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 Mexicans are working to solve largely Mexican problems.
In August, Mike Ryan, director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Emergencies Department, pointed out that the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic could be underestimated in Mexico due to the low number of tests carried out. He also expressed concern about differences in mortality, when low-income people are five times more likely to die than better-off people. By November, Mexico had more than one million cases and more than 100,000 deaths.

In September, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) presented his second government report stating that “we will emerge from the pandemic with a better health system.” Another issue was the economic crisis caused by the pandemic: “the worst is over and now we are on the way up; the lost jobs are already being recovered, they are gradually returning to normal production and we are already beginning to grow”, he said. However, it is estimated that more than 100,000 companies have already gone bankrupt this year, without support or official programs. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), warned that another 500 thousand companies could disappear in the next six months. According to data from INEGI, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 18.9%.

In October, civil organizations published the second report “Situation of Indigenous and Comparable Communities Facing the Health Emergency Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus.” They reported a significant increase in cases and deaths compared to the July report: one in three communities has presented infections and 35% of the sick had to be hospitalized. However, it was revealed that the percentage of communities that take protective measures fell from 43% to 25%, which is explained in part by economic wear and tear. “We find a strongly rooted distrust in the indigenous people with health institutions, the care provided there and the importance they give to indigenous lives”, the report indicates. The monitoring revealed concern about job insecurity and the “great advance in the control of the cartels.”

Some legislative advances in human rights issues...

In September, Mexico recognized the competence of the UN Committee on Forced Disappearances to hear individual cases. The Miguel Agustin Pro Human Rights Center stated that “it will not only benefit individual cases (...); with the structural recommendations that this body can make (...), the State’s own institutions would be strengthened to confront, in a really effective way, the crisis of disappearances.” Since the beginning of the AMLO government, 1,257 clandestine graves have been detected and 1,957 bodies exhumed, a fact that for the govern-
The authorities consider that "there has been a significant decrease in forced disappearance committed by the authorities. More than 90% are associated with organized crime," among other advances.

In September, the general law to prevent, attend to, and comprehensively compensate forced internal displacement was approved, although the Ministry of Finance reported that there are no resources for it. A few days before, in the framework of the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the Episcopal Dimension of the Pastoral of Human Mobility of the Catholic Church asked the authorities to address "this phenomenon that, in Mexico, is growing every day due to insecurity and violence generated by organized crime through murder, disappearance, forced recruitment, extortion, robbery, dispossession, threats, harassment or intimidation and fear; extreme poverty, the abandonment in which many especially indigenous communities live and, on many occasions, natural disasters."

In November the Senate ratified the Escazu Agreement, which seeks to guarantee the rights of access to information, citizen participation, and access to justice in environmental matters. It is an international instrument signed in Costa Rica by 24 countries in 2018. "It is very important for Mexico because it establishes provisions on the generation, dissemination and access to environmental information and addresses the generation of a safe and conducive environment for defenders of human rights in environmental matters," the United Nations explained.

... and, still, many problems to see to ...

In August, AMLO accused civil organizations of receiving money from foreign foundations to oppose his administration’s megaprojects (among them, the Maya Train). The organizations mentioned responded that "megaprojects have exploited and destroyed the territories of indigenous peoples, reducing their autonomy, their ecosystems and the enjoyment of their human rights. Indigenous defense groups and individuals who have opposed the megaprojects have been subjected to multiple attacks and intimidation that in some cases have led to their imprisonment and even their execution." In the case of the Maya Train, they detailed that "it represents serious risks and environmental, social, economic and patrimonial impacts, as has been warned by communities, academics, organizations and even by instances of the federal government itself. Likewise, it was not decided by the Mayan people (...) but a consultation was carried out without complying with international standards." They denounced the "campaign to delegitimize the work of civil organizations, through attacks on defense and indigenous organizations, and, recently, through a media campaign that seeks to make international cooperation appear illegal." They demanded a public apology, as well as guaranteeing the human rights of defenders.

In August, Animal Politico news program revealed that most of the members of the National Guard, which according to the law should be a civilian institution, are made up neither by civilians nor by police, but by military personnel transferred from the armed forces. There is strong concern about the continuity of militarization, particularly after the publication, in May of last year, of the Agreement that establishes that the armed forces will be able to carry out public security tasks (see Focus). Strengthening this same concern, in October, General Salvador Cienfuegos, Secretary of Defense during the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto, was arrested in the United States, by order of the United States Anti-Drug Agency (DEA). AMLO announced that "all those who are involved in this case, who are acting in the government in National Defense, will be suspended and removed." However, he affirmed that he is "absolutely convinced that the Armed Forces of Mexico are fundamental institutions for the development of our country."

