



SIPaz

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

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

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

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- 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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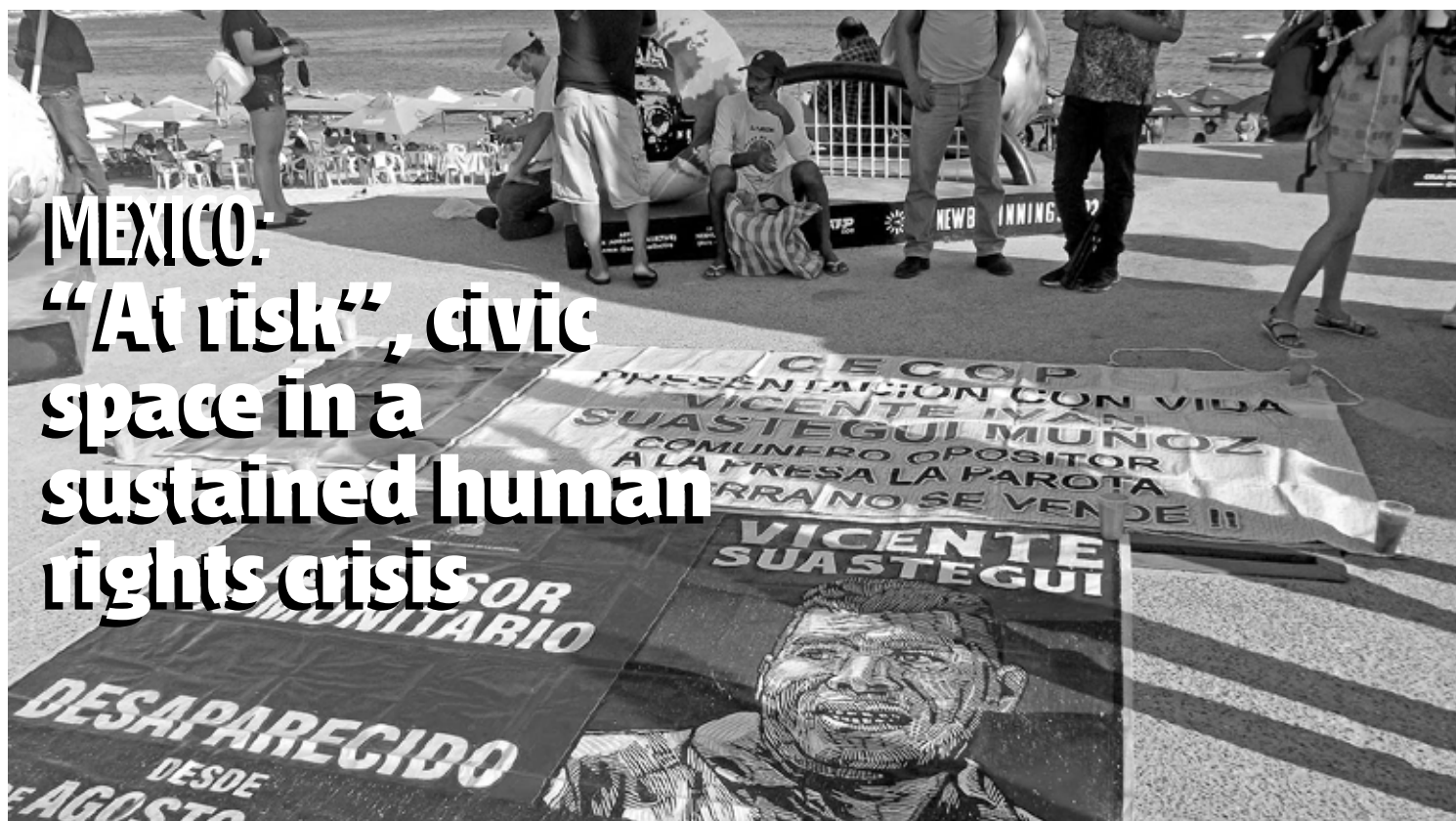
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MEXICO: “At risk”, civic space in a sustained human rights crisis

In March, Amnesty International (AI) presented its report on the human rights situation in 2021 and the beginning of 2022 through an event held in Mexico City. It stressed that *“Mexico continues to experience a serious human rights crisis that is manifested not only in the large number of people whose fundamental rights are constantly violated, but in 2021 we observe with great concern the risk of reducing civic space that is seen in the constant attacks on civil society organizations, the press, and human rights defenders.”*

In other points of concern, it mentioned the *“advance of militarization”*, since in 2021 *“the largest number of military personnel was deployed since the war on drug trafficking began in 2006”* through mobilizing 99,946 military personnel. Likewise, beyond the militarization of public security, more and more tasks have been assigned to the Armed Forces for the control of customs, ports, public works of megaprojects, among others.

