

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

The authorities continued to discriminate against Christians in law and practice. Their right to build or repair churches remained restricted by a 2016 law requiring approval from security agencies and other state bodies. According to the EIPR, such bodies had granted full legal registration to fewer than 200 churches out of a total of 5,540 applications since 2016, while only 1,412 churches received preliminary, conditional approvals.

Members of Muslim minorities, atheists, Christians and others were prosecuted and imprisoned for blasphemy or for "terrorism"-related charges. In June, two Shi'a men were sentenced to one year's imprisonment for practising their faith. In August, security forces arrested Quranist writer and blogger Reda Abdel-Rahman and forcibly disappeared him for 22 days, apparently in retaliation for the religious and political writings of his exiled relative. He remained in pre-trial detention.

## RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

The authorities continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain refugees and migrants. Between January and September, security forces arrested and detained at least 14 Syrians, 29 Sudanese people and one Guinean person in police stations in southern Egypt for irregularly entering or staying in Egypt.

In November, security forces violently dispersed two peaceful protests by Sudanese refugees and migrants over the murder of a Sudanese child. Security forces arrested dozens of protesters and subjected them to beatings, racial slurs and other ill-treatment.

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1. [Egypt: Rare protests met with unlawful force and mass arrests](#) (Press release, 2 October)
  2. [Egypt: Death sentences against 37 convicted of terrorism after unfair trial](#) (Press release, 2 March)
  3. [Egypt: Survivors of sexual violence and online abuse among prosecuted women TikTok influencers](#) (Press release, 13 August)

# EL SALVADOR

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## Republic of El Salvador

Head of state and government: **Nayib Armando Bukele Ortiz**

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**Thousands of people were detained in quarantine centres for alleged violations of a mandatory quarantine imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were reports of precarious and insanitary conditions in these centres, as well as arbitrary detentions and excessive use of force. The President made public statements stigmatizing journalists and human rights organizations. The rights of the victims of crimes under international law and of human rights violations during the internal armed conflict remained under threat. Restrictions and attacks on freedom of the press and limited access to official information were reported throughout the year. The total ban on abortion remained in place.**

## BACKGROUND

In February, the Council of Ministers held an extraordinary session of the Legislative Assembly accompanied by a security forces deployment with reports of snipers stationed in the vicinity and restrictions on press freedom.<sup>1</sup>

In April, the President publicly rejected rulings of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court.<sup>2</sup> In August, an investigation by the media revealed that President Bukele's administration might have negotiated with a local gang to reduce crime rates.

No detailed information was made public about the content of the Territorial Control Plan, which sets out the country's national security policy. Local organizations expressed concern about the continuing repressive and militarized approach to public security.

## RIGHT TO HEALTH

According to official figures, more than 2,000 people were detained in quarantine centres

for alleged violations of the mandatory national quarantine imposed in late March, some for up to 40 days. Conditions in these centres fell short of minimum standards for sanitary conditions and physical distancing, putting those held at unnecessary risk of COVID-19 infection.<sup>3</sup>

Between 13 March and 27 May, the Supreme Court received 330 *habeas corpus* petitions and 61 *amparos* (requests for judicial protection) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many of these cases, people alleged that conditions in the quarantine centres were inadequate, lacked cleaning materials and drinkable water, and that people were unable to access medication for chronic illnesses. El Salvador's Ombudsperson Office (PDDH) identified at least 44 cases of people deprived of their liberty in the context of the quarantine between March and May who had underlying medical conditions.

In April, a human rights defender who has diabetes was detained when she went out to buy food and medicine for her three-year-old child. She spent more than a month in a quarantine centre with poor conditions, which could have increased her exposure to COVID-19.

That same month, while cases of health workers infected with COVID-19 and a lack of adequate equipment were being reported, the President vetoed Decree 620. The Decree, which aimed to guarantee health insurance and biosafety equipment to health workers, was later declared constitutional by the Constitutional Chamber.

