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Mexico
“A long way to go to exit human rights crisis”, Government

FOCUS:
Human rights in the hands of corporate goodwill

ARTICLE:
Samuel Ruiz García - Ten Years of Living Memory

SIPAZ ACTIVITIES:
Mid-November, 2020 to mid-February, 2021

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VOL.
XXVI
Nº 1
Mar 2021

Table for the preparation of the NPHR
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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.

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### 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.

### International Coalition

- Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (YMCA)  
  Argentina
- Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America  
  (North Carolina, USA)
- Benedictine Sisters of Erie  
  (Pennsylvania, USA)
- Capacitar  
  (California, USA)
- CAREA  
  (Berlin, Germany)
- Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America  
  (N. Carolina, USA)
- Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men’s Institutes
- Peace and Justice Committee  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Centro Memorial Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
  (La Habana, Cuba)
- Christian Peacemaker Teams  
  (Illinois, USA)
- Church of the Brethren  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Dominican Sisters of San Rafael  
  (California, USA)
- Episcopal Peace Fellowship  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation/EEUU  
  (New York, USA)
- FOR Austria  
  (Austria)
- Franciscan Friars, Santa Barbara Province  
  (California, USA)
- Franciscan National Justice, Peace and Ecology Council  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Global Exchange  
  (California, USA)
- IF/When  
  (California, USA)
- Illinois Maya Ministry, United Church of Christ  
  (Illinois, USA)
- Iniciativa Ecuuménica «Oscar Romero»  
  (CIPFE, Montevideo, Uruguay)
- International Committee for the Peace Council  
  (Wisconsin, USA)
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation  
  (Alkmaar, Holland)
- Jubilee Economics Ministries  
  (USA)
- JustaPaz  
  (Bogotá, Colombia)
- Kentucky Interfaith Taskforce on Central America  
  (USA)
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Loreto Community Latin America / Caribbean Committee  
  (Colorado, USA)
- Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas  
  (California, USA)
- META Peace Team  
  (Michigan, USA)
- Movimento Ecuuménico de Derechos Humanos  
  (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
- National Benedictines for Peace  
  (Pennsylvania, USA)
- Pax Christi  
  (Pennsylvania, USA)
- Pax Christi International  
  (Brussels, Belgium)
- Peace Brigades International  
  (London, England)
- Peaceworkers  
  (California, USA)
- Presbytery of Chicago  
  (Illinois, USA)
- Racine Dominican Sisters  
  (USA)
- Resource Center for Nonviolence  
  (California, USA)
- Servicio Paz y Justicia de América Latina  
  (Montevideo, Uruguay)
- Sojourners  
  (Washington DC, USA)
- Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends  
  (Florida, USA)
- SweFOR  
  (Sweden)
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
  (Massachusetts, USA)
- Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
  (USA)
- Western Dominican Province  
  (Arizona, USA)
- Witness for Peace  
  (Washington DC, USA)
On December 10th, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, the Report “Second Year, A New Human Rights Policy and Presentation of the National Human Rights Program” was presented by the Ministry of the Interior.

Regarding the situation of human rights defenders and journalists, it reported that in the period, 1,313 persons (426 journalists and 887 defenders) have been incorporated into the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and journalists. It also pointed out that said mechanism is currently the object of “profound transformations” seeking to move from a reactive to a preventive scheme. Alejandro Encinas, Undersecretary for Human Rights, Population and Migration, highlighted the fact that the Mexican government opened the space to the United Nations Committee against Forced Disappearances to hear individual petitions as “a demand from families for whom it was denied for years.” He announced the publication of the National Human Rights Program (PNDH in its Spanish acronym) that aims to “rethink the performance of the entire public administration in the field of Human Rights, assuming it as a cross-cutting axis of all public policy.”

A diagnosis largely shared by Civil Society

In December, Espacio CSO for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists declared that it views some of the announcements and measures adopted by the State as positive. On the part of the executive branch, it highlighted the National Comprehensive Protection System that would promote “greater networking with the states.” It positively valued “the change in the legal nature of the Mechanism, making it possible to strengthen its structure”, as well as the incorporation of a differential and intercultural approach. The Legislative Branch recognized as progress the Law initiative regarding the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the Escazu Agreement.

However, Espacio CSO continues to view with concern the “lack of clarity in the timing for compliance with the route, as well as budgetary guarantees and labeled resources that ensure effective compliance with the measures.” It recommended greater dialogue with defenders, human rights organizations and journalists: “it is an essential factor to achieve the objectives set”, it stressed.

Subsequently, in February, the presentation of the report “Situation of the Defense of Human Rights and Free Expression in Mexico since the Pandemic” was carried out jointly by the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) with other organizations. It documents that in 2020, six journalists and 24 defenders, mainly environmentalists, were murdered.

Vulnerable groups even more so in the context of the pandemic

By mid-February, Mexico had totaled about two million cases of COVID-19 infection, and around 175 thousand deaths. In addition to the direct impacts of the health crisis, a worsening of several pre-existing trends has been observed, particularly for vulnerable sectors.

In November, within the framework of International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Wom-
en, mothers of victims of feminicides delivered a letter with more than 18 thousand signatures to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), to demand justice and the cessation of feminicides. In 2020, 2,874 women and girls were murdered. Only 724 cases are being investigated as femicide.

In January, the Network for the Rights of the Child in Mexico (REDIM) presented a report entitled “The Year of the Syndemic and the Abandonment of Childhood in Mexico”, in which it highlighted that violence against this sector has multiplied during the pandemic. 63% of minors have experienced some type of violence, and during confinement, tensions at home increased by 34.2% compared to 2019.

