



Stronger Together: Making Change at Every Level

2023 Impact Report



Cristosal
Human Rights

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Letter from Noah Bullock

Dear Friends,

Cristosal's greatest impact is in the transformation of hundreds of people from victims of abuse and violence to human rights defenders and leaders of small movements defending their rights. Human rights advocacy cannot be limited to hotel conference rooms and social media posts; it must be done directly with people who have decided to defend their rights because their lives and freedoms depend on it.

Over the course of the year, our teams have visited communities from the Northern tip of Guatemala on the Mexican border to the southern and eastern corners of Honduras and El Salvador. Our lawyers conducted legal clinics in communities impacted by arbitrary detentions, corruption, and hate crimes and - together with victims- won justice in courts. Our human rights educators used dialogues to build networks to identify people in need of protection and promote collective advocacy capacities. Our researchers worked with community leaders to document abuses and build evidence of rights violations.

When institutions fail to protect human rights, the collective power of people fighting for justice becomes the safeguard of human dignity. Cristosal's growth is a strategic response to this reality. We are not just building our capacity; we are investing in the future by nurturing a new generation of human rights defenders and creating the capacity of people in organizations at many levels.

Cristosal's impact in Central America has garnered regional and international recognition, and we owe that to you who have stood by us. Your unwavering commitment to our mission, your support through periods of adversity and political uncertainty, and your celebration of our successes are the roots of our strength. We are deeply grateful for your faithfulness and your belief in our work. Thank you.



Noah J. Bullock
Noah Bullock
Executive Director





Letter from David Holiday

Dear friends,


After serving last year on the Cristosal board, I've transitioned this year to serving as the board president. It is a huge responsibility, given these trying times in Central America and the important role this organization plays in the region. I'd long been a supporter of the organization in both personal and professional capacities. Still, now that I've been able to peek a bit more "under the hood," I can proudly share the good news that Cristosal is truly unique, with internal strengths as an organization that I keep discovering. One of the strengths I value in particular is the organization-wide drive to learn and adapt to changing contexts – a flexibility enhanced by individual donors' support.

In all three countries, I've had the opportunity to spend time with the staff and leadership of Cristosal, and I can tell you that they are an amazing and dedicated crew of individuals working tirelessly to support human dignity in very challenging political environments. I'm especially impressed by the strong leadership of Flor Salazar and Karen Valladares, two incredibly capable women advocates driving the work in Guatemala and Honduras, respectively.

If you are reading this from afar, you probably already know that Cristosal is the largest human rights organization working in northern Central America. But more importantly, Cristosal's mission is rooted in listening to and accompanying victims of abuses – from those forcibly displaced by violence and climate-related disasters to victims of states of exception, victims of corruption schemes, and victims of historic human rights cases. I'm proud to be associated with an organization that, while guided by international principles, finds its *raison d'être* in standing with vulnerable individuals and communities.

Cristosal has rightfully earned the respect of Central Americans from all walks of life through its steadfast and professional composure in defending human rights, even in the face of backlash from powerful elites.

Central America's fight for human rights is a collective effort, and Cristosal is at the forefront. Anyone who wants to help build the movement should care about Cristosal. Thank you for being one of those people.



David Holiday
Board President



Officers 2024

- David Holiday, **President**
- The Rev. Geoff Curtiss, **Vice-President**
- Santana Alvarado, **Secretary**
- Roger Jones, **Treasurer**

Welcome New Members

- Brenda Pfahnl, **Board Member**
- Hannah Odell, **Board Member**
- Tamara Taraciuk, **Board Member**

In memory of:



Amb. Francisco Altschul
A friend, board member, and steadfast supporter of Cristosal and the cause of human rights, died on August 11, 2023. Francisco had a distinguished career in development and urban planning. He was appointed El Salvador's Ambassador to the U.S. in 2010 in advocating for Salvadoran families during turmoil and rebuilding communities for a better future.

