LATEST:
In Mexico, “Human rights are not violated” anymore??

FOCUS:
VIOLENCE
A high tide on a full moon in Chiapas

ARTICLE:
Vanishing Points
Women against Violence and in Defense of their Land and Territory

SIPAZ ACTIVITIES:
Mid-August to mid-November 2021
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.

### International Coalition

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In September, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) presented his third government report in which he addressed the human rights situation. Although he said that in Mexico “human rights are not violated”, several civil organizations contradicted his statements. In its 2020 report, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) presented 11,387 complaints of human rights violations, committed by different public institutions.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) stressed that with the mobilization of the armed forces for public order tasks, customs control, migration control and management and development of megaprojects, other military abuses have been added. HRW affirmed that, “human rights violations - including torture, forced disappearances, abuses against migrants, extrajudicial executions and attacks against independent journalists and human rights defenders - have continued during the government of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.” “Only 1.3% of crimes committed in Mexico are solved”, said the organization Zero Impunity (Impunidad Cero). The Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center (Centro Prodh) stated: “without a doubt, the federal government has promoted some actions that go in the right direction (...) but from there to affirm that in Mexico violations of human rights have been eradicated there is a distance that goes from truth to falsehood.”

Enforced disappearance: a huge outstanding issue

In commemoration of the International Day of the Victims of Forced Disappearances (August), civil organizations and groups carried out actions to highlight the seriousness of the situation in Mexico and to demand that the authorities guarantee the effective search for disappeared persons. According to the National Search Commission (CNB), the number of missing persons in Mexico has risen to 94,939 from 1964 to November 2021.

On the positive side, in October, a decree was published that created the Commission for Access to Truth and Promotion of Justice for serious human rights violations committed between 1965 and 1990. During this period known as the “Dirty War”, crimes of forced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial executions of people who belonged to movements or organizations that questioned State policies were committed. The Commission will have the purpose of investigating, supervising and issuing reports related to human rights violations during this period.

In Mexico, “Human rights are not violated” anymore??
Defenders, journalists, women and minors: among the most vulnerable sectors

In October, the Interior Ministry announced that so far during the AMLO government, 47 journalists and 94 defenders have been murdered. It reported that, of the murderers of journalists, only five have been sentenced. The states with the highest number of murdered activists are Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

In October, civil organizations reported to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) the repression and stigmatization of feminist demonstrations. They pointed out the “improper use of force, sexual violence, and physical and digital harassment.” The complaints also had to do with restrictive and criminalizing laws of social protest; militarization and the use of force in this context; the violation of the right to assemble peacefully and freedom of expression. In addition, they highlighted the stigmatizing speeches used to discredit the movements. In September, for example, AMLO declared that “Mexican feminism has directly become an opposition movement” to his government.

In August, the Undersecretary for Human Rights and Migration, Alejandro Encinas, presented a study on the impact that the pandemic has had on children. He reported that 5.2 million students did not enroll in school due to causes related to the pandemic or lack of resources. He mentioned the decrease in the proportion of children and young people who entered the school system for the first time. On the other hand, between March and June 2021, historical maximum levels were registered in family violence. “Girls, boys and adolescents suffer from psychological, sexual, physical, economic violence and abandonment or neglect within their homes”, the undersecretary reported. The report shows that during the pandemic there were 273,661 births of babies to teenage mothers; 4,401 homicides of minors between 2018 and 2020; and suicide increased by 12% in this age group.

MIGRATION: “Exodus from Poverty” crosses Mexico

In October, the migrant caravan “for dignity, freedom and peace” began in Chiapas, to “bear witness to the criminalization suffered” by people on the move. More than four thousand migrants made up the contingent, including pregnant women and more than a thousand children, as well as people with a disability.

On the other hand, organizations, networks and collectives from Mexico and Central America launched the "ProtecciónNoContención (#ProtectionNotContention) campaign to put an end to the repression, containment and deportation of people on the move. “In the last three years, the Mexican government has participated with the US government in actions to limit the protection of migrants and asylum seekers, outsourcing the borders of the United States, militarizing Mexican immigration policy and criminalizing those who seek protection”, they stressed. People are forced to leave their countries because conditions that allow them to build a decent life do not exist, they explained. The lack of responses from the immigration and asylum authorities in Mexico have left migrants on the southern border in limbo, mainly from Haiti, Venezuela and Central America, who have remained in that place for more than a year without job opportunities or access to health and education. When they have sought to enter Mexico in search of minimum conditions for a dignified life, they have been repressed and detained by agents of the National Migration Institute (INM) and the National Guard.