AI was also concerned about the is-

sue of forced disappearances when in 2021 at least 7,698 cases of missing and unlocated persons in the country were documented. With this, at the end of the year the number of disappeared persons rose to 97,000 since 1964. Furthermore, *“facing these figures, impunity continues; by 2021, only 35 convictions had been handed down for the crime of forced disappearance.”*

Another issue of concern was migration due to reports of excessive use of force and arbitrary returns by authorities, as well as kidnappings, extortion and homicides by non-state players. It considered that the management of migration by the National Guard *“constitutes a serious risk for respect for the rights and guarantees of migrants.”*

Of particular concern: the situation of human rights defenders and freedom of expression

In March, the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA) pre-

sented a report on the situation of environmental defenders and communities in Mexico. It pointed out that, in 2021, 25 environmental defenders were murdered and 238 attacks of different types were presented, almost 165% more than in 2020. So far in the current administration, 58 environmental defenders have been murdered. In the reasons to explain so much violence, CEMDA points out *“environmental processes that are not carried out legally, that are not culturally appropriate, that do not respect the rights to information, participation or autonomy (...) Secondly, the slowness and omission of the judiciary to resolve socio-environmental conflicts (...) stands out. In addition, in some cases it contributes to validating acts of criminalization against human rights defenders. In the third place, public prosecutor’s offices persist in failing to investigate acts of violence; finally, the ineffectiveness of the protection mechanisms stands out.”*

In April, the organization in defense of freedom of expression Article

Demonstration to demand the presentation alive of the defender of territory, Vicente Suastegui Muñoz, Acapulco, March 2022
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AMNISTÍA INTERNACIONAL

Transmisión en vivo Conferencia de Prensa

INFORME ANUAL DE AMNISTIA INTERNACIONAL

2021-2022

Sigue la transmisión por  YouTube

/AmnistiaInternacionalAméricas

 **MARTES 29 DE MARZO, 2022**

 **10:00am MÉX | 1:00pm ARG**

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19 presented its 2021 report entitled *“Denial”*. In it, it documents that, in 2021, an attack against the press was recorded every 14 hours with a total of 644 attacks. *“The Mexican state was involved in two out of every five attacks”*, it stressed. The three years of AMLO’s government add up to 1,945 attacks against the press, among which are 30 murders of journalists, *“marking the most violent period against the press on record.”* In addition, in 2021 *“the tendency to deny and make problems related to human rights disappear from public discourse was consolidated”*, hence the title of the report. Article 19 stated that *“this denial translates into official misinformation, public stigmatization of the press, discretion in the allocation of official advertising, deception in the transparency system, violence against the press, digital divide, and human rights violations.”*

By mid-May, 11 murders of journalists had been documented since the beginning of 2022, a figure higher than countries that are in a war conflict and positioning Mexico as the deadliest country for the press.

Worrying tendency of the federal government to deny or minimize the accusations in the matter of human rights

In March, the European Parliament passed a resolution stressing that *“Mexico has long been the most dangerous and deadliest place for journalists outside of an official war zone.”* It asked the Mexican authorities for *“measures to guarantee the protection and creation of a safe environment for journalists and human rights defenders, addressing widespread corruption and deficiencies in the judicial systems, which cause high rates of impunity.”* It mentioned that *“it observes with concern the harsh and systematic criticism formulated by the highest authorities of the Mexican Government against journalists and their work.”* For its part, the Government of Mexico expressed its annoyance, assuring that *“Mexico has ceased to be a land of conquest and, as on very few occasions in its history, the libertarian principles of equality and democracy are being asserted. Here no one is repressed, freedom of expression and the work of journalists are respected. The State does not violate human rights as happened in previous governments, when you, by the way, kept a complicit silence.”* Several media outlets, officials, academics and organizations lamented the lack of diploma-

cy and professionalism in the writing, many even thought it was a joke and some even apologized to the European Parliament for the speech that, the next day, AMLO confirmed to have written.