Regarding migrants, in November, the “Report of the Findings of the Human Rights Observation Mission on the Southern Border of Mexico” identified that “the context regarding migration policy (...) became more complex and intensified, which was evident with the increase in militarization and border control, as well as the strengthening of the agreements between Mexico and the United States, coupled with this, was added (...) the health emergency.”

In December, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH in its Spanish acronym), organizations and migrant shelters expressed their concern at the decisions that tend to militarize the National Migration Institute (INM in its Spanish acronym): “in 18 states, people with a military profile have been appointed to lead (...) that Institute.” They reiterated the need to direct efforts towards “a perspective of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, rather than security, since this perspective contributes to the idea of the criminalization of groups of migrants, which further aggravates their situation of vulnerability.”

Adding to concerns about militarization...

In November, a letter signed by six UN Special Rapporteurs addressed to the Mexican government was published, expressing their concern about possible human rights violations related to the Maya Train, when the consultation process that should protect the right to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples “would have been imposed to legitimize the project, since the decision had already been made.” They also stated that the information process was limited and culturally inappropriate. Lastly, they expressed concern about the situation of human rights defenders, in particular “about acts of harassment against General’s Office in Mexico (FGR in its Spanish acronym). Cienfuegos was repatriated to Mexico and, in January, the FGR determined that there will be no criminal proceedings against him due to lack of evidence. AMLO assured that, although his government seeks to end impunity and corruption, it will not allow “retaliation, revenge, and inventing crimes.”

However, more than 300 organizations and groups of victims asked the president to remove the head of the FGR, Alejandro Gertz Manero, for failing to fulfill his duties in the case. They declared that his action “makes it clear that in Mexico the military are untouchable” and that the closure of the investigations “is also the absolute closure of the possibility of (...) investigating in an effective and efficient manner at the highest levels power.”

Another side of militarization: in December, AMLO announced the intention of creating an Armed Forces company to entrust the administration of three sections of the Maya Train as well as Chetumal, Palenque and Tulum airports. This is to seek a good administration of the projects, allocate pension resources to the Army and the Navy, in addition to guaranteeing security in the region.

Megaprojects and extractivism, “essential” activities... from the government’s perspective

In November, a US judge accepted the request of the United States Department of Justice to dismiss the money laundering and drug trafficking charges against the former Mexican Secretary of National Defense, General Salvador Cienfuegos, who had been arrested in October in California. The US authorities dropped the charges and delivered more than 700 documents on which the criminal accusation was based to the Attorney General’s Office in Mexico (FGR in its Spanish acronym).
those who require more information, more time for their decision or express their disagreement (...), as well as attacks on human rights defenders who have filed any legal action, through criminalization, marking and defamation, the denial of their indigenous identity and the disqualification of their work.”

Meanwhile, the project has continued to advance. In December, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) authorized the Environmental Impact of Phase 1, which allows the National Fund for the Promotion of Tourism (FONATUR) to start with the works, although 16 conditions are imposed. Among them is to follow up on the agreements resulting from the 2019 indigenous consultation.

Several legal appeals have been filed. In December, a court ruled on the definitive suspension of the construction of new works on Section 2 in Campeche. This was in response to an injunction filed by more than 100 indigenous, rural, urban and coastal communities. The resolution prevents new works from being carried out on that section during the corresponding lawsuit.

Regarding extractive companies, in January, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN), denied the injunction presented in 2015 by the Macehual people of the Sierra Norte de Puebla, against the Mining Law despite calls from the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples (INPI). Indigenous peoples from various communities in the country and civil organizations considered that the ruling represents a setback from the construction of the multicultural State and the protection of the territories and biocultural heritage of the peoples. The Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA) questioned the decision to “validate a system that has historically stripped indigenous peoples of their territory, and that has repeatedly committed violations of their human rights.”

EZLN and CNI: in clear opposition

In January, the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Indigenous Government Council (CIG) denounced that the pandemic has served the Federal Government for “the imposition of mega-projects and the militarization of the country”, in addition to which “it contributes to the war of extermination against our peoples, where health services and economic capacity are very scarce.” They declared that “Lopez Obrador’s lying words and his so-called fourth transformation are intended to create a wall that hides the war that is raging against the peoples and the life of Mother Earth, wanting to isolate us and present us as opponents of progress.” They announced, however, that “we will continue fighting until life triumphs over death, with our most powerful weapons: dignity, resistance and rebellion.”

In addition, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) reported that hundreds of organizations, artists, intellectuals and people from more than 30 countries, the CNI, the Indigenous Government Council (CIG) and the EZLN itself agreed to fight for humanity on the five continents. It announced that they will carry out “meetings, dialogues, exchanges of ideas, experiences, analyses and evaluations among those of us who are committed, from different conceptions and in different fields, to the struggle for life.” It ratified its “certainty that the fight for humanity is worldwide. Just as the ongoing destruction does not recognize borders, nationalities, flags, languages, cultures, races.” It reported that the activities in Europe will take place between July and October 2021, with the direct participation of a Mexican delegation made up of the CNI-CIG, the People’s Front in Defense of Water and Land of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala, and the EZLN. At later dates to be specified, meetings will be held in Asia, Africa, Oceania and America.