Our Board of Directors/Staff Leadership

2023 Board of Directors

- The Rev. Mike Angell, **President**
- The Reverend Dr. Lisa R. Fortuna, **Co-Vice-President**
- The Rev. Norma Guerra, **Co-Vice-President & Ombudsperson**
- Roger Jones, **Treasurer**
- The Rev. Geoff Curtiss, **Secretary**
- Amb. Francisco Altschul, **Board Member**
- David Holiday, **Board Member**
- Beth McFadyen, **Board Member**
- Steve Adams, **Board Member**
- Santana Alvarado, **Board Member**
- Jose Miguel Cruz, **Board Member**
- The Rev. Bob Wilson, **Board Member**
- Clare Gibson Nangle, **Board Member**
- The Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, **Board Member**
- Tatiana Obando, **Board Member**

Staff Leadership

Country Coordinators

- Flor de María Salazar, **Guatemala**
- Karen Valladares, **Honduras**

Directors

- Abraham Abrego, **Strategic Litigation**
- Rina Montti, **Human Rights Research**
- Salvador Novellino, **Administration and Finance**
- Fátima Pacas, **Education**
- Mauricio Quijano, **Protection**
- Karla Ramos, **Communications**
- Jeanne Ridders, **Resource Development and Outreach**

Chief Legal Officers

- Ruth López, **Anti-corruption**
- David Morales, **Transitional Justice**
- Zaira Navas, **Impunity**

Our Team

Cristosal's 2023 staff consisted of **122 people who proudly promoted and defended human rights** in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Our diverse staff of human rights defenders includes **63% women, and 6 people who identify as LGBTQ+**, united in our mission to promote and defend human rights in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Our teams include trained lawyers, psychologists, social workers, communications specialists, anthropologists, accountants, sociologists, and administrators.

- Strategic Litigation Team: **39**
- Protection Team: **25**
- Education Team: **7**
- Research Team: **11**
- Communications Team: **8**
- Administration & Finance Team: **20**
- Executive Office and Country Coordinators: **4**
- Project Management Team: **6**
- Resource Development & Outreach: **2**

What Does it Mean to Defend Human Rights?

“Being a human rights defender is a major commitment. It is a responsibility to the people who have suffered violations and to justice and reparation. Cristosal is where I can reach my full potential as a professional and human being, where I have experienced the most humane and unwavering group of people I have ever worked with.”

Ruth Lopez, Chief Legal Officer on Anti-Corruption,

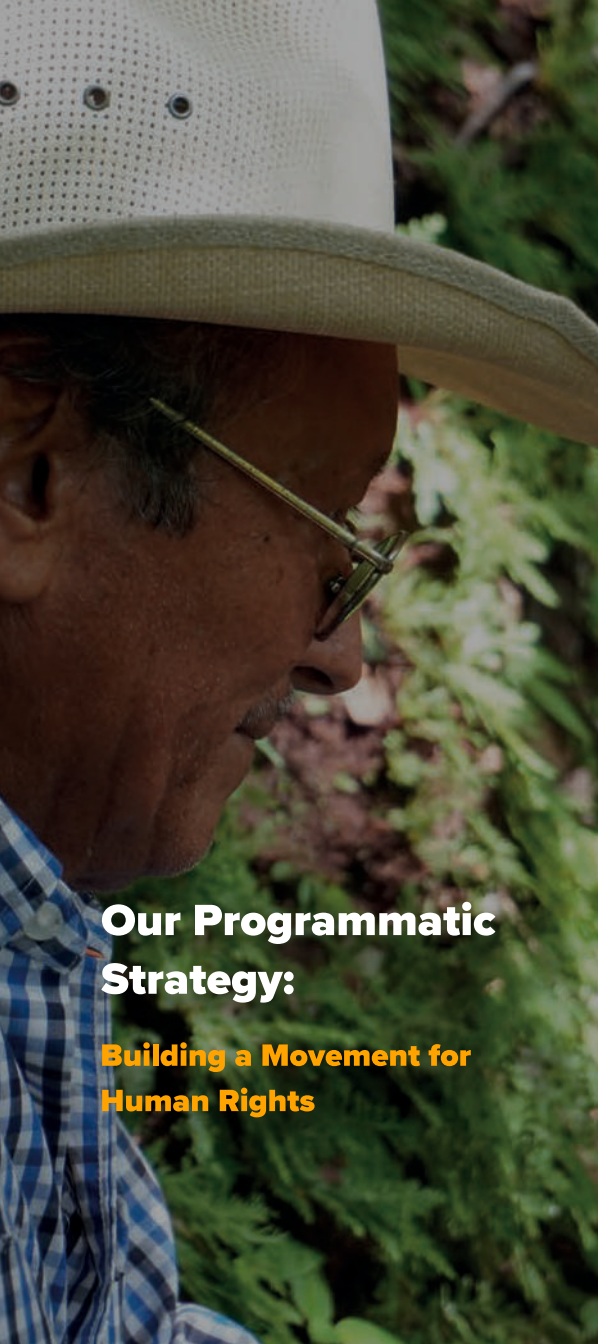
“Being a human rights defender is an attitude and a commitment to the dignity of people, particularly victims.”

