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SIPAZ ACTIVITIES:
Mid-February to mid-May, 2021

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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.

**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.

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**International Coalition**

- **Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (YMCA)** (Argentina)
- **Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America** (North Carolina, USA)
- **Beneficent Sisters of Erie** (Pennsylvania, USA)
- **Capacitar** (California, USA)
- **CARE** (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 Ecuuméntica «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)
- **Loretto Community Latin America/Caribbean Committee** (Colorado, USA)
- **Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas** (California, USA)
- **META Peace Team** (Michigan, USA)
- **Movimiento Ecuuméntico 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)
- **Peacemakers** (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 June 6th, elections will be held in Mexico in which 500 councils and more than 20,300 local offices will be decided, including 15 governorships. They will be held in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. One year after the start of the health emergency, the number of infections exceeded 2,500,000 cases and more than 220,000 people have died. Although the official figures have been declining and vaccination has been advancing, the health emergency continues.

Another omnipresent feature of this electoral process is political violence. By mid-May, 563 attacks against politicians and candidates had already been documented. 83 of these were murdered (63 of whom were from a party other than the ruling party in their states), according to the Etellekt consultancy. The penetration of organized crime in the campaigns is pointed out as one of the factors of such high rates of violence, but it is not the only one. These elections are “midterm”, coinciding with the middle of the six-year term of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) of the National Regeneration Movement Party (MORENA), and will be a factor in defining the continuity of his project called the Fourth Transformation. There is a great dispute between the different political sectors for or against it.

In elements of analysis, the organization Services for an Alternative Education (EDUCA) stated in a bulletin: “The debate that exists is whether MORENA has really pushed the changes that the country demands. There is a well-founded doubt as to whether what we are facing is really a transformation of public life. On the one hand, MORENA has hit some sectors that enjoyed great privileges in the past: a sector of the business community, the press and the media, the ‘golden bureaucracy’; actions of vital importance have been promoted to benefit the impoverished of this country, such as the increase in the minimum wage, support for young people, people with disabilities and the elderly, and some of its social programs. However, on the other hand, (...) the armed forces have been empowered, social movements such as the environmentalist and women’s movements have been confronted, institutions such as the CNDH (National Human Rights Commission), the TEPJF have been co-opted (Electoral Court of the Federal Judicial Power) and the Judicial Power. Civil society organizations, independent journalists and human rights defenders, who have been described as ‘conservatives’ by the National Palace, are attacked.”

**Human rights defenders and communicators: vulnerability**

Mexico ranks fourth among the deadliest countries in the world for human rights defenders. In 2020, 19 defenders were killed. It has been pointed out that one of the vulnerability factors arises from questions from the President himself. An example of this, in March, President Lopez Obrador stated that “in previous governments massacres were allowed and human rights defenders of the so-called civil society remained silent in the face of the massacres, including UN organizations and OAS human rights defenders.” Civil organizations supported the actions of the UNHCHR and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), asking that their work be respected.

Also in March, AMLO claimed that...
the organization in favor of freedom of expression Article 19 “is supported by foreigners, all the people who have to do with Article 19 belong to the conservative movement that are against us.” In this same framework, he criticized the United States for expressing its views on human rights violations in Mexico, including attacks on journalists in the annual report of the State Department in which it is stated that “although Mexican journalists enjoy freedom to criticize the government, the President publicly discredits them, which has caused communicators to receive attacks and threats on social networks.”

In 2020, 692 attacks on journalists and the media were registered.

In the face of direct allegations, Article 19 condemned that Lopez Obrador intended to “discredit and disqualify us without any support”, by stating that the organization has international funding, which is public. It questioned that since he assumed power, the President makes use of “this distorted exercise of the right of reply”, using it “for disqualification and what it generates is an inhibitory effect.” In turn, more than 160 civil organizations and journalists expressed their support for the work of Article 19. “The president’s remarks against civil society organizations, the media, communicators and journalists contribute to the existing polarization in the country, and the situation of vulnerability in which they find themselves”, they pointed out.

**8M: thousands of women march to demand a life free of violence**

On March 8th, within the framework of International Women’s Day and despite the pandemic, thousands of Mexican women marched in various states of the Republic to demand a life free of violence. These demonstrations occurred at a time of disagreement with the AMLO administration when he still declared in his previous morning conference that feminist movements are “groups manipulated by conservatives and their demands are political attacks” (see article).

Notably, on the same day, the Senate committees approved, among others, removing the Attorney General’s Office (FGR) from the National System to Prevent, Attend, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, in order to “preserve its autonomy.”

