LATEST:
Mexico
The risk of invisibility and aggravation of multiple pending human rights issues in the context of the pandemic

FOCUS:
Gender Violence
Fighting Another Pandemic

ARTICLE:
Gender Violence during COVID-19 Lockdown

SIPAZ ACTIVITIES:
From mid-February to Mid-May 2020

IN THIS ISSUE:
SIPAZ is an international observation program created in 1995, after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to monitor the conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

International Service for Peace (Servicio Internacional para la Paz or SIPAZ) is a response from the international community to the request of Mexican human rights organizations and religious leaders in Mexico, asking for a permanent international presence in Chiapas. In February 1995, a delegation of various international peace organizations came to Chiapas. They decided to create an organization encompassing a coalition of faith based and nonviolence based organizations in the United States, Europe and Latin America that shared a common concern regarding the situation in Chiapas.

Today SIPAZ supports the search for nonviolent solutions and aids in the construction of a culture of peace and dialogue between the actors involved in the conflict in Chiapas as well as, increasingly, in other areas in Mexico (Oaxaca and Guerrero). SIPAZ also serves as a bridge for communication and exchange between other organizations and networks that work to construct a just and lasting peace at a local, national, regional and international level.

The SIPAZ International Team in Chiapas:

- Maintains an international presence and accompanies processes that are working towards the construction of a culture of peace in Mexico.
- Provides trustworthy communication that integrates the voices of local actors and mobilizes the local, national and international community in the search for alternative solutions to the causes of violence in Mexico.
- Joins together with organizations, movements and networks in order to share and strengthen the processes that are leading towards building a just peace.
- Maintains contact and dialogue with the many different actors that are present in the conflict.

SIPAZ recognizes and respects the principles of non-intervention and sovereignty of the Mexican State and its citizens upon whom must depend the negotiation and initiative that are necessary in order to achieve an eventual solution to the conflict.

The coalition members of SIPAZ represent many years of experience in international non-governmental peacemaking and conflict resolution. Building on that experience, SIPAZ seeks to play a facilitative role enhancing the context in which the search for alternative solutions to the causes of violence in Mexico.

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In April, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) presented his fifth quarterly report. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, he reported that this year there will be 22 million beneficiaries of the different social programs and that in nine months two million new jobs will be created, among others by the Sembrando Vida (Sowing Life) program. He stressed that his government had already “made the decision to overcome the dilapidated state in which the public health system was left to us.” “This crisis is temporary, transitory, normality will soon return. We will defeat the coronavirus,” he declared. It should be remembered that the Mexican president was criticized internationally for his attitude towards the pandemic. While other Latin American governments began to implement isolation measures, Lopez Obrador called for “our lives as usual” to continue for several weeks, before implementing a confinement that has been more voluntary than mandatory.

Indigenous peoples, prisoners, migrants: highly vulnerable groups to Covid-19

In April, civil organizations made “an urgent call for sufficient staff and equipment to be provided to guarantee indigenous people quality care.” In addition, they demanded that a national plan to rescue community economy be put in place for those who cannot carry out their work due to confinement and that information regarding the pandemic be translated into indigenous languages. This last point was also one of the demands of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), this month.

In May, civil organizations reiterated their “deep concern about the conditions that the pandemic may generate in indigenous” communities. “In addition to the lack of infrastructure, medical personnel, and continuous supply of medicines, institutional discrimination and the lack of a culturally appropriate and affordable preventive approach to the communities are added; as well as, in this context, the lack of adequate monitoring and follow-up for returning migrants,” they denounced. Likewise, they were concerned about “the economic vulnerability of the majority (...). The lack of access to decent sources of employment in the communities makes them dependent on trade and informal employment, as well as on remittances from migrants,” sources of income that “are at risk of sharply declining.”

In March, civil organizations called for measures to be taken in prisons to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They recalled that “due to the close proximity conditions in prisons, incarceration generates the ideal conditions for contagion and these are aggravated when there is overcrowding, lack of water and hygiene conditions.” The CNDH also called for preventive measures to protect the life and health of persons deprived of liberty; of visits; of prison staff, and of service providers.

In this context, in April, an Amnesty Law was approved, through which people who have committed minor crimes could be released. It will not benefit “recidivists, people accused of homicide, kidnapping, serious injuries, violence or use of firearms, femicides, rapists, traffickers, huachicoleros or burglars.” It will also apply to indigenous people who have not been guaranteed “the right to have interpreters or defenders who have knowledge of their language and culture.” The Office in Mexico of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) urged “the rapid application of the law.” It also stated that “it is a positive step that
must be framed in the discussion on the transformation of the Mexican justice system, to review figures such as "informal preventive detention" and "a variety of penal types that lead to abuse of the prison sentence."

In April, Human Rights Watch asked Mexico for the "immediate release of migrants if they can no longer be deported to their countries of origin or if they are in arbitrary detention," in light of border closures and to prevent outbreaks of coronavirus in detention centres. It denounced that "thousands of migrants are being held (...) in inhumane and unhealthy conditions", so it is not surprising that since March "people detained in five migrant detention centres in Mexico have started protests and have demanded their release" for fear of infection. There have been "clashes in which there were dozens of wounded and at least one dead," it added. "It is absolutely imperative that the Mexican government act immediately to release or find alternatives," it stressed. Mexico has taken no action in this regard.