Luis Salazar, Human Rights Mentor

“During my internship with Cristosal, I was part of creating, for the first time, a document for and about trans people defending rights in Central America. This moved me and made me stronger. The document uses comparative data on the lived experiences of trans people and is a protocol for their protection. Working with other civil society organizations and people from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala was wonderful.”

Amalia Leiva, intern of the Trans and Non-binary Gender Internship Program, El Salvador





Our Programmatic Strategy:

Building a Movement for Human Rights



We protect and support victims of human rights violations as they seek justice, rebuild their lives, and organize in solidarity with others.

We challenge and hold judicial systems accountable to defend rights and guarantee democracy through legal action, policy work, and public denouncement.

We speak truth to power bringing victims' voices, documenting cases, compiling evidence and reports, and speaking out for justice in communities, municipalities, and using national, regional, and international platforms.

We promote dialogue at every level to raise the voices of victims, propose solutions, facilitate inclusion, and encourage people to participate in transforming their societies in favor of human rights.



Changing the Narrative

In northern Central America and around the world, authoritarian leaders have attacked human rights through public discourse that undermines the international responsibility to protect these fundamental rights. Despite the dangers posed by harmful narratives, civil society organizations, advocates, and activists are dedicated to challenging these discourses with facts and evidence. Our work amplifies the voices of the most vulnerable, emphasizing their resilience and courage.

For almost 25 years, Cristosal has carefully listened to victims' experiences, accompanying them, respecting their autonomy, and amplifying their voices.

Our programs of research, which document and process information, along with our strategic communications team, allow us to make significant impacts. Thanks to the support of our donors, in El Salvador, we launched the One Year Report on the Emergency Regime. This report, which documented arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and acts of torture, has had a far-reaching impact:

Global Visibility: Cited in hundreds of news publications worldwide as leading human rights organization in Central America.

International Voice: Our spokespersons gave approximately 250 interviews with national and international media.

IACHR Recognition: We were invited to address the IACHR to report on the human rights situation in El Salvador.

UN Attention: The Rapporteur of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a statement highlighting the situation in the country that is concerning.

Similarly, in Honduras and Guatemala, we challenged the use of force and arbitrary detentions under states of exception. Our report, "Emergency Powers and State Violence in the Central American Region," further solidified our reputation as a leading human rights defender in the region.

As Noah Bullock reminds us, speaking out and demanding justice carries consequences. However, with the faithful support of our donors, organizations, activists, media, and other key actors, we form an unyielding movement that fearlessly documents the realities on the ground and demands accountability.



Our teams worked in



5 municipalities in Guatemala



8 in Honduras



19 in El Salvador

Impacting Human Rights



Our education team facilitated dialogue with more than **1,275 people** from communities around northern Central America.



Our protection teams assisted **961 victims** of forced displacement caused by state and criminal violence as well as the effects of climate change.