**Reform of the FGR: a setback in human rights matters**

In April, the Senate approved the bill to issue the new Law of the Attorney General’s Office (FGR). The Agustín ProDH Center warned that “to the concern of broad sectors of civil society, groups of family members and academics and experts in human rights, serious setbacks materialized.” “It eliminates the rights of the victims, cancels instances of accountability, erodes controls for the appointment of prosecutors and disassociates the FGR from inter-institutional coordination mechanisms (...) using autonomy as a pretext”, it denounced. Many groups of families of victims, particularly those of the disappeared, have also spoken out against the ruling and denounced having been left out of the debate.

The Law was even criticized by high-level officials. The head of the National Search Commission, Karla Quintana, noted that “what it does is limit and deny the rights of the victims (...). It denies the power to take on cases and even complicates it so that it is not obliged to do so. It sets us back decades in what has been achieved in the area of human rights. In general, the issue of autonomy in the law shows a complete misunderstanding of the term, which I don’t think is a mistake, it is completely intentional.”

**Indigenous peoples: between attention and contradictions**

In April, the Law of Consultation with Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities was approved, which should allow these sectors to “express their opinion on administrative and legislative projects that could affect (them).” However, it was also endorsed that “there will be no increase in the budget for this issue in the current fiscal year.” In fact, it prevents the implementation of the law that some opponents described as “simulation.”

In May, the President traveled to Quintana Roo, where he offered his
apologies to the Mayan peoples for the historical grievances they have suffered. “We are here asking for forgiveness and stating that we will never forget the inhabitants of deep Mexico”, he added.

However, in an open letter, the group of Mayan historians Chunto’uun Maya, from Yucatan, declared that “there are many things that continue: they continue to cut down the mountains to plant them with soy, they continue to take away the mountains and cenotes that we have defended.” This “request for forgiveness may be the opportunity to sit down and talk”, they added. For their part, indigenous groups in Yucatan, organizers of the UJeets’el le kik’ikuxtal (For a Dignified Life) campaign, rejected the apology, considering that it goes hand in hand with dispossession and human rights violations. “Whoever asks for forgiveness perpetuates racism, discrimination and contempt”, they claimed. They argued that colonization persists, “with more violence and intensity each day”, with the imposition of megaprojects.

MEGAPROJECTS: Conflicting visions

In February, three new provisional suspensions were granted for Section three of the Maya Train. The injunction claims were made against the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), granted to the National Fund for the Promotion of Tourism (FONATUR), and were presented by the Assembly of Defenders of the Mayan Territory “Múuch Xíinbal” and the Chuun t’aan Maya Collective. They argued that colonization persists, “with more violence and intensity each day”, with the imposition of megaprojects.

In charge of the operation of “the entire Maya Train, and not just sections 1, 6 and 7 as initially planned.” This announcement assumes that “all profits will go directly to the Army” to finance the pensions of sailors and soldiers and to “guarantee security in the region.” With this decision, an “unprecedented” support is given to an institution “that accumulates more power each day and perpetuates it as an economic and political agent for subsequent governments”, security analyst Alejandro Hope said.

EZLN begins “Journey for Life - Europe Chapter”

Seven Zapatistas form the maritime section of the delegation that will visit Europe. Four are women, two are men and one is transgender. 4, 2, 1. Squadron 421. In April, the maritime commission began its “Journey for Life - Europe Chapter”, with several farewell acts in the Zapatista territories in Chiapas. “The delegation received the mandate from the Zapatista peoples to take our thoughts, that is, our hearts far away. Not only to embrace those who rebel and resist on the European continent, but also to listen and learn from their stories, geographies, calendars and ways”, stated the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

On May 2nd, Squadron 421 left Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo, in La Monteaña, the ship that will take them to Europe on a six to eight-week trip. They are expected to arrive in Madrid on August 13th, the date on which it will be 500 years since the fall of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire at the hands of the Spanish. The objective is to complete the reverse journey to that of the conquistadores and “fight for life, organize, defend, but together”, said Insurgent Sub-commander Moisés. The EZLN announced activities in 30 countries in Europe.

Migration: Change of US President makes no significant difference to access to rights for migrants

In March, the Collective for the Observation and Monitoring of Human Rights in Southeast Mexico expressed its concern and rejection of “the deployment of migratory containment operations on the southern border.” It also recalled that these measures “were made known in the context of negotiations with the United States to access vaccines against COVID-19.”

Although the organizations recognized “positive signs from the United States government aimed at re-establishing and improving the asylum system and the intention was announced to develop a strategy to attack the causes of Central American migration and to strengthen access to international
protection at regional level”, “the specific details and to what extent the government will carry out actual consultations with civil society organizations in the region are not yet known.” They denounced that to date “in practice, the focus of Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico towards forced displacement continues to be one of national security.”