**Megaprocesses: “essential” activities?**

Since April 6th, AMLO decreed the suspension of work for non-essential activities due to the health emergency, but activities related to megaprocesses were exempted. He ratified this position on April 22nd, when he released a series of guidelines contained in a decree to address the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. In addition to reducing the salary of senior officials and the operating expenses of government agencies, it raises the guarantee of the continuity of projects such as the Maya Train, the Dos Bocas refinery or the Felipe Angeles International Airport, oil production and social programs.

Given this, communities, activists and civil organizations called for the suspension of the construction of the Maya Train as it puts at risk "the health and life of the workers who will have to continue with the works (...) as well as the population, mostly indigenous, affected by it." It seems that the federal government is taking advantage of the current situation to advance, without the risk of opposition, in the continuation of a project that has been questioned by various sectors and whose opacity has even generated the issuance of a suspension order by a Federal Judge before an appeal filed by the communities of Calakmul and Candelaria," they stated. They also requested that, after the emergency, "a real, serious, informed and equitable dialogue process be started that guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples. They stressed that "the absence of information on the environmental, economic and social impacts that said work will entail has been insistently repeated."

In May, a federal judge granted an injunction to indigenous people in Chiapas to suspend the works of the Train in the Palenque stretch, since "it would enhance the risk of the inhabitants of the Maya Ch’ol community of contracting the COVID-19 virus and by the same token, the possibility of being treated would decrease." The National Tourism Promotion Fund (FONATUR) assured that it has not been notified and considered the provisional suspension inadmissible. Subsequently, the CNDH also made a call to stop the works because of the risk of contagion that the indigenous communities and workers involved face.

In the case of the Trans-Isthmus Corridor, more than 150 organizations requested the immediate cancellation of the Program. They spoke in favor of building an alternative proposal - based on reflection and horizontal dialogue. They denounced that the right to self-determination of indigenous and Afro peoples has not been respected. In addition, they foresee environmental impacts "if the new imposition of this set of megaprocesses is allowed (...), pollution, health effects and global warming would become more acute, and the basic needs of the inhabitants and peoples of a large portion of the south-southeast would be compromised." They recalled that "development" projects implemented on the Isthmus, "have not really benefited local populations; on the contrary, they have generated a severe deterioration in their ways of life, their cultures, the environment, the social fabric of the community, and have been affected by an increase in militarization."

**Invisibility of other pending human rights issues amid the pandemic**

On March 8, International Women’s Day, Mexican women made history by holding marches and other types
of demonstrations, achieving a never-before-seen call to demand greater equality and to protest against gender violence and femicides. In addition, after the invitation to a national strike for March 9th, with hashtags such as #ElNuevesNingunaSeMueve, it is estimated that around 22 million women joined (see Focus and Article).

In March, the Mexican Centre for Environmental Law (CEMDA), presented a report in which it reiterated the danger for environmental defenders in Mexico. It noted that between January 2012 and December 2019, there were 499 attacks against environmental defenders and 83 murders. During 2019, the first full year of the AMLO government, 39 attacks occurred, 15 of them being murders. CEMDA stresses that: “No progress has been made in a structural change that generates the appropriate and safe conditions for the exercise of the right to defend human rights. Currently, we still find discourses and narratives from the government that disqualify and stigmatize the defense of human rights, which polarizes the perception of society, managing to delegitimize and create a hostile environment so that other attacks can be committed.”

On May 10th, Mother’s Day in Mexico, women demonstrated to confirm that they will continue to search for their missing children. The call was broad and, due to the pandemic, the protests took on other forms that included actions on social networks or caravans. Family organizations urged the government not to stop searching for the more than 61,000 disappeared, despite the contingency, and to speed up the identification of the more than 37,000 bodies that are unidentified so far.

Also, in May, a decree was published that will assign public security tasks to the Armed Forces for the next five years, in aid of the National Guard (GN), until it develops its structure, capacities and implantation throughout the national territory. It is unclear who will have command of the military forces dedicated to these tasks. The group #SeguridadSinGuerra (Security without war) expressed its rejection of the decree, considering that “it has a series of gaps, among them the time and geographic scope in which the Armed Forces will act with public security powers, it does not contemplate accountability mechanisms nor does it guarantee that the armed forces are subordinated to a civilian power.”

CHIAPAS: a health sector that can easily be overwhelmed

In mid-March, before the government measures, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) announced the actions it will take in the face of the pandemic, including a complete closure of its autonomous structures and a call for confinement for its support bases. It invited the general population “to take the necessary sanitary measures that, on a scientific basis, allow them to survive and survive this pandemic”, without “dropping the fight against femicidal violence, (...) in defense of the territory and Mother Earth, (...) for the disappeared, murdered and imprisoned and (...) for humanity.”

In April, organizations in Chiapas asked the government: “to see to the social determinations of the pandemic that place migrant populations, working children and street children, residents of urban peripheries, people in detention, precarious workers as sectors with greater vulnerability to contagion, timely diagnosis and access to treatment.” In the case of indigenous peoples, they demanded “to fully respect the exercise of their right to autonomy and their own models of health care.”

The health emergency “highlights the dismantling of public health systems,” they denounced. They urged that “under no circumstances should measures of force be applied from the police and military bodies for the purpose of containing the population.”