MILITARIZATION: continuing concerns

In August, Amnesty International and the Security without War collective reiterated that “it is urgent that the Mexican government stop the participation of the military in public security tasks.” They recalled that militarization has triggered an increase in serious human rights violations. Although the reform proposed by AMLO for the National Guard (GN) to become part of the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) has not yet been approved, “official documents confirm the military dominance that, in fact, already it exists on this police body”, they denounced. Analysts consider that at present, the GN is “made up of 50% of military police from SEDENA, 10% of naval police from the Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR), 20% of members of the Federal Police, and 17% of new recruits hired by SEDENA and SEMAR, trained in military bases.”
Their participation in migratory operations has been of particular concern since “it has had a serious effect on the safeguarding of the Human Rights of the mobile population.” In this regard, the head of SEDENA, Luis Cresencio Sandoval, declared during his visit to Chiapas in August that the Armed Forces had completed “a series of operational activities” on the southern border that had the participation of more than 14 thousand members. For the period from June 2019 to December 2020, 193,640 migrants were presented to the immigration authority. Specialists estimate that “more than 78 percent of the arrests of migrants in Mexico during this period were carried out by the military or members of the National Guard.”

**CHIAPAS: Worsening violence**

There have been several moments of violence that have been experienced in Chiapas in the past months (see Focus). In San Cristobal de Las Casas, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights stated that, “they shoot with high-caliber weapons, and clashes between armed groups under the permissiveness of the municipal and state authorities.” In October, the journalist and columnist Fredy Lopez Arevalo was assassinated on the street where he lived in this same city.

In October, Dayli de los Santos Herrera Gutierrez was detained, identified as the alleged mastermind of the murder of the indigenous justice prosecutor, Gregorio Perez Gomez, in August, who was in charge of the investigations into the violence in Pantelho. De los Santos and his brother are singled out by El Machete self-defense group as commanders of a “criminal group” called “Los Herrera”, which they blame for at least two hundred homicides committed in Pantelho in collusion with the municipal government of the PRD. In November, the state Congress removed the elected municipal president, Raquel Trujillo Morales (also from the PRD), for having an investigation against him for the murder of a person in July of this year.

In October, the All Rights for All Network (Red TDT) demanded that the attacks against the migrant shelter “Casa Betania Santa Martha” in Salto de Agua cease, after a group of armed people entered the shelter threatening those present. It explained that this is the third time in the year that this type of aggression has occurred and that it occurs in a context where other organizations that defend the human rights of migrants have also been harasssed. In mid-September, the Casa del Caminante Jiatric Samuel Ruiz Garcia, located in Palenque, closed its doors due to threats.

At the same time, self-defense groups appeared. The first was El Machete, which was established due to the political and security crisis in Pantelho. The second, called “People of the Jungle”, was revealed in September, when it expressed its support for El Machete. In October, the “Simojovel Armed Forces” appeared demanding, among other things, “1. Respect for our indigenous demands, 2. No more diversion of the people’s resources, 3. We will not allow hitmen or armed drug traffickers.” Also in October, a supposedly self-defense group appeared in Altamirano, where a strong post-electoral conflict was generated to prevent the swearing in of the elected candidate Gabriela Roque Tipacamu, wife of Roberto Pinto Kanter, both accused of wanting to continue with their cacicazgo (since 2002), in this municipality.

**Demonstrations and criminalization**

In October, a year after the repression of the protest against the installation of a National Guard barracks in Chilon, relatives and residents demanded the termination of the criminal proceedings against Cesar Hernandez Feliciano and Jose Luis Gutierrez Hernandez. They were arrested for the crime of rioting, after participating in a demonstration against the construction of said barracks, to later be tortured, arbitrarily deprived of liberty and held incomunicado. Their defense has filed a series of legal appeals but all have been dismissed. In addition, it should be remembered that in November 2020, Mayan-Tzeltal communities filed an injunction against the construction of the barracks (since a free, prior and culturally appropriate consultation was not carried out). To date, said injunction remains unresolved.

In October, civil organizations denounced that, for more than ten years, they have carried out different actions to counteract the environmental impact that afflicts the San Cristobal de Las Casas wetlands. They emphasized...
LATEST

**Aggressions in Zapatista territories while the “Journey for Life” continues**

The Zapatista delegation “Squad 421” arrived back in Mexico in September, after visiting several European countries for more than four months, where they exposed their struggle and got to know that of various social and popular groups. It was followed by La Extemporanea air delegation, made up of 177 members as well as a delegation from the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). Between Squad 421 and La Extemporanea (which has not yet returned), the Zapatista itinerary through Europe will encompass some thirty countries.