In April, it was announced that the United States, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala reached an agreement to reinforce their borders, which will involve a deployment of 10,000 officials including the National Guard on the southern border of Mexico.

CHIAPAS: A highly conflictive pre-electoral context

In March, given the forthcoming elections, the Bishops of Chiapas addressed the citizens, regardless of their religious convictions, to encourage them to vote in a responsible, informed and critical way, always thinking about the common good of society. They found that “throughout the last electoral processes, divisions and confrontations have been generated, which have resulted in violence and death.” They regretted that in political parties “the search to satisfy personal or group interests prevails.” They were also concerned that “some power groups, linked to criminal activities, infiltrate political parties or coerce them by financing candidacies in order to enjoy protection and impunity.”

At the end of March, the registration of candidates for municipal presidents, federal and local deputies, as well as members of the Chiapas city council, concluded. MORENA militants in different municipalities protested the imposition of candidates from other parties, especially the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico, and accused MORENA state leaders of “tampering with the entire candidate selection process”, “leaving out the true militants.”

In the midst of this dispute, there were several hot spots with little or no attention from the authorities currently focused on the electoral contest. The first example of this, the old agrarian conflict between Aldama and Santa Martha, Chenalho, which has already left more than 20 dead on both sides and several wounded, remains unresolved. Although peace agreements were signed in 2019 and 2020, the armed aggression has not ended. In April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reported that it had granted precautionary measures in favor of 12 communities in Aldama. In May, a new death was reported in Aldama, which occurred while elements of the National Guard and the state police were in the same community as the deceased.

In another part of the state, in May it was reported that the agrarian dispute over the possession of thousands of hectares of land in the municipality of Venustiano Carranza between members of the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization, OCEZ - Casa del Pueblo and the San Bartolome de Los Llanos worsened again, leaving at least two dead. Both groups are claiming that they were attacked by the other. Given the situation, the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas and the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) made an “urgent call for Peace and dialogue.”

In April, two members of Frayba were kidnapped while they were traveling to Palenque. After 40 hours of detention, they were released. According to news reports, the retention stemmed from a car accident in which the vehicle in which they were traveling was involved. Frayba denied this information and expressed concern that these versions “minimize the context of violence in the region and consequently the high risk that human rights defenders experience, misrepresenting the attacks to which we are constantly targeted, passing them off as acts unrelated to our work.”

OAXACA: electoral process marked by violence

At the beginning of May, there were 15 investigation files for electoral violence, six of them for political violence based on gender. Two of the most serious cases were the murder of Ivonne Gallegos, an independent candidate for the municipal presidency of Ocotlan de Morelos; and the case of the disappearance of Claudia Uruchurtu, while she was holding a protest against the municipal president of Asuncion Nochixtlan who was seeking re-election.

Another source of conflict continues to be the project of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Inter-Oceanic Corridor (CIIT). This program includes, in addition to the renovation of railways and the modernization of Salina Cruz Port,
the construction of industrial parks. In May, the information stage of the indigenous consultation regarding the installation of said “development poles” began in San Blas Atempa and Santa María Mixtequilla. In Mixtequilla, those present at the consultation, the majority community members, questioned the “lack of information” and the “unfair and advantageous” way in which the government monopolized the lands. There were voices for and against, mostly, questioning the “rush” to install the assembly. For their part, community members from Puente Madera, the municipal agency of San Blas Atempa, blocked the Pan-American federal highway in rejection of the consultation. Shortly after, President Lopez Obrador announced that the Interoceanic Corridor will be administered by the Secretariat of the Navy-Navy of Mexico (SEMAR).

In terms of land and territory, another focus of concern has been the municipality of Santiago Jamiltepec, a benchmark for peaceful resistance against hydroelectric megaprojects. In March, Jaime Jimenez Ruiz, a former municipal agent from Paso de la Reyna and part of the movement for the defense of the Rio Verde, was assassinated. With this case, the number of murders in 2021 against social players linked to said defense rises to five. The organization Services for an Alternative Education (EDUCA) warned about “cacique authoritarianism and impunity” that are experienced in Paso de la Reyna. “This wave of violence grows in tandem with the total ineffectiveness of state and federal authorities”, it said.

On another note, in February, Oaxaca Consortium presented a report to the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on the situation in Oaxaca. It warned about the “simulation that exists around public gender policy.” This, it stated, when the budget granted to the State to implement actions on this issue was not assigned. In addition, the State Victims Commission should have been installed in 2017, but does not yet exist. It also spoke of the total ignorance on the matter by the Oaxaca Public Security Secretariat (SSPO). In addition to this, Consorcio provided data that account for the little use of the criminal term of femicide, as well as the difference in registered cases.