Not only the COVID-19 virus “threatens life”

In February, the caravan “In Search of the 43” students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School who disappeared in Iguala in 2014, in which their relatives participated, arrived at the Mactumactza Rural Normal School in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. In response to a blockade, “more than two hundred state police officers with tanks and tear gas bombs stationed themselves at the entrance to the Normal School (…) without any protocol, began to drop the gas shells (…) with the toll of three wounded students, two mothers and a three-year-old granddaughter”, the Tlachinollan Centre for Human Rights reported. The Undersecretary for Human Rights, Alejandro Encinas, asked the state government “for the investigation and punishment of those responsible for giving the order to repress the caravan.” The State Attorney General’s Office reported that two police officers were detained and that an investigation is ongoing against “those who are responsible for the crimes of rioting, attacks against peace and the bodily and patrimonial integrity of the community and the state, and attacks on the means of communication, as well as injuries to four uniformed officers.”

Regarding defenders, in April, Frayba expressed concern about new death threats and surveillance acts against Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, parish priest of Simojovel, “harassment that also endangers the security of his pastoral team and the general population.”

As regards forced displacement, from March to May, authorities from Aldama and Santa Martha (Chenalho), denounced acts of aggression between residents, which have their origin in a long-standing conflict due to the dispute over 60 hectares in the border
LATEST

In April, Governor Alejandro Murat published a decree outlining measures to confront the pandemic, one of them being the mandatory use of face masks in public. Those who fail to comply with this measure must pay a fine or be subject to arrest for up to 36 hours. Different organizations stated that this provision “invades federal powers and violates the human rights of indigenous peoples”, as they are excessive, especially for those who must go out day by day to earn a living. In May, Codigo DH won an injunction against state provisions, recognizing that federal criteria in no case consider the use of public force or the authorization of sanctioning or coercive measures.

As for defenders and journalists, in February, a reporter and a cameraman who were covering a protest about a land conflict in the Agrarian Court of the City of Oaxaca, were threatened with death if they did not delete their recording. Soon after, members of ten media outlets were physically and verbally assaulted. In the absence of police officers, the organization for defenders and journalists, in the absence of police officers, the organization for freedom of expression Articulo 19 considered it “alarming that the safety of citizens and those who exercise freedom of expression is not guaranteed.” Oaxaca reports protested the attacks, even more so because they join

area between both towns. The municipal president of Aldama and Frayba reported “attacks with firearms from paramilitary armed civilian groups in the communities of Santa Martha” against Aldama residents on an almost daily basis, with the result that “many families fled [again] towards the mountains.” At the same time, Santa Martha authorities have indicated that “their neighbours in Aldama were the ones who started the shooting.” Although a non-aggression pact was signed in June 2019, the attacks continued.

In May, gunshots were denounced in Chalchihuitan, allegedly perpetrated by an armed civilian group from Chenalho. In the context of the pandemic, these attacks put at risk about 1,236 displaced people, who are in extreme poverty. They obtained an injunction to protect their life and safety, but the authorities “have not effectively complied with its implementation”, Frayba claimed.

**Land and territory: Defense initiatives continued**

In March, members of the Regional Indigenous and Popular Council of Xpujil (CRIPX), the municipal seat of Calakmul, Campeche, and members of the human rights area of the San Cristobal diocese (which launched an initiative in a show of solidarity through which more than 12 thousand signatures were collected in 15 municipalities of Chiapas), demanded respect for the rights of the indigenous people affected by the Maya Train project, when international standards regarding consultation were not met, and by not presenting a study of environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts.

In March, the Popular Front in Defense of Soconusco “June 20th” (FPDS) reported that the Chiapas government called it to a working meeting in which representatives of the mining company El Puntal participated, “to warn them that the government will apply the "rule of law" for the titanium mining company to restart its works. In the presence of the Chiapas Prosecutor’s Office and the Agrarian Attorney’s Office, the businessman pointed out 12 members of the FPDS as the “leaders” of the organization and threatened to apply criminal complaints against them. "Making use of the ‘rule of law’ would be to review all the inconsistencies and irregularities that the project presents," it claimed.

In March, the Trustee of the San Cristobal de Las Casas municipality asked the National Water Commission (CONAGUA) to revoke the concession granted to the Coca-Cola FEMSA company to exploit groundwater in the municipality. He asked “to give priority to the needs of the San Cristobal population over commercial and industrial use, since our municipality suffers from a shortage of water.” CONAGUA responded that “there are no elements” to “legally revoke the concession titles.” Groups defending the environment urged CONAGUA to “reconsider its position.” They stated that the “benefits derived from the generation of jobs (...), as well as the resources that it allocates for the financing of some civil organizations (...), are nullified and overcome by the damages and risks that the extraction of water produces.”
“an extensive list of grievances in which groups, unions, organizations and individuals believe that by attacking the representatives of the media they will only report what is in their interests.”

In May, a banner with death threats against the mayor and the members of the June 19th Committee of Victims for Justice and Truth (COVIC) appeared in the municipality of Nochixtlan. This organization was formed to demand justice following the police repression of June 19th, 2016, evicting members of the teaching profession and parents protesting against the educational reform bill of Enrique Peña Nieto, which left six people dead and 108 wounded. These threats are presumed to stem from advances in the investigation in recent weeks when Gabino Cue Montegudo, a former governor of Oaxaca, as well as the state and federal security secretaries who were serving at the time, were summoned to appear.