Chiapas: “Outrageous situation of structural violence”

In December, a Civil Observation Mission (COM) made up of 14 member organizations of the All Rights for All Network (Red TDT) as well as three international organizations visited Chiapas to document “the human rights
The COM collected “testimonies with people affected by situations of forced displacement, land dispossession, arbitrary detentions, torture, harassment, threats, criminalization, among other attacks.” It considered “outrageous the situation of structural violence that is allowed and even promoted by the different levels of government and their little or no disposition to address the conflict, trivializing, discriminating and criminalizing the communities.” They urged the Mexican State to “cease the simulation and the lack of care for the communities and defenders.”

This approach is similar to what was expressed by Pueblo Creyente (Believing People) of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas in a January statement. For the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the passing of jTatik Samuel Ruiz (see Article): it lamented the systematic violence and inequalities, especially during the pandemic. It spoke of the lack of education, of employment, of the effects that children are suffering from not going to school and the lack of interaction with others. Faced with these and other permanent threats such as megaprojects or militarization, Pueblo Creyente said that the communities have sought to continue with autonomy, resistance and self-determination. However, there is an increasing danger in the defense of territory due to the increase in threats, surveillance and harassment. It also spoke of the increase in violence by armed groups and organized crime, and due to the proximity of the July elections. “As Pueblo Creyente we have to find a way to act that keeps us hopeful. Our option is for life”, it stressed.

"Definitive" (?) agreement in the Aldama-Chenalho conflict

In November, a humanitarian aid brigade that was delivering food to displaced families in Aldama was shot at by an armed civilian group allegedly from Santa Martha, Chenalho. In this attack, the nun Maria Isabel Hernandez Rea was injured. The mayor of Aldama stressed that at the time of the attack a Mixed Operations Base (MOB), made up of military and federal and state police, was 200 meters away. The governments “have ignored the constant calls to stop the armed aggressions”, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) stated. The diocese of San Cristobal urged the Mexican State to “disarm and dismantle the paramilitary armed civil groups in that area and, together with those who provide them with weapons, apply the weight of the law.”

In November, Frayba reported new attacks with firearms in Aldama, days after a “Definitive Agreement” was signed between this town and Chenalho, to resolve the long-standing agrarian dispute between the two municipalities. In addition to the properly agrarian component, Alejandro Encinas announced that the damage to the victims will be compensated and that cooperation will be sought between the National Guard and the state security forces to guarantee security. However, attacks have continued to date.

Numerous other hot spots

In November, the Digna Ochoa A.C Human Rights Center located in Tonalá denounced that one of its members, Nataniel Hernandez, and his family were victims of death threats and damages against their vehicle. The defender had gone to document a violent situation in Colonia Arenero due to a problem related to green areas that were invaded. In addition, the Center reported that for the same case it has requested precautionary measures from different authorities. However, “they have not been implemented and this has led to a wave of acts of confrontation, threats, discrediting, defamation, slander and physical attacks”, it reported.

In November, the report “Violence against Women in the Context of a Pandemic” was presented, which reports on the “increase in family violence, sexual violence, cyber violence and, clearly, femicides.” This increase took the form of “18 femicides, two attempted murders, 34 intentional homicides, 12 attempted murders, and 54% occurred in the homes of the women themselves.” The difficulties of access to justice in confinement due to the “suspension of judicial and civil proceedings” are of particular concern.
In January, representatives of the Tzeltal people of the municipality of Chilon, together with Frayba and the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Centro Prodh), reported that they filed an injunction over the construction of a National Guard Headquarters in their territory, because they were not consulted. They also asked the Chiapas Attorney General’s Office to desist from prosecuting two ejidatarios who “were repressed and criminalized for demonstrating against said project.”

In January, Frayba reported having received information from the Patria Nueva Good Government Council denouncing that “members of the Ocosingo Coffee Growers Regional Organization (ORCAO) have attacked the Moises Gandhi community with firearms.” It recalled several other previous incidents of the same nature. Nor is it the only case of growing conflict around lands recovered by the EZLN, there are several others, one of them in Nuevo San Gregorio, municipality of Huixtan.

**OAXACA: Vulnerability of environmental defenders opposed to megaprojects**

In January, Fidel Heras Cruz, community defender and president of Paso de la Reina Ejidal Commissariat, was murdered in the municipality of Santiago Jamiltepec. He was an active member of the United Peoples’ Council for the Defense of the Verde River (COPUDEVER), an organization that maintains active resistance against the Paso de la Reina and Rio Verde hydroelectric projects. The Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI) also reported on “threats from powerful economic groups linked to the exploitation of stone material.” Ejido and municipal authorities, as well as civil organizations demanded that a thorough investigation be carried out so that the crime does not go unpunished.

In November, UCIZONI and CEMDA denounced before the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner in Mexico (UNHCHR) the violations of their rights in the framework of the approval and implementation of the Trans-Isthmus Corridor. They asked him to urge the Mexican State to suspend the project until the peoples have “full information on environmental and social risks and impacts.” They detailed the irregularities in the consultation carried out in March 2019 which, they denounced, was not prior, free, informed, culturally adequate and in good faith as recommended by the international conventions ratified by Mexico. “There was no dialogue, but a government monologue”, they asserted.

Regarding extractive projects, in December, the No to Mining for a Future of All Front denounced that it has tried unsuccessfully to establish a dialogue with SEMARNAT. It denounced that the information presented by the Cuzcatlan Mining Company in the Environmental Impact Statement contains “false information.” Instead, it recalled that “the communities that inhabit the Central Valleys have witnessed water pollution, the emission of dust, noise, the driving away of wildlife in the region, the impact on the landscape, as well as serious violations of human rights and social conflicts produced by the project.” The Front urged refusal of the authorization of the Environmental Impact Report; guarantee effective protection of the environment against private interests; and grant the requested audience to “build solutions together with the affected peoples and communities.”