In September, Article 19 reported that in the first semester of 2020, 406 attacks against journalists and/or the press were registered, a figure that easily exceeds the 280 attacks registered during the same period in 2019. It explained that "some factors that propagate growth of the aggressions..."
are the intolerance of public officials to public scrutiny, particularly when linked to the pandemic, the repression of protests, as well as the takeover of public power by organized crime.”

In September, a group of relatives of disappeared persons seized the facilities of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), in Mexico City, demanding justice. More collectives and organizations joined, even in other states. Protesters changed the official CNDH sign to put in its place “Not One Less Refuge” (Casa de Refugio Ni Una Menos) in order to pressure the authorities to recognize gender violence and implement measures. Solidarity increased after the eviction, in Ecatepec, of women who had taken over the offices of the Human Rights Commission of the State of Mexico (CODHEM). Shortly after, the Secretary of the Interior and the head of the CNDH promised to pay attention to the request of representatives of victims’ groups.

In October, under the justification of redirecting resources to address the health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic and despite doubts, the Chamber of Deputies approved the elimination of several public trusts, including those destined to reparation for victims and the mechanism of protection of journalists and human rights defenders.

EZLN announces that it will go out to “travel the world” in 2021

In October, the EZLN announced that in April 2021 some Zapatista delegations will go out “to travel the world (...) seeking not difference, not superiority, not confrontation, much less forgiveness and pity. We will go to find what makes us equal.” The communiqué says that, “we look at and listen to a sick world (...), fragmented into millions of people alien to each other, bent on their individual survival, but united under the oppression of a system ready to do anything to satisfy its thirst for profit, even when it is clear that its path goes against the existence of planet Earth.” The first continent to visit will be Europe, where they intend to reach “the Spanish capital, on August 13, 2021”, 500 years after the supposed conquest of what is now Mexico. “We are going to tell the people of Spain two simple things: They didn’t conquer us. That we continue in resistance and rebellion”, the EZLN said. “That they don’t have to ask us to forgive them anything. Enough playing with the distant past to justify, with demagoguery and hypocrisy, current and ongoing crimes: the murder of social fighters (...); the genocides hidden behind megaprojects”, it added.

CHIAPAS: It never rains but it pours

In November, an Emergency Declaration was issued in Chiapas due to severe rains caused by the tropical depression “Eta”, which caused more than 20 deaths, several collapses and landslides. That added to a long list of problems, already exacerbated by the health, economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

In recent months, there has been an increase in violent situations: in September, three people killed and six injured were the result of an “attack”, according to some media, and “confrontation”, according to others, which took place in Tila, between ejidatarios and dissatisfied residents. For five years, the ejidatarios recovered, by legal means, their territorial rights with which the municipal seat was transferred to the community of El Limar. The Vicarage of Justice and Peace of the Diocese of San Cristobal recalled that “almost three weeks ago a group of residents from the Tila ejido carried out blockades at the main entrance and in other sections near the town. (...) We know that there was the intention of a process of dialogue and negotiation to seek a solution to the conflict, but apparently the situation got out of control.” The Tila ejido reported that the situation of violence was detonated when “a group of ejidatarios went to unblock the barricade and they were met with bullets.”

Another case: despite the signing of a non-aggression pact in July, repeated firearm attacks have continued to be reported between the municipalities of Aldama and Santa Martha, Chenalho, as a result of a 60-hectare agrarian conflict, that has left around 25 dead, dozens displaced and injured. In August, a video was released showing
an alleged armed civil group from the municipality of Chenalho. Frayba has reiterated “that the government of Chiapas has ignored the humanitarian crisis in the Altos region by being permissive with the paramilitary civil armed groups of Chenalho.” For its part, the Digna Ochoa Human Rights Committee blames the violence “on armed groups that operate from the side of the Aldama municipality.”

Also, in the Highlands of Chiapas, in October, three years after the forced displacement of more than 5,000 people, the Chalchihuite Committee denounced that in Chalchihuitan “the paramilitary attacks of Chenalho and Rutilio Escandon Cadenas, current governor of Chiapas, have not complied with any of their demands, nor the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission, nor the precautionary measures of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.”

On another note, in August, two EZLN support base coffee warehouses were burned in the Moises Gandhi community, Ocosingo municipality, by alleged members of the Ocosingo (ORCAO) Coffee Growers Regional Organization. This occurred within the framework of the dispute over land recovered in 1994 between the two organizations. In November, the Good Government Council (JBG) of Nuevo Amanecer en Resistencia y Rebelde por la Vida y la Humanidad denounced the “kidnapping and torture of a fellow Zapatista support base” by members of the ORCAO. It mentioned that organizations that defend human rights have witnessed violence in the area while carrying out a humanitarian and documentation caravan, which reached Moises Gandhi and Nuevo San Gregorio in October. This caravan observed the “attacks, threats and harassment perpetrated by armed groups” and reported that “while the caravan was touring the area, more than nine shots were heard.” Faced with the kidnapping, a demonstration was held in Mexico City “to repudiate this new paramilitary aggression against the Zapatista support bases, denounce the complicity of the municipal, state and federal governments with the attackers, and demand that the Lopez Obrador government put an end to ‘the war against the Zapatistas’ and the indigenous communities that oppose their megaprojects.” The kidnapped person was released the next day.

