



## **Ruth López: One Year as a Political Prisoner**

### **for exposing corruption in El Salvador**

**Guatemala City, May 18, 2026.** — Ruth López, head of Cristosal’s Anti-Corruption Unit and a human rights defender, marks one year as a political prisoner of the Salvadoran regime as a result of her internationally recognized work exposing corruption. Ruth is one of the 245 cases of political persecution documented by Cristosal to date.

Ruth was detained on May 18, 2025, at approximately 11:00 p.m., after being lured out of her home under false pretenses by officers of the National Civil Police. She was then forcibly disappeared for more than 32 hours, during which neither her family, her lawyers, nor the organization knew her whereabouts. UN experts later described the incident in an official statement as an enforced disappearance. It was eventually confirmed that she was being held at the Traffic Division detention facility. On July 5, she was transferred without prior notice to the Izalco prison farm.

During the preliminary hearing in June 2025, the Attorney General’s Office changed the charges against her—first accusing her of embezzlement and then, fifteen days after her detention, illicit enrichment—highlighting the arbitrary nature of the case. In a disproportionate decision, the judge ordered pretrial detention; in December 2025, that detention was extended for an additional six months. On June 30, 2025, Amnesty International declared Ruth a prisoner of conscience. Amnesty Secretary General Agnès Callamard described her detention as part of “a systematic pattern of criminalization aimed at silencing those who expose abuses, demand justice, and call for transparency in public administration.”

Later, on September 22, 2025, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary measures ordering the Salvadoran State to protect Ruth’s life, physical integrity, and health; end her incommunicado detention; guarantee regular contact with her family and lawyers; and review the continuation of her pretrial detention.

As part of her work on behalf of victims, Ruth advocated for due process for people arbitrarily detained under the state of exception. She also did so when the United States transferred a group of Venezuelans to the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT), coordinating the legal team that filed nearly 75 habeas corpus petitions on behalf of their families. Today, those same communities, organizations, churches, and international institutions are demanding that due process also be guaranteed for her.

As a committed lawyer and later as head of Cristosal’s Anti-Corruption Unit, Ruth and her team pursued justice in approximately 50 landmark cases, including: the constitutional challenge against the attempted coup against the Legislative Assembly on February 9, 2020; the irregularities and alleged multimillion-dollar fraud related to the implementation of the Chivo Wallet and Bitcoin adoption; the use of public funds to spy on journalists and human rights

defenders with Pegasus spyware; and irregular direct contracting practices within the Ministry of Health during the pandemic.

Her work gained international recognition when the BBC named her one of the 100 most influential and inspiring women in the world in December 2024. The Salvadoran regime sought to silence Ruth through imprisonment, but her voice has only grown stronger. During her detention, she has received five additional international awards: the 2025 International Human Rights Award from the American Bar Association (Toronto, July 2025); the Right to Defend Rights Award (San Salvador, November 2025); the 2025 Magnitsky Award for Outstanding Human Rights Lawyer (London, November 2025); the OCCRP Anti-Corruption Hero Award (Washington, D.C., February 2026); and the Sir Henry Brooke Award from the Alliance for Lawyers at Risk (London, March 2026).

Although authorities prevented Ruth from speaking to the press during her hearing in June 2025, she managed to say while being transferred: "They will not silence me; I want a public trial! Grant me a public trial — people deserve to know. Those who have done nothing wrong have nothing to fear." Today, one year after her detention, Cristosal continues to amplify her words and demands a public trial for Ruth so she can prove her innocence. The organization also calls for full compliance with the precautionary measures ordered by the IACHR.

Ruth's family is one of thousands of Salvadoran families that have suffered the detention of an innocent relative. The imprisonment of critical voices not only harms those closest to them; it also seeks to send a message of silence to the entire population. But local and international voices have responded: the six international awards, statements by UN experts, Amnesty International's declaration recognizing Ruth as a prisoner of conscience, the IACHR precautionary measures, and hundreds of messages of solidarity from around the world are proof of that. That is why Cristosal now recalls Ruth's words at the time of her detention: "Have decency — one day this will come to an end."