“They will not put us in the dock” was Lopez Obrador’s response after the UN Committee against Forced Disappearances (CDF) presented its report on the situation in Mexico in April. The agency revealed that 95,121 people are missing in Mexico, amid *“almost absolute impunity.”* It reported that the main perpetrator is organized crime, sponsored, to varying degrees of participation, acquiescence or omission, by public servants. The CDF recognized advances in normative, institutional and jurisprudential matters during this six-year term of office. However, it stressed that the gap between theory and the implementation of practices is still pending. It urged the Mexican government to *“abandon the approach of militarizing public security”* since *“the participation of the armed forces in security tasks is, more than a solution, a risk and an incentive for disappearances to continue occurring.”*

AMLO: high level of approval

The human rights questions do not seem to affect the level of approval of the president. In April, the consultation for the revocation of his mandate was held, a historical precedent in Mexico for a president to be removed from office for *“loss of trust”* of the citizenry. The results had different interpretations: for some, they show a *“resounding”* acceptance of the Obrador government; for others, the rejection was evidenced by the abstention of more than 80% of the population; and for others still, it is expected that this initiative will also be celebrated in future governments with future presidents.

Although for many the revocation of the mandate *“was taken for granted”* due to AMLO’s level of popularity, the number of participants became one of the keys to interpreting this electoral

exercise. First, because for the exercise to be binding, a 40% voter turnout had to be reached, which did not happen. And second, because the 17.7% in favor did not reach the 30 million votes with which AMLO won the presidency. For AMLO, the 15.6 million votes he obtained speak of the level of acceptance his government has when former leaders came to power with fewer votes than that. He also blamed the National Electoral Institute (INE) for the low turnout of voters.

Indeed, since the June 2021 elections, MORENA, AMLO's party, has lost its qualified majority in Congress, reducing its room for maneuver. As a result, in March, the Electricity Reform promoted by the president was voted on in the midst of a strong debate. With 275 votes in favor and 223 against, it was rejected because it did not obtain the approval of two thirds of the Chamber. The decision has sparked great controversy as there are those who affirm that it is a betrayal of the homeland and the people, that in the end, it will be those in the future who must face the consequences of this fact. On the other hand, some celebrate it as a triumph because in addition to considering it an *"obsolete and regressive"* reform by not considering clean energy and curbing foreign investment, they assure that it reflects the consolidation of opposition to the 4T project.

On another note, the same day that the Electricity Reform was discussed, President Lopez Obrador sent the initiative to reform the Mining Law regarding the exploration and exploitation of lithium to the Chamber of Deputies, which was approved almost immediately. The reactions were also immediate, although in general it had a positive impact, some spoke against it, considering it a farce. Civil organizations recognized that it is progress that attention is being paid to the issue of mining exploitation, but they assured that it is not enough and that it is necessary to make profound changes to the Law to stop the dispossession and privileges that mining companies have in Mexico. They pointed out that



Revocation of
mandate, April 2022
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the Mining Law should contemplate various aspects such as *"eliminating the nature of public utility and preference of mining activities, making effective the right to decide of communities and peoples regarding the granting of mining concessions in their territories, removing the privileges of access to land and water granted to companies"*, among others.

CHIAPAS: Worsening Violence in Various Areas of the State

The last few months have continued to be characterized by worsening violence in various areas of the state, particularly in Los Altos and in the border area.

In Los Altos, even the touristy San Cristobal de Las Casas has been affected with reports of frequent armed clashes, murders and robberies. Regarding the indigenous, a particularly hot spot continues to be the border area between Aldama and Santa Mar-

Reforma eléctrica
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Pilgrimage for Peace, for Life, against Violence and Discrimination, Las Margaritas, February 2022
© SIPAZ

tha (municipality of Chenalho), the object of an agrarian conflict since the 1970s after an inadequate territorial demarcation. But, *"it is not, therefore, only intra- and inter-community agrarian conflicts that by themselves would deserve an immediate intervention strategy by the corresponding authorities. To look at it from this perspective is to irresponsibly reduce the magnitude of the problem. We are talking about an open dispute over territorial control, in which interests of all kinds come together, and whose terrible consequences we have seen in other states of the Republic"*, said the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba).

