

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST DEFENDING ABORTION RIGHTS ACQUITTED

On 17 January 2024, an Andorran court acquitted human rights defender **Vanessa Mendoza Cortés**. She was wrongfully prosecuted on a criminal charge of defamation for speaking out about women human rights and Andorra's total ban on abortion at a UN expert body in 2019.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

Following a protracted judicial process of more than three years, the court hearing against **Vanessa Mendoza Cortés**, the President of Stop Violence (*Associació Stop Violències, in Catalan*), took place on 4 December 2023. She was accused of a 'crime against the prestige of the institutions' (under article 325 of the penal code) for exercising her right to freedom of expression in the context of her actions defending women and girls' human rights in Andorra and criticising the full ban on abortion in the country. The prosecutor had requested a fine of 6,000 euros (circa USD 6,500), and an additional 6,000 euros in civil damages, as well as a six month ban from holding public office.

The charges against Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, which initially included defamation offences and carried heavy penalties, including jail, stemmed from her engagement with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) in 2019, as part of the regular and vital exchange of information conducted between this UN body and human rights defenders.

On 17 January 2024, the court acquitted Vanessa Mendoza Cortés of the defamation charge against her, upholding her right to freedom of expression and recognizing the legitimacy of her cooperation with the United Nations as a human rights defender.

Vanessa Mendoza Cortés spoke to Amnesty International on 8 February and delivered the following message of thanks to all those who took action on her behalf: *"I want to personally thank the more than 70,000 people who have taken action to support me put pressure on the Andorran authorities. You are part of this collective and peaceful victory. Despite the tough years, I feel lucky to walk side by side with you. Our strength is in our solidarity and in standing up for each other's rights."*

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Vanessa Mendoza Cortés (She/Her)

THIS IS THE 2nd AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 15/23

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur12/6465/2023/en/>