On another note, in November, the Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity reported that 2,344 cases of violence against women have been documented so far during the government of Alejandro Murat. In addition, in four years, “1,005 women have been reported as missing (...) compared to 121 cases registered in the same period of government of Gabino Cue.” However, they assure that these figures do not reflect reality mainly because not all cases are reported. However, they consider that they reflect “a simulating, ignorant and denying government that maintains impunity in the face of pain and the demand for justice.”
GUERRERO: “Like a Night without Stars”

In December, La Montaña Tlachinollan Mountain Human Rights Center presented a report entitled “Like a Night without Stars”, which identifies the main problems facing the state. Abel Herrera Hernandez, its director, said: “We have seen that this year, with the lockdown, the violence in Guerrero has increased. Above all, we have seen that the armed actors are acting with impunity. (...) We see an empowered crime that is entering the communities to subdue the population. And a subject authority because it is allied with other crime groups.”

He mentioned that the situation of journalists has worsened: “Three cases of journalists murdered in Acapulco, in Iguala, in Apaxtla have been documented (...) The power of crime is confronting defenders, journalists, social defenders, activists. And this is serious in a state like Guerrero, where impunity, (...) continues to prevail.”

Regarding the community police, he reported that “in the same territory as UPOEG, 15 members of UPOEG have been assassinated, including one of its main leaders. (...) They assassinated a coordinator of the CRAC. (...) We have documented eight cases of members of the Regional Coordination of Community Authorities who have been assassinated.”

Regarding the pandemic, he concluded: “The towns are abandoned, there is no one to hold onto (...) The women are the ones who are paying for the lockdown. We have documented seven cases of femicides that we are accompanying and 19 cases of violent deaths of women, six cases of missing women, five murdered girls.”

Regarding the accompaniment of the center of the Ayotzinapa case, Tlachinollan reported that, “in 2020, when the objective was to give a strong shift in the investigations, the issue of the Coronavirus arose, which has had a significant impact on the investigations and searches. However, these continued and as a result, by the month of April they began to have some responses. On September 26th of that year it was established that we have 80 arrest warrants issued. Of those theses of Tomas Zeron de Lucio, head of the Criminal Investigation Agency, Carlos Gomez de Arrieta, head of the Ministerial Police, Captain Martinez Crespo, and Jose Angel Casarrubias Salgado, alias el Mochomo are notable.”

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Your donations make it possible for SIPAZ to continue offering international observation and presence in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. We need your help!
Globalization in today’s world has resulted in changes at both the micro and macro levels, with pros and cons, including new challenges when it comes to the protection of human rights (HR). The globalized world has reshaped economic powers into a world in which multinational companies have especially come to gain unprecedented power and influence.

Businesses have an enormous impact on the lives of people and the communities in which they function, including positive impacts. However, human rights organizations and civil society, through various reports with countless examples, have shown situations in which companies take advantage of inefficient national regulations, which end up contributing to violating human rights and causing serious damage to the environment, without any consequences for those responsible.

Companies: the obligation to respect human rights

The obligation to protect and ensure that human rights are respected is the responsibility of the State. However, in a world in which companies have more and more power, sometimes even more than states themselves, a complex situation is created. Businesses also have an obligation to respect human rights no matter in which country or where they are operating.

It should be clarified that the obligation to respect human rights is not the same as what is called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), of which a growing number of companies boast. In this field, they are allowed to choose what they want to do and what social responsibility they can assume depending on their good will, while, with human rights, you cannot choose which ones you want to comply with, something that concerns both companies and investors behind their projects.

Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

“The responsibility of companies to respect human rights implies not only a negative duty to refrain from violating the rights of others, but also a positive obligation to support a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders in the countries in which they operate.” - Michel Forst, former Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders for the UN.

It has been documented that defenders and communities that defend the environment, as well as the land and

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territory, are increasingly facing serious threats due to the strategies of some companies that try to silence them, which sometimes has even led to their death. The Business and Human Rights Resource Center highlights how prioritizing the commercial interests of companies often prevails over those of communities. A legal term has even been coined for it: SLAPP, which stands for "Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation", which describes a lawsuit filed by companies with the purpose of preventing a person or a group of people from speaking freely about certain things or exercise their rights.

Multiplication of international initiatives to protect human rights regarding companies

With the empowerment of companies, their responsibility for human rights has become a more relevant debate. During the last ten years, international initiatives have been presented with the aim of creating or improving effective mechanisms for the protection of human rights, both for the protection of victims and for the companies themselves.

In 2011, the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights was created which, among other tasks, makes official visits to the different States, the last one in Mexico being in 2016. In addition, after a six-year investigation, a normative framework was created the same year grouped under three pillars: "Protect, Respect and Remedy." It establishes 31 principles directed to States and companies, in which they clarify the duties and responsibilities of each with regard to the protection and respect of human rights in the context of business activities. It defines that States must not only protect the rights of citizens, but also that they must regulate the companies’ actions through laws and public policies, and when there is a violation of human rights by a company, they must ensure that redress mechanisms are implemented.

The European Union has been consolidating an initiative through what would be a binding "Due Diligence" Treaty, the objective of which is to have a regional legal framework that requires European companies to integrate the issue of human rights, as well as the environmental due diligence in all its operations, and holding them responsible for their behavior in third countries. It has been reported that the legislative initiative will be presented by the European Commission during the year 2021.

