

10 December 2020

Andorra – Criminalisation against Stop Violències

On 2 December, the Criminal Court of Andorra (“Batllia”) rejected the request made by the lawyer of women human rights defender **Vanessa Mendoza Cortés** to close the investigation against her client, which was opened on October 2019, for "defamation with publicity", "defamation against the co-princes" and "crimes against the institutions”.

[Vanessa Mendoza Cortés](#) is a psychologist and women’s rights defender. She is head of Stop Violències, a human rights organisation that works on gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights and advocates for the decriminalisation of abortion in Andorra.

On 2 December 2020, the Criminal court of Andorra rejected the request made by Vanessa Mendoza Cortés’s lawyer to close the investigation against the woman human rights defender which was opened in 2019. On 28 October 2019, the government of Andorra launched a criminal investigation against Vanessa Mendoza Cortés following both a public statement she made on a televised documentary concerning sexual and reproductive rights in the country, and the presentation of a shadow report submitted by Stop Violències to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 19 October 2019. The investigation was opened under the charges of "defamation with publicity" against the Government under Article 172, "defamation against the co-princes" under Article 320, and "crimes against the institutions" under Article 325 of the Criminal Code. As a result, the woman human rights defender is facing at least four years in prison.

Vanessa Mendoza Cortés has also reported an ongoing smear campaign which has been launched against her by several Andorran newspapers and social media platforms. The woman human rights defender believes that she is under both physical and digital surveillance. This comes after Andorra had been warned in the UN 2020’s report on “intimidation and reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations in the field of human rights” to stop the disproportionate measures taken against Stop Violències and Vanessa Mendoza Cortés.

In addition, Vanessa Mendoza Cortés has a parallel and ongoing police investigation against her, which she learned about it on 11 November 2019, when the police called her in for questioning regarding her conduct during a public assembly held on 28 de September 2019. This police investigation is ongoing even though there has been no further updates concerning its status or progress.

Front Line Defenders believes that judicial persecution and the smear campaign against Vanessa Mendoza Cortés are solely linked to her legitimate and peaceful work as a human rights defender in defending women’s rights and advocating for the decriminalisation of abortion in Andorra.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Andorra to:

1. Immediately drop the charges and cease the judicial harassment of Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, as Front Line Defenders believe that she is being targeted solely as a result of her legitimate and peaceful work as a woman human rights defender;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the women human rights defenders in Andorra;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Andorra are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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