Meanwhile, in Chiapas, in September, the AIMAG Resistance and Rebellion Network denounced that members of the Ocosingo Coffee Growers Regional Organization (ORCAO), detained two members of the Good Government Council (JBG) Patricia Nueva, municipality of Ocosingo. AIMAG pointed out that “ORCAO has perpetrated a series of criminal actions against the EZLN Support Bases of the Moises Gandhi autonomous community for several months. The most despicable acts being those registered since August 2020, where looting, robbery, destruction and burning of the autonomous cooperative store El Arco Iris was carried out in a violent manner, as well as the kidnapping of Felix Lopez Hernandez on November 8th, 2020 and of two members of the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights on April 12th of this year.” It considered that “this escalation of violence orchestrated from the high powers of the federal government occurs during the EZLN initiative Journey for Life Europe Chapter, which seeks to expand, in a peaceful and creative way, the seed of resistance-rebellion for humanity and Mother Earth, that is, for life.”

The EZLN made a statement following the release of the two members of the JBG, pointing out the inaction of the government, which “overlaps and encourages these crimes” and maintains “alliances with drug trafficking that cause indigenous communities to be forced to form self-defense groups” in addition to “promoting and financing paramilitary groups such as those that continually attack communities in Aldama and Santa Martha.” In the communiqué “Chiapas on the Brink of Civil War”, it also spoke of the slowness of the vaccination campaign, the obstruction of the departure of the Zapatista delegation to Europe and the permanence of the same cadres in different political parties, among others.

**OAXACA: Aggressions against human rights defenders increase**

In August, the Democratic Civic Union of Neighbourhoods and Communities (UCIDEBA) denounced that its leader, Antonio Zarate Bernal, was kidnapped and later found “with multiple blows and with signs of torture.” It denounced the persistent repression that has been going on for several years and recalled that Antonio Zarate Bernal was arrested in 2011 and released two months later for not verifying the crimes for which he was accused. The arrest would have to do with “the criminalization carried out by the Mexican State (...) which has maliciously used the Mexican justice system to set up cases for prefabricated crimes.”

In September, Jose Castillo Castro, defender of land and territory in the Chontal community of Barra de la Cruz, in the municipality of Santiago Astata, was hospitalized after receiving two shots in an attack carried out by two people who were traveling on a motorcycle. The Center for Human Rights and Advice to Indigenous Peoples (CEDHAPI) demanded that this attack be investigated, noting the increase in attacks on human rights defenders and journalists.

The No to Mining for a Future for All Front denounced that during the mobilization organized in October demanding the cancellation of the San Jose mining project, operated by Fortuna Silver Mines, municipal and agrarian authorities that make up the Front received threats from people who claimed to bring weapons “to remove those from the mobilization” and have the protesters identified. “Our mobilization is peaceful, they abide by the law, within the constitutional framework and in compliance with the agreements of the general assembly to prohibit mining activities”, they recalled.

In November, the Attorney Gener-
al’s Office issued a “pink alert” for the disappearance of environmentalist Irma Galindo Barrios. The defender of the forests of her Ñuu Savi people was in Mexico City collecting food for communities in the municipality of San Esteban Atatlahuca that were attacked at the end of October by an armed group after denouncing the depredation of their natural resources. The events left one person dead, four missing, dozens of houses burned down and around 300 displaced. The environmentalist had already been the victim of defamation, harassment and threats since 2019.

In November, the Encounter in Defense of Our Natural and Communal Assets The Isthmus Is Ours took place, convened by organizations of the National Indigenous Council in Jalapa de Marquez. Its participants denounced the intensification of violence due to the presence and participation of organized crime in business activities in that region, as well as threats and harassment by companies. They also demanded a halt to criminalization for the defense of the territory against the Tehuantepec Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor.

As for advances, in September the Assembly of Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of the Land and Territory (APIIDTT) reported on the legal victory of the Zapotec communities against the Gunaa Sicaru wind project of the multinational company Electricité de France (EDF) that involves an investment of six billion pesos and a surface area of 4,700 hectares of leased land. It explained that, in September, a court granted the outright suspension against EDF, which will not be able to carry out any work until the case is resolved. Last year the APIIDTT filed an injunction as the community members have not given their authorization for the construction of the project.

In November, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN) generally approved the draft judgment in favor of the defense of Los Chimalapas. This event occurs nine years after the government of Oaxaca presented a constitutional case against the creation of the Belisario Dominguez municipality by the government of Chiapas, which involved the invasion of approximately 84 thousand hectares of Oaxacan territory. The National Committee for the Defense and Conservation of Los Chimalapas, considered that this result favors Oaxaca, but in particular the people of Los Chimalapas, who have fought to defend their territory in a conflict that was used by ranchers, loggers and drug traffickers to deforest and invade.

**GUERRERO: between violence and poverty**

On October 1st, in Guerrero as in other states, several municipalities received their new mayors, many to find themselves with serious problems: lack of water, absence of municipal police, unfinished and poorly done works, unpayable debts, unrest and protests due to unfulfilled commitments, wrote La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center. Guerrero is one of the states where “the intervention of organized crime became more evident” in the June elections. Through threats to the candidates and/or their families, the criminal groups forced them to give up their intention to govern and in other cases, they imposed a particular candidate, Tlachinollan declared.