In another situation of violence, in October, ejidatarios of San Sebastian Bachajon demonstrated against the construction of a National Guard (GN) barracks in Chilon. They warned that “when the Zapatista movement began (…), the federal government in turn installed military bases in different communities (…) resulting in a high rate of murders, raped, pregnant and abandoned women, separation of marriages, abandoned children, an increase in alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution, as well as the spread of organized crime and insecurity.” They called for the immediate removal of the municipal president of Chilon and the communal commission of San Sebastian Bachajon “for having signed an agreement to install a National Guard base (…) without consulting the inhabitants.” According to Frayba, around 300 police officers and elements of the National Guard repressed the peaceful mobilization. Two people were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty and others were injured.

Impunity: the origin of current violence?

In September in Mexico City, the Act of recognition of the State’s responsibility in the case of the Acteal massacre (1997) was held. In it, a group of victims participated who decided to sign a Friendly Settlement Agreement within the framework of the lawsuit filed before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2005. The Undersecretary for Human Rights, Alejandro Encinas, admitted that the attack was perpetrated by “paramilitary groups with the complacency of the authorities.” He reported that the Agreement includes 18 deceased victims and 12 survivors, thus “the rights of those who await a thorough resolution of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights are preserved.” This was in contrast to what was raised by the Foreign Ministry in this same event, in the sense that this Agreement “will put an end to the litigation process before the IACHR”. Another group of victims, Las Abejas de Acteal Civil Society and 44 organizations
from ten countries, expressed that the agreement by some victims is a “legitimate decision that we do not intend to judge”, but they asked “to avoid the construction of an erroneous image”, in the sense that “the case is already resolved.” They also expressed their “concern regarding the 15 years of litigation of this case before the IACHR with a slow visible progress and enormous wear on the victims and their families.” Later, Las Abejas de Acteal Civil Society affirmed that “a public apology is not enough.” It questioned: “If you were really so interested in peace and equality, why do you continue to guarantee impunity to the paramilitaries? Why are there still deaths and injuries from high caliber bullets in Aldama and Tila?” They affirmed: “if there is no punishment, if they do not see negative consequences of the crimes they commit, the paramilitaries will continue to be emboldened.”

OAXACA: Defense of Mother Earth, heart of multiple defense processes

According to information released in October, the Canadian company Minaurum Gold requested permission to explore 6,410 hectares of the Chimalapas Forest for the extraction of gold and copper. More than 300 references from the academic and artistic world, as well as 60 organizations stressed that “we cannot allow the desire for enrichment of a privileged minority and the excessive demands for materials of industrial society to serve as an excuse to end such a valuable heritage.” They warned that “these extractive activities would generate enormous environmental impacts in one of the most biodiverse places on the planet.” Authorities of San Miguel Chimalapa also made clear their rejection of mining exploitation in their territory.

In October, one year after the signing of agreements between the National Water Commission (CONAGUA) and 16 Zapotec communities of the Central Valleys of the Coordinator of United Peoples for the Care and Defense of Water (COPUDA), said organization closed the CONAGUA offices to report non-compliance. The agreements sought to “recognize the territorial rights of the communities and the participation of the communities in the administration of groundwater through internal community regulations.”

Also, in October, Zapotecs from Union Hidalgo filed a civil lawsuit in the Paris Court against Electricité de France (EDF) for “multiple violations of their rights” requesting the suspension of the Gunaa Sicaru wind farm project. They claimed that the residents have not been consulted. They blamed the company for contributing to “an escalation of violence against human rights defenders (...) by groups close to EDF.”

In other aspects of human rights, in August, two years after the declaration of the Gender Violence Alert (GVA) in 40 municipalities of the state, the “Rosario Castellanos” Women’s Studies Group (GESMujer) warned that, with 458 cases since its inception, the administration of Governor Alejandro Murat “is shaping up to be the one with the greatest femicidal violence in recent history.” 243 of these cases occurred since the beginning of the GVA. 62% of violent murders of girls and women occurred in municipalities with the alert, “which reflects that due to the lack of forceful actions (...), it has not been possible to stop femicidal violence and, even more, that it is being extended to municipalities not considered at risk.” GESMujer declared that “the GVA is a mechanism that made it possible to make visible (...) the high levels of institutional violence against women and girls, but also made visible the serious institutional shortcomings.”

GUERRERO: Between denunciations and mobilizations

September marked the sixth anniversary of the serious human rights violations committed against the students of the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School, which included the forced disappearance of 43 of them. In this framework, AMLO promised that those responsible will be punished. He gave details of progress, such as the searches, the 80 people arrested in addition to the arrest warrants against the military, police and officials. The UNHCHR recognized “the important achievements made”, while encouraging “the Mexican State to intensify its
In November, Jose Martinez Crespo, the first military officer allegedly linked to the case, was arrested.