As for land and territory, resources and coordination efforts continue to multiply. In February, indigenous people of San Pedro Quiatoni won an injunction against mining companies subsidiary of the US Gold Resource Corp for not having respected “the right to territory, nor the right to consultation and consent.” Also in February, representatives of some 50 communities and 20 organizations formed the Oaxacan Assembly in Defense of Land and Territory, to “achieve consensus of struggle in the peaceful defense of Mother Earth, its cultures and its own forms of organization.” They denounced that “the Mexican government, as a faithful servant of transnational companies, has promoted the privatization of communal and ejido lands (...) in order to give legal security to companies” whose projects usually translate into “destruction of the social fabric, the immobilization of the protest, destruction and contamination of natural assets.” Likewise, in March, the community of Santa María Zapotitlan won an injunction against the Zalamera mining company. The injunction considered that there is a collective interest since “territory is the key to the material, spiritual, social and cultural reproduction of an indigenous people.”

**GUERRERO: Risk of invisibility of multiple problems**

Guerrero is another of the states where it is feared that COVID 19 may have tragic impacts due to the sanitary, economic and social conditions prior to the pandemic. In April, municipal and community authorities highlighted the needs of the “indigenous and Afro brothers” not only in the health crisis but due to its consequences. They asked that “community decisions to establish control systems for the entry to and exit from many communities be respected.” They considered that “they are drastic but necessary measures of protection.” They asked for attention for the laborers who work in agricultural plantations in the North who were forced to return without “health care.” They also warned about the migrants in the United States, thousands from Guerrero in difficulty, some of whom returned and found their communities closed even to them.

Even in the emblematic case of Ayotzinapa, the Committee of Mothers and Fathers of the 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa who disappeared in Iguala in 2014 has expressed its fear “that the media agenda focused on the health issue will make the disappeared invisible.” In March, three suspects involved in acts of torture against those prosecuted in the case were arrested. Furthermore, “the former director of the Criminal Investigation Agency (AIC), Tomas Zeron de Lucio, and the former head of the Federal Ministerial Police, Carlos Gomez Arrieta, are about to be arrested.” Accompanying organizations acknowledged these actions “because they confirm what families have always denounced: the manipulation of the investigation.”

On the question of defenders and journalists, in April, the Guerrero State Human Rights Commission (CDHEG) delegate, Eliseo Jesus Memije Martinez, was murdered along with his son in the municipality of Coyuca de Benitez. Likewise, in April, Tlachinollan and the Red TDT (All Rights for All Network), denounced the risks run by the members of the Morelos y Pavon Regional Centre for Human Rights, who accompany the victims of forced displacement in the municipality of Leonardo Bravo. In April of this year, they, the displaced and the journalist Ezequiel Flores from Proceso magazine were threatened with death “by the group of armed civilians, the Unit-
Artículo 19 indicated that in the case of Flores Contreras “verbal and physical aggressions against him (...) have been systematic on the part of agents of the State and alleged members of organized crime.” Artículo 19, has documented 280 attacks against the press in Guerrero, placing the entity as the fourth most dangerous state for the practice of journalism.

Meanwhile, displaced persons from the municipalities of Leonardo Bravo and Zitlala, denounced that “armed groups have taken control of the communities of Carrizal de Bravo and El Balsamar.” They demanded the presence of the National Guard, a request that appeared a year ago in the minute they signed with the Ministry of the Interior to “take control of security throughout the region, but the federal government has not followed through on this promise.”

In May, the opposition leader to the Media Luna mining company, Oscar Ontiveros Martinez, was executed by an armed group in the municipality of Cocula. Relatives denounced that “it was for political-labor reasons and in repression for his activism in the mining company (…), since he was a key worker in the work strike of November 2017.” They recalled that in 2018, three workers who participated in protests demanding union independence and respect for the rights of tenants were killed.

As regards advances, in April, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN) declared the modifications of Law 701 of Recognitions, Rights and Culture of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Guerrero of 2018 unconstitutional “since there was no prior, free, informed, good faith and culturally appropriate consultation.” Tlachinollan welcomed that the ruling left “clearly established that it is not the state authorities that can unilaterally decide the course of the people’s lives.”
"The gender-based violence pandemic, up to April 13th, has claimed more Mexican lives than COVID-19: 100 women have died from the coronavirus since it entered the country on February 28th, while 367 have been killed in that period.". 
_The Washington Post, April 13th, 2020_

**Mexican machismo - the origin of the violence**

These days the main topic in the news around the world is clearly the coronavirus pandemic that is the cause of COVID-19 lung disease and in many cases it structures life in a way that we have never anticipated. It dominates how we work, how we eat, how we communicate, in one way or another it affects us all. However, in times like these, it is easy to forget about another pandemic that has been affecting Mexico for centuries, one of the ugliest aspects of this country: femicidal violence.

It is a well-known fact that Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women and girls. Over the past year, there have been ten murders of them per day, according to statistics. Even more worrying is the fact that those numbers have increased dramatically in the past five years. Data from the Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection show that between 2015 and 2019, there was a 77% increase in the total number of intentional deadly crimes against women.

It is worth mentioning that most of these crimes are not registered as femicides, but as intentional homicides.

The roots of gender violence lie in the long history of macho culture in Mexico. In the pre-Hispanic world, women were already considered as devalued and inferior beings, but along with the Spanish conquerors in the 15th century, new dimensions of inequality and repression arrived. Women were excluded from society, from the outside world. They could only deal with domestic life while men had the power to control their lives.