The lack of real openness of the Mexican government

In both Mexico and several other countries, the debate on Business and Human Rights is increasingly present on the agendas of different players, largely due to pressure from civil organizations working on the issue. For example, in March last year, several multilateral agencies and organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Mexico, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union and the Focus Group of Civil Society on Business and Human Rights in Mexico, organized a multi-sector forum to discuss the best way to implement due diligence, and explore alternatives to better protect people in vulnerable situations from possible corporate abuse.

Several Mexican governments have expressed openness to include civil society and communities affected by business projects in the development of public policies, however, so far, none has managed to open a truly participatory process. “Rather, it was a simulation process where the government meets with organizations and communities and reaches agreements, but in the end they are not fulfilled”, says Yvette Gonzalez, from the organization Project on Organization, Development, Education and Research (PODER), who participated in the working groups organized at the initiative of the government of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-

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Last December, the government of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador presented the National Human Rights Plan (PNDH in its Spanish acronym) that contains several important strategic lines towards promoting mandatory due diligence for companies in the country. They could be a major breakthrough. However, doubts remain that its implementation will become a reality.

Sustainable development for whom?

Despite the fact that the Mexican State has signed and ratified hundreds of human rights conventions, including on this issue, for decades, successive governments have promoted megaprojects and extraction as priority forms of development, many of these projects causing as much serious environmental damage as human rights violations of indigenous communities and the population in general. Several of them are implemented by public companies, making it difficult for the State to play a mediating role between the population and companies. Furthermore, with the energy reforms since the late 1980s, various sectors of the economy have been liberalized, which has facilitated the entry of transnational companies into the country.

Currently, one of the flagship projects of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is the Maya Train, which has not only raised strong questions about the environmental effects it would have, but also about the violations of the rights of the indigenous peoples affected, omitting several rights included in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) *. In addition, several investigations show that the main beneficiaries of the Maya Train project will be mainly large companies. However, this project and the questions it has raised are not an isolated case.

Ejido Carrizalillo, Guerrero

The Carrizalillo ejido in the state of Guerrero has one of the most important mines in Mexico for the production of gold and silver with two open pits and an underground mine. It has had a mining presence since 2008, then through the Canadian company, Goldcorp. From 2014 to the present day, it is exploited by the mining company Leagold Mining Corporation merged with Equinox Gold, also with Canadian capital.

Over the years, the ejido that had initially managed to negotiate various compensations with the company has experienced dispossession, environmental contamination and damage to health, as well as lack of compliance by the company with the agreements signed. In addition, there have been actions of criminalization and violence on the part of the authorities.

According to the ejidatarios, the current company has violated different clauses of the Collaboration and Consideration Agreement signed in 2019 *. Faced with the imbalance of power to negotiate again, the ejidatarios initiated a blockade of the mine in September 2020.

Parota Dam, Guerrero

The Parota Dam project has existed for more than 30 years. In 2003, the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE in its Spanish acronym) entered communal lands and began to carry out works without consulting or informing the campesinos about the effects 9. It should be clarified that this project would imply changes in the use and ownership of the land, the relocation of several localities, the direct displacement of around 25,000 people and some 75,000 would be indirectly affected.

In 2003, the Council of Ejidatarios and Communities Opposing La Parota (CECOP) 10 was formed. Its resistance process to date has involved imprisonment, deaths and divisions. Given the lack of legal resources, they decided to fight to be recognized as comparable communities to appeal to the framework provided for indigenous peoples that, even with its limitations, offers some defense routes.

The resistance of CECOP, which has been accompanied by La Montaña Tlachinollan Mountain Human Rights Center, has undergone multiple legal actions (allowing the order of temporary suspension of the works by different legal entities and on several occasions the release of prisoners). They continue to ask for the definitive cancellation. The current President has said that, at least during his tenure, he will not continue with this project 11.

Chicomuselo, Chiapas

Since 2008, the Canadian company BlackFire has tried

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8 Rema


to work in the municipality of Chicomuselo, Chiapas, for the creation of the largest barite mine in the world. Communities have opposed this project. The resistance, as in many cases, has come at a high cost to opponents, including the 2009 assassination of human rights defender Mariano Abarca12.

Resistance through various actions such as demonstrations and complaints before federal and international authorities have allowed the mine to be temporarily closed. However, 12 mining concessions granted by the Mexican government to various companies, which have not been consulted with the affected communities, are still valid until the year 2059 the “Samuel Ruiz García” Committee for the Promotion and Defense of Life denounced in 2017. In addition, harassment continues to be reported towards the population that rejects mining exploitation. It has also been reported that companies have taken advantage of the existing poverty to offer financial support and other incentives, which has caused divisions among the inhabitants.

In 2019, a federal judge in Canada admitted the possibility that Mariano Abarca “might not have been assassinated” if the Canadian Embassy in Mexico had “acted differently”, following the complaint that relatives of the defender filed with the Federal Court of Canada in Ottawa by act and omission in the mining conflict in 200813.

San José del Progreso, Oaxaca
The community of San José del Progreso opposes the operations of the Cuzcatlán mine, owned by the Canadian company Fortuna Silver Mines (FSM) since 200914. The Coordinator of United peoples of Ocotlan Valley (COPUVO in its Spanish acronym) and the Magdalena Ocotlan Defense Committee against Mining were created, which are confronting the mining operation, something that has been increasingly dangerous and even deadly. In 2012, COPUVO defender, Vasquez Sanchez, was assassinated, a case that continues to go unpunished, after receiving threats from San José authorities and the Fortuna Silver Mines mining company, the same threats that were ignored by federal and state authorities.

