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El Salvador, the country with the largest prison population

During the state of emergency, according to the records of human rights organizations, there were 209 cases of enforced disappearances committed by state agents (police, military and prison guards).



The state of emergency led to the arrest of 74,861 alleged gang members and the seizure of 3,559 weapons, El Salvador's National Civil Police reported. With a population of 6.3 million people, these mass arrests made it the country with the highest prison population rate in the world.

Family members and organizations denounce that many of those arrested for their alleged relationship with the maras (criminal gangs) are innocent. The effectiveness of the measure, challenged for human rights violations, has been in force since March 27, 2022.



"The permanent suspension of constitutional guarantees under the figure of the state of emergency is the only public policy tool implemented by the government," denounced Cristosal, an organization in defense of the human rights of civil society in the Central American country.

While organizations in El Salvador declared last November in a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) that they have 327 complaints of forced disappearances during the state of emergency (detained by the police or military without informing their families), the country's presidential representative described it as false.



El Salvador, a center of confinement for terrorism.

The scrutiny of local NGOs and the international community has made it possible to see the folds of the gross figure and has found thousands of cases of arbitrary detentions, among which a very specific profile of those persecuted in the state of emergency stands out: activists, human rights defenders: accused of being gang members, falsely pigeonholed in the ranks of the Mara Salvatrucha 13 or Barrio 18, His detention is actually politically motivated.

The BBC in London also denounced the harsh testimonies of the mass imprisonment decreed by Bukele in El Salvador: "While they were kneeling, they gave them electric shocks and one even had his blood drawn."

The case is one of many included in [Cristosal's](#) report on the first year of the state of emergency, which has documented the deaths of 153 people in state custody, all of whom were detained during the state of emergency.

Of those, 29 died of violent death and another 46 died of "probable violent death" or suspicion of "criminality," the report specifies, and points out as a "common pattern" the presence of lacerations, bruises that show blows, wounds with sharp or blunt objects, or signs of strangulation or hanging on the corpses.



"I've heard the opposition say that people die in prisons. And that we are somehow killing the inmates or letting them die [...] But in prisons people die as they die outside because they get sick, because they grow old; there are some who have terminal illnesses, and so on," Bukele said.

During the state of emergency, according to the records of human rights organizations, there were 209 cases of enforced disappearances committed by state agents (police, military and prison guards).

"The state of emergency in El Salvador has generated patterns of forced disappearance that derive from the more than 5,000 arbitrary detentions reported to human rights organizations, because in many of these cases the authorities deny information about where these people are detained and what their situation is," says Verónica Reyna, director of the human rights area of the Passionist Social Service (SSPAS).

The official report



In addition to the detainees and the weapons seized, the authorities managed to seize from the alleged terrorist groups (according to the law of the country) 3,559 firearms of different calibers, 6,889 vehicles, 18,824 cell phones and more than 3,300,000 dollars in cash, according to official sources.

Most of the detainees are held in high-security prisons such as the [Terrorism Confinement Centre \(CECOT\)](#) and the [Zacatecoluca and Izalco prisons](#), located in the departments of La Paz and Sonsonate, respectively.

Official statistics indicate that to date 1,201 gang leaders have been arrested, of which 922 came from the Mara Salvatrucha and 279 from the Barrio 18 in its two factions: Sureños and Revolucionarios.

Most of the members of the gang leadership (Ranfla Nacional) are behind bars after the capture in Mexico of Carlos Antonio Pérez Nieto, alias Lola City Paraíso or Diablito, who is the 12th Chair of the MS, that is, one of the 15 main leaders on a national scale.

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Edited by Maria Piedad Ossaba

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