Machismo, the main cause of femicidal violence, is the ideal of virility that considers everything feminine to be bad. "[It is] the expression of the magnification of the masculine in detriment of the constitution, the personality and the feminine essence; the exaltation of physical superiority, brute force and the legitimation of a stereotype that recreates and reproduces unjust power relations."

In Mexico, machismo is "part of the way of being, of the popular character, of the collective unconscious" and although it can be recognized that in the last 20 years the feminist movement in Latin America has grown considerably, there is no doubt that gender violence is still fairly standardized in Mexican society.

**The Turn of the Millennium in Ciudad Juarez**

The beginning of the new millennium represented a break, both in the political world and in the discourse on...

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1. Lugo, Carmen: Machismo y violencia, 1985
2. Ibid.
gender violence in Mexico. In the 1990s, Ciudad Juarez gained international attention for a series of femicides that began to be documented from January 1993. Until 2018, approximately 1,775 murders of women in that city were recorded.

The increase in victims of femicidal violence is directly related to the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which caused a new migration of young women looking for work and a more independent life in the sweatshops of the Northern border. It was precisely these women who were particularly vulnerable, and therefore often the victims of femicidal violence.

In the case of the Ciudad Juarez feminicides, the attitude of the government authorities has been strongly criticized. In 2006, a study was published that stated that "while around 400 girls and women have been kidnapped and murdered, few arrests and convictions that have been enforced" 3, in addition to the fact that the accused and convicted persons claimed to have been tortured by the police before confessing to the crimes.

In response to the enormous impunity of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez, feminist organizations and collectives demanded that the government take adequate measures to facilitate the investigation processes in these cases, as well as give access to justice to all victims of gender violence. In order to “give visibility and permanence to gender issues on the public agenda,” 4 the National Institute for Women (INMujeres) was created in 2001. Two years later, the Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (CONAVIM) followed, which first focused on the context of Ciudad Juarez, and expanded to the national territory in 2009.

In the Legislature from 2003 to 2006, the largest number of women was recorded in the Chamber of Deputies (about 25%) up to then, the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence (LGAMVL) began to be discussed.

This law recognizes the different forms of violence against women, which include psychological, physical, sexual, economic and patrimonial violence, among others. In addition, it proposes institutional coordination to prevent, protect and eradicate violence and has a budget to ensure the implementation of the proposals.

**Government Measures: Gender Violence against Women Alert**

On top of this, a mechanism was established, which aims to implement a set of emergency government actions to confront and eradicate femicidal violence. Since 2007, the Gender Violence against Women Alert (GVWA) can be declared in a specific territory, be it a municipality or a federal state, in which "there is a serious situation of violence against women associated with machista and patriarchal practices persistent in society." 5 For the GVWA to be declared, it must be requested by one or more human rights organizations, then a working group is formed to evaluate the application and later decide on its admission.

To date, Gender Violence Alerts have been declared in 13 states of Mexico, including Chiapas and Guerrero.

Without a doubt, the GVWA is an important signal that recognizes the state of emergency due to the serious situation of gender violence. However, human rights organizations have observed that in many cases emergency actions are launched, "without reflecting substantial changes in the number of femicides or the conditions in which women live." 6

**Government Measures: PROIGUALDAD**

During the six-year term of office of Peña Nieto, the National Program for Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination against Women (PROIGUALDAD) was established in the 2013-2018 National Plan, which sought to respond to

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3 Pantaleo, Katherine: Gendered Violence: An Analysis of the Maquiladora Murders, 2010

4 Fundar: Retos y aportaciones de la Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia

5 CONAVIM

6 Fundar
the commitments signed by the Mexican State within the framework of international conventions and agreements. In this, as in many other cases, there is the criticism that programs are only announced, but no results are presented. Regarding PROIGUALDAD, they should have been presented last November, but are still being overseen by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit.

**President Lopez Obrador’s Stance**

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), who has been in office for just over a year, has publicly spoken out against gender violence. In the framework of International Women’s Day on March 8th, 2020, the president stated that “gender violence is incompatible with the Fourth Transformation” and that “we are sure that we will reduce crime rates and femicides.”

He highlighted the achievement of gender parity in the Cabinet of the Presidency and the fact that for the first time in the history of Mexico the Ministry of the Interior is headed by a woman, Olga Sanchez Cordero. In addition, he stressed that 60% of the people who benefit from his government’s social programs are women.

Feminist organizations and activists have criticized that, although AMLO denies being like other presidents, he “maintains the same policy of concealment as his predecessors” as regards gender violence. “There is a lack of understanding, a need or a folly of not wanting to recognize that discrimination and violence against women is very serious. This resistance starts from a conservative vision in all ideological groups, not only liberals”, said Maria de la Luz Estrada, coordinator of the National Citizen Observatory of Femicide.

Despite several protests in front of the National Palace in Mexico City and the thousands of voices of feminist activists demanding a change in policy, the President of the Republic maintains the position that “contrary to what the ‘conservatives’ say, his government does not pretend to fight violence” and that “impunity no longer exists.”

**Marching and Singing against Patriarchy**

2019 was marked by the feminist movement not only here in Mexico but also globally. In March, the #MeToo movement that originated in the United States in 2017 spread to the neighboring country and caused more than 400,000 Mexican women to denounce their abusers on social media.

A series of feminist protests began last August that continued until March 9th of this year. Initially, it was sparked by several complaints of police violence in Mexico City (CDMX). Four members had sexually abused a minor without receiving any sanction. Then it was revealed that the legal doctor had not followed the procedure, so there were no expert medical tests. There was not even an arrest warrant against the perpetrators.