The FSM mining company, through its subsidiary Cuzcatlan, has continued to operate in the region despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) has assured that it will not grant permission and despite the decision of the regional assemblies to declare that their territories will be free from mining. In July 2020, Cuzcatlan requested for the second time from SEMARNAT the authorization of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in its Regional modality (EIS-R San José II), in order to continue exploiting gold and silver for ten more years15.

**Variety of strategies in the absence of an established defense route**

It is important to highlight the diversity of defense strategies that have been implemented with local, national and international components.

For example, there is the case of Union Hidalgo, Oaxaca, where the French transnational company Electricite De France (EDF Group), through its local Mexican subsidiaries, began to implement the “Gunaa Sicaru” wind project on indigenous Zapotec community land in 2015, without consulting or informing the community. France, being a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is obliged to ensure that its companies respect human rights in other countries, so representatives of Union Hidalgo, together with the human rights organizations ProDESC and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), filed a civil lawsuit in France in October 2020 denouncing violations of their rights by the French company16.

In the case of Rio Sonora, Sonora, the worst mining environmental disaster in Mexico’s history happened, when, in August 2014, a Grupo Mexico mine, Buenavista del Cobre, spilled 40 million liters of acidified copper sulfate into the Sonora and Bacanuchi rivers, affecting more than 22 thousand people from seven municipalities. Almost seven years after the disaster, the promises of the Government and Grupo Mexico remain unfulfilled. Despite direct and indirect intimidation towards the affected people or opponents of business projects, the communities organized in the Rio Sonora Basin Committees with the support of national organizations for the defense of human rights, and the accompaniment of PODER, have demanded justice, remediation, reparation and non-repetition in front of national and international judicial mechanisms in the form of a strategic litigation17.

In the case of the Juba Wajiin community, Guerrero; in 2011, the indigenous Me Phaa began a community and regional struggle in defense of territory and life against the mining policy of the Mexican State, after the Federal Government granted two concessions on their territory, without having informed or consulted them. Faced with the environmental and social damage that open-pit mining would imply, the community decided to wage a fight and managed to obtain a historic ruling in 2016 in their favor that prevents mining companies from entering their territory for violating collective rights of indigenous peoples18.

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18 Tlachinollan Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña. LA
The cases highlighted in the text are just a few that exemplify how these processes use different defense strategies. They show challenges such as the double interest of the government, which, on the one hand, is responsible for guaranteeing human rights but, on the other, has its own economic interests or seeks to benefit companies as “development agents”. Furthermore, the main energy companies in Mexico are public.

It also shows how communities and defenders, after many years, continue to defend their rights and territories. What has often strengthened the defense has been the organization of the affected communities, forging alliances with others, with civil society and human rights defense organizations to be able to share tasks and exchange both experiences and information, said two members of PODER, part of the Focus Group of Civil Society on Business and Human Rights in Mexico, in an interview with SIPAZ.

Challenges and opportunities from the growing field of Business and Human Rights

“We must stop privileging business, competitiveness over human rights” - Miguel Soto, PODER

In the same interview, the members of PODER highlighted the global debate and the recognition that there is a responsibility of companies as a great advance, although it should be based more in Mexico. They expressed that many cases show the need for a binding treaty for public and private companies to make due diligence effective, to ensure that the rules that already exist are mandatory; and, in particular, to draft legislation that obliges companies to also respect human rights when they operate in third countries, even if the national legislative framework does not establish it.

The aforementioned international initiatives are positive, but a clearer demand mechanism is needed and little progress towards local implementation of the guiding principles has been observed during their ten years of existence.

Due to the power of companies, which is growing more and more, there is a serious risk that companies may have a greater interference in public policies, until they have the ability to “capture the State”, said Miguel Soto from PODER. In addition, in Mexico, there remains a major challenge in terms of access to justice and the right to reparation in general, said Ivette Gonzalez from PODER. Another challenge is being able to truly dialogue with companies so that they assume their responsibility and realize that, in the end, complying with it could be beneficial for them.

It is also worth mentioning that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last year have led to greater difficulty in continuing with resistance processes, particularly those related to access to justice and reparation. This together with the limitations to be able to meet, demonstrate or organize events that are not exclusively digital. Meanwhile, megaprojects and extractivist companies have been able to continue their activity, being recognized as “essential activities.” This makes the need and urgency of establishing one or more mechanisms that regulate the actions of companies even clearer, as well as a real and balanced debate on development models that are committed to the future.

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INCANSABLE LUCHA de Júba Wajiín por ser y vivir como hijas e hijos del fuego. Recuperado 12 de febrero 2021.


Other Resources:
- Comité Económico y Social Europeo 2020: INT/911 DICTAMEN Diligencia debida obligatoria, [Dictamen exploratorio]
- Informe: México: Empresas y Derechos Humanos. 2016. Compendio de información que presentan la Coalición de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil al Grupo de Trabajo sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos de la ONU
- COMISIÓN INTERAMERICANA DE DERECHOS HUMANOS CIDH. 2019. Informe Empresas y Derechos Humanos: Estándares Interamericanos
This year marked the 10th anniversary of the passing of Samuel Ruiz García, a peace-builder bishop and defender of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Latin America. With Mayan altars, prayers in the indigenous language, flowers and songs, Eucharistic ceremonies and other distant and face-to-face events, various civil organizations, members of the Catholic Church, as well as human rights defenders shared their path with Samuel Ruiz through Chiapas.