In other aspects of human rights, in September, civil organizations demanded that the authorities stop the criminalization of the “Jose Ma. Morelos y Pavon” Regional Center for the Defense of Human Rights. They recalled that the municipal president of Leonardo Bravo vetoed the entry of members of the Center in Chichihualco, “where this organization has accompanied families displaced by violence and the presence of organized crime for more than a year and a half.” They expressed concern over speeches “by public servants who, based on hate speech and slander (...), seek to discredit the work of organizations and individuals that defend human rights.”

In September, the Guerrero Front for Our Disappeared, published the letter it sent to authorities in which it detailed the conditions they have experienced, the lack of security for defenders, the lack of protection for journalists, and the obstruction of access to the truth and justice, stopped searches and investigations and poor attention to victims.

Likewise, in September, 2,000 indigenous and Afro-Mexican citizens of Guerrero marched in Chilpancingo, to demand the constitutional recognition of their rights through the approval of the bill that was presented in December of last year. They denounced that the National Guard held the protesters for 30 minutes at the entrance to Chilapa de Alvarez, so that they would not reach the capital.

In October, a year after the murder of the leader of La Montaña Popular Front (FPM), Arnulfo Ceron, a rally was held in Tlapa to demand justice. The Tlachinollan Human Rights Center pointed out that “several material authors and some intellectual ones are being prosecuted for the cunning crime. The attack (...) evidenced the impunity with which organized crime kidnapped, killed and disappeared people.” It affirmed that “the challenge of the authorities will be (...) to take advantage of the situation in the Arnulfo case to create the conditions that prevent organized crime from re-taking root in the mountain with its stream of violence and death.”

© Popular Front of the Mountain
“Sixteen months after its establishment, the National Guard (GN), a security body created in the current six-year term of office to confront crime, has 209 complaints against it for alleged human rights violations from January to September 2020.”

(El Universal, 2020)

In May 2020, and in the midst of the pandemic, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador published a decree in the Official Gazette of the Federation in which he attributed special public security tasks to the armed forces and the Navy, “a measure to militarize the streets of the country as a way to guarantee the safety of citizens.”

(Clarín, 2020)

Participation of the Armed Forces (AF) in Public Security Tasks

To understand the role that the AF play in Mexico today, it is necessary to look back at the events that triggered the army’s incursion into public security actions.

In March 1996, 167 deputies of the 56th legislature filed an Action of Unconstitutionality against the participation of the Armed Forces of Mexico in public security tasks. In other words, the deputies claimed that the army was violating the provisions of Article 129 of the Constitution, which indicates that “in times of peace no military authority can exercise more functions than those that have an exact connection with military discipline.” Despite this, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN), ruled as constitutional the presence of the AF in public security tasks, as long as they were “under the command of civil authorities”, and that they could act at the request of civil authorities and subordinate to them, emphasizing that the action of the AF was not automatic (Rosado Pulido, 2020)

The shadow of another serious problem in the country would give cover to the idea that a military presence in the national territory was necessary: the intensification of drug trafficking, which made subsequent governments seek to combat organized crime at the hands of police bodies and armed forces, investing significant amounts of money in the purchase of weapons, military training and through a series of actions reorganizing the police forces.

Institutional Reorganization

Throughout history, the different federal governments have included in their priorities the reorganization of the police forces for different reasons. Some key examples are the creation of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) in 1999 during the government of Ernesto Zedillo. The PFP was defined as a central element of the federal strategy to combat
By 2000, Vicente Fox had created the Secretariat of Public Security (SSP), whose main function was to set up what would become the Federal Police (PF). During the government of Felipe Calderon, Mexico was experiencing the consequences of the alarming increase in violence, for which the ex-president declared that this institution had been unable to serve as a model for all the police in the country, and “proposed to reorganize the attorney general and create a single federal police under the command of a police Czar” (Cano, Toni, 2008).

Therefore, in 2009, the Federal Police was created as a decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Public Security, whose objectives were, among others, to apply and operate public security policy. Despite this initiative, Calderon’s six-year term of office was one of the bloodiest, as a result of the so-called war against organized crime, with more than 1000 people killed during the first five months of 2007 and repeated human rights violations by the army, such as the case of Ernestina Ascencio Rosario, a 72-year-old Nahua indigenous woman, “who was repeatedly raped, beaten and tortured by several soldiers in the state of Veracruz, and later died as a result of the injuries” or the case of “two women and three children under the age of eight who lost their lives in the state of Sinaloa [while they] were traveling in a pickup truck, which was hit by 24 bullets fired by soldiers” (SIPAZ, 2007).