In the following days, the complaints of a minor who suffered sexual abuse by a member of the Industrial Banking Police of the Photography Archive Museum, and a woman who was allegedly harassed by CDMX police officers on the street were reported.

These cases caused huge outrage that made it possible for a demonstration to be organized in a short period of time to denounce police violence, which took place on August 12th, 2019. Four days later, on August 16th, the women of CDMX demonstrated for the second time. During the marches some protesters broke windows and painted the Insurgentes Metrobus station. Also the monument of the Angel of Independence was vandalized.

The Mexican press reports focused mainly on the material damage resulting from the protests, forgetting the causes of the mobilizations. A discourse was built in which women were not victims but victimizers. “It privileged the idea that women’s anger is irrational and misplaced, when all the evidence points to gender violence being a systematic phenomenon, with historical roots and with daily events that...”
FOCUS

reproduce it. Considering that material damages are greater than human and social damages is also a form of violence,” declared the feminist group Mujeres + Mujeres regarding media coverage.

In November, in the context of protests in Chile, another movement emerged known as “Un violador en tu camino” (A Rapist on your Path). Faced with violations of women’s rights by the Chilean State, the army and the Carabineros, the feminist collective “Lastesis” created a participatory protest performance, consisting of a choreography and a song against patriarchy. The song went around the world. On November 25th, thousands of activists from Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, Mexico, USA, Argentina and many more performed the song in their corresponding countries within the framework of International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women.

A Mexico without Women

In January of this year alone, a total of 320 murdered women were registered, of whom 72 were classified as femicides and 248 as intentional homicides. The femicide of Ingrid Escamilla Vargas in particular became known due the spread of images of her lifeless body. Ingrid, 25, was skinned by her partner on February 9th in Mexico City. The subsequent distribution of photos of the victim’s body on social networks caused outrage in public opinion and a debate on the role of the media. Next, Claudia Sheinbaum, the mayor of Mexico City, stated that the dissemination of the images would be sanctioned. In addition, she announced a specific law proposal to punish the distribution of images of crime victims by public officials.

For March 8th, 2020, International Women’s Day, the Feminist Assembly “Juntas y Organizadas” (Together and Organized), announced a march in Mexico City. A historical number of around 80 thousand participants was registered. In addition to the CDMX march, demonstrations were held in more than 20 Mexican cities, including Oaxaca and San Cristóbal de Las Casas, in Chiapas.

On February 18th, the Veracruz feminist collective “Brujas del mar” (Sea Witches) had called for a national women’s strike on March 9th under the hashtag #ElNueveNingunaSeMueve (Nobody moves on the 9th). The objective of that action was to demonstrate how the country would look if there were no women, in addition to highlighting the importance of women for the Mexican economy. The concept of a national women’s strike was not particularly new. The first time a similar action known as “Women’s Day Off” was carried out in Iceland in 1975. It was then repeated in several countries around the world until it reached Mexico in 2020.

On March 9th, it was calculated that a total of 22 million women did not show up to work across the country. As for the effect that strike had on the economy, it is difficult to assess: we must take into account the setbacks in the world economy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the decrease in oil prices in March that also caused a devaluation.
of the Mexican peso. In any case, it can be said that the economic losses caused by the women’s strike were higher than anticipated.

According to the Mexican Association of Human Resources Management (AMEDIRH), an economic impact was calculated at around one and a half billion dollars lost in total, which is equivalent to more than half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) generated in Mexico per day.

**Fighting Violence - With Men, not against Them**

In 1996, Zapatista women achieved the prohibition of the consumption of alcoholic beverages and drugs, which was one of the main causes of domestic violence in the Zapatista communities in Chiapas. This example demonstrates the importance of actions between men and women to achieve the elimination of gender violence.

Although it is true that in recent years more and more attention has been paid to the issue of gender-based violence, there is no doubt that this development has also caused a strong polarization on the subject. Especially, in times of digitization, the image of the “feminazi”, the person who hates men, is spread, and along with this a mistaken perception of what feminism poses. For this reason, it is necessary that men also contribute to change Mexican society towards greater equity.

In Chiapas, the “Hombres G” (G Men) group, which belongs to the Centre for Comprehensive Grassroots Education (CEIBA) does just that. Since 1998 they have been working on gender with men and have masculinities workshops in order to “reflect on how our masculine, patriarchal, hegemonic, controlling condition is constructed from a deeply violent culture.”

“The idea is to sensitize ourselves in the first place, but above all to transform ourselves and transform our practices in a personal sense, but not only, we need to go beyond individual reflection and this implies a social commitment to community and especially collective work”, Abelardo Palmo Molina, one of the facilitators of the workshops explained.

The collective cooperates with indigenous and peasant organizations in the Chiapas border area. Palmo Molina emphasized the importance of working on the gender issue with men in alliance with organized women: “The vast majority of men who come to this space are partners of women who are already organized and who have thought for years about the gender issue and need their partner or son or grandfather or cousin to reflect on not continuing to reproduce violence in the family, at home, not continuing to have practices that do not allow the growth of female partners.”

The meetings have a direct impact on the families of the participants. They benefit couples, sons and daughters. The “Hombres G” also carry out mixed workshops, in which some women have shared their experience. They said that they were really observing a change in their life partner, for example, that they listened more or showed more affection.