It is evident that the legacy of JTatik (father, in Tzeltal) Samuel has transcended cultures, borders and generations and today, the teachings of the “bishop of the poor” are revived in the peace-building process in Chiapas.

“His legacy, a force for peace building”

As part of this celebration, the Civil Society organization Las Abejas de Acteal, published a statement in which it recalls Samuel Ruiz as the bishop who came to recognize the reality of indigenous peoples, to transform himself and transform Chiapas, realizing “that his work as bishop had to respond to that reality.” This was the watershed for pastoral agents to begin to help “to organize commissions and collective work in the towns to give priority to health, education, production and defense of the land”, the organization notes.

This transformative arrival allowed the indigenous peoples of Chiapas to welcome Samuel Ruiz as one of their own. In addition, with the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church acquired a commitment to the poor and indigenous, especially in Latin America, recognizing the forms and ways of indigenous peoples, helping it to be an “autochthonous church.” In this sense, Samuel Ruiz Garcia’s decision to opt for indigenous peoples, not only from the practices of faith, but from a participatory education to sustain awareness, animation and organization was “proof of how culture was integrated with faith in this peacebuilding exercise by JTatik ”, says Gonzalo Ituarte O.P. current director of SERAPAZ and close collaborator of Samuel Ruiz.

In the framework of the discussion “Your Spirit in our Journey. Lights of the Legacy of JTatik Samuel Ruiz for Peace-building”, some of the key teachings of JTatik Samuel in the peacebuilding process in the state were shared.

Abelardo Cruz Jimenez, former president of the Kiptik ta Lecubtesel organization recalled how JTatik Samuel helped in “the reconstruction of the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas” and also in the transformation of the communities through unity and the use of God’s word to continue the struggle: “JTatik Samuel encouraged us and told us that, like a pot, our peoples were broken, but they could put themselves together again (…) we took out drums, flutes and flags and began to organize ourselves (it was) a very difficult fight because the government put pressure on us”, Abelardo states.

The mediation in which Samuel Ruiz participated during the conflict between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was a form of recognition by the actors in this conflict, making him “a key piece in the construction of peace”, and at the same time putting him “in the line of fire”, given the fact that the Mexican government tried to link him with the formation of the EZLN, resulting in several attempts to try to remove him from the diocese of San Cristobal and that even the Vatican canceled the central part of his pastoral, the formation of deacons and indigenous catechists, which would
change with the visit of Pope Francis in 2016.

As a result of this work, Samuel Ruiz made it possible to understand mediation as a process of accompaniment and search for dialogue, “a meeting point, the search for things in common” and where the recognition of the parties in the conflict is necessary to find “the paths of transformation.” This mediation process sought for the government players to recognize “the legitimacy of the social actors, of those who are in struggle as collective subjects with their own voice” and thereby achieve the strengthening of the “historically oppressed” subject.

Furthermore, at the time of greatest oppression of indigenous peoples, Samuel Ruiz had as an initiative the construction of spaces that could respond to the demand of communities and other organizations in defense of their rights. With this desire, he sought the link between the processes in struggle to “generate bridges that would allow them to walk towards the same horizon” but also to generate the participation of social actors in the transformation of these oppressive structures.

The constant work in favor of peace-building in Chiapas and in Mexico was recognized in 1998, when Rigoberta Menchu, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Desmond Tutu, Oscar Arias and the Dalai Lama, all Nobel Peace Prize winners, signed an acknowledgment letter that was delivered to Samuel Ruiz in San Cristóbal de Las Casas within the framework of the Peace Council that was held that same year in the state. The intention of this meeting was to show that peace is possible and above all that interreligious collaboration could also contribute to this work. “In a world where religion is used too often to justify division, hatred and violence - and it is seldom used to alleviate these problems...”.

Samuel Ruiz García received the salute of Pope Francis who visited his tomb in the cathedral of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 2016. With his visit, he authorized the use of native languages in religious ceremonies and celebrated a mass accompanied by indigenous deacons. During the Eucharist, the Pope said: “Many times, in a systematic and structural way, your peoples have been misunderstood and excluded from society. How sad!” “How good it would do us all to make an examination of conscience and learn to say: sorry”, calling for reconciliation. This gesture was for many “the vindication” of the bishop to opt for the poor, while for others it is an act of justice to the work of Tatik Samuel.

“The fact that Pope Francis should have a moment of prayer, of silence in front of the tomb of Tatik Samuel is extremely significant, it is an endorsement of a work, a journey of 40 years. Very similar to the bishop defending the poor, Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, at the beginning of the colonial era”, Bachajon parish priest, a member of the Society of Jesus, Jose Javier Aviles Arreola said.

In this sense, it is stimulating to see how the vitality of Don Samuel’s inheritance continues to be fruitful, but it also reminds us that the structural violence that oppresses the people is still in force. “It is not repeating the past but approaching reality from the new challenges, and starting from them be attentive, attentive and find new answers so that the search for peace is possible”.

This year is an opportunity to analyze the future with the same eyes as Don Samuel, to “look beyond the darkness of the difficult moments that we as humanity go through to better appreciate the lights of the road”.

Samuel Ruiz’s legacy teaches us not to lose sight of the importance of common dialogue in comprehensive peace-building processes since, “when approached correctly, conflicts are a motor that allows structural and substantive changes, especially for groups that are historically in a situation of vulnerability.”

