

Judge orders El Salvador human rights lawyer jailed for 6 months pending trial





SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — A judge in El Salvador ordered a [lawyer from a prominent human rights organization](#) who has been an [outspoken critic](#) of some of President Nayib Bukele's policies to be jailed Wednesday for six months on illegal enrichment charges.

Earlier, Ruth Leonora López had demanded a public trial as police brought her before the judge. Wednesday's hearing was closed to the public as the case is under seal.

Observers say the case against López is retaliation for her work while authorities allege she aided one of her former employers being prosecuted for embezzlement. Authorities [arrested López at her home on May 18](#).

The anticorruption lawyer, who works for the nongovernmental organization Cristosal, has denied the accusations.

Leaving the court after her hearing, López shouted "I am a political prisoner, the accusations are for my legal work, for my reporting this administration's corruption. There are not institutions that guarantee Salvadorans rights. I am innocent."

As she was escorted by police to her hearing Wednesday, a shackled López with a Bible between her hands, shouted: "They're not going to silence me, I want a public trial," according to a brief video posted by Cristosal on X. "The people have to know."

Earlier, defense attorney Pedro Cruz, surrounded by reporters in the courthouse, said he disagreed with the decision to seal the case. He said prosecutors had done so "because they fear they made an unfounded accusation."

Later he said that her defense team had solid arguments and evidence and hoped for a fair trial.

She had not made her initial appearance before a judge until Monday, more than two weeks after her arrest.

At that hearing, prosecutors announced the illegal enrichment, different from the original embezzlement, and requested that she be held while they continue to investigate.

Cristosal has been an [critic](#) of some of Bukele's policies, including the state of emergency giving him special powers that has now been in place for more than three years.

The measure restricts the right to gather, to be informed of rights and to have access to a lawyer. It extends to 15 days the time that someone can be held without charges. Some 86,000 people have been arrested under the state of emergency.

López is the head of Cristosal's Anti-Corruption Unit, which has produced reports and filed legal actions related to government corruption.

Mary Lawlor, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, said via X that she was closely following López's hearing. "The state must guarantee her right to due process. She must be freed."

López's alleged wrongdoing dates to her time as an adviser to Eugenio Chicas, the former president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal during the administration of President Salvador Sánchez Cerén (2014-2019).

"Ruth has dedicated her life to the defense of human rights and the fight against corruption," Cristosal said in a statement last week. "Hers is not an isolated case: it is part of a pattern of criminalization against critical voices."