

## Concern over the detention of Eleonora López and Alejandro Henríquez amid escalating intimidation of lawyers in El Salvador

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) expresses its grave concern regarding the recent arrests of two lawyers in El Salvador, as reported by IM-Defensoras:

- **Ruth Eleonora López**, Director of the Anti-Corruption and Justice Unit at *Cristosal*, and a lawyer widely recognised for her work in promoting transparency and accountability, was arrested on 18 May 2025 at her home in San Salvador. Authorities have accused her of embezzlement in connection with a former public service position, yet no specific charges or evidence have been made public. Ms. López was held incommunicado for over 24 hours, raising serious concerns about due process violations and the denial of access to legal representation.
- **Alejandro Henríquez**, a lawyer representing the *Cooperativa El Bosque*, was arrested on 13 May 2025 and charged with ‘public disorder’. On 12 May, approximately 300 families of the Cooperativa, facing imminent eviction, held a peaceful protest and requested Mr. Henríquez's intervention to help prevent the eviction. Reports indicate excessive use of force by police and military personnel during the demonstration, including the use of tear gas against women and children. Mr. Henríquez was arrested the day after the protest, at the offices of an environmental organisation to which he belongs, reportedly without a court order. His legal counsel later reported being denied access to speak with him.

Lawyers for Lawyers is deeply concerned that these arrests might be connected to the lawyers' legitimate professional activities. The blatant disregard for due process—including detention without a court order and incommunicado imprisonment without access to legal representation—constitutes a serious violation of fundamental rights. These cases appear to form part of a broader, systematic pattern of state retaliation against lawyers, which severely undermines the rule of law and the public's access to justice.

Since the imposition of the state of exception in 2023, the Salvadoran authorities have intensified efforts to suppress dissent through the use of exceptional legal measures, arbitrary prosecutions, and coordinated smear campaigns. These measures have significantly curtailed the ability of lawyers to carry out their professional duties safely and independently, particularly those engaged in human rights, anti-corruption, and public interest work. This hostile environment directly undermines the independence of the legal profession and the right of individuals to access justice.

El Salvador is a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the American Convention on Human Rights, which protect the right to liberty, security, and due process. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, in particular Principles 16, 18, and 23 also provide that:

- Lawyers must be able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference;
- They shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for actions taken in accordance with recognised professional duties and standards;



- Governments shall ensure that lawyers are not identified with their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.
- Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization.

Lawyers for Lawyers urgently calls on the Government of El Salvador to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Ruth Eleonora López and Alejandro Henríquez and drop all charges that appear to be connected to the exercise of their professional duties.
2. Guarantee their physical and psychological well-being, and ensure access to legal counsel and family visits;
3. Respect due process rights in all legal proceedings and disclose the basis for the charges brought against them;
4. Cease all acts of harassment, intimidation, and criminalisation of lawyers in El Salvador and uphold the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers ensuring that all lawyers in El Salvador can carry out their professional activities independently and without fear of reprisals.

Lawyers for Lawyers will continue to monitor the situation of lawyers in El Salvador closely. We urge the international community, including bar associations, civil society organisations, and international human rights mechanisms, to remain vigilant and to take all appropriate measures to ensure the protection of legal professionals in the country.