

U.S. citizen, wanted by Uncle Sam, freed from jail **By Gillian Gillers**  
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To the dismay of the U.S. State Department, Chere Lyn Tomayko was released from prison Friday after the Supreme Court said she could not be extradited to the United States on kidnapping charges because she had been granted refugee status.

Tomayko, a U.S. citizen, fled the United States in 1997 with her daughter, Alexandria, then 8, after a Texas court ruled Tomayko and Alexandria's father, Roger Cyprian, had joint custody over the child. Tomayko claimed Cyprian abused her and Alexandria.

Tomayko was arrested last September and spent 10 months in El Buen Pastor prison in San José before Public Security Minister Janina del Vecchio granted her refuge status last week.

Alexandria, now 19, Tomayko's Tico husband Javier Montero, and their two blond daughters, Ana Sofía, 8, and Ariana Nicole, 5, greeted her at the door of the prison with hugs, kisses and shouts of "Mommy!"

"My heart can only think about going home and sleeping with my children and my husband... Thanks so much to this republic for the support," said Tomayko, who wore a red shirt with the words, "Tica at heart."

Tomayko's story, which has mesmerized the press and the public here, has ruffled relations between Costa Rica and the United States. The U.S. Embassy sharply criticized the decision to grant Tomayko refugee status.

"We are very worried about the implications of this decision for Costa Rica's commitment to international treaties," the embassy said in a statement. "This could set a very harmful precedent."

President Oscar Arias celebrated Tomayko's release and dismissed U.S. authorities' ire.

"This is such a little thing that it's not going to distance" the two countries, Arias said in a statement. "This is a sovereign country, and we have the right and obligation to make decisions we think are fitting. In this case, we tried to protect human rights."