In 2012, during Enrique Peña Nieto’s six-year term, the Public Security Secretariat ceased to exist and the National Security Commission (CNS) was created, a body that, together with the Federal Police, became dependent on the Ministry of the Interior. In addition, during his government, Peña Nieto created the Gendarmerie division of the Federal Police, through which he sought to implement a “police operation and management model close to society”, again giving the perception of having changed the title without changing the militarized option.

However, the Federal Police were involved in issues of corruption, organized crime, money laundering (Lastiri, 2020), links with drug trafficking and multiple human rights violations, including the disappearance of the 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa (Ramirez, 2020), revealing the high levels of corruption that existed in the institutions. What happened in Ayotzinapa was the turning point so that not only civil society organizations but society in general and to a huge extent began to demand a change of model.

The Contradictions of the new government and the National Guard

The election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018, brought with it the unknown of what the role of the new president regarding the actions of the armed forces would be. In his statements made during an interview conducted by the newspaper La Jornada one year after taking office the president said: “If it were up to me, I would dissolve the Army and turn it into a National Guard, I would declare that Mexico is a pacifist country that does not need an Army and that we would all do the defense of the nation, if necessary. That the Army and Navy would become the National Guard to guarantee security.” (La Jornada, 2019). However, his actions seemed contradictory, and it was later confirmed that the new president had decided to continue with the militarization model that he had criticized so much during previous presidencies, stating that “in the current circumstances there is no alternative” and that it would be “irresponsible on his part” to remove sailors and soldiers from the streets, as it would leave Mexicans in a “defenseless state.” This revealed the gap between his campaign promises and the current reality of the country, which seems to eliminate any expectation of a change of course in matters of security in this six-year term.

Thus, under the discourse that the crisis of violence in Mexico was due to “rivalry” and little cooperation between the different police forces in the country (Benítez Manaut, 2018), the president focused from the beginning of his mandate on the construction of what would be the new Secretariat for Citizen Security and Protection (SSPC), which would replace the armed forces in internal security tasks,
and proposed the creation of a new police force that would allow the progressive demilitarization of the country: the National Guard (GN).

On December 31st, 2019, the Federal Police was officially dissolved with the intention of creating a civil police force where there was no corruption. However, the Secretariat for Citizen Security and Protection made an agreement for members of the Federal Police to be incorporated into the National Guard if they wished to do so. Furthermore, the transfer of 57 thousand members of SEDENA to join the National Guard was recently announced (Jimenez, 2020).

These decisions and agreements gave rise to the debate on the fact that the National Guard should be legally civil since, with the intention of reinforcing this new institution, the president has proposed that members of the army can join the GN as long as they have left their military post, which does not happen in many cases. It has even been shown that this “has been directed and managed from the beginning by active Army officers, who equally give orders as police chiefs and as commanders of the Armed Forces” and that the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) “gave a hand from its Military Police corps, but maintaining all its structure and its commands, and only renaming them with police letterheads and giving them some courses.” (Animal Politico, 2020).

The constitutional reform of the National Guard in which public security tasks are attributed to the armed forces in an “extraordinary, regulated, supervised, subordinate and complementary manner”, will be in force until March 27th, 2024.

The document lists the new powers granted to the army, which allows us to verify that its incursion goes beyond crime prevention in urban areas or where the police normally operate, but also includes the surveillance of border areas; the control of customs sections, checkpoints, customs checkpoints, supervision centers; as well as migration control and surveillance of tourist areas. There are also tasks that were exclusive to the National Guard and that the armed forces will now be able to do, such as: “carry out the arrest of people and the seizure of assets related to criminal acts”, as well as “participate with other federal, local or municipal authorities in joint operations, among others” (Expansion Politica, 2020). The President has deployed 10,237 elements of the National Guard as security commissioners at PEMEX facilities; as well as the construction of the new “Felipe Angeles” Airport, in the State of Mexico. Another of the President’s assignments for the Army and the National Guard is the surveillance of roads and airports through the creation of the General Directorate of Roads and Facilities, as well as the General Directorate of Air Transport that will have 84 thousand 450 members (El Sol de Mexico, 2020).

President Lopez Obrador also promoted the bill to reform the law to “transfer the powers of the Ministry of Communications and Transport (SCT) over ports to the Ministry of the Navy (SEMAR)” (Infobae, 2020), that is, the militarization of the ports by which it is attempted to displace the civil authorities to give way to military authorities. In this sense, Andres Alcantara Silva, a lawyer from the Ibero-American University declared that “the powers that the SCT currently has in this matter will become the exclusive competence of the Navy, completely displacing the civil authorities.” Later in response to this, Senator Eruviel Avila assured that it is not about militarization but about strengthening the ports.