As of late July, at least 104 health workers had died from COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

### **ARBITRARY DETENTION**

Hundreds of people detained for alleged quarantine violations were taken to government quarantine centres or police stations, as if they had committed a crime. In that context, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled that the authorities had no legal basis for holding people in these centres as a form of punishment. Some detainees stated in their appeals before the

Chamber that they were detained solely for leaving their houses to buy food or medicine.

### **EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE**

The PDDH received hundreds of complaints of human rights violations by the security forces, including reports of excessive use of force and ill-treatment, in the context of enforcing the quarantine.

In March, a 17-year-old boy reported that the police detained him as he was leaving work on a sugar plantation. He and his family stated that the police beat him and took him to a detention centre, where he was held with adults for almost three days before being released without charge.

In another case, a young man reported that when he went out to buy food and fuel after being paid, a police officer detained him, beat him and shot him twice in the legs.<sup>5</sup>

### **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

Throughout the year, the President issued public statements vilifying civil society groups, including journalists and human rights organizations, and stigmatizing those seeking greater government transparency and accountability.

In June, human rights organizations reported that, following the introduction of the measures to tackle COVID-19, attacks on local organizations and women human rights defenders increased significantly, particularly through digital media. Organizations also reported an increase in government statements that put human rights defenders at risk.<sup>6</sup>

The Legislative Assembly failed to approve the Law for the Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Human Rights Defenders and for the Guarantee of the Right to Defend Human Rights; the bill had been presented before the Assembly in 2018.

### **RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION**

In February, the Legislative Assembly approved a decree containing the Special Law on Transitional Justice, Reparation and

Reconciliation. This contains provisions that hinder the investigation and effective punishment of those responsible for crimes under international law. The President vetoed the decree later that month.<sup>7</sup> However, the government failed to make public information related to military operations during the internal armed conflict (1980-1992) and denied judicial access to military operation files related to the 1981 El Mozote massacre.

In September, a Spanish court convicted a former Salvadoran colonel and former defence minister for the murder of five Jesuit priests in 1989, during the armed conflict.<sup>8</sup>

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The total ban on abortion remained in place and until June at least 18 women remained in jail on charges related to obstetric emergencies.

1. El Salvador: Deployment of security forces in the Legislative Assembly raises alarm over the future of human rights (Press release, 9 February)
2. El Salvador: Open letter to President Nayib Bukele regarding measures taken for COVID-19 (Open letter, 30 April)
3. When protection becomes repression: Mandatory quarantines under COVID-19 in the Americas (AMR 01/2991/2020)
4. Global: Amnesty analysis reveals over 7,000 health workers have died from COVID-19 (Press release, 3 September)
5. El Salvador: Repression and broken promises, the new face of the country after one year of President Bukele's government (Press release, 1 June)
6. Las medidas del gobierno ante la covid-19 han propiciado un entorno violento y hostil para las defensoras de derechos humanos (AMR 29/2560/2020, Spanish only)
7. El Salvador: Las autoridades deben garantizar justicia, verdad y reparación para las víctimas del conflicto armado (AMR 29/1930/2019, Spanish only)
8. El Salvador: Conviction of one of those responsible for the murder of Jesuit priests must break the chain of impunity (Press release, 11 September)

# EQUATORIAL GUINEA

## Republic of Equatorial Guinea

Head of state: **Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo**

Head of government: **Francisco Pascual Obama Asue**

**The crackdown on human rights defenders continued and administrative obstacles prevented NGOs from obtaining legal registration. The right to a fair trial was violated. Police used excessive force and the right to freedom of expression, including access to information, was violated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Draft legislation threatened to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and sex workers.**

## BACKGROUND

The government planned to organize international events to attract foreign investment and signed new mining contracts with foreign companies. Corruption and embezzlement continued to hit the headlines. In February, the Appeal Court of Paris upheld a three-year suspended sentence and a €30 million fine against Vice-President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mangué, the President's son, for embezzlement.

In March, the government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by declaring a state of emergency on health grounds which included rights-restricting provisions. Some restrictions were lifted on 15 June.

The government resigned in August, acknowledging its responsibility for the economic crisis which was aggravated by the pandemic. A new government took over.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The authorities violated the right to freedom of expression, including access to information, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, the government stopped publishing the numbers of COVID-19 cases,