Later, President Lopez Obrador made a tour of the state. In the company of the new governor Evelyn Salgado, they visited several communities. “The claim of the indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities revolves around the axes of the basis for a decent life: health, education, housing, roads and reactivation of the countryside”, said Tlachinollan. The serious problem of violence was also present: the proliferation of armed groups and the lack of access to justice for women victims of violence. Tlachinollan recognized that, despite the programs implemented by the federal government, the families of La Montaña “have not been able to cross the threshold of extreme poverty” and that this visit generated many expectations when both leaders “took on the commitment to prioritize the poor regions and states.” However, it said that, at the municipal level, interests are different, in particular due to corruption and the mismanagement of resources which they use “as their own patrimony.”

Another problem linked to violence in the state has been forced displacement. Since September, a commission of displaced families from the municipalities of Leonardo Bravo and Zitlala, have been in a sit-in outside the Ministry of the Interior in Mexico City to demand compliance with commitments made in April in an inter-institutional meeting where the National Commission Human Rights (CNDH), prom-
ised that, in coordination with the Executive Commission for Attention to Federal Victims (CEAV), it would recognize the status of victims of displaced families; and the Government personnel promised to find safe places for their relocation due to the impossibility of return. So far, no progress has been made on any of these fronts.

Regarding impunity, on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the disappearance of the students of the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School in Iguala, activities were organized to demand justice and truth. Relatives of the student teachers criticized “the reluctance” of the government in the investigation, and “the slowness” of the Prosecutor’s Office. This is due to the forty arrest warrants that have not yet been executed and the lack of investigation against members of the 27th Infantry Battalion for their alleged participation. The UNHCHR said that “relevant progress has been made” but that it is “of utmost importance to transform the progress made into concrete actions that aim to break the pact of silence (...) to know the truth of what happened.”

In October, two months after the disappearance of Vicente Suastegui Muñoz, brother of the opposition leader to the La Parota hydroelectric dam, Tlachinollan said that there is no progress in the case despite having identified the people who participated in his disappearance. It stated that formal complaints have been made against such persons; in addition to filing a complaint against the state police and the Navy, “because days before his disappearance he was deprived of his liberty on the grounds that he carried weapons without a permit.” Despite this and the search sessions, the Guerrero General Prosecutor’s Office does not act with “the full force of the institutions.” Acapulco and Iguala are experiencing a security crisis where the authorities have not “acted to dismantle the criminal structure.”

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The wall against which the clocks were broken in much of the south of the country is the wall of structural violence. In this way, behind most of the conflicts in Chiapas, we find political, social and cultural and economic marginalization, the same marginalization that has worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with regard to access to health and education.

According to the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), of the total population of Chiapas in 2020 75.5% were in poverty, and 29% in extreme poverty. The latter figure, incidentally, only decreased by 1.6% compared to 2018.

If we look at social deprivation, more than a third of the population (32.5%) shows educational disadvantage; less than 40% of the population has access to health services; less than 80% have access to social security; only 20% benefit from quality housing; just over half the population (55.8%) have access to basic housing services; and less than a quarter of the population (24.5%) have access to quality food.

These figures are only the most superficial and measurable face of historical and widespread segregation that have faced different communities and social groups in Chiapas. And if we add to this, as pointed out by the Observatory of Democracies for southern Mexico and Central America (ODEMCA), the wave of violence that blunted the war on drugs declared since 2006 as well as the geopolitical subordination to the scheme of regional security of the United States, it seems that we have the perfect recipe of ungovernability. The icing on the cake (or perhaps a much more basic ingredient such as flour or egg) is the increasingly prominent role of organized crime.

For Gerardo Alberto Gonzalez Figueroa, a researcher at the Department of Health of El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), “Chiapas became in the last four or five decades, not only the pathway of the cocaine that came from (Central and) South America, but a fertile ground for heavyweight capos to have their way.” However, since 2000, Gonzalez Figueroa mentions, two cartels carved up control over the route from the Highlands to the Gulf of Mexico, while another took control of the entire Chiapas coast connecting with the Pacific Ocean.

Criminal groups that have been identified with presence in Chiapas are the Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, the Beltran Ley-
Las Abejas de Acteal denounce the role of the Chiapas State Attorney General's Office, which has not been able to clarify the case of Simon Pedro Perez or bring anyone to justice © Las Abejas de Acteal

va Cartel, and more recently and powerfully, the Sinaloa Cartel and the New Generation Jalisco Cartel. It also highlights the consolidation of local groups who have amassed presence and power, such as the San Juan Chamula Cartel, which also has greatly diversified its criminal enterprises.