Other heavy armed clashes have been reported in Frontera Comalapa, almost daily in the ejido San Gregorio Chamic. For eight months the dispute over control of that region between two armed civilian groups has intensified. To the homicides between rival gangs are added dozens of cases of forced disappearance, mainly of young people.

Another indicator of the worsening of violence: in April an extraordinary election day was called in Venustiano Carranza, Siltepec, Emiliano Zapata and El Parral, for the annulment of the elections of June 6th, 2021. Last year the results were canceled or elections did not even take place due to conflicts, threats, as well as theft or burning of

ballots. On repeating the exercise, the elections were suspended again in the Frontera Comalapa and Honduras de la Sierra municipalities since *"there are no security conditions or guarantees to carry out the electoral day"*, the National Electoral Institute (INE) reported.

In May, several attacks were also reported in areas of land recovered by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN): members of the Ocosingo Regional Organization of Coffee Growers (ORCAO) attacked communities in the Moises Gandhi community, causing the displacement of 83 people. Shortly after, Frayba denounced acts of violence against the Zapatista community of Nuevo San Gregorio, Lucio Cabañas Zapatista Rebel Autonomous municipality, also due to a dispute over recovered lands. Frayba also denounced *"the indifference of the Mexican State to implement an effective action to deactivate the violence."*

Attacks on human rights defenders: the risk of raising your voice

In March, the Believing People of Chicomuselo denounced that there is *"persecution, threats and intimidation"* against the parish priest of this location, Matías Rodríguez Jimenez. They pointed out that when the priest *"was on his way to the neighboring municipality of Frontera Comalapa (...) he noticed that three people on motorcycles were following him. A few kilometers away, two more people joined him and blocked his way, so he stopped, at which point three individuals approached to hit his car and said: 'We know who you are and what you do, look after yourself!'"* Believing People also reported surveillance at the parish house in recent months. Several civil organizations recognized the priest's work *"accompanying the people's struggle for the defense of the territory against mining companies, the illegal sale of alcoholic beverages, Moscamed, violence against women, militarization, insecurity and rezoning."*

In April, presumed inhabitants of

the Bienestar Social neighborhood who have invaded an ecological zone in San Cristobal de Las Casas, as well as members of the criminal group known as 'motonetos', prevented an act in which the issue of the declaration of critical habitat of 115 hectares of mountain wetlands. When around 100 people, including activists and citizens, arrived at the event site, they were received by armed people who fear that the declaration will evict them. The situation became tense and the environmentalist Leon Enrique Avila was subjected to jostling, threats and physical attacks.

Multiple actions against violence, among other demands

In February, around two thousand indigenous people from Believing People made a pilgrimage in the municipality of Benemerito de las Americas to demand the suspension of two palm oil processors, due to the contamination they generate in their territory. They explained that they have filed complaints with various government agencies but have received no response. They also questioned labor exploitation in these companies. They raised other requests *"such as health, provision of medicines, construction of hospitals, more doctors. In terms of violence, the localities suffer from organized crime, kidnappings, robberies of properties and murders"*.

Likewise, in February a confrontation took place in Las Margaritas that ended with two people dead and several injured. This, residents of this municipality say, was just one more example of the violence that has co-opted the state and that is spreading more and more visibly throughout the territory. In this context, churches of different religious denominations convened the *"Pilgrimage for Peace, for Life, against Violence and Discrimination"* that took place in March. They announced the creation of the *"Alliance of Churches for Peace"* that will seek to work together for the common good *"in the midst of the serious deteri-*

oration that our entire state of Chiapas is now experiencing.”

