

EL SALVADOR: The international legal community calls for protection guarantees for lawyer Roxana Cardona against repeated police harassment

23 October 2026

The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned by the repeated acts of harassment and intimidation reported by lawyer Roxana Cardona. We urge the Salvadoran authorities to investigate these incidents, ensure her safety and physical and psychological well-being, and end any reprisals related to her professional work and her participation in public debate.

Roxana Cardona is a human rights lawyer and the founder and director of the organisation *Justicia Social y Contraloría Ciudadana*. She has played an active role in the public debate on the legal and social consequences of the government's security strategy, challenging restrictions on the guarantees of due process, the presumption of innocence and the right of detainees to an effective defence. Furthermore, she provides legal support to people deprived of their liberty under the state of emergency and publicly denounces human rights violations. Her work includes the filing of two constitutional challenges against the decrees regulating that regime and against the Mining Act, as well as the filing of habeas corpus applications on behalf of victims.

According to the information received, two officers from the National Civil Police (PNC) recently visited Roxana Cardona's home, asked to see her Unique Identity Document (DUI), recorded her details and photographed the property, without clearly explaining the reason for their actions. After publicly denouncing this, she received a message from a police officer stating that senior officers were upset with her. The lawyer fears that these incidents are linked to her critical posts about the authorities. She has also reported that her social media accounts have been blocked and that there have been attempts to gain unauthorised access to them.

These incidents come amid a climate where surveillance and police presence have usually preceded the arrest of lawyers and human rights defenders in El Salvador. This was the case with Ruth López¹, who was arrested at her home on 18 May 2025, and Enrique Anaya², who was arrested on 7 June 2025.

The harassment of Roxana Cardona began in 2024, when she reported the presence of police officers in the vicinity of her home. Subsequently, she was the subject of a complaint alleging domestic violence, which she considers unfounded; in the context of this, an

¹ International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD), [Ruth López: El Salvador: human rights defence lawyer detained for her anti-corruption work](#), 22 May 2025; UIA - Institute for the Rule of Law (UIA-IROL), [UIA-IROL Calls for the Immediate Release of Lawyers Ruth López and Enrique Anaya](#), [...], 24 July 2026.

² International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD), [Enrique Anaya – El Salvador: Unlawful detention and criminalisation of lawyer Enrique Anaya](#), 8 June 2026; UIA - Institute for the Rule of Law (UIA-IROL), [UIA-IROL expresses its concerns over the arrest of Salvadoran lawyer Enrique Anaya Barraza](#) [...], 23 June 2025

attempt was reportedly made by the authorities to take her daughter away from her. Faced with persistent acts of harassment and fears for her safety, she was forced to leave El Salvador temporarily in 2025. Upon her return, the harassment reportedly resumed.

This case is set against a backdrop of serious concern regarding human rights violations and restrictions on judicial safeguards in El Salvador since the imposition of the state of emergency in March 2022. During this period, arbitrary arrests, obstacles to the effective exercise of the right to a defence, and acts of surveillance, harassment and intimidation against lawyers and human rights defenders have been documented, particularly against those who publicly question the actions of the authorities³. These circumstances heighten concerns for Roxana Cardona's safety and the risk of reprisals linked to her professional work and her participation in public debate.

The undersigned organisations warn of the risk of further reprisals against Ms Cardona, including the possibility of arbitrary detention. This concern is compounded by her fragile state of health and by the difficulties that could arise in ensuring an effective legal defence should she be deprived of her liberty, in a context marked by reports of incommunicado detention and restrictions on detainees' contact with their lawyers and family members.

We recall that Principles 16 and 23 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers stipulate that lawyers must be able to practise their profession free from intimidation, harassment or undue interference, and to express themselves freely on matters of justice and human rights without suffering reprisals as a result.

In light of this situation, the undersigned organisations urge the Salvadoran authorities to:

1. **Investigate the alleged incidents** in an independent, thorough and impartial manner, clarifying the reasons behind the recent police visit to Roxana Cardona's home and previous incidents, as well as the purpose of collecting her personal data and photographs of her home. Furthermore, we urge the Office of the Ombudsman for the Defence of Human Rights to examine the facts and follow up on the case, within the scope of its remit.
2. **Ensure the safety and physical and psychological integrity of Roxana Cardona and her family**, by taking the necessary measures to prevent further acts of intimidation, illegal surveillance or reprisals.
3. **Ensure the free and independent exercise of her profession and her work in defence of human rights**, refraining from any action that might constitute reprisal

³ International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD), [El Salvador: OIAD takes part in a fact-finding mission on the situation of the legal profession in the country](#), 29 July 2026; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), [State of emergency and human rights in El Salvador](#), 28 June 2024; Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2026: El Salvador](#); Amnesty International, [El Salvador: 'Security' without rights: The impact of mass arbitrary detentions and the denial of due process on the possible commission of crimes against humanity in El Salvador](#), 15 July 2026.

for her publications, her public complaints or her legal support for persons deprived of their liberty. Any potential criminal proceedings must fully respect the guarantees of due process and the right to a defence.

We call on the international community to urge the Salvadoran authorities to guarantee the protection of Roxana Cardona, to release the lawyers who have been arbitrarily detained, and to put an end to all forms of intimidation and reprisal against those who practise law independently and defend human rights in El Salvador.

Signatory organisations:

- International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)
- Unión Progresista de Fiscales (UPF)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
- Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE).
- Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
- Asociación de Mujeres Juezas de España (AMJE)
- Ilustre Colegio de la Abogacía de Bizkaia
- Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
- The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL)
- Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD) Turkey
- European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)