

March 16, 2026 12:00AM EDT | News Release

Available In [English](#) [Français](#) [Español](#)

US/El Salvador: Deportees Forcibly Disappeared

Disclose Their Whereabouts; Take Them Before a Judge



Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click 'Accept.' You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Accept](#) [Decline](#) [Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)[DONATE NOW](#)

Confinamiento del Terrorismo, CECOT) mega prison.

“Whatever the criminal history of these Salvadoran men, they have a right to due process, to be taken before a judge, and their relatives are entitled to know where they are being held and why,” said [Juanita Goebertus](#), Americas director at Human Rights Watch. “Deportation cannot mean enforced disappearance.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed 20 relatives and lawyers of 11 Salvadorans who were deported from the United States between mid-March and mid-October 2025 and then immediately detained in El Salvador. Like most detainees in El Salvador, these men have not been allowed to communicate with their relatives or lawyers.

None of the relatives or lawyers have had any indication from the authorities that the men have been brought before a judge since their arrival. Some have not been informed of where their loved ones are held, or why. In five cases, relatives learned about deportees’ whereabouts only through [litigation at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\)](#).

The Trump administration [has alleged](#) that several of the Salvadorans are members of the MS-13 gang. The United States [disclosed](#) that one of them is César Humberto López Larios (“El Greñas”), a known MS-13 gang leader. Neither US nor Salvadoran authorities have provided evidence or information to substantiate the claim that any of the others are gang members.

Human Rights Watch analysis of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) [data](#) indicates that, of the at least 9,000 Salvadorans deported to El Salvador since January 2025, only 10.5 percent had a conviction in the United States for a violent or potentially violent crime. Relatives of ten of those detained said that they had served sentences in the United States: some for possession of drugs and two for violent crimes, including one for homicide and one for sexual assault.

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click ‘Accept.’ You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)[DONATE NOW](#)

has confirmed the list's authenticity.

Most relatives interviewed said they tried to locate their relatives through ICE's [Online Detainee Locator System](#) but found no results. They said US officials then told them that their relatives had been deported to El Salvador.

All of the relatives Human Rights Watch interviewed said they had asked Salvadoran authorities about their loved ones' whereabouts. Authorities refused to provide information, claiming they "lacked a legal mandate" or that they had no record of them.

Relatives of five deportees [submitted a request](#) to the IACHR. In October and December 2025, El Salvador informed the commission that four of them were being held at the Santa Ana prison, and one other at CECOT. The commission said that El Salvador should disclose the detainees' legal status, end their incommunicado detention, and take steps to protect them.

In two additional cases, relatives believe their loved ones are being held at CECOT. In one other case, family members believe their relative is detained at Santa Ana prison because they identified him in photos and videos posted by El Salvador President Nayib Bukele. In the remaining three cases documented by Human Rights Watch, relatives have no indication of their family members' whereabouts.

Salvadoran courts have also refused to provide information. Relatives and lawyers of five of the deportees said they filed habeas corpus petitions before the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, in May, August and October 2025. The court rejected one petition, claiming the facts presented were not sufficiently "precise." It has not responded to the others.

Under international law, an [enforced disappearance](#) occurs when authorities deprive a person of their liberty and then refuse to disclose that person's fate or whereabouts, placing them outside the

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click 'Accept.' You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)[DONATE NOW](#)

The mother of another deportee, who had lived in the United States for 11 years beginning at the age of 17, said that the last time she spoke with her son was on March 13, 2025, when he said he would shortly be deported to El Salvador. On March 15, when she tried to locate him using ICE's online locator system, no results appeared.

“That same day I started looking for lawyers in El Salvador, but several told me they could not take those cases because they feared government reprisals,” she said. “I called several institutions, the Attorney General's Office, the Ombudsperson's Office, a migrant shelter, and government ministries in El Salvador, but they gave me no information. At the Ombudsperson's Office, they told me that due to the state of emergency, they were not obligated to provide me with information. I feel abandoned.”

El Salvador's state of emergency has been in place since March 2022, The government has used it to suspend, among others, the rights to be informed promptly of the grounds for arrest, to remain silent, to legal representation, and the requirement to present any detainee before a judge within 72 hours of arrest. Human Rights Watch has documented [widespread](#) human rights violations during the state of emergency.

“The desperation of families to find disappeared loved ones evokes the darkest days of dictatorships in Latin America,” Goebertus said. “The United States should stop casting people into the black hole of El Salvador's prison system.”

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click 'Accept.' You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)

[DONATE NOW](#)

[DONATE NOW](#)

Region / Country [Americas, El Salvador, United States](#)

MORE READING



November 12, 2025 | News Release

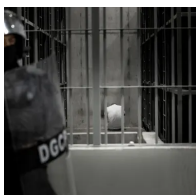
US/El Salvador: Torture of Venezuelan Deportees



April 11, 2025 | News Release

US/El Salvador: Venezuelan Deportees Forcibly Disappeared

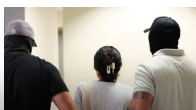
REPORTS



November 12, 2025 | Report

“You Have Arrived in Hell”

Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador’s Mega Prison



December 2, 2025 | Report

“We Need U”

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click ‘Accept.’ You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

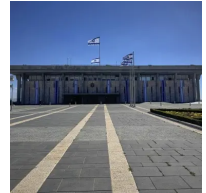
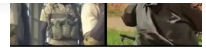
[Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)

[DONATE NOW](#)

2 March 31, 2026 | Statement

Israel: Discriminatory Death Penalty Bill Passes



3 November 16, 2017 | Report

“All of My Body Was Pain”



4 September 8, 2016 | Report

“Our Time to Sing and Play”



5 November 25, 2019 | Report

A Dirty Investment



Protecting Rights, Saving Lives

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people in close to 100 countries worldwide, spotlighting abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice

[DONATE NOW](#)

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click ‘Accept.’ You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Privacy policy](#)

[English](#)

[DONATE NOW](#)

Connect With Us



[Contact Us](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Permissions](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Child Safeguarding](#) | [Text Version](#)

© 2026 Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700

Human Rights Watch is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit registered in the US under EIN: 13-2875808

Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click 'Accept.' You will not be tracked unless you choose to allow us to do so. Read our [privacy policy](#).

[Privacy policy](#)