In April, the Second Zoque Congress was held to “build collective solutions to (...) the imposition of extractive projects, forced displacement of families, exacerbation of national and international migration, as well as interest in privatizing water, lands and the Chichonal volcano.” The participants also denounced the violence caused by armed groups, as well as the division and co-opting by assistance programs. They also expressed their concern about the “reactivation of energy projects that seek the construction of new hydroelectric dams in the municipalities of Chicoasen, Copainala and Francisco Leon.” They recalled that in 2016 they managed to mobilize to avoid the concession of land for the exploitation of twelve oil wells. They expressed that “today, as before, we have decided not to sell out, not betray ourselves and not give up.”

Similarly, in April, around 400 residents of different communities in the municipality of Chilon gathered in the community of Pamal-Navil to make a pilgrimage for life, justice, unity and dignity for Mother Earth and the peoples. The demands of the Tseltal people were made known: respect for Mother Earth, the defense of their territory and absolute freedom for community defenders Cesar Hernandez and Jose Luis Gutierrez prosecuted for the crime of mutiny since 2020 after demonstrating against the construction of a National Guard barracks in their territory.

Highlighting other types of concerns, in March thousands of Zapatistas filled the streets of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Palenque, Las Margaritas, Altamirano and Yajalon to protest against the capitalist wars that “oppress the peoples and destroy mother earth in all geographies. They showed their solidarity not only with “the resistance of Ukraine and Russia” but also “with all the peoples where war conflicts prevail such as Palestine, Kurdistan, Syria, the Mapuche people, the original peoples throughout the planet and so many libertarian processes that

are attacked, persecuted, murdered, silenced” (see article).

OAXACA: Worsening of the situation of free expression and the defense of human rights in the state

In the last nine years, 11 journalists have been murdered in Oaxaca. Another alarming number is that of the investigation files for human rights violations of journalists and communicators in the state: the Ombudsman for the Human Rights of the People of Oaxaca (DDH-PO) registers 288.

In April, journalists protested to demand justice for the murders of journalists Heber Lopez (February 2022) and Gustavo Sanchez (June 2021), during the dialogue held by the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists in Juchitan. They spoke with banners bearing the slogan *#PeriodismoEnRiesgo* (*#JournalismAtRisk*), in solidarity with journalists attacked in the region and demanding justice for those murdered communicators, as well as their families. At this same event, social organizations from the region also demonstrated, exposing the human rights violations of activists in the face of the dispossession of their lands for the development of wind projects and the Tehuantepec Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor.

In May, within the framework of another round table organized by the Mechanism in Tlaxiaco, displaced residents of Guerrero Grande demanded the appearance alive of defender Irma Galindo Barrios, who disappeared in October 2021. This environmentalist defender of forests in the Mixteca disappeared in Mexico City while she was collecting supplies for communities in the municipality of San Esteban Atat-

IRMA GALINDO
HASTA ENCONTRARTE



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lahuca that were attacked at the end of October after denouncing the degradation of their natural resources. “No one should disappear for defending nature”, claimed the protesters who since October 2021 have not been able to return to their homes that were burned by people supposedly related to local authorities.

It should be noted that Oaxaca is the second entity with the most beneficiaries of the federal Protection Mechanism, with a total of 153 people.

GUERRERO: Mexican Army involved in the Ayotzinapa case

In March, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) presented its Third Report with the findings of the investigations they have carried out into the disappearance of the 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa in September 2014. The evidence collected reveals that both the Army and the Navy were involved in the disappearance and in the manipulation of information for seven years. They indi-



Demonstration to demand the presentation alive of the defender of territory, Vicente Suastegui Muñoz, Acapulco, March 2022
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cate that the Ayotzinapa students had been under investigation for years; that there were soldiers infiltrated inside the school; that four days before the disappearance, the Command of the 35th military zone ordered all the Guerrero battalions to follow the students; that on the day of the disappearance, both the police and the military maintained detailed monitoring of the students, including the interception of communications in real time; that said information was not shared with

the authorities in charge of the investigation; among others. They presented an unpublished video recorded by a drone from the Secretary of the Navy, in which elements of said institution are seen entering the Cocula dump (key place of the investigation in 2014) and manipulating the scene.

In May, relatives of the 43 affirmed that “the authorities in charge of investigating have been able to do little to force the Mexican Army to provide the related information, on the contrary, the agreements of the federal executive with this institution allow us to conclude that the government is not willing to strain relations, much less allow them to be prosecuted, despite the fact that the president has publicly reaffirmed his commitment to clarify the facts and punish the guilty.”