**What Are the Implications of Militarization for Human Rights?**

It is important to reflect on the indirect consequences of militarization in Mexico, mainly with the legalization of the new powers of the Armed Forces and what they mean for human rights. What must be done, according to Samuel Storr, Consultant of the Civil Security Program of the Ibero-American University, is not only an analysis of the militarization of civil authorities or turning the Armed Forces into the police, but a deep analysis of the use of force and to what extent it is legitimate, necessary and effective (Storr, 2019).

In this sense, it is clear that the absence of a legal framework that regulates the actions of the armed forces and encourages “transparency, accountability and accountabil-
ity mechanisms” (Rosado Pulido, 2020) has resulted in the way in which the AF have carried out public security tasks. That is, by having a vision of eliminating the enemy, they make excessive use of force and the fatality rates are very high, reflecting violations of human rights or loss of human life. “The National Guard became the antithesis of what the MORENA government proposed, and it became a militarized institution, where to date 65,574 violent deaths have been registered; 63,793 malicious homicides and one thousand 782 femicides, so far during this administration and from January to September of this year, there have been 26,954 malicious homicides, of which 724 are femicides.” (El Dictamen, 2020).

As stated by Christof Heyns, a member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, who was in Mexico in 2013 as Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary executions “we have never seen that it is a good idea to have the military take on the job of the police” as they tend to escalate instead of diminishing conflicts (SIPAZ, 2020). For her part, Olga Guzman, Incidence Director of the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH) explained that “for more than 13 years, the participation of the military in public security has increased the illegal and indiscriminate use of the force, as well as crimes such as arbitrary deprivation of liberty, murder, torture, and forced disappearance. The improper use of their powers has been directed mainly against civilians, to whom they attribute membership of criminal organizations or their participation in criminal activities” (SIPAZ, 2020).

According to the National Human Rights Violation Alert System of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the National Guard “has been accused of committing arbitrary detentions, intimidation, cruel and inhuman treatment, assaults against women, arbitrarily using the force, use of violence in a disproportionate way, committing acts of torture and illegal detentions.” Without controls to punish those who commit human rights violations, the military training of most of its members and their increasing presence on the streets are some of the factors that, according to specialists, have caused the GN to already have hundreds of accusations (El Universal, 2020).

**The Armed Forces, Between Corruption and Impunity**

In recent years it has been seen how corruption within the military institutions has led to many military and high command officials being involved in legal proceedings. A recent case (2018) is that of Genaro García Luna, former secretary of Public Security with Felipe Calderon and head of
the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI) with Vicente Fox, and with other positions in the Zedillo administration. García Luna was accused of receiving “millions of dollars in bribes” from the former leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquín Guzmán Loera, “El Chapo” (Forbes, 2019).

Another emblematic example is that of General Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda, Secretary of National Defense in the government of Enrique Peña Nieto, who was arrested and accused of money laundering, trafficking in heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana from 2015 to 2017. In addition, Cienfuegos’s time at the head of the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA), was characterized by the violation of human rights, he is indicated as being responsible for the Tlatlaya massacre and the disappearance of the 43 disappeared student teachers from Ayotzinapa, both occurring in 2014 (Flores Meza, 2020). However, the charges against the former official were dropped by the authorities of the United States and in Mexico he has not been issued an arrest warrant so far. The links with organized crime and the violation of human rights in the Cienfuegos case would seem to not merit a legal process.

On November 13th, the first officer involved in the disappearance of the 43 students was arrested. José Martínez Crespo is accused of crimes such as organized crime, homicide and forced disappearance (SIPAZ, 2020). “The Armed Forces have been placed on a pedestal due to an alleged level of trust, but they have not escaped corruption and abuse” (Flores Meza, 2020). This is shown by the recent tests of trustworthiness carried out among the members of the National Guard, where 4,339 members did not pass said test (Gutiérrez González, 2020).

In 2012, the Supreme Court established “that the civil authorities should investigate and judge the abuses committed by the military against civilians under ordinary criminal justice.” However, there was very little progress in the processing of these cases during Peña Nieto’s administration. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) “from 2012 to 2016, more than 500 investigations were opened against the military, but only 16 convictions were obtained” (Human Rights Watch, 2018). For its part, the Office in Mexico of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights welcomed the criteria of the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation that recognizes that “cases of homicide during military activities where both parties, the active and the passive subject, belong to the army, fall within civil and not military jurisdiction.” (UN Human Rights, 2020).

Without a doubt, this government has demonstrated that it is following the line of militarization in matters of public security. We see, after several governments, that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador seems convinced that militarizing the streets is synonymous with security. The President even said in the middle of the year: “Although they criticize me that I want to militarize the country, I will continue to insist that the armed forces should help us in public security tasks, I am convinced that it is necessary.” And he assured that if there were any violation of human rights “it would be rectified.”

However, it has been observed that these situations have arisen and that there continues to be impunity, not only for the military but also for the highest command, who through corruption cover up the crimes within the institutions, even the Army, the Federal Police, the Gendarmerie, the National Guard or any other name with which it is baptized.