GUERRERO: Exponential increase in violence

In April, La Montaña “Tlachinollan” Human Rights Center launched the “Campaign for Life: Sea of Grievances, Mountain of Ruptures”, to denounce “the exponential increase in violence carried out by organized crime groups that act in collusion with the security forces and other local authorities.” In this context, it pointed out that since the beginning of the pandemic, it has documented 20 cases of femicides, 20 of sexual violence, 80 of physical violence and 85 of economic violence and that “between 2007 and 2018 the number of complaints of forced disappearance multiplied by 20 (…), without there being a single conviction in these.”

Tlachinollan also declared that “Guerrero faces a serious human rights crisis that has deepened with the COVID-19 health emergency. The presence of organized crime, structural violence and impunity has resulted in thousands of victims of human rights violations. (…) In 2018 there were at least 13 organized crime groups that dispute territorial control for the planting and transfer of drugs in the state. This presence of organized crime has triggered an increase in homicides, kidnappings and extortion.”

Reporting puts whoever does it at risk. In April, the National Human
Rights Commission (CNDH) distanced itself from statements of the former governor, Angel Aguirre Rivero, in relation to the member of Tlachinollan, Vidulfo Rosales Sierra, also a lawyer for the parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa student teachers who disappeared in 2014, when the former governor accused the defender of being “one of the main promoters of MORENA’s campaign in Guerrero.” “It constitutes a direct attack on the defense of human rights, and shows a systematic pattern (...) to discredit the work of the defender (...), who has been repeatedly subjected to attacks and threats”, the CNDH noted.

In May, the Governing Board of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists expressed concern “at the conditions faced for the exercise of the defense of human rights and journalism.” It explained that “throughout the month of April there were various risk incidents that range from the blocking of communication channels, stalking, harassment by authorities, digital harassment, harassment when covering news stories, to threats against physical integrity and the free exercise of their activities.”

Likewise, in May, a Civil Observation Mission in La Montaña declared that it had noticed “a serious lack of attention on the part of public institutions.” In addition, it asserted that the problems have deepened during the pandemic, “due to the closure of public institutions, the reduction in staff and budget of the various public agencies that attend to these problems, as well as the confinement measures themselves that have exacerbated the gender violence.”

For the rest, the pre-electoral context has been marked by controversy. MORENA’s candidate, Evelyn Salgado Pineam is the daughter of who was initially the candidate for the party in power, who after much local and national pressure had to withdraw after having two complaints of rape against him. In addition, she is married to Alfredo Alonso, son of Joaquin Alonso Piedra, El Abulón, financial operator of the Beltran Leyva cartel in Acapulco, arrested in 2016.

Launch of the Campaign for Life: Sea of Grievances, Mountain of Ruptures © Tlachinollan
“About two billion people live in countries affected by conflict, violence or delicate situations; of them, more than a third are young people between 15 and 24 years old.”

IMJUVE 2018

According to the United Nations Youth Strategy Report (2020), the world is home to the largest generation of young people in history with 1.8 billion people, of which about 90% live in developing countries. In Mexico there are 30.7 million young people, that is, 24.6% of the total population.

Within the framework of the Youth, Peace and Security project of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), the International Service for Peace (SIPAZ), the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) and the Support Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO) carried out a series of surveys aimed at young people from Mexico, the United States and Canada, the objective of which was to find out about their perception of violence, conflict and peace.

The results are not representative of all youth in the region. However, they have allowed us to deepen our reflection on the subject and make an intersection with the current health situation. The questionnaires were answered online by 93 young people between 16 and 36 years of age, during the first semester of 2021. For practical and methodological reasons, this analysis focuses on the voice of Mexican youth, from Nuevo Leon to Chiapas. This text is only a first approach to the experiences and perspectives of youth about the current situation of the country, the state of their living conditions and their perception of the possibilities of building roads for well-being and peace.

What does it mean to be young?

The United Nations (UN) defines young people as those between 15 and 24 years of age. In Mexico, the age range goes from 15 to 29 according to the Mexican Institute of Youth (IMJUVE). However, the concept of youth is colored by the sociocultural, institutional, economic and political factors of each country, even varying from one region to another. In Mexico, for example, to construct this definition it is necessary to consider all the areas occupied by this population block, from education to work, from cultural to political; their capabilities, their opportunities, but also their needs and abuses must be recognized. For this reason, seeking to enclose all the complexities of being young in a concept delimited only by age places us on a linear plane where youth is reduced to a transition stage, “in the transition of a condition from children to adults”, reducing it to a “fragile and temporary period of life.”