We protected **435 family groups** who were victims of human rights violations under the state of exception and provided an additional **275 legal consultations** for families and groups of victims.



Our legal teams have taken action in more than **70 including 30 cases** regarding rule of law, four transitional justice cases, **11 cases** of hate crimes or discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, and more than **20 cases** of corruption.



Our forensic analyst, lawyer, and expert witnesses in Guatemala helped reach a conviction and **15-year sentence** for the person responsible for the murder of trans rights activist Andrea Gonzalez. She was the president of OTRANS Reinas de la Noche.



In Honduras, our team provided strategic legal assistance under international standards and jurisprudence in the ongoing **case of the femicide of Keyla Martinez**.

Strategic Litigation

Strategic litigation plays a pivotal role in Cristosal as a tool to uphold human rights. Our legal teams work with victims, their families, communities, and other professionals to facilitate profound social and systemic change. We are stronger when we work together strategically.

In 2023, Cristosal employed strategic litigation to:

Empower and Restore: For victims of human rights abuses, both past and present; strategic litigation includes education about their rights and critical information about bureaucratic and disorienting justice systems. Our lawyers seek formal and informal avenues to advocate for justice, seek reparations, tell victims' stories, and access mental health support vital for rebuilding lives. This encompasses individuals impacted by past conflicts and those confronting present-day injustices.

Expose and Reform: Strategic litigation scrutinizes systemic abuses, including forced displacement, police brutality, and corruption. By confronting unjust laws and abuse of power, we hold those in power accountable and fight for reform within systems intended to protect human rights. Our reports on human rights abuses under El Salvador's state of exception have been key to exposing the reality of a security policy built on abuse of power.

Inform and Protect: Every strategic litigation case is a critical reference point for present and future generations. For survivors of El Salvador's civil war, it demonstrates a commitment to seeking justice, even when delayed. For those combating ongoing threats, it underscores using legal tools to defend their rights and safeguard the region's most vulnerable.

Cristosal's considered application of strategic litigation extends well beyond any single legal venue. It offers a pathway to empowerment, a mechanism to expose flaws within systems, and a tool to advance the protection of human rights in northern Central America.





The Ongoing Fight for Transitional Justice

El Salvador's history of repression, from the civil war of the 1980s to the current regime of exception, highlights a lack of transparency and accountability surrounding human rights abuses of the past. Victims and their families are denied information about perpetrators, the circumstances of the crimes, and even the fate of missing loved ones. This prevents closure and allows the cycle of violence to continue. Cristosal believes knowing the past is essential to prevent the repetition of such events.

Cristosal is a leading force in pursuing transitional justice in El Salvador. Our impact in 2023 includes:

El Mozote Massacre: Cristosal represents survivors and affected communities in the El Mozote massacre case. The organization maintains active engagement with these communities, fostering a collaborative approach in both legal strategy and advocacy efforts.

Detention of Perpetrators: Cristosal's efforts led courts to order the detention of high-ranking military officials, including General Guillermo Garcia and General Bustillo, responsible for the El Calabozo massacre.

New Generations Engaged: Cristosal works with the descendants of El Mozote survivors to promote historical memory and amplify their voices in the media and their communities.

Dialogue for Change: We work with the victims' families to facilitate and engage in dialogue with institutions in creating our legal strategy and to participate in the cases we have taken to the IACHR. Ongoing dialogue is critical to strengthening their struggles and the impact of their advocacy.

Exhumations and Reparations: Cristosal facilitated the exhumation and return of victims' remains from El Mozote and other massacres, a crucial step toward achieving justice and acknowledging the longstanding suffering of families.

There is an ongoing need to uncover the truth, hold perpetrators accountable, and provide a path toward healing for victims of past and present human rights violations in El Salvador. Cristosal is committed to walking with the victims and their descendants in this struggle.

Fighting for Water Means Fighting Corruption

Ramiro Gomez has lived in San Miguel Siguilá, a town in the highlands of Guatemala, his whole life. He is the municipality's representative of the Transparency and Probity Commission. His neighbors chose him to lead because of his spirit of resistance and his desire to fight against corruption.