Given the resistance to resolve a case as emblematic as that of Ayotzinapa, there is little hope for more recent cases. In May, a political act was held in Acapulco to demand the presentation alive of the defender of the territory, Vicente Suastegui Muñoz, who has been missing since August 2021. He is a member of the Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to La Parota Dam (CECOP) therefore, “...we maintain that Vicente’s disappearance is for political reasons, for his participation in defense of the land. The CECOP is a movement that has been repressed, several have fallen, they have been deprived of their liberty and have had to live with anxiety”, stated La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center.

Likewise, in May, the Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities-Community Police (CRAC-PC) requested “a prompt, exhaustive and

impartial investigation into the murder of the defender of the rights of the Afro-Mexican people, Luis Ortiz Donato, which occurred last Thursday, April 28th” in the municipality of Marquelia. Likewise, they emphasized that “his murder is a deadly message from powerful groups and organized crime, who feel protected by a state justice system that does not investigate crimes against defenders.” ■

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Violence Crisis Crosses the Right to Freedom of Expression in Mexico



"#NosEstanMatando (#TheyAreKillingUs) You don't kill the truth by killing journalists!"
Slogan at protests by journalists, Mexico, January 25th, 2022

The murders of the journalists Yesenia Mollinedo Falconi and Sheila Johana Garcia Olvera, which occurred on May 9th, 2022 in Veracruz, as well as that of Luis Enrique Ramirez Ramos, a journalist and political analyst who was kidnapped and murdered just four days earlier in the north of the country, brought the toll of communicators executed in Mexico to 11 so far in 2022. The delegation of the European Union (EU) and the embassies of its member states in Mexico, as well as those of Norway and Switzerland, condemned these murders: *"The events that occurred in less than a week reflect once again the very serious degree of violence and intimidation faced by many journalists in Mexico"*, the diplomatic representatives pointed out ▀

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said, for its part, that it is urgent to implement measures to strengthen the federal protection mechanism, to stop the harassment of journalists who criticize the government, and to put an end to the *"almost absolute"* impunity for these crimes. Tyler Mattriace, researcher for the Americas at HRW, assured that *"this year is on the way to becoming the deadliest in history for journalists in Mexico"* and that *"President Lopez Obrador has not only failed to address violence against the press, but also continues to use his morning conferences to harass and intimidate journalists."* The *"theater"* of public order represented by the messages of *"Zero impunity"* *"does not guarantee that there will be justice for the murders"*, the organization said.

Mexico, one of the deadliest countries in the world

Several sources emphasize it: Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. The country remains in 143rd place out of 180 in the World Press

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 / REUTERS

Fotografía: Cuartoscuro



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Freedom Index (2021), unchanged from the previous year. It has certainly improved its ranking in recent years from 153rd place in 2013. But Mexico's score, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), increased to 46.71 in 2021 (45.45 in 2020), which implies a worsening of the situation of freedom of expression due to an increase in attacks and a more hostile environment for journalists.

The description of the situation in the country published on the organization's page warns: *"Homeland of the drug cartels, Mexico continues to be one of the deadliest countries in the world for the media. Journalists (...) suffer from intimidation, attacks, they can be killed in cold blood. Numerous journalists have disappeared in the country; many others have been forced into exile to be safe."*

Coverage of corruption and politics, the most dangerous topics

In 2021, the issues behind the attacks against journalists were corruption and politics with 285 cases (44.25% of the total), according to the report of the same year, *"Denial"*, from Article 19. Coverage of issues related to security and justice, known colloquially as *"red note"* in Mexico, is in second place with 155 cases (24% of the total). Covering issues such as human rights, protests, social movements, and defense of land and territory represent third, fourth, and fifth place.

"What is happening in Mexico is terrifying, it is once again the country with the most deaths in a year, although it is a

country at peace in theory", explained the secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, Christophe Deloire, coinciding with the publication of its annual balance 2021. *"Journalists who investigate drug trafficking, the underworld of a corrupt political class, are killed more often than in other countries. It's sinister"*, he added.