Historically, the Armed Forces have shown that there is a general tendency to use disproportionate force and abuse of power. The countless cases show how impunity and the lack of justice have allowed more and more human rights violations to go unpunished.

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1 On June 30th, 2014, a military convoy allegedly killed between eight and 15 civilians, apparently part of a group of criminals that had previously attacked them. It happened in the municipality of Tlatlaya, in the State of Mexico, about three or four hours from the capital. The authorities arrested the soldiers and the Prosecutor’s Office accused them of murder and tampering with the crime scene, among other crimes. However, a magistrate released them due to lack of evidence (Ferri, 2019).
The Contributions of Indian Theology in the Transformative Commitment of the Catholic Church in Chiapas

"Indian theology has been a permanent encounter, touching the deep roots of the peoples, finding that we are walking with the people. It is touching the most profound of the peoples. Indian theology is the presence of the peoples. Indian theology makes resistance, it is a path, it makes prayer that is acclamation, it is sowing: I sow myself in the land, in the water, on the hill, on the mountain ... prayer is profoundly transformative."

Jorge Santiago Santiago

The first month of the coming year will mark the tenth anniversary of the passing of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia (1924-2011), a recognized defender of the rights of indigenous peoples in Mexico and Latin America. Also known as j’Tatik Samuel (which means father in the Tzeltal language), he is - possibly - the bishop who has most promoted what is usually called Indian Theology.

Indian Theology is a theological current that has interreligious and ecumenical expressions. It is characterized by recovering and recognizing the ancient religious thought and beliefs of Native Peoples.

Pedro Gutierrez Jimenez, Petul, a Tzeltal Maya, from the Institute of Intercultural Studies and Research (INESIN) in Chiapas, explains that we all have a spiritual experience, which is reflected in the entire history of humanity: from nomadic stages to sedentary civilizations, an experience of present spirituality can be observed, albeit using different names and recurring to various rituals and images. In the case of Chiapas, Indian theology mainly seeks to relate the beliefs of the Maya peoples with Christian belief, particularly the Catholic faith.

Mayan beliefs and spirituality in Native Peoples address various issues such as love and respect for Mother Earth, the search for human and social harmony, the practice of justice through community agreements and the search for alternatives for the lekil kuxlejal or good living, among other aspects. Indigenous spirituality manifests itself in different ways: through rituals and ceremonies with candles, herbs and incense, for example in caves and springs; the use of dances and songs in native languages; the prayer around the Mayan altars that symbolize "the whole": time and space, humanity and spirituality, heaven and earth, life and death, north and south.
... Indian Theology recognizes the liberating force and spiritual wealth of the Native Peoples, who had previously been demonized by the church. It recovers for current reflection sacred Mayan texts such as the Popol Vuh.

Before the conquest in Mexico 500 years ago, the Native Peoples in Chiapas already had (and have maintained) their spirituality and belief that any spirituality can be integrated into their own altars as long as it comes with the intention of enriching, as opposed to the destructive attitude of the Conquest, which for many years had the intention of destroying the spirituality, the wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples and making western culture prevail.

With the passage of time, people within the church and laity realized the liberating force that millenary cultures have and the alternatives for the future found in their experience of life and of God. Indian theology encourages peoples in their stubborn hope for “another possible world”.

Little by little, the doors of Latin American theology were opened to diversity on the continent. At the same time, the economic, political and social marginalization in which the native populations survived began to be of concern, in addition to being threatened by dispossession and total extinction due to the advances of megaprojects of the capitalist world in their territories. It is within this framework that the indigenous Pastoral, Indian Theology and the indigenous Church have developed, with these efforts coinciding with indigenous struggles for their collective rights, for their self-determination, autonomy and self-government.

In February 1991, just over 20 years after several bishops, including J’Tatik Samuel, saw the need for dialogue between Christian spirituality and that of the Indigenous Peoples, the first continental meeting of Indian theology was held, precisely in Chiapas. Over time, the misgivings and prejudices that previously hindered inculturation and indigenous appropriation of the Catholic Church were overcome.

It is important to highlight that these advances in Indian Theology are the fruit of a collective action of indigenous parishioners, indigenous leaders and also ecclesial servants related to the indigenous cause.

Before his departure, Samuel Ruiz García organized a broad process of elaboration of a third diocesan synod, leaving Indian Theology as one of the “six pillars” of diocesan commitment. In this text, the diocese ratified its commitment to continue to consolidate itself as a “Native, Liberating, Evangelizing, Servant Church, in Communion with God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

In Chiapas, 20 years after J’Tatik Samuel left his service as bishop, the diocese continues to strengthen its commitment to this theological perspective, favouring a dialogue between current evangelization processes with the wisdom of native peoples.

