



Civil Society Calls for Urgent UN Action to Denounce U.S./El Salvador Detention Agreement

April 29, 2025

On April 29, 2025, together with members of civil society from around the world as well as international legal practitioners and scholars, the Center for Constitutional Rights and Movement Law Lab sent an urgent letter to leaders of key international bodies, demanding urgent action to denounce the unprecedented agreement between the United States and El Salvador to transfer individuals across borders into the notoriously brutal Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) in blatant violation of international human rights obligations. The signatories called on the United Nations Security Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the President of the Human Rights Council, and the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States to take immediate and meaningful action within their respective mandates by: publicly addressing the alarming international legal and human rights violations; investigating the terms of the agreement and conditions of confinement at CECOT through a Special Envoy or other investigatory mechanism with unimpeded access to CECOT; and taking any other measures to disrupt the further erosion of international law and this alarming threat to global peace and security.

For the letter and signatories, [see here](#).

April 29, 2025

To António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations;
To Jérôme Bonnafont, Honorable President of the United Nations Security Council;
To Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;

To Ambassador Jürg Lauber, President of the UN Human Rights Council;
To Luis Almagro Lemes, Secretary General of the Organization of American States;
Delivered via email

RE: Civil Society Calls for Urgent UN Action on US/El Salvador Detention Agreement

Your Excellencies,

The United States and the Republic of El Salvador have entered into an unprecedented agreement to transfer individuals across borders into the notoriously brutal Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) in blatant violation of international human rights obligations. The agreement and reported actions constitute serious violations of international law, including the prohibition against torture and non-refoulement, as well as basic principles of due process and humane treatment. These troubling actions recall the sordid history of the United States' extraordinary renditions to foreign torture sites and the Guantánamo Bay prison facility. There, in a similar attempt to evade judicial review and accountability, Muslim men and boys were held indefinitely without charge in harrowing conditions and subjected to torture and abuse.

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, together with international legal scholars and practitioners, write to request that you take immediate and meaningful action within your respective mandates by: publicly addressing the alarming international legal and human rights violations; investigating the terms of the agreement and conditions of confinement at CECOT through a Special Envoy or other investigatory mechanism with unimpeded access to CECOT; and taking any other measures to disrupt the further erosion of international law and this alarming threat to global peace and security.

BRIEF FACTUAL BACKGROUND (See Annex for additional information)

Since mid-March 2025, the U.S. government has been paying El Salvador to inhumanely imprison approximately 260 individuals - including 238 people from Venezuela - at CECOT. Through a purported \$6 million contract with the Salvadoran government, the U.S. is currently warehousing hundreds of immigrants in a maximum security mega-prison in El Salvador for a renewable one-year term, "pending the

United States' decision on their long-term disposition." The precise terms of this agreement are unknown, because the agreement itself has not been made public, nor has it been formally reported or registered in accordance with domestic law in either country. U.S. State Department documents suggest that upwards of \$15 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds have been set aside to pay El Salvador to confine additional people on the United States' behalf, indicating the potential expansion of this agreement. On April 14, 2025, the leaders of El Salvador and the U.S. met and discussed a potential expansion of their joint venture to include transfers of other migrants and even U.S. citizens ("homegrown" in the words of U.S. President Donald Trump) to the El Salvadoran prison.

These countries' actions are a direct affront to the post-WWII human rights framework, which the current United States administration further seeks to undermine. Here, the countries boast about the harsh conditions of confinement and the ill-treatment of people they hold incommunicado in legal limbo, and explicitly codify into bilateral contractual agreements grave violations of jus cogens international legal norms that give rise to erga omnes obligations. The agreement and subsequent statements represent a dangerous paradigm in which states can negotiate over the fate of people's bodies without any process, potentially subjecting them to crimes against humanity - including persecution, deportation, enforced disappearances, trafficking, deprivation of physical liberty and torture - while each government disclaims its ability to provide legal recourse to individuals to challenge their transfer and continued detention, as evidence in the Kilmar Abrego Garcia case. Such agreements should be held as patently illegal, and the U.S. and El Salvador's actions must be met with swift and material consequences, lest they embolden other countries to enter into similar arrangements or otherwise pursue such policies.

The U.S.-El Salvador agreement consolidates a political and legal orientation that is dramatically eroding rights-based migration and asylum policies, exemplified by such troubling global developments as the U.S.' abuse of the immigration systems to abduct and attempt to deport Palestinian rights activists, and the European Commission's proposed European System of Returns. Countries are openly rejecting long-established international legal obligations to refugees and asylum seekers and seeking to entrench policies of "externalization" that violate the principle of non-refoulement and subject migrants and other vulnerable people to inhumane conditions in prisons, secret military

bases or police stations without access to legal counsel or the asylum process, leading to endless suffering, violations and deaths.

REQUEST FOR INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

We request that the Secretary General act urgently to use all tools within the scope of his mandate to address this situation, including appointment of a Special Envoy and the facilitation of a country visit to El Salvador, to make visible both the details of the agreement between the United States and El Salvador, as well as the conditions of confinement at the CECOT facility to clarify the potential issues of trafficking, forced labor, torture and other human rights abuses.

We also urge the President of the UN Security Council to urgently call an emergency meeting (whether ARRIA Formula or special session) on the matter before the end of his term on April 30; support the investigation of a Special Envoy or fact-finding mission to El Salvador to report on the conditions of detention at CECOT and secure a public release of the agreement between the U.S. and El Salvador; and enforce or facilitate the immediate cessation of the transfer of persons from the U.S. to El Salvador and the return of those already unlawfully transferred, with a timeline for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance.

We call on the High Commissioner for Human Rights to speak out on these violations and to provide the necessary support to relevant UN human rights mechanisms, including Special Procedures Mandate Holders, to take every effective measure to denounce, investigate the terms of any existing agreement and the conditions of confinement at CECOT or other locations, and urge the immediate cessation of the transfer of persons from the U.S. to El Salvador and the return of those already transferred.

We finally call on Members of the Human Rights Council and the Organization of American States to dedicate a portion of their upcoming June session, host urgent debates, issue resolutions, investigate private and other state complicity in this scheme.

Respectfully,



Attachments



[CSO Statement Calling for UN Urgent Action on US El Salvador, April 2025.pdf](#)

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