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- Organización Sociedad Civil Las Abejas de Acteal. (21 de enero de 2021). El 25 de diciembre de 1997, Jtotik Samuel celebró en Acteal la misa de Navidad más triste que haya vivido...
- Obtenido de Las Abejas de Acteal.
INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

CHIAPAS

Civil observation missions
- In December, we participated in a Civil Observation Mission (COM), made up of 14 member organizations of the All Rights for All Network (Red TDT), as well as three international organizations that visited communities in the Highlands, North and Coast regions of Chiapas.
- In January, we accompanied one of the Observation Missions that visited Nuevo San Gregorio, where there is an agrarian conflict that affects lands recovered by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

Gender
- On November 25th, within the framework of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we participated in a virtual conference called to present the report “Violence against Women in the Context of a Pandemic”, as well as in face-to-face activities convened in San Cristobal de Las Casas and Pijijiapan.
- In January, we accompanied the march-rally organized in San Cristobal de Las Casas to demand justice for the murder of Mariana de Lourdes Sanchez, a student at the Faculty of Medicine of the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH), who was found dead after filing a complaint for sexual violence.

Indigenous Peoples
- In November, we attended the Virtual Discussion “Deferred rights: self-determination and autonomy in the 4T”, convened, among others, by the Ibero-American University of Puebla.

Defenders of Human Rights and Freedom of Expression
- In January, we participated in the online event where the human rights organization Cerezo Committee presented a report in which it revealed that 14 human rights defenders were victims of extrajudicial executions in Mexico during 2020.
- In February we attended the virtual space in which the report “Situation of the Defense of Human Rights and Free Expression in Mexico since the Pandemic” was presented. It was convened by the Center for Justice and International Law (CEIL), in conjunction with other organizations.

Land and Territory
- In November, we participated in the online space in which the “Mariano Abarca” Second Prize for Environmental Defense in Chiapas 2020 was awarded to the organization June 20th Popular Front in Defense of Soconusco (FPDS).
- In January, we attended the virtual event “Maya Train: a Death Project”, organized by Periferies.

Militarization
- In January, we attended the press conference in which representatives of the Tzeltal Mayan people of the municipality of Chilón, together with the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) and the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Centro Prodh), announced that they had filed a claim for an injunction against the construction of a National Guard Headquarters in their territory, because they were not previously consulted.

Migration
- In November, we attended the virtual presentation of the “Report of the Findings of the Human Rights Observation Mission on the Southern Border of Mexico”.
- In January, we attended the online event “Caravans and Other Migrant Struggles in Mesoamerica” organized by Ibero, Mexico City.

Impunity
- In November, we attended the online press conference in which it was announced that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) approved the Report related to the case of the Viejo Velasco Massacre.
- In December, we were present at the celebrations organized for the XXIII anniversary of the Acteal Massacre in Chenalho.

Human Rights
- In January, we participated in the virtual event in which the Network for the Rights of the Child in Mexico (REDIM), presented its 2020 annual report entitled “The year of the Syndemic and the Abandonment of Childhood in Mexico”.
- In February, we attended the online event “Torture and Health Crisis: Urgent Actions to Comply with International Commitments and Guarantee Personal Integrity in Times of COVID-19”, which was convened by Ibero Puebla.

Events
- In January, we attended the Eucharistic ceremony organized on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the passing of Tlatik Samuel Ruiz. Through a statement, Believing People of the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas lamented the systematic violence and inequalities experienced by individuals and peoples, especially during this pandemic. We were in several online events organized in the framework of this anniversary (see Article).

OAXACA
- In December, we participated in the online discussion “Against Fear, Hope” during the launch of the book “Rethinking the Pandemic”, prepared by Uniterra.
- In February, we had a virtual meeting with the director of Alternative Education Services (EDUCA) to update analysis and coordinate actions.

GUERRERO
- In November, we were at the virtual press conference “Position on the Arrest of Captain Jose Martinez Crespo”, in which mothers and fathers of the 43 disappeared students from the Ayotzinapa Rural School in 2014, demanded that a formal prison ruling be issued and the officer be prosecuted.
- In December, we attended the online presentation of the XXVI Report of La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center, entitled “Like a Night without Stars”.
- In January, we held a meeting with the director of the Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon Human Rights Center, with whom we discussed the situation in Guerrero and sought to coordinate actions.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS
- In December, we attended the virtual webinar “Protecting Human Rights Defenders: the Commitment of the European Union”, organized by the delegation of the European Union in Mexico.
- Also in December, we met with the fourth visitor of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in San Cristobal de las Casas to address various problems in the state of Chiapas.
- In February, we participated in a virtual space together with other organizations, which focused on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and in which representatives of the Belgian Embassy and the representation of the European Union participated.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE
- In November, we facilitated a space for reality analysis convened by the field of Indian theology of the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas in Huixtán.
- In November, we gave a virtual presentation with students from two universities in Mexico City who are participating in a peace professorship.
- In December, we facilitated two days of planning, monitoring and evaluation with the operational team of the Commission for Reconciliation and Community Unity (CORECO).
- In January, we participated in an analysis space with the Mesoamerican Voices work team in the framework of its strategic planning for 2021.

NETWORKING
- In December, SIPAZ participated in the Panel: “Building Peace in Times of COVID: Latin America Facing the Crisis”, within the framework of PeaceCon 2020, coordinated by the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AFP) of the United States.
- In December, we held the annual meeting of the GPPAC North American region, which we coordinated.
- In December, we participated with a presentation on the lessons learned from the dialogue process in Chiapas in an effort to build conditions for negotiation in the armed conflict in the Philippines.
- In January, 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.