For women to live a free and fearless life in Mexico, there needs to be a change in society, a change in Mexican culture that comes from machismo. The work of “Hombres G” shows, although through small steps, how this deeper social and cultural change can be achieved.
Gender Violence during COVID-19 Lockdown

“Outbreaks of disease affect women and men differently, and pandemics exacerbate existing inequalities for women and girls, as well as discrimination against other marginalized groups such as people with disabilities and those in situations of extreme poverty.”

United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), 2020

In recent months, a health situation has been experienced that has allowed many women to occupy other spaces of information, dissemination, political leadership, and personal and collective reflection. Nevertheless, questions about the violation of their rights also continue during this pandemic. When various national governments announced the need to observe a period of lockdown, some international organizations expressed their concern about the inevitable increase in gender violence that this would cause, as well as the threat it represents for many women and girls in Mexico, Latin America and the entire world.

The UN Regional Office of Women for the Americas and the Caribbean reported that women, girls and adolescents may face additional obstacles to flee from violent situations or access to aid services, especially if there are movement or quarantine restrictions. Furthermore, the evidence shows that avoiding other alternative spaces to the home represents a greater threat to victims, since the home is often the place where the most abuse and violent behavior occur.

Although gender-based violence manifests itself in many ways, during the pandemic we have seen the rates of digital violence increase, of Internet harassment; we have seen violence that is reinforced by confinement, such as gender stereotypes in which women have all - or almost all - the responsibility of taking care of household chores, the education of their children or care for the elderly; there is talk of xenophobia, economic violence, increased threats to and criminalization of women human rights defenders, discrimination and lack of access to health services by sex workers; There is talk of the vulnerability of older women, with disabilities, with diverse sexual orientation, trans, living with HIV, migrants, displaced persons and refugees, victims of armed conflict, indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural or living in informal settlements.

The Government Paradox

In Mexico, the increase in gender violence was noticed in different geographical spaces, but in the same time space: in March, when the #QueDateEnCasa campaign was launched nationwide. In states such as Oaxaca, the “Rosario Castellanos” Women’s Study Group (GES Mujer), carried out an analysis in which 16 violent deaths of women had been registered, seven of which occurred during the month of March, when the lockdown was voluntary, while the other nine murders took place when the quarantine was already considered mandatory. In addition, there was a 26% increase in calls for help to women according to the organization. Thus, in a period of no more than four months, 36 women had been violently murdered, ten of them at home.

In other entities such as Chiapas, records indicate that emergency calls for incidents such as sexual abuse and harassment, rape, intimate partner violence and family violence also shot up with 115,614 calls, that is, an average of 155 women suffered violence every hour. The Attorney General’s Office
of the State of Chiapas published in its report on crime incidence in Gender Violence Alert an increase in cases between 2019 and 2020. Thus, between January and March of this year, a total of 1,733 cases were registered, of which 1,296 were for family violence. In addition, in March, 706 crimes were registered as opposed to 540 documented in February, Tapachula, Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristobal de Las Casas were positioned in the top three municipalities with the highest incidence.

The evidence was in confrontation with the opinion of the President of the Republic, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who assured that the supposed increase in gender violence during confinement was not necessarily happening in Mexico. This was coupled with the argument that the same parameters used in other nations cannot be applied to measure this situation, in addition to the fact that the country is experiencing a climate of “fraternity”. He stated that there is no increase in complaints, although he acknowledged that the figures could be wrong. Dozens of civil and feminist organizations responded to these statements, assuring that not recognizing these attacks, normalizes violence against women and puts them and their children at risk.

In addition to the denial of gender violence, there is the recent decision of the federal government to cut the resources allocated to the Houses of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Women (CAMIs), structures that operate through subsidies from the Indigenous Rights Program that at the same time, is under the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), while other services were rated as essential. From this perspective, indigenous women are even more vulnerable than mestizo women since these examples are the only ones to which they have access from their community, in addition to the fact that the support given is in their language and protects and accompanies women, adolescents and indigenous girls, in those places where the State does not reach.

The Birth of Alternative Projects

However, while some government institutions supporting women suspend their services in whole or in part, other players in society begin to mobilize. Civil organizations and feminist collectives sought to adapt their work to continue offering psychological or legal support from a distance, even if this represents a real challenge. Therefore, solidarity initiatives were born, by and for women. In Mexico City, a mapping of all government institutions, groups and civil organizations that are providing support to women was made by state, resulting in a digital document accessible to those who have access to internet: the Feminist Directory “Machismo Is not in Quarantine” put together by activist and feminist Estefania Veloz, lawyer and journalist Frida Gomez and parliamentary adviser in the Senate of the Republic, Andrea Chavez. In the Southeast region of Mexico, pro-Zapatista organizations organized a “Global Week of Action for Life” in which people were invited not to abandon, among other things, the fight against the violence of feminicide. This call took the motto #EncierroNoMeCalla [the lockdown won’t silence me], with which it summoned to participate in workshops, conversations, analysis, etc. on various topics, including the importance of a gender perspective during this pandemic. With this motto, academics, activists, indigenous leaders, lawyers, journalists, psychologists and other specialists came together to participate and make this historical problem visible, but within the current health context. Another social media campaign was recently launched called #AislamientoSinViolencia (isolation without violence), coordinated by the Oaxacan Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity, GES Mujer, Ixmucane AC, Meraki, Weaving Community and the Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Oaxaca, which joined civil society, feminist groups and government institutions.

