



Statement

Cristosal Welcomes the Release of Victims, But Demands Accountability for Serious Human Rights Violations

Guatemala City, July 18, 2025 — Cristosal welcomes the release of a group of individuals unjustly detained by the governments of El Salvador, Venezuela, and the United States. However, this measure does not erase the gravity of the human rights violations committed by these governments.

While this release is undoubtedly a positive step, it should not be seen as an act of justice, but rather as part of a political agreement involving the illegal detention and exchange of individuals. We believe this act more closely resembles a hostage swap conducted outside any framework of international humanitarian law, revealing how these governments use the unjustified imprisonment of people as bargaining chips.

Both El Salvador and the United States attempted to justify the detention of a group of Venezuelans by claiming they were linked to criminal groups. However, Cristosal's investigations show that over over 152 registered venezuelans shows that 90% of them had no criminal records, were not facing legal proceedings, and there is no evidence connecting them to any crimes.

In El Salvador, the lack of strong democratic institutions, independent judges, and genuine legal protections enabled the imprisonment of these Venezuelan nationals for more than four months without any legal basis. During this time, their families and advocates had no contact with them, nor any information about their whereabouts, placing them in a situation of enforced disappearance—an act that directly violates international human rights standards.

We are also deeply concerned about the situation of Venezuelans who had asylum status or pending asylum applications in the United States prior to their detention. Sending them back to Venezuela places their lives at risk and violates the international principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning individuals to countries where they may face danger. It is essential that the international community monitors these cases and ensures guarantees for their safety and access to protection in a safe country.

Cristosal has supported more than 150 Venezuelan families in their struggle to defend the rights of their imprisoned relatives, and nearly 80 habeas corpus petitions were filed with El Salvador's Supreme Court. Not one has received a response.

In El Salvador, more than 86,000 people are currently detained without contact with their families, access to a fair trial, or adequate legal defense. Among them are human rights defenders and community leaders.

For all these reasons, we demand a full investigation and accountability. All the governments involved must answer for the arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and illegal deportations. Justice must be rooted in the rule of law—not in political convenience. This release is only the beginning, and the fight for truth, justice, and reparations is just getting started.