Even when the IMJUVE speaks of youth as the moment in life when a person begins to establish their identity based
different forms of behavior, a moment of projection into the future, of creating expectations and dreams; the actions that both governments and society design and implement for the welfare of youth have a contradictory sense, raising a discourse of centrality and importance, but allocating few efforts and resources for their development. This contradiction contributes to obstructing the access of young people to their basic rights.

Although many of the young people surveyed align themselves with the conceptualization of youth based on the age criterion, as well as the "possibility or power of action in the future", many of them identify themselves as active subjects, participatory and with diverse capacities to positively influence their environment.

Youth and violence

According to the article by Animal Politico “The Reality of Youth in Mexico: Poverty, Discrimination and Non-compliance with their Rights”, published in 2018, in Mexico the situations of violence that affect young people are mainly discrimination, lack of access to basic rights, and poverty. However, the young people who participated in the survey perceive insecurity and crime as the main forms of violence that affect their daily lives.

1) Insecurity and crime

Both young women and men identified assaults, physical attacks, kidnappings, and murders as the most common forms of violence in their environment. Widespread insecurity was outlined as the greatest risk. An overwhelming majority expressed feeling "fear" of going out to carry out everyday activities such as going to school, working or sharing public spaces. The street was identified as one of the most unsafe spaces, while common crime and organized crime were identified as the main perpetrators of violence.

The various manifestations of gender-based violence also figured prominently in the responses. Both women and men expressed concern about the high incidence of street harassment and the risk of being assaulted. In particular, women claimed to feel unsafe during all the time they spend in public spaces and transport. The fear of "going out and having something happen to me" or the possibility of "going out alone and not coming back" appeared repeatedly among the answers.

2) Discrimination

According to the article “Young Mexicans: Structural Violence and Criminalization” (Urteaga and Moreno, 2020), the discrimination faced by youth due to their age puts them at a disadvantage to integrate into working life and participate politically since “youth subordination” in the social imaginary - which assigns to youth a definition essentially linked to irresponsibility and lack of ambition and commitment - favors “systematic discriminatory practices that exclude this sector of the population and place it in a highly vulnerable situation.”

The questionnaires clearly reflect this type of exclusion. The participants claimed to face various forms of age discrimination directly linked to the perception of inability or irresponsibility. Expressions of how adults think "you can't", "you are not taken seriously", "they think you are stupid" and "there is no trust" came up repeatedly. Some also expressed that due to their condition as young people they are not listened to or considered seriously for jobs: "they don't let me participate and it is as if my word had no value", "there are no well-paid jobs, at work they see me as young and do not value my work."

On the other hand, it was the youth of the southeast region who in greater numbers mentioned racism as one of the expressions of violence they face on a daily basis. Economic background, skin color and origin were the most named causes. Those who belong to an indigenous group expressed that because they are young and indigenous they do not have access to decent work and that in some cases people assume that “because I am young or indigenous I want to steal from them.”

For their part, young women assured that there is gender inequality since they are not allowed to do what they like or face conflicts due to the fact of not accepting the roles that are imposed on them. There are expressions of misogyny in the workplace, unequal salaries and a higher workload at home.

3) Poverty and unemployment

According to the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) “almost half of the population of young people in Mexico lives in poverty.” This situation places them as a highly vulnerable sector, since they are perceived as a
threat to social cohesion, excluding them from work or educational spaces and opportunities.

Although young people recognized security-tranquility as the first necessary element to live in peace and achieve wellbeing, the second most mentioned factor was access to and guarantee of basic rights. A large majority of the responses focus on livelihoods and stable work as a sine qua non for a decent life. “Having the necessary means to have a decent life and physical, mental and socio-emotional health” and “having an economic stability that allows me to cover all my needs” are some examples of the opinions expressed.

4) Lack of access to education and health services

On another note, school absenteeism and dropping out continue to be a challenge for youth in Mexico, particularly due to the social gaps that afflict impoverished youth, especially in rural areas. Such is the case of the state of Chiapas, where the percentage of young people between 15 and 24 years old who attend school is 35%, the lowest at the national level, while the highest is presented by Mexico City with 55% of young people enrolled in school, this according to the INEGI’s 2020 Population and Housing Census.

Excessive travel times to schools, study plans that exclude young people with different abilities or speakers of indigenous languages, as well as a high percentage of young people who do not have access to education due to lack of income, are some of the most visible problems.

Additionally, 5.2 million female and male students of all levels interrupted their studies due to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, students between the ages of three and 29 “did not enroll in the 2020-2021 school year”, according to the Survey to Measure the Impact of COVID-19 on Education (ECOVID-ED) 2020. On the other hand, it was found that 32.3% of young people in Mexico have access to health services.

