

November 12, 2025 12:00AM EST | News Release

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

US/El Salvador: Torture of Venezuelan Deportees

Stop Sending People to Face Danger; Ensure Accountability



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](#).

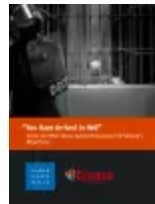
Accept Decline Privacy policy

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

- The Trump administration is complicit in torture, enforced disappearance, and other grave violations, and should stop sending people to El Salvador or any other country where they face a risk of torture.

(Washington, DC) – The Venezuelan nationals the United States government sent to [El Salvador](#) in March and April 2025 were tortured and subjected to other abuses, including sexual violence, Human Rights Watch and [Cristosal](#) said in a report released today.

The 81-page report, “[You Have Arrived in Hell’: Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador’s Mega Prison,](#)” provides a comprehensive account of the treatment of these people in El Salvador. In March and April 2025, the US government sent 252 Venezuelans, including dozens of asylum seekers, to the Center for Terrorism Confinement (Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, CECOT) mega prison in El Salvador, despite credible reports of serious human rights abuses in El Salvador’s prisons. The Venezuelans were subject to refoulement—being sent to where they would face torture or persecution—arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, inhumane detention conditions and, in some cases, sexual violence.



November 12, 2025

“You Have Arrived in Hell”

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



[Download the full report in English](#)

“The Trump administration paid El Salvador millions of dollars to arbitrarily detain Venezuelans who were then abused by Salvadoran security forces on a near-daily basis,” said [Juanita Goebertus](#), Americas director at Human Rights Watch. “The Trump administration is complicit in torture, enforced disappearance, and other grave violations, and should stop sending people to El Salvador or any other country where they face a risk of torture.”

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](#)

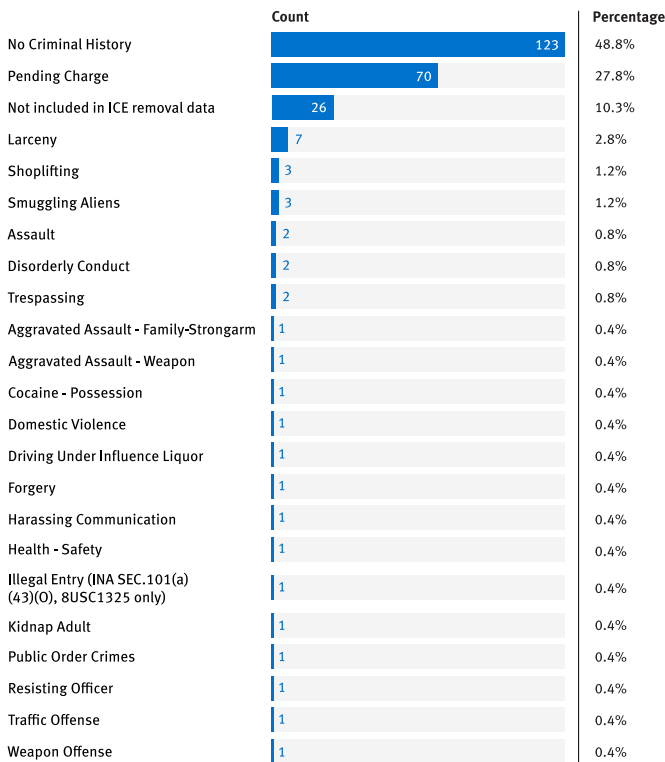
English

DONATE NOW

The US government reportedly provided at least US\$4.7 million to El Salvador including to cover costs of detaining the men. Some Venezuelans sent to El Salvador had been seeking asylum in the United States after fleeing persecution in Venezuela.

Criminal History of Venezuelans Deported to El Salvador

Deportations on March 15, March 30 and April 12, 2025



Source: Government data provided by ICE in response to a FOIA request, posted by the Deportation Data Project and analyzed by Human Rights Watch.

© 2025 Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch and Cristosal found that roughly half the Venezuelans sent to CECOT had no criminal history, and only 3 percent had been convicted in the United States of a violent or potentially violent offense. Additional background checks showed that many had not been convicted of crimes in Venezuela or other Latin American countries where they had lived.

Relatives and lawyers said that at least 62 of the Venezuelans were removed amid their asylum process in the United States and despite having passed their initial “credible fear” screening, which gave them the right to a full hearing on their asylum claims before an immigration judge. Three said they had arrived in the United States after being fully vetted and processed through the Safe Mobility Offices program established by the US government.

