack of commitment to guaranteeing human rights, in May 2021 the legislative initiative to protect human rights defenders called the ["Law for the recognition and integral protection of human rights defenders and the guarantee of the right to defend rights" was shelved](#). The State continues to fail its international obligations regarding the protection of human rights, and refuses to engage processes involving from international scrutiny, as in the case in the [recent hearing on the human rights situation in which it was summoned by the IACHR](#). Additionally, the government actively works to discredit the positions and communiqués of international mechanisms and human rights organisations every time they denounce, express concern about the situation or issue any recommendations. This has led to attacks like the one perpetrated on 21 June 2021, [when unknown individuals stole files from the CO-MADRES organisation](#) containing sensitive information on investigations into people who disappeared during the armed conflict.

We express our deep concern about the risks faced by human rights defenders, journalists and their families, as well as the impacts of working in this challenging context. The State must cease attacks, ensure the separation of powers and the rule of law, and provide guarantees for the free exercise of the right to defend human rights and to exercise independent journalism.

We urge the international community and human rights organisations to remain vigilant of the situation and to speak out, particularly in view of the specific risks faced by women defenders and journalists. It is urgent to resolve the requests for protection measures and to guarantee effective mechanisms to protect their lives.

Authoritarian rule, hate speech that legitimises stigma and violence against those who have historically advocated for justice, equality and peace generate risk for the exercise of the defence of human rights and leave defenders and journalists defenceless – an unprecedented situation in El Salvador in peacetime.

## **Regional e internacional**

American Jewish World Service

Article 19 Oficina México y Centroamérica

Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos (AIETI)

Asociación para el Progreso de las Comunicaciones (APC)

Asociadas por lo Justo (JASS Mesoamérica A.C.)

Centro de Derechos Reproductivos (CDR)

Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL)

Código Sur

Comisión de Derechos Humanos Hispano Guatemalteca - Guatemala

Entrepueblos-Entrepobles-Herriarte-Entrepobos

Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina y el Caribe (FAU-AL)

Front Line Defenders

Fundación Acceso

Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (IM-Defensoras)

Iniciativas de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (ICID)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Latin America Working Group (LAWG)

Observatorio para la Protección de Defensores de los Derechos Humanos (OMCT-FIDH)

Organización Mundial contra la Tortura (OMCT)

Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad

Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres defensoras de derechos sociales y ambientales

Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos

Servicio Internacional Cristiano de Solidaridad SICSAL

SOS El Salvador

Women's Link Worldwide

## Local

Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto - El Salvador

Asociación Comunidades Construyendo Paz en los Territorios (CONPAZCOL) - Colombia

Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes ("Las Melidas") - El Salvador

Asociación PRO DERECHOS HUMANOS de España - España

Asociación Transparencia, Contraloría Social y Datos Abiertos (TRACODA) - El Salvador

Calala Fondo de Mujeres - Estado Español

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir - El Salvador

CEFEMINA - Costa Rica

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) - Honduras

Christliche Initiative Romero e.V. - Alemania

Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local - El Salvador

Colectivo de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras Sociales de Honduras - Honduras

Comisión de Ayuda al Refugiado en Euskadi (CEAR-Euskadi) - Estado Español

Comisión de Derechos Humanos Hispano Guatemalteca - Estado Español

Comité de Ex-Presos y Presas Políticos de El Salvador (COPPE) - El Salvador

Comité de Reconstrucción y Desarrollo Económico Social (CRC Suchitoto) - El Salvador

Comité Oscar Romero de Buenos Aires - Argentina

Concertación Monseñor Romero - El Salvador

Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH) - Honduras

Coordinadora de ONGD España - Estado Español

DIKÉ LGBT+ - El Salvador

Ecologistas en acción – Estado Español

Elige Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos A.C. - México

Equipo Jurídico por los Derechos Humanos (EJDH) - Honduras

FOCOS TV - El Salvador

Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (FESPAD) - El Salvador

Fundación Mujeres Pro Transparencia - Estado Español

Iniciativas de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (ICID) - Estado Español

Juventudes Socialdemócratas de El Salvador - El Salvador

Mesa por el Derecho a Defender Derechos Humanos - El Salvador

Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres - El Salvador

Red de mujeres por una opinión pública con perspectiva de género - México

Red de Víctimas de la Patrulla Fronteriza - México

Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en Honduras - Honduras

Red Salvadoreña de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (RSDDH) - El Salvador