In this sense, one can observe a worrying increase in insecurity and violence associated with organized crime in Chiapas, coupled with schemes of "collusion and filtration of drug trafficking to the most diverse spheres of government and its institutions", as the ODEMCA points out.

Such institutional weakness in the state was clearly expressed when high levels of violence were recorded in the elections last June, which placed Chiapas in thirteenth place with more cases of assassinations of politicians and the prevention of the installation of 232 voting centers. In addition, it perceived involvement of organized crime in funding and appointment of candidates for political office as increasingly more open.

The Layers of Complexity

The map of the conflict in Chiapas is constantly reconfigured and in a very diffuse manner, as was reported within the framework European Union ambassadors’ visit to Chiapas on November 11th. Given the networks of participation of organized crime, the State, or companies that want to protect their interests, the work of coverage of these processes by journalists is very high risk. Assaults, threats, bribery attempts have been documented, and many cases are not denounced for fear of reprisals. This has caused the creation of "areas of silence" and self-censorship, so that information is not always easy to access.

Not to mention the work of human rights defenders, who are also under constant siege by these players, and in this framework the murder of Simon Pedro Pérez stands out, a member of the civil society organization Las Abejas de Acteal. This highlights the insufficient response of the three levels of government to guarantee the exercise of the defense of human rights in a safe and propitious environment. In this regard, it should be noted that the impunity index for cases of assassinations of journalists and activists in the country is 99%.

For its part, the problems observed in peoples and communities in Chiapas mix agrarian conflicts that have been unresolved for years, even decades; problems of political confrontation, which often go hand in hand with community division (even with the component of government programs as a conflict catalyst). To this is added the state’s remilitarization (strongly militarized since the 90s), which has involved the reinforcement of the southern border since 2019 with more than 11 thousand federal troops, increasing the risk of harassment to communities, gender violence and violations of human rights. An example of this is the killing of a Cuban migrant in the municipality of Pijijiapan at the hands of a member of the National Guard at the beginning of November.

Linked to the latter, the increasingly restrictive policies of rights to the migrant population stand out, through the detention, containment, repression, and deportation of persons on the move without recognizing their needs for international protection. In this way, the militarization of borders implies greater risks to the safety of people seeking decent protection and life, meeting in Mexico with corruption and inaction of programs and institutions that should see to them.

On the other hand, we must add the power that local caiques have had for decades, and the other side of the coin: the lack of ability of the authority that "is exceeded before the Balkanization of the territory where it cannot be imposed because the legal or illegal groups are disputing power hand to hand, as well as the control of the territory", as ODEMCA tells us, and points out that it is "in this archipelago of struggles and fragmentary powers, but capable of imposing themselves, where a galloping impunity thrives that paradoxically demonstrates the great institutional fragility and the high degree of reducing protection for Chiapas Society as a whole."

Finally, all these elements are boiled to the temperature of impunity and the difficulty in accessing the justice system, in which the torture is exercised systematically as a method of investigation and control. Forced disappearance is a cutting reality: November 22nd, 2021, 505 people have been registered as missing and not located in the state of Chiapas; and mass forced displacement is a living reality for about 14,776 people in Chiapas, on many occasions linked to violence by armed groups.

One of the cases that exposes more alarmingly the dysfunctionalities of the justice system that civil society organizations such as Frayba have repeatedly indicated, was the murder, which occurred on August 10th, of the Indige-
nous Justice Prosecutor, Gregorio Perez Gomez, who was in charge of the Pantelho investigation, where since the end of July an escalation of violent acts was raised.

**Conflict Zones**

The conditions of deep deterioration and ungovernability in several areas in Chiapas are condensed in conflicts, of an armed nature on numerous occasions. Among those which are currently active are the cases of Aldama, Pantelho, Chenalho, Venustiano Carranza, Simojovel, San Cristobal de Las Casas, Ocosingo and Altamirano. These are municipalities that, among other things, are the scene of shootings, attacks, kidnappings and displacement.

The conflict between Aldama and Santa Marta (the latest part of the municipality of Chenalho) has kept the inhabitants of these locations in a crossfire that has left a toll of several dead, injured, displaced families, and a dense environment of siege and fear.

For its part, as Hermann Bellinghausen points out, in Ocosingo, the once coffee growers organization ORCAO “continues harassment, sabotages, kidnappings, shootings, blockages and robberies of plots against the Zapatista bases of autonomous Tseltal communities.” In this context, on “September 11th they abducted Sebastián Núñez and Jose Antonio Sanchez, members of the Autonomous Zapatista Government of Nueva Patria.”

A case that stands out for being particularly sui generis, is that of San Juan Chamula, which even has a denomination of origin for its own cartel, which according to the special investigation of journalist Christian Gonzalez “controls a large part of production and distribution of narcotics, theft of vehicles and auto parts, (people)trafficking, weapons, fuels and wood, as well as the sale of (pornographic) material.” As we can see, this highlights the diversification of criminal activities, which go beyond drug trafficking. The networks through which this criminal group extends include the area of the Highlands, Comitan, the Jungle, and even crosses the border with Guatemala.

