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AFTER DETAINING PEOPLE IN EL SALVADOR TORTURE PRISON FOR 125 DAYS, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR DISAPPEARING MIGRANTS

After Detaining People in El Salvador Torture Prison for 125 Days, the U.S. Government Must Be Held Accountable for Disappearing Migrants

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — After 125 days imprisoned in El Salvador’s notorious “megaprison,” the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT), Venezuelan nationals Edicson Quintero Chacón and Jose Manuel Ramos Bastidas were released yesterday and placed on a U.S.-brokered flight to Venezuela, alongside approximately 250 other Venezuelans whom the United States paid to detain at CECOT. Counsel for both men expressed profound relief at their release, and emphasized the urgent need for accountability from the U.S. Government for disappearing them to CECOT in the first place.

The U.S. government sent the men to CECOT on March 15, 2025, where they were held incommunicado and without charges in a facility widely condemned for mass arbitrary detention and inhumane treatment. Both Mr. Quintero Chacón and Mr. Ramos Bastidas had previously been ordered removed from the United States, after which they told a federal court that they just wanted to return home to Venezuela. The U.S. government sent them to CECOT instead. The terms of the agreement with El Salvador specify that the U.S. would send “members” of a Venezuelan gang, Tren de Aragua (TdA), but there is no evidence linking the men to TdA. Their return to Venezuela was part of a prisoner swap deal that included the release from Venezuela of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents.

“This news of flights to Venezuela was like being hit with a bucket of cold water because my family had absolutely no idea this was happening,” **said a member of Mr. Quintero Chacón’s family, who asked to remain anonymous.** “Edicson should never have been sent to CECOT in the first place. No one should. He was treated cruelly and inhumanely when all he wanted was safety. This so-called prisoner swap doesn’t undo the injustice he suffered, nor the pain and terror that my family has had to endure in the past several months with no idea of whether we’d ever see him again.”

“We have been waiting for this moment for months, and I feel like I can finally breathe, knowing that Jose Manuel is now free from CECOT and on his way home,” **said Roynerliz Rodriguez, partner of Jose Manuel Ramos Bastidas.** “His son, whom he hasn’t seen since he was four months old, is eagerly waiting for him. These last months have been a living nightmare, not knowing anything about Jose Manuel and only imagining what he must be suffering. I am happy he is free from CECOT, but I also know that we will never be free of the shadow of this experience. There must be justice for all those who suffered this torture.”

Serious concerns remain regarding the legality and transparency of the U.S. government's actions. Many of the individuals sent to CECOT by the U.S. government had pending asylum claims and expressed credible fear of return to Venezuela. Their forced return to Venezuela, without due process to address their requests for asylum in the United States raises significant questions about the United States' compliance with domestic and international legal obligations.

Nor has there been any public accounting of how the U.S. government selected individuals for transfer to CECOT or the full scope of conditions they endured. To date, the government has not released a complete list of names of the people they paid El Salvador to detain, and it remains unclear whether each victim is accounted for.

The use of foreign detention facilities, particularly those with documented records of systemic abuse, raises serious human rights and due process concerns. The U.S. government should not engage in detention outsourcing arrangements and should not collaborate with regimes that flagrantly violate human rights. There must be a full investigation into these disappearances and clear safeguards barring the Trump Administration from doing this again.

"We are deeply relieved that Mr. Quintero Chacón and Mr. Ramos Bastidas are finally released from CECOT, but this should never have happened in the first place," **said Rebecca Cassler, senior litigation attorney at the American Immigration Council.** "The U.S. government paid to detain these men in one of the world's most notorious prisons, then denied responsibility while they suffered. For months, the Trump administration misled the courts and the public, pretending it had no control over their fate. This deal proves otherwise. There must be a full investigation into how this happened, and accountability for the grave harm inflicted on these men."

"We celebrate this news, along with the loved ones of Mr. Quintero Chacón and Mr. Ramos Bastidas and over 250 Venezuelans who returned to Venezuela yesterday after being disappeared and tortured for months at the direction and expense of the United States government. The 'deals' made for these Venezuelans' confinement and transfers between the United States, El Salvador, and Venezuela treat human beings as bargaining chips and underscore the cruel consequences of criminalizing migration and monetizing torture. The

U.S. government must stop these abuses and uphold its obligations to protect the rights and dignity of all people,” said **CJ Sandley, senior staff attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights.**

“It is with great joy and relief that we celebrate Mr. Quintero Chacón's and Mr. Ramos Bastidas' safe return to Venezuela and long-overdue reunion with their loved ones. It is unconscionable that they and 250 other Venezuelan men were sent by the United States to be detained at CECOT and forced to endure suffering, the extent of which we still don't fully know. This administration has tried to wash its hands of the individuals they sent to be tortured, but their release yesterday shows just how involved the government has been throughout this entire process,” said **Stephanie M. Alvarez-Jones, Southeast Regional Attorney at the National Immigration Project.** “While we celebrate their long overdue release, the government must be held accountable for its outrageous actions.”

The American Immigration Council, Center for Constitutional Rights, and the National Immigration Project represent Mr. Quintero Chacón in his habeas corpus proceeding in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, where they have been fighting for his freedom from CECOT. National Immigration Project represents Mr. Ramos Bastidas in his habeas corpus proceeding, which is also before the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

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About the American Immigration Council

The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration and by working toward a more fair and just immigration system that opens its doors to those in need of protection and unleashes the energy and skills that immigrants bring. The Council brings together problem solvers and employs four coordinated approaches to advance change—litigation, research, legislative and administrative advocacy, and communications. In January 2022, the Council and New American Economy merged to combine a broad suite of advocacy tools to better expand and protect the rights of immigrants, more fully ensure immigrants’ ability to succeed economically, and help make the communities they settle in more welcoming.

Follow the latest Council news and information on BlueSky @[immcouncil.org](https://www.immcouncil.org) and Instagram at @immcouncil.

About The National Immigration Project

The [National Immigration Project](https://www.immcouncil.org) is a membership organization of attorneys, advocates, and community members who believe that all people should be treated with dignity, live freely, and flourish. We litigate, advocate, educate, and build bridges across movements to ensure that those most impacted by the immigration and criminal systems are uplifted and supported. Learn more at [nipnlg.org](https://www.nipnlg.org). Follow the National Immigration Project on Bluesky, Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram at @NIPNLG.

About The Center for Constitutional Rights

The [Center for Constitutional Rights](https://www.ccrjustice.org) works with communities under threat to fight for justice and liberation through litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications. Since 1966, the Center for Constitutional Rights has taken on oppressive systems of power, including structural racism, gender oppression, economic inequity, and governmental overreach. Follow the [Center for Constitutional Rights](https://www.ccrjustice.org) on Facebook, [@theCCR](https://twitter.com/theCCR) on Twitter/X, and [@ccrjustice](https://www.ccrjustice.org) on Instagram, and [@ccrjustice.org](https://www.ccrjustice.org) on BlueSky.

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