The US and Salvadoran governments repeatedly refused to disclose information about the Venezuelans’ fate or whereabouts in what

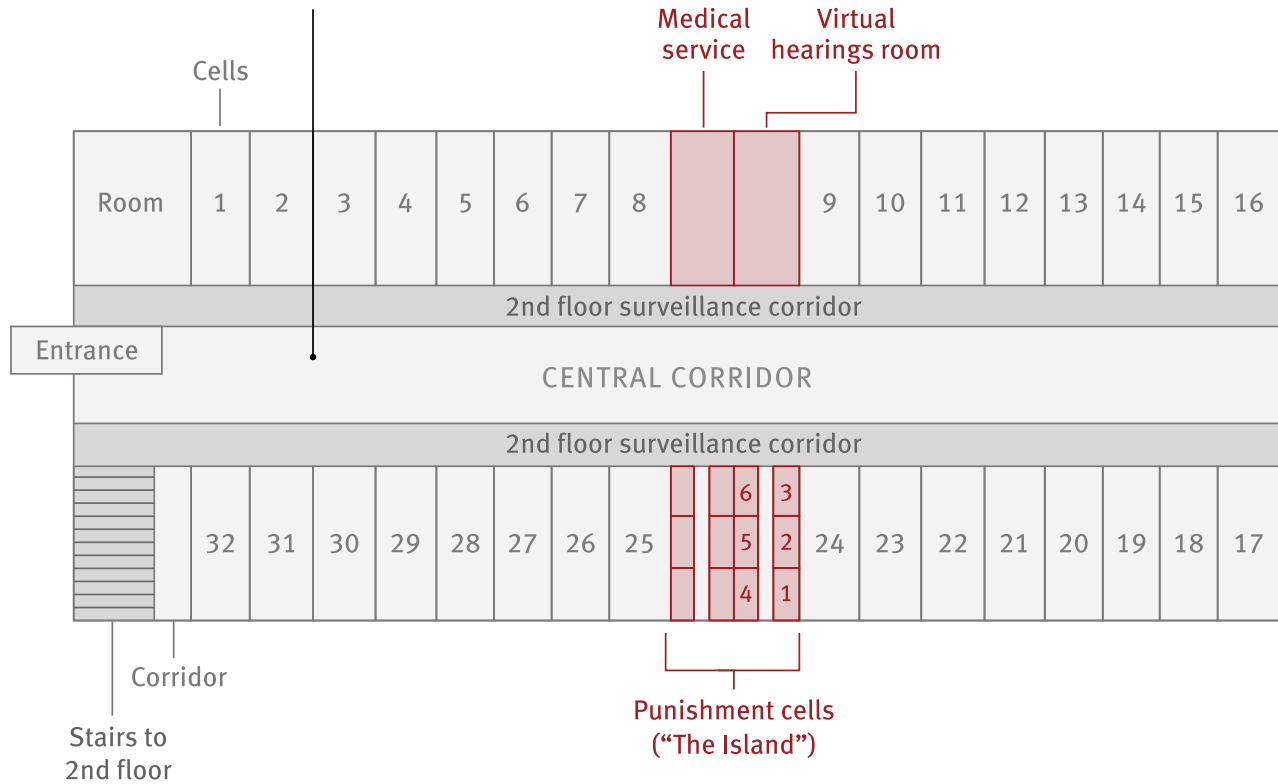
Human Rights Watch values your privacy, and we care about how your personal data is used and shared online. We use cookies and similar technologies for marketing and analytics purposes. To allow us to disclose your personal data to third parties for such purposes, click ‘Accept.’ You will not be tracked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

Privacy policy

English

DONATE NOW

Each module consists of two rows of cells separated by a central corridor



Source: Approximate reconstruction of Module 8 of the CECOT, based on interviews with migrants and corroborated by open-source research conducted by the University of California, Berkeley’s Investigations Lab.



© 2025 Human Rights Watch

“Guards came to search the cells every day,” one of them said. “They took us all out of our cells, made us kneel, handcuffed our hands behind our backs and put our arms on our heads, and beat us with batons, kicks and fists ... and then left us kneeling for 30 or 40 minutes.”

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](#)

discipline detainees, Human Rights Watch and Cristosal said. The brutality and repeated nature of the abuses also appear to indicate that guards and riot police acted on the belief that their superiors either supported or, at the very least, tolerated their abusive acts.

The Venezuelans were held in inhumane conditions, with scarce and inadequate food, poor hygiene and sanitation, limited access to health care and medicine, and no access to recreation or education.

In mid-July, the Salvadoran government [sent](#) the 252 people to Venezuela in exchange for 10 US citizens or permanent residents who had been [detained](#) in many [cases arbitrarily](#). [Venezuela](#) has experienced a humanitarian crisis and systematic human rights violations under the Nicolás Maduro administration, which have compelled nearly 8 million people to flee.

“The US government has not been linked to acts of systematic torture on this scale since Abu Ghraib and the network of clandestine prisons during the war on terror,” said Noah Bullock, executive director of Cristosal. “Disappearing people into the hands of a government that tortures them runs against the very principles that historically made the United States a nation of laws.”

Your tax deductible gift can help stop human rights violations and save lives around the world

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](#)

MORE READING



April 18, 2025 | Dispatches

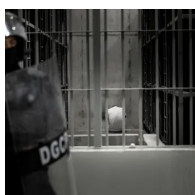
One Man's Ordeal Triggers Test of US Constitution



April 11, 2025 | News Release

US/El Salvador: Venezuelan Deportees Forcibly Disappeared

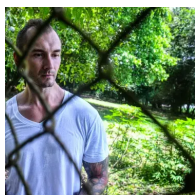
REPORTS



November 12, 2025 | Report

“You Have Arrived in Hell”

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



May 22, 2025 | Report

“The Strategy Is to Break Us”

The US Expulsion of Third-Country Nationals to Costa Rica

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](#)

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

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](#)

[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](#)