And so we come to the case of San Cristobal de Las Casas, where in recent months there has been a worrying increase in violent acts, among which are the murders of the Attorney of Indigenous Justice, of journalist Fredy Lopez Arevalo, and the Italian volunteer Michele Colosio. Added to this is the presence of armed groups that roam the city, and the intermittent clashes and shots that are lived in several areas of the locality.

Then there is the case of Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of the State, where a shootout occurred in broad daylight on July 7th, as a result of what is presumed was a confrontation between two criminal groups that are disputing control of the area.

Cases that have attracted the attention of public opinion in recent months have been Pantelho and Chenalho, where for years, but especially in recent months there is a dense climate of violence due to the takeover by criminal groups linked to the drug trafficking and other illicit activities. This situation had already been exposed in a formal report to the Secretariat of Government, thanks to the work of Simon Pedro Perez Lopez.

The list is not short, we could continue with the cases of Tapachula and Comalapa border, but we would still be missing a good part of places where the absence of the State is experienced. As the Observatory points out, “the immediate scenario points to a (context) of latent and growing violence, to the extent that the responses of the Government of Chiapas and the Federal Government are kept in a veiled silence that does not result in setting out an explicit strategy to tackle the armed explosion. Meanwhile, the National Guard and the Mexican Army increase their presence in the state, without reflecting an explicit change in control and territorial regulation that the affected populations can note.”

**Corollary. The Emergence of Self-defense Groups**

The political and security crisis in several of these areas has generated the formation and public appearance of self-defense groups. To date, four of these groups have been announced. The first was El Machete in Pantelho, which was announced on July 10th after a series of confrontations of the community against the Herrera Group, noted for its links to organized crime and which has facilitated the environment of violence and insecurity in the area. This group has also been linked to figures in power, such as Mayor Delia Janeth Velasco Flores and the Mayor elect, Raquel Trujillo Morales, who was not recognized by the communities, who then elected a Municipal Council (which was legally recognized by The Congress of Chiapas) to govern until an
authority they themselves elect under the scheme of uses and customs is designated.

This conflict generated a serious crisis of displacement in the region, as registered the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights: approximately two thousand Tsotsiles of the municipalities of Pantelho and Chenalho were displaced by the generalized violence of organized crime and the omission of the Mexican state to address the situation.

Continuing the topic of the public appearance of self-defense groups, on September 29th, a video was released in which the People of the Jungle group was presented, supporting El Machete. However, information on its territorial ascription is not clear and if there is support from civil society in such an area.

The last two groups were announced at the beginning of the same month: on October 3rd, the self-proclaimed Simojovel Armed Forces were formed and the Altamirano Self Defense Group was also presented on October 7th. The latter expressed their intention to expel the Pinto (Kanter) family from that municipality.

It is relevant to note that in the cases of Pantelho, Altamirano and Simojovel, the self-defense groups did not only rise against the insecurity and violence lived in their communities, but also did so in order to prevent elected authorities from taking office. As ODMECA points out, there are new populations that “demand the formation of municipal councils and horizons are opened that could support the formation of community governance councils that displace the corrupt structure of the system of political parties.”

In this sense, as the Observatory of Democracies questions, we still do not know if they will be processes where the capacity of civilian management prevails to strengthen the horizons of autonomy and indigenous self-determination or if on the contrary, “it will only add to a greater concentration of armed populations that, under the diffuse notion of self-defense and the coloniality of arms, ends up increasing barriers to a civilian population that is trapped in the midst of violence and (for) increasing militarization.”

A Parallel View

Faced with this scenario, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) has given a forceful message. In its communiqué on September 19th, 2021, it warns that Chiapas is on the verge of civil war. It produced a diagnosis on the scenario of violence in the state and warns about the coming escalation of violence and the need for a strong response by the “bad government” to stop it. They point out that the Government maintains “alliances with drug trafficking (which) cause the indigenous communities to be forced to form self-defense groups” and also that it “promotes and finances paramilitary groups such as those who continually attack communities in Aldama and Santa Martha.” Local police officers are null or accomplices, as suggested by Subcommannder Galeano and they denounce government inaction, which “fans and encourages” crimes like the kidnapping of two members of the Nueva Patria Good Government Council (JBG), Municipality of Ocosingo, which occurred on September 11th.

As Hermann Bellinghausen says, “it is evident that federal civil authorities, their National Guard and the Federal Army itself are permissive, and in fact they leave the dozens of assaulted communities helpless.”

Finally, the EZLN denounces corruption and the theft of public officials, and holds the MORENA Governor, Rutilio Escandon, directly responsible for this irresponsible and dangerous lack of control in the state.