"My main motivation is to fight to denounce the people doing illegal things affecting us all", says Ramiro.

On a Cristosal visit in 2023, Ramiro walked around an unfinished construction site and pointed out broken and dilapidated pipes. This project was supposed to have supplied drinking water to more than 700 families in the area, but it never did because of corruption.

“We will continue to be at the forefront of these struggles so that our rights are protected, and indigenous people and the poor be respected.”

Ramiro and other committee members have gathered evidence for the last two years to investigate corruption and other injustices in their community, including the water project that never worked. This is where Cristosal's Anti-corruption and Justice team can help. With the community's knowledge and Cristosal's tools, they brought their evidence to the government offices of prosecution and auditors. The prosecutor's offices have been sent to investigate the site, and the file has been re-opened, showing that at least 180 fictitious positions were assigned to people who never worked there.

At Cristosal, we firmly believe that citizen and community participation is the cornerstone of the fight against corruption. This is how people defend their human rights. Our professional teams work hand in hand with communities, empowering them to build evidence for their cases. This collective effort is a beacon of hope for communities that have been marginalized for far too long.



For more information from Mr. Ramiro Gomez, a Guatemalan community leader and justice advocate, check out this video.





Protection: From Victims to Defenders

Cristosal prioritizes the rights and dignity of victims through our victim-centered approach to human rights defense. We go beyond protecting them from the violence itself. We safeguard them from stigma, discrimination, retaliation, and re-victimization as they seek justice and remake their lives.

Obstacles: Victims in northern Central America faced significant obstacles to restoring their rights in 2023, including fear, prejudice, corruption, and limited government response.

Cristosal's response: Cristosal recognizes the need for humanitarian, mental health, and legal aid as victims navigate the complex path toward justice and recovery. Our interventions are informed by international best practices for victim support, empowering victims to become survivors and advocates for change.

In 2023, we have collaborated with civil society, public institutions, and the media, when possible, to extend our capacity. We continue to use human rights frameworks to move beyond crisis intervention to build robust protection systems. In turn, we encourage victims as they organize and take on leadership in emergent human rights movements and turn their fear into resistance.

“ We are 16 women from 16 different communities, and we are afraid that they will find out that we are human rights defenders, that we are the women who lend a voice to those who don't have one. We are afraid of this regime of exception. We are defenders of women's rights in our communities, but we had nowhere to go to talk about what is happening in our communities. We are afraid.

Our relationship with Cristosal has given us the strength to denounce, defend, and speak out. We have identified the violations and rights we did not know we were entitled to. We all have rights. We cannot remain silent even if we are afraid.”



Becoming Leaders

Rising from Ashes: Meet the Fenix Association

Thousands of people seeking asylum and protection in the US and other countries are returned to Central America. In the critical period, just after their return, many people are forced to flee again. Cristosal's protection team in Guatemala has worked with many people who cannot return to their places of origin. Victims of forced displacement have immediate needs for aid and protection. Their chances for long-term solutions are increased to the degree that this aid is one of personal empowerment and rebuilding of their lives and communities.

This happens when victims become defenders and leaders, taking on the challenge to respond to others in the same situation. The Fenix Association, a fledgling organization comprised of people deported to Guatemala with unmet protection needs, shows how inspiring that transformation can be.

The Fenix Association is starting its work with ten people who were once unhoused and unemployed after their deportation back to Guatemala. Luz, one of the founders, told us her story: "I went from living on the street to a place with dignity for me and my baby. In the street, they saw me as nobody, But no one knew how ended up there. I have suffered a lot of discrimination; everyone thought I was a criminal. I thank God and Cristosal for helping me because they did not label me, even though I was a street person. I was an outsider, and they decided to help me. **I have learned things, I feel better, and I am a different person.**"





Dialogue for Democracy

Dialogue lies at the heart of democracy and human rights. By speaking and listening as equals, we practice the very principles these ideals uphold. However, democracy and human rights face constant challenges – from rising authoritarianism to the deliberate silencing of those who dare to dissent.