Access to education and health are two very present themes in the analysis that the youths took from their reality. Even though these issues were mentioned on fewer occasions, aspects such as fear of getting sick and not being able to pay for medical treatments, concern for one’s own health and that of family members, as well as the desire to live in a healthy environment, were factors mentioned in the questionnaires.

The perception of young people as culprits

Despite all the forms of violence that youth face on a daily basis, historically adultcentrism and generational stereotypes have contributed to building an image of the young as a perpetrator or aggressor, with which the condition of youth remains “compromised and vulnerable” in the identification of priority victims of violence for attention.

Urteaga and Moreno point out that the presumption that young people “should be combated for being guilty of violence and crime” has the force to incriminate, justify persecutory actions and establish a legal framework within which young people - criminals - can be killed without this implying committing a crime.

In 2019, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducted a study on crimes due to gender violence, gangs and other types of murder. The document revealed that it is males over nine years of age who account for more than 50% of the victims according to data from 41 countries and that the probability that a child is murdered “increases along with his age”, establishing the period between 15 and 29 years as the one with the highest risk of homicide in the world.

In America, it is estimated that 46 out of every 100,000 victims are between 18 and 19 years old. An interesting piece of information presented by this publication and that allows us to balance the scale is the fact that “high levels of violence are associated with young men, both victims and perpetrators.”

In this sense, the results of the questionnaires show that men are perceived as the main aggressors in conflicts, while women occupy the first position in the category of victims. To the question “where do you stand on the victim-aggressor scale?” an overwhelming majority identified themselves as a “victim” and in some cases as a “victim/aggressor”, but none identified themselves exclusively as an “aggressor”.

In contrast, the International Peace Institute (IPI) document Youth Participation in Global Governance for Sustaining Peace and Climate Action (2021) shows how youth movements have played an increasingly prominent role in participating in initiatives to build peace in their communities. However, in global policy-making forums, young people continue to be marginalized by age and gender stereotypes, men continue to be identified as perpetrators of violence and young women as passive victims.
FOCUS

The current Federal Government’s strategy for Mexican youth

Given the conditions of lack of access to rights experienced by Mexican youth, organizations such as CONAPRED have pointed out the responsibility of the different levels of government to guarantee “access to a formal, well-paid job with benefits; access to quality health and education services at all levels of care, and the fight against violence in homes, schools and communities (mainly organized crime, common crime and human trafficking).”

In January 2019, the federal government granted the first support of the Youth Building the Future social program, which offers $MXN 4,310 per month (plus social security), connecting 301,003 young people between 18 and 29 years old with a company, institution or workshop, in order to “develop or strengthen work habits and technical skills to increase their future employability possibilities.” In Chiapas 30,299 young people have been connected, of which 54.7% (16,564) are women and 45.3% are men. Different sectors of society have been critical of said program since, although it has a multiple alignment in terms of social rights, scholarship holders can participate only once and at the end of the training period, “the workplace has no obligation” to hire them (Report of the Social Management and Cooperation Organization, GESOC, 2019).

Contrasting the opinions in the questionnaires, it is possible to observe that although there are policies that seek to address priority issues such as access to the rights to education, work and health, the prevailing concerns of Mexican youth continue without a concrete response or program specifically directed at this sector.

What living in peace means for Mexican youth?

In the framework of the UN Forum on the implementation of the agenda on Youth, Peace and Security, Jayathma Wickramanayake pointed out the need to perceive young people as participants in all efforts, particularly those in favor of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, given that the stereotypes and myths of violence that surround them continue to contribute to their marginalization.

“These misperceptions can lead policymakers to adopt a securitized approach to youth, peace and security and to overlook the efforts of young peacebuilders. In some cases, the perception that young activists are a threat to national security can also put them in danger”, The International Peace Institute notes In turn, Jayathma Wickramanayake affirms that “young people resist, protest, organize and implement peace-building initiatives in their communities and countries to restore democratic values, good governance and transparent institutions in the places where they live” despite the prejudices and voices that point to youth as problematic or passive victims.

To the question “what does it mean for you to live in peace?”, the most frequent response of young people was “live without fear”. A vast majority openly expressed their desire to live peacefully and without fear or worries: “it is not having to worry about your safety”, “going out and not feeling fear”, “being able to walk freely through the streets, knowing that your loved ones are safe and sound indoors, that a child can go out to the store without fear of being kidnapped, living in peace is living in harmony and tranquillity in the space where you live with your neighbours.”

Additionally, the young women responded that for them it means “to be able to carry out my activities and lead my life without fear, without the fear of being assaulted, without the fear of being raped and returning safely to my home”, “it is not having to worry about whether or not I will return home.”