In short

In Chiapas, the consequences of historical discrimination that has particularly affected communities and indigenous peoples can be seen, and this has resulted in the prevalence of contexts of marginalization and multidimensional poverty and in a continuum of violence and serious violations of human rights. Its perpetration comes from both the State and the agents of organized crime and companies: the Trinity with the same face that is often confused, and that has infiltrated the structures of institutional and socio-community organization.

Impunity is a constant and does nothing but increase the tide of conflict in the state, which is a rough sea of political parties and family cacicazgos linked with drug trafficking, government inaction and sustainment of paramilitary groups and an illegitimate electoral system.

To continue sailing on this swell is unsustainable. However, a lighthouse of hope is found in the communities that have organized themselves in favor of their human rights.
and for the defense of land and territory. What is lacking for the alarm bells to stop sounding and for the responsible players to begin to assume their responsibility?
The panorama of violence in Chiapas and its various elements of complexity have been placed in public view in an alarming manner in recent months despite being present for decades (if not centuries). This context affects women with a special tenacity, as well as other groups in vulnerable situations, such as migrants, indigenous people, sexual dissidents, to name but a few.

In Chiapas, almost a third of the population belongs to an indigenous people and three quarters live in poverty. This context often creates the conditions for the perfect storm: a high number of women not only have to face the deep gender gap, but also the structural discrimination for being indigenous, and the historical segregation that keeps them in marginalized conditions.

Nevertheless, despite the harsh attacks of systemic violence, there are several nuclei of organization that resist and confront these structures. Many are led by brave women who speak out and carry out countless actions against gender violence, megaprojects, insecurity and the various causes of the rupture of the social fabric of communities.

An example of one of these spaces for action and reflection is the Movement in Defense of Land, Territory and for the Participation and Recognition of Women in Decision Making, which had its XIII Assembly on November 13th in Acteal, Chenalho.

This meeting was attended by 157 women, representatives of groups from the following areas: the Coastal Region, Zoque, the Highlands, Bachajón, Palenque and the Jungle. The languages present were Zoque, Tseltal, Ch’ol, and Tsotsil. These groups were accompanied by civil society organizations and journalists, including the Chiapas Women’s Rights Center (CDMCH), Doctors of the World, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Hu-
man Rights, the Swedish Movement for Reconciliation (SweFOR) and the International Service for Peace (SI-PAZ).

The value of this networking space lies largely in its horizontal character, which promotes exchange and resonance between the different communities and regions, who, by listening to the different problems faced by each one, can find similarities and support points; while, by identifying differences, they build perspective and provoke the search for common solutions. In the same way, it is a space that promotes intergenerational, intra- and intercommunity dialogue, in addition to being projected to continue in the future in a self-managed way.

The heart of the meeting revolved around the analysis of the context of each region. They highlighted the problems related to megaprojects, militarization, COVID-19, gender violence and government programs.

In this sense, the compañeras from Palenque commented that “the government continues to advance with its projects, such as the Maya Train. We do not know what will happen to those who live near the railroad tracks. Some think it was for their good, but it is not.” Several women, such as those from the Zoque region, have been fighting mining for more than 40 years. As they explained, “it is not only mining, but also other megaprojects, such as oil exploitation, hydroelectric plants, the geopark and monoculture practices that are invading our territories.” And they stressed, “we women lack the right to land.” They explained how megaprojects and extractivism pollute the land, water and air, and the negative effects on the health of the communities. “We demand a good life, we do not want pollution and that is why we do not use chemicals or fertilizers.”

In addition, they pointed out that deforestation is a cause of water scarcity and infertility of the land: “the oil palm monocultures destroy our biodiversity, pollute and deplete water sources, erode our soil, cause forced displacement, are implemented as an instrument of land and territory grabbing, violating our fundamental human rights, accelerating the loss of food sovereignty and the traditional knowledge that women have for food production and seed preservation”, explains the Statement of Women against Oil Palm Monocultures (Agua y Vida, 2021). These projects are imposed on the territories of indigenous communities in the Southeast of Mexico without prior consultation and without giving information about the effects on the land. All this generates violence, criminalization on the territories and the bodies of women. Likewise, monocultures break natural cycles, short chains of exchange of local products and cause a strong loss of identity that translates into migration, alcoholism and domestic violence that disrupts lives (Agua y Vida, 2021).

The women’s presentations were accompanied by embroidered banners, “banners of denunciation, so that our voices can also be heard from the embroidery”, where the expressions of the reality that are lived in their community were reflected. In several communities, alcoholism, drug use and violence against women were identified as the main problems. In this context, the Sembrando Vida (Sowing Life) program was mentioned for causing an increase in drug and alcohol consumption, which also results in an increase in gender violence. “Besides, it generates internal divisions in the communities because some want the program and others don’t. For this same reason, some communities have two commissariats.”