Work from the perspective of Indian Theology was also recognized by Pope Francis when he came to visit Mexico and Chiapas in 2016. In San Cristobal de Las Casas, he presented a decree that authorized the use of native languages at Masses and other celebrations, a very relevant symbolic gesture.

“Accepting to be in this Diocese is also accepting Indian theology. Indian theology is a treasure of the Diocese and the church, it is not an imposition. It must be in our hearts, learning and sharing”, the current bishop, Don Rodrigo Aguilar, recognizes.

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3 Eleazar López Hernández. 2009. LA TEOLOGÍA INDIA EN LA MATRIZ LATINOAMERICANA.
4 Ditto.
5 Ditto.
6 El Universal. 7 de Febrero 2016: Papa entregará en Chiapas autorización para misas en lengua indígena.
7 El Universal. 6 de febrero 2016. Papa Francisco da aval a misas en lenguas indígenas.
Mid-August to mid-November 2020

SIPAZ ACTIVITIES

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

CHIAPAS

Civil Observation Missions
- In August, we participated in an online process of several days to monitor the Civil Observation Missions on the southern border, to monitor and analyze the migrant problem on the different routes that cross the state of Chiapas in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In October, we participated as observers in the Caravan in Solidarity with the autonomous communities of Moises Gandhi andNuevo San Gregorio, organized to “deliver humanitarian aid, carryoutHuman Rights observation and document the recent attacks, threats and harassment perpetuated by armed groups against [...] support bases of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).”

Forced Displacement
- In August, we were at the presentation of the report of the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights, entitled: “Episodes of Mass Forced Displacement in Mexico 2019”.
- In September, we attended the press conference of the Chalchihuitles Committee for Internally Displaced Persons, in which they reported that three years after their displacement, the precautionary measures of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Chalchihuitan have not been met.

Indigenous Peoples
- In October, we participated in the online forum “The Struggle for Self-determination in Policies and Legal Frameworks in Mexico”, convened by the Alliance for Free Determination and Autonomy (ALDEA).

Land and territory
- In September, we attended the press conference called by the organization Indignacion, to denounce the “Violations of the Maya Train and the Responsibility of the Judiciary.”

Militarization
- In August, we participated in the webinar “Militarization of Public Security in Mexico”, convened by the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH).

Migration
- In September, we attended the presentation of the report “Migrations in Mexico: Borders, Omissions and Transgressions”, prepared by the Documentation Network of Organizations for the Defense of Migrants (REDODEM).

Human Rights
- In September, we participated in the online discussion “Capture of the State, Macro-criminality and Human Rights”, organized by the Heinrich Boll Foundation.
- In September, we attended the online press conference organized by civil society organizations under the heading “Networking of Civil Society against Austerity Measures that are Detrimental to Human Rights in Mexico”, following the Chamber of Deputies approval of the elimination of several public trusts.

OAXACA
- In September, we participated in the event “Defense of Land and Territory from Community Action” convened by the Damian Gallardo Martinez Committee.
- In October, we were at the online event “The Challenges of Education for Peace” organized by the Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Gender Equity (Consortio Oaxaca).

GUERRERO
- In September, we participated in the online event “Ayotzinapa: Towards the Truth”, organized by Amnesty International in the framework of the sixth anniversary of the forced disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School in Iguala.
- In October, we held an online meeting with members of the team from La Montaña Tlacinhollan Human Rights Center, to update our analysis of what is happening in Guerrero, and to agree on joint actions, including the follow-up of the case of Amilullo Ceron, defender of human rights disappeared and murdered in Tlapa a year ago.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS
- In September, we participated in various activities carried out within the framework of the fifth Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights for Latin America and the Caribbean “Responsible Business Conduct in Difficult Times: Turning Challenges into Opportunities”, which was convened, among others, by the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Labor Organization (ILO).
- Also in September, we attended the event “Uniting Capacities to Respond to the Regional Crisis: Convening Organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean”, organized by the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPJAC), a platform to which we belong.
- In September, we attended the event “Setting the Table for Peace: Multi-stakeholder Processes for Human Security”.

NETWORKING
- In September and October, we were in a joint space of partners with whom SURSIENDO was working on digital security aspects, to share perceptions, analysis and protocols to work in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In September, we had a face-to-face meeting of the partners that participated in the “Latin America Project, Between Violence and Hope - Phase III: Accompaniment of Communities in Non-violent Resistance to Extractivism”, coordinated by Pax Christi International.
- In September and October, we participated in meetings in the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas on the socio-political conflict in Chiapas and the role that the Catholic Church can play before it, particularly in the case of Tila in the northern part of the state, at the invitation of the Vicarage of Justice and Peace.
- In November, we co-facilitated a forum and clinic of GPPAC partners in North America, in which they worked, among other aspects, on the post-electoral context in the United States and its implications, as well as on ways to promote greater participation of youth in peace-building.

Read the full version of our Activities at: www.sipaz.org