

## One year since the arbitrary detention of Ruth Eleonora López in El Salvador

**One year after the arbitrary detention of lawyer Ruth Eleonora López, Lawyers for Lawyers remains deeply concerned by her continued deprivation of liberty and the persistent violations of her fundamental rights. Her case has become emblematic of the deteriorating conditions for lawyers and the rule of law in El Salvador.**

Ruth Eleonora López, a constitutional lawyer, has dedicated her career to advancing justice and accountability in El Salvador. As head of Cristosal's Anti-Corruption Unit, she investigated major corruption cases, filed criminal complaints before the Attorney General's Office, represented victims of fraud, and defended democratic principles through strategic litigation. In March 2025, following the transfer of more than 200 Venezuelan and Salvadoran nationals to El Salvador's CECOT prison without due process or legal representation, she was among the few lawyers willing to challenge these actions. She filed 76 habeas corpus petitions on behalf of families seeking information about the whereabouts of their relatives.

Shortly thereafter, on 18 May 2025, Ruth López was arrested at her home without a judicial warrant and without any prior investigation, on allegations of illicit enrichment. Authorities failed to disclose her whereabouts to her family and lawyers until 20 May 2025, amounting to an enforced disappearance during that period.<sup>1</sup> Despite a judicial order authorising her detention in a police facility due to her fragile health condition, she was transferred to a penitentiary centre on 4 July 2025. She has remained in pretrial detention ever since.

For much of her detention, she has been held *incommunicado*, with severely restricted access to her family and legal counsel. Although she requested a public hearing, proceedings have remained closed to the public, raising serious concerns regarding due process, transparency, and judicial independence.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary measures ([Resolution 66/2025](#)), ordering the State to protect her life, integrity, and health; ensure regular contact and access with her family and legal counsel; and review the continuation of her preventive detention in light of applicable standards, including the possibility of alternative measures. These measures have not been satisfactorily implemented.

Ruth Eleonora López's detention is particularly alarming as it appears to constitute retaliation linked to the legitimate exercise of the legal profession. Her case unfolds in a broader context of systematic violations of due process guarantees in El Salvador. Since the implementation of the state of exception in 2022,<sup>2</sup> the Salvadoran government has suspended various constitutional guarantees, including fundamental rights closely connected to the right of defence.

These conditions have significantly restricted lawyers' ability to carry out their professional duties safely and independently, particularly those working on human rights, anti-corruption efforts, and public interest litigation.<sup>3</sup> This hostile environment directly undermines the independence of the legal profession and the public's right of access to justice, while creating a chilling effect on lawyers engaged in these areas of work.

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<sup>1</sup> [El Salvador: UN experts demand protection for Ruth López after enforced disappearance | OHCHR](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Decree 333 of the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of El Salvador](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Lawyers for Lawyers, Situation of lawyers in El Salvador amid rule of law concerns](#)



El Salvador is a State Party to the American Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and is therefore obligated to guarantee the rights to liberty, personal security, access to justice, and due process. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, particularly Principles 16 and 18 further require governments to ensure that lawyers can carry out their professional duties free from intimidation, harassment, or interference; and are not identified with their clients or causes.

In light of the above, Lawyers for Lawyers urgently calls on the Government of El Salvador to:

1. Fully implement the IACHR precautionary measures set out in Resolution 66/2025, including by protecting Ruth Eleonora López's life, integrity, and health; guaranteeing regular access to her family and lawyers; and reviewing the necessity and proportionality of her continued pretrial detention, including the possibility of alternative measures;
2. Guarantee a public trial with full respect for judicial guarantees, due process rights, and without undue delay;
3. Cease all acts of harassment, intimidation, and criminalisation of lawyers in El Salvador;
4. Respect and guarantee the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, so that all lawyers in El Salvador may carry out their professional activities independently and without fear of reprisals.

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