Cristosal understands the power of dialogue. We create safe spaces for people whose rights have been violated to share their experiences, learn from one another, and find strength in community. In all three countries, our teams travel to communities and invite people to learn and share their experiences with human rights violations and their struggle to defend their rights. This work has become essential in El Salvador, where a climate of fear has left victims isolated and silenced. Our dialogues break that isolation, empowering people to realize they are not alone while also documenting the violations they've endured. These shared stories create a powerful evidence base for Cristosal's legal and protection teams as they seek justice for victims.

During community visits, we encounter individuals in need of information and seeking justice – like the group of indigenous people in western El Salvador who participated in dialogues. As we listened, we uncovered the patterns of rights violations they faced. They received legal advice, and our research teams documented their cases. As we engaged with more communities, the voices of El Salvador's indigenous people became an important part of the collective narrative.

What we learned from community members formed the basis of a comprehensive report on how the Salvadoran government's repressive measures impacted the rights to participation, expression, and association. We presented this report to the public and held a press conference, which included representatives from the 71 community organizations that had shared their stories.

When isolated, communities can lose hope. But when their voices unite, their impact amplifies—and dialogue is the catalyst for this transformation. Your support fuels these conversations, strengthening the fight for democracy and human rights.

Our Donors Make Us Stronger

Thank you!



We are grateful for the generous support of the many households, faith communities, and institutional partners who made our work possible in 2023. We welcome our new donors and extend our heartfelt appreciation to those who have stood with us through the years and to everyone who has become a supporter along the way. **Together with Cristosal staff, we form a vibrant and diverse community united in our commitment to advancing the human rights movement in Central America.**

The loyalty of Cristosal supporters makes us stronger. Your accompaniment means the world to us - thank you. The financial support from individual donors and faith communities is our foundation and has also allowed us to build relationships with institutional funders - extending our reach even further. Together your investment supports rising human rights defenders, victims of human rights violations, and community organizers to create change at every level. We appreciate all of our 2023 supporters!

New this year!



The 2023 list of donors will have a home on our website.

You can also read the 2023 tributes given by Cristosal donors.



View the full list of our 2023 supporters



Our Community of Solidarity and Support

Partner Spotlight: **St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Phoenixville, PA**

St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Phoenixville, PA, has been a steadfast partner for over a decade, promoting justice and growing the human rights movement through generous financial support and regular visits to El Salvador via Cristosal's Global School of Human Rights. Gary Russell and Cindy Hammaker from St. Peter's highlighted how in-person engagement, whether traveling to the region or hosting Noah and other Cristosal staff, has ignited a "permanent spark" that profoundly connects parishioners to the realities faced by local communities in Central America.

Thank you **St. Peter's**



for your enduring friendship, and may your example inspire others to ignite their own "permanent spark" fueled by compassion and witness, weaving a transformative tapestry of hope.



Read more about St. Peter's connection.



Solidarity in Action

Global School and Internship

In June of 2023, the first Global School Seminar in Honduras was launched! We engaged in meaningful conversations and exchanges with experts, community organizations, and each other around the root causes of migration. We also gained insights into rural life and enjoyed great coffee while visiting a coffee cooperative and meeting its leaders and members. We are grateful that the Global School participants represent diverse perspectives from North and Central America, each strengthening and propelling the human rights movement forward.

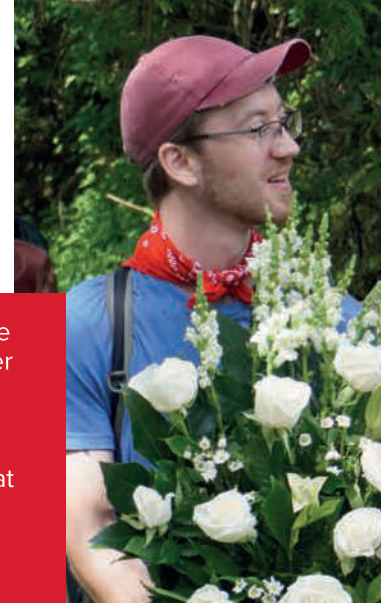
International Internship

We are grateful to have up-and-coming human rights professionals join us remotely and in person. Undergraduate and graduate students bring their time, skills, good questions, and thoughtful ideas to advance human rights in Central America and in the country they call home. Thank you, 2023 Interns!