In addition to insecurity, many identify other factors that could contribute to a desirable and dignified life, among which are notable: the guarantee of basic rights, respect and solidarity, the end of corruption and access to justice. For them, living in peace also means: “being healthy”, “economic stability”, “a decent job”, “a full life”, “a world where they respect me and I can support my family without anguish and without having to leave the state to look for work”, “a way of life where there is respect among all individuals without any type of discrimination”, “being calm, having a full...
life, with the ease of getting justice.”

In the case of those who belong to indigenous peoples, particularly in the south of the country, living in peace also includes the peaceful resolution of conflicts related to land and territory, as well as “having the right to prior and informed consultation on anything that threatens against life.”

**Joining the demand to “be free and live without fear”**

The deep concern about the growing levels of violence and insecurity as well as the progressive precariousness of the lives of young Mexicans were the main motivations that led SIPAZ, WPDI and CORECO to consult with them directly on these issues. This consultation has allowed us to deepen our knowledge of the diverse and contrasting realities that young people experience.

This exercise was a practical way for us to establish communication with youth in the midst of the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it was a satisfactory and enriching communication exercise, it also raised concerns about the growing need of this sector of the population to receive direct, specific and contextualized attention. We listen carefully to their deep concern for their safety and survival, and that of those around them. We also note their demand for justice and the urgent guarantee of their basic rights.

We are struck by the fact that some issues that both academia and civil society organizations consider central have had little relevance in the results obtained, for example: migration, abuses of authority by public servants and public order forces, as well as displacement and forced disappearances, among others. We know that it may be due to the methodological bias in the way the sample was integrated, but we also consider that the sense of emergency and prevailing need for survival that COVID-19 brought with it relegated these needs and demands to the background.

Although a third of the participants identified themselves as players capable of acting in a positive and non-violent way in the face of conflicts, we are particularly concerned about the almost generalized perception of a lack of alternatives and tools to act, as well as the implicit meaning of lack of future perspective.

This document is an invitation to reflect on the position we play in each of the contexts and aspects of youth life, and the way in which our actions and words allow or hinder the full exercise of their rights, as well as their trust in themselves to positively transform their environment.

Finally, we join the diverse voices of youth in their demand for recognition, appreciation, respect, justice, guarantee of their rights, food security, climate security and the protection of their territories. But above all, and in keeping with their own words, we join their demand to live in a country without violence, a country where they can “be free and live without fear.”
“Women and girls in Mexico live in a context where the State does not act to protect their rights. When it involves protesting on public roads, against gender violence, they are violated in different ways, including violence based on gender.”

Amnesty International, 2021

In the middle of the pandemic, despite the possible risks of infection from COVID-19, thousands and thousands of women, members of feminist collectives and civil organizations, as well as individuals, took to the streets in multiple states of the Republic on March 8th, International Women’s Day, to demand respect for their rights and, in particular, to demand a life free of violence.

On this day, women around the world have been demonstrating for decades through different actions to highlight the worrying situation in which women live for the simple fact of being women. According to reports from the Secretariat for Citizen Security and Protection (SSPC in its Spanish acronym), from January of this year, Mexico continues to suffer from worrying rates of gender violence, with an average of ten women murdered per day; two of these cases are registered daily as femicides. In addition, several sources have recorded that these figures have increased in the midst of the pandemic.

2021: An 8M in the Middle of the Pandemic

For more than a year, Mexico, like most of the world, has been under restrictions due to the pandemic that limited an act of the same historical magnitude as last year when more than 200,000 women marched in the capital and participated in a national strike that caused a loss of 37 million pesos. However, these restrictions did not prevent thousands of women of different generations, social classes, racial and gender identities, from raising their voices on social networks, through marches, parties, songs, drums, street art and online conversations, etc. to make the same message clear: enough is enough of violence and insecurity.

8M Activities in the Republic

Feminist protesters, women’s groups or women who are not part of collectives, groups or organizations are protected by the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, Amnesty International clarifies in the 2021 report “Mexico: The Wrath of Women”. However, the report confirms that the authorities in Mexico have responded with violence and the violation of this and other human rights of women.

Despite this, various activities were carried out, some of which denounced precisely this type of violence. For example, in Chiapas, women members of the civil society Las Abejas de Acteal, delivered a statement to the nearby military base with the message that they do not want soldiers on their land. In cities such as Tuxtla Gutierrez, San Cristobal de Las Casas or Tonala, hundreds of women marched with slogans such as “The police do not take care of me, my friends take care of me”, denouncing several femicides that occurred during the last year in the state.
and that remained in impunity.

In the state of Guerrero, the slogan “A rapist will not be a governor” was heard, as well as in the country’s capital, in reference to the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) candidate for governor, Felix Salgado Macedonio, who faces complaints of rape and allegations of sexual abuse and harassment.

