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ANDORRA ACTIVIST DEFENDING ABORTION RIGHTS ACQUITTED

On January 17, 2024, a court in Andorra cleared Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, a defender of human rights, of all charges. Vanessa had been unjustly accused of defamation simply for advocating women's rights and challenging Andorra's complete prohibition on abortion at a UN meeting 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 December 4, 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 criticizing the full ban on abortion in the country. The prosecutor had requested a fine of 6,000 euros (About CAD 8,700), 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, initially included defamation offences and carried heavy penalties, including jail. They 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 January 17, 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 February 8, 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."*