-  **Edgardo A Letona**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
-  **Carlos González Sierra**
Harvard University
-  **Caleb Jacobson**
University Maryland Baltimore County, Fulbright Scholar
-  **Kay White**
Loyola University, Chicago, School of Law
-  **Kaitlyn Hripko**
Human Rights Center - University of Dayton
-  **Ximena Silva-Aquirre**
Human Rights Center - University of Dayton
-  **Eleno Hernan Castro**
The Johns Hopkins University
-  **Anne Ruelle**
Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice
University of Chicago



Check out a short video on Honduras, 2023



“ I have had the great pleasure of working in El Salvador for over a year with the assistance of a Fulbright Scholarship, where I was able to meet and work with important organizations and great people in the advancement of human rights. During this time, I completed my fellowship at Cristosal, where I honed my qualitative research skills and accompanied teams as we visited communities that have had historic struggles in environmental justice and human rights.”

Caleb Jacobson



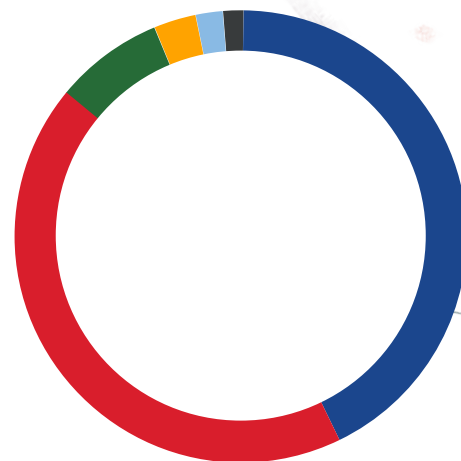
Stronger Together: Our Financials







Revenue and Allocation of Expenses

Fiscal years ending, Dec. 31, 2022 and Dec. 31, 2023

In thousands	2022	2023
Revenue		
Grants	\$4,401	\$2,589
Households	\$344	\$385
Other Income	\$162	\$243
Faith Communities	\$55	\$57
Total Revenue	\$4,962	\$3,274
Expenses		
Program	\$4,091	\$3,633
Management/General	\$280	\$324
Resource Development	\$222	\$256
Total Expenses	\$4,593	\$4,213
Change in Net Assets		
	\$369	-\$939
Net Assets at the beginning of the Year	\$1,439	\$1,808
Net Assets at the end of the year	\$1,808	\$869

Allocation of Program Expenses



-  Protection
-  Human Rights Education
-  Strategic Litigation
-  Strategy Communications
-  Strategy and Monitoring
-  Human Rights Research

Learn more about
Cristosal's financials, and
previous Impact Report.



Join the Movement



Stand with the Vulnerable

Central America faces a complex web of human rights challenges. Cristosal is on the front lines, assisting victims of discrimination, violence, forced displacement, and lack of access to justice. Your support empowers us to provide legal aid, safe havens, a voice for the voiceless, and a microphone for those who have something to say.



Defending Democracy

Democracy thrives on accountability and diversity of participation. Cristosal denounces injustices and attacks on democratic institutions. Your support allows us to monitor human rights abuses, advocate for transparency, and hold those in power accountable.



Amplifying New Voices

Change starts with brave individuals and communities. Cristosal stands with emerging human rights defenders, providing training, resources, and a platform to amplify their messages. Your contribution fuels this movement, ensuring a more just future for Central America.



Stronger Together

Central America's future hinges on collective action. By joining Cristosal in the movement for human rights, you stand with dedicated human rights defenders and impacted communities. Together, we are building a Central America where human rights are respected.



Cristosal


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2023 Impact Report


General Information

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