They noted militarization as a trigger for the increase in violence against women. Finally, a message that resonated in all the communities could be identified: “We do not want more violence, we want justice.”

The Movement in Defense of Land, Territory and for the Participation and Recognition of Women in Decision Making is a space built on solid ground to build fairer realities. A very important force for the social change that is a pressing need in Chiapas is this, which comes from the union of different voices and experiences, resisting and pushing back the barriers of violence and arbitrariness ever further...
SIPAZ ACTIVITIES

Mid-August to mid-November 2021

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

CHIAPAS

Gender
- In October, we participated in the press conference in which civil organizations shared their views on the theme “The Situation of the Human Rights of Women and Girls in the Context of the Protests in Mexico”, held with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

- In November, we accompanied the groups of women and relatives of victims of femicides in the “March of the Catrinas” (San Cristobal de Las Casas), with the aim of demanding justice for the victims of femicide and highlighting violence against women.

- In November, we participated in the XIII Assembly of the Movement in Defense of Land, Territory and for the Participation of Women in Decision Making, which was held in the community of Acteal, municipality of Chenalho.

Internal Forced Displacement
- In November, we attended the press conference “Forced Displacement in Mexico: Result of Impunity and an Unsolved Problem”, in which displaced persons from different states of Mexico participated, at the invitation of the Agustín Prodh Center and the Jose María Morelos y Pavón Human Rights Defense Center from Guerrero.

Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Expression
- In August, we participated in the conference in which the Cerezo Committee Mexico organization presented the “Tenth Report Defending Human Rights in Mexico: Without Truth and Without Justice There Is No Transformation”.

- In October, we attended the press conference that was held in San Cristobal de Las Casas a year after the repression and criminalization of the protest against the installation of a National Guard barracks and the subsequent militarization of Chilón, in which the end of the criminal proceedings started against Cesar Hernandez Feliciano and Jose Luis Gutierrez Hernandez, who were detained in this context, was again demanded.

Land and territory
- In August, we participated in the meeting “Access to Information, Megaprojects and Human Rights in Southern Mexico”, which was carried out by the PODER organization in San Cristobal de Las Casas, in which they conducted two investigations on the Maya Train Project and the Tehuantepec Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor.

- In October, we co-facilitated the Mother Earth Pastoral Encounter, which was held in Teopisca with the participation of the different pastoral areas of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In October, we participated in the XII Regional Forum for the Transformation of Socio-Environmental Conflicts in Latin America “The Escázu Agreement: Powerful Instrument or Paper Tiger?” convened by the Civic Collaboration Center (CCC), among others.

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

- In August and November, we participated in a space for analysis on security in San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was attended by several civil organizations with a presence in that city.

- Invited by the Vicariate for Justice and Peace, in August, September and October, we participated in various meetings in the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas on the socio-political conflict in Chiapas and the role that the Catholic Church can play in it (in particular in the case of Pantelho).

OAXACA

- In November, we attended the Meeting in Defense of Our Natural and Communal Assets The Isthmus Is Ours, convened by the Assembly of Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory (APIIDTT) and other members of the National Indigenous Council in the community of Jalapa de Marquez on the Tehuantepec Isthmus.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING TOWARDS ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS
- In August, we held an online meeting with the Belgian ambassador to Mexico to express our concern about the escalation of violence in the state of Chiapas.

- In October, we participated in the VI Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, convened by the United Nations, among others.

- In November, we participated in a meeting with Ambassadors from the European Union as part of their visit to Chiapas.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE
- In August, together with the Swedish Movement for Reconciliation (SweFOR), we facilitated a workshop on Risk Analysis and Security with the Impacto organization.

- In October, we participated with a presentation on the human rights situation in Mexico, in a course on Active Non-Violence convened in Sweden by SweFOR.

- In November, we facilitated part of the Meeting of Builders and Constructors of Peace and Reconciliation convened by the Commission for Reconciliation and Community Unity (CORECO) in the municipality of La Independencia, Border Area of Chiapas.

- In November, we facilitated a space for analysis with the team of pastoral agents from the Southeast area of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In November, we gave a background presentation with human rights defenders at the invitation of the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights.

NETWORKING
- In September, we participated in a meeting with representatives of the pastoral areas that are part of the Monitoring Commission of the Congress of Mothers Earth, a component of the social pastoral of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In September, we participated in a forum on conflict in Chiapas, convened by the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC), among others.

- In October, we co-facilitated the IV Online Meeting on Peacebuilding, an event that was convened by GPPAC, among others.

- In November, we participated with a presentation in the online meeting for the community that works on Non-Violent Civil Protection and Accompaniment, organized, among others, by Non-Violent Peace Force.