Another example is that of the organizations defending sex workers who started a collection campaign involving private donors, as well as the “Elisa Martinez” Street Brigade of Support for Women AC for the collection of medicines, supplies, food, personal hygiene items, condoms, etc. In addition, access to monthly support for self-employed workers was requested from the Mexico City government.

It is evident that reflection should continue on how information and support for women during this pandemic can be accessible to all, not only to one type of woman, but to all the diversity that exists among them; thought should also be given to the integration and participation of a broader spectrum of society in the fight against gender violence. Access to technology is not evident for all women who suffer violence, much less for those who live in conditions of extreme poverty, indigenous women, women with any type of disability or even who live in all three situations and who suffer all these problems.
INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT CHIAPAS

Civil Observation Mission
- In February, a member of the SIPAZ team participated in a Civil Observation Brigade (Brico) for a period of 15 days, coordinated by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Centre for Human Rights in the La Realidad Caracol in the border area of the state.

Highlands
- In February we participated in a space for security analysis in San Cristobal de Las Casas, attended by various civil organizations with a presence in this city.
- In February and March, we accompanied the displaced from Banavil, Tenejapa municipality, in various procedures with authorities, with whom they hoped to obtain progress in their case.

Northern jungle
- In April, we participated in a space for analysis with various organizations with a presence in the municipality of Chilón, to share information and reflections on the reality in that area.

Gender
- In February, we were present at the quarterly Assembly of the Diocesan Coordination of Women (CODIMUJ), which was held in San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- In February we attended the Forum “Let’s talk about government programs, megaprojects and the effects they have on the lives of indigenous peasant women and on the communities”, which took place at the facilities of CIDECI-Unitieria, in San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- On March 7th, we attended the assembly of the Movement in Defense of Land, Territory and, for the Participation and Recognition of Women in Decision Making.
- On March 8th, we accompanied the march held in San Cristobal de Las Casas in the framework of International Women’s Day.
- On March 9th, we participated in the national women’s strike called in February by the Veracruz feminist collective “Las Brujas del Mar” with hashtags such as #UnDiaSinNosotras and #ElNueveNingunaSeMueve.
- In May we were in the online discussion “The importance of the gender perspective in the fight against COVID-19” convened by the Ibero.
- In May, we participated in a virtual Meeting of the Network of Human Rights Defenders in Chiapas.

Prisoners
- In February and March, we visited prisoners members of the organizations “Solidarios de la Voz del Amate” and “La Voz de Indígenas en Resistencia”, both groups adherent to the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), in San Cristobal de Las Casas prison. In April and early May, we maintained communication with these groups through weekly phone calls.

Events
- In February, we attended the event called within the framework of the 25th anniversary of the Civil Observation Brigades (Bricos), coordinated by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights.
- In March, we attended the press conference called by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights, in which members of the Regional Indigenous and Popular Council of Xpujil (CRIPX), municipal seat of Calakmul, Campeche, as well as members of the diocese of San Cristobal were present. Both groups ratified their rejection of the Maya Train megaproject.

APRIL
- We were in an online presentation on “Forced displacement and the health crisis due to coronavirus in Chiapas.”
- In April, we participated in the conversation on “Right to health and freedom of expression in the digital age”, convened by the organization Articulo 19.
- We participated in the virtual Forum “No to the so-called Maya Train” where issues related to said project were addressed, such as the displacement of communities, the ecological impact or non-compliance with international consultation standards, among other topics.

MAY
- We were at the webinar “The European Union commemorates World Press Freedom Day in Mexico”, organized by the EU Delegation in Mexico, in which several journalists participated.
- We participated in the virtual talk “Covid and Human Rights: people in detention centres and the migrant population”, organized by ITESO.
- We were at the online forum “The Resistance of the peoples in times of pandemic”, an online event convened by Peace with Dignity.
- We participated in the Second Forum “The Mayan Train and the Interoceanic Corridor: Re-colonization of the Mexican south-southeast?”, convened by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).
- We were in the webinar “Economic effects resulting from the emergency in Chiapas”, convened by the Advisory Council on Climate Change of the state.
- We participated in the virtual dialogue table “How are we doing? Situation of defenders and journalists”, convened by CENCOs.
- We participated in the virtual Forum “COVID-19 and its impact on economic, social and cultural rights”, convened by ITESO.
- We were in the COVID-19 Global Coordination Call on the topic “Special problems in the response to the pandemic in the context of Latin America”.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING TOWARDS ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS
- In March, we attended the Event “Due Diligence on Human Rights and Reparation Against the Impacts of Business Activities” held in Mexico City, which included the participation of authorities, multilateral organizations, companies, civil society and movements affected by megaprojects.

PEACE EDUCATION
- In February, as part of the Mother Earth Support Network (RAMAT), we co-facilitated a workshop on foundations from the Bible and from Indian theology, to defend land and territory, with a representative from the southeast area of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

INTERNAL TRAINING
- In February, we participated in a webinar called by the Mennonite Central Committee (CCM), in which Services and Advice for Peace (SERAPAZ) shared reflections on the topic of “Conflict Resolution and Transformation in Mexico - Challenges for civil society and its organizations.”
- In March we attended a workshop on extractive companies in Mexico, facilitated by the Fundar organization.
- In April we participated in an online training, “Making Sense of Conflict in the age of pandemic”, convened by the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC for its acronym in English, a space to which SIPAZ belongs).