The Double Violence Faced by Female Protesters

In many cases, the media, instead of talking about the just demands of women and their frustration at the little progress on their agenda to date, spoke about damaged public buildings, clashes with police, detainees and casualties (both on the side of the protesters and security personnel), within the framework of the marches. In the capital alone, local authorities reported 81 people injured during the protest. In addition, some sources reported the use of tear gas by the police, something that the government has denied.

The Amnesty International report highlights that the Mexican authorities respond to protests by women and talking about gender violence with excessive and unnecessary use of force, with illegal and arbitrary detentions, with verbal and physical abuse. In addition, it exposes how feminist demonstrations, despite being mostly peaceful, have begun to be stigmatized as violent, and how several protesters suffered human rights violations during these types of marches since last year.

In addition, the document highlights how the slogans and symbols painted by the protesters on walls, floors and public monuments, in the same way as interventions on monuments are “expressions that are protected by the human right to freedom of expression.”
INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

CHIAPAS

Civil observation missions
- From April 25th to May 4th, we accompanied the Zapatista maritime delegation part of the Journey for Life, Europe Chapter as observers, which left Chiapas for Isla Mujeres bound for Europe.

Gender
- In February, we attended the discussion “Mexico before CEDAW: Findings der Violence”, convened by Amnesty International and several women’s organizations.
- In March, we participated with a presentation at “Toolbox for Strengthening Self-protection”, prepared by the Swedish Movement for Reconciliation (SweFOR).

Land and Territory
- In February, we were at the online event organized by the organization Project of Economic, Social and Environmental Conflicts in Chiapas “report was presented, based on the learnings of the ecofeminist school “Women Defending the Land-body Territory.”
- In February, we attended the “Water, Territory and Life - Justice for Samir Flores” discussion, organized by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights and the Ajmaq Resistance and Rebellion Network.
- In February, we participated various events that were part of the Conference on Human Rights and Business, organized by the International Peace Brigades (PBI).
- In March, we were at the online event entitled “Impacts of Canadian Mines on Indigenous Communities in Mexico”, organized by Peace Brigades International (PBI).

Militarization
- In March, we attended the online session “Militarization and Women’s Rights”, part of the “Information Days on the Risks of Militarization”, coordinated by the Miguel Agustin PRODH Rights Center.
- In April, we were at the online session “Why Militarization has Deepened”, part of the same Conference.
- In May, we attended the online session “Military in Public Security”, also part of these sessions.

Events
- In February and May, we participated in the Assembly of Believing People in San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- In March and May, we participated in an analysis space with various organizations with a presence in the municipality of Chilón, to share information and reflections on the reality in that area.
- In March, we shared a space for analysis on the situation in the border area, in which various religious players and civil organizations from the area (or with work in the area) were present.
- In April, we met with various civil and religious organizations that work in the Palenque area, to update our analysis of this region.
- Invited by the Vicariate for Justice and Peace, in May we participated in a meeting 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 in it (in particular in the case of Venustiano Carranza).

OAXACA
- In February, we attended the session “Historical Territoriality and the Dispute over the Isthmus”, convened by the CLACSO Working Group “Borders, Regionalization and Globalization.”
- In March, we were at the presentation of the organization Project of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, AC (ProDESC), “Business Due Diligence in Human Rights: the Case of Unión Hidalgo, Oaxaca, in France.”

GUERRERO
- In March, we attended the virtual event “Agu, Like the Oak and the Wind of La Montaña”, organized by the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center to highlight the situation of violence suffered by women, particularly indigenous, in the Guerrero region.
- In March, we participated in the Conversation “Women Victims of Internal Forced Displacement and Forced Disappearance”, convened by the Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon Center for the Defense of Human Rights.
- In March, we had a virtual meeting with members of the Collective Against Torture and Impunity (CCTT) based in Acapulco, to update analysis and coordinate actions.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS
- In March, we participated in the discussion from the Americas on the European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024.
- In March, we had an online meeting with several members of the US Embassy.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE
- In March, we facilitated a workshop on Non-violent Strategies, organized within the framework of an Assembly of the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE), in which around 80 people participated.
- In May, we co-facilitated the session on Peacebuilding that was held within the framework of the Diploma in Conflict Transformation organized by CORECO.

NETWORKING
- In February, we participated in the 3rd Online Meeting on Peacebuilding, an event that had the participation of the expert in Positive Conflict Transformation, John Paul Lederach, and which was convened, among others, by GPPAC.
- In March, we were at a meeting with representatives of the pastoral areas that are part of the Monitoring Commission of the Congress of Mother Earth, a component of the social pastoral of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.