According to Article 19, reporting on security matters increases the risk of being a victim of organized crime (33 of the 42 attacks were perpetrated by these groups) and civil security forces (52 of 110). In this sense, journalists who deal with these issues are more likely to suffer death threats (15 out of 36 cases), arbitrary arrests and deprivation of liberty (13 out of 33 cases) and to be killed, since four of the seven journalists killed in 2021 covered security and justice issues. Between attacks and impacts, it is not surprising that the fear of being attacked causes, above all, journalists who cover security and justice issues to self-censor themselves to avoid greater risk.

Impunity and rise in violence

Despite some recent progress, Mexico continues to face a serious problem of impunity. RSF considers that the collusion of the authorities and politicians with organized crime and national and transnational companies seriously threatens the security of news players and hinders the operation of justice in the country at all levels. When journalists investigate issues that are bothersome to the government or related to organized crime - especially at the local level



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- they can be threatened and intimidated, and even killed, the organization says.

The coming to power of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) in December 2018 does not seem to have managed to stop either the spiral of violence against journalists or impunity, impunity (ranging between 91 and 98% according to sources), being a factor that precisely nourishes this spiral.

Article 19 documents that, in 2021, in Mexico, an attack against the press was recorded every 14 hours, with a total of 644 attacks recorded throughout the year. During 2021 seven journalists were killed. In the three years of the government of President Andres Manuel López Obrador, 1,945 attacks against the press were added, among which are 30 murders of journalists and two disappearances. This represents *"almost 85% more attacks against the press than the first three years of the previous president, marking the most violent period against the press on record"*, the 2021 Article 19 report indicates.

Denial and invisibility

The same report highlights that in 2021 *"the tendency to deny and make problems related to human rights disappear from public discourse was consolidated."* The Mexican president has minimized the murders of journalists, affirming that they were only an insignificant percentage of the murders that Mexico experiences every day, which, although true, is of no consolation.

It is important to underline that, in 2021, public officials were the main aggressor against journalists and the media, as has been the case since 2009, the year in which Article 19 began the registry of attacks against the press in Mexico. Thus, of the 644 attacks in 2021, the Mexican State was involved in at least 274 of them (42.55%), through public officials, civil security forces (police, guards, etc.) and armed forces (National Guard, Army, Navy, etc.). In other words, the Mexican authorities are directly linked to two out of every five attacks against the press.

Stigmatization and criminalization

On February 1st, 2022, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) called on the Mexican government to recognize the crisis of violence that journalism is going through in Mexico. Likewise, it asked to suspend the spot *"Who is Who in Lies"*, which it described as a *"spot totally foreign to the democratic standards of freedom of expression"* that *"makes the firm messages that should be heard in support of journalistic work and rejection of violence against journalists seem strange."* The Mexican president denied that there was a relationship between the increase in violence against journalists and what was said about them in his conferences, which he described as *"incorrect speculation."* AMLO declared: *"Very few journalists are fulfilling the noble job of reporting."* Article 19 also documented that, in 2021, during the president's morning conferences *"on at least 71 occasions, an average of almost six times a month,*



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the head of the Federal Executive himself or other members of the government reviled the press.” According to the same source, 40% of the president’s verifiable statements were not true: 34% mixed true information with erroneous information and 17% were totally false. In this sense, AMLO contributes to a large extent to a cycle of false information and stigmatization, according to the “Denial” report.

On another note, the report indicates that there is an information gap in Mexico both due to the lack of internet coverage, especially in rural regions, and by monopolizing the media when 33% of the total expenditure on official advertising is invested in only three media (La Jornada, Televisa and TV Azteca) which reduces the diversity of options and opinions by privileging a few.

Demands for improvements

So far in 2022, there have been several demonstrations across the country to demand justice and an end to violence against journalists. Due to its concern about the increase in such violence and the high level of impunity in Mexico, the European Parliament asked the Mexican authorities in March for “measures to guarantee the protection and the creation of a safe environment for journalists and human rights defenders, tackling widespread corruption and shortcomings in judicial systems, which lead to high rates of impunity for these crimes.” In addition, it mentioned that “Parliament observes with concern the harsh and systematic criticism formulated by the highest authorities of the Mexican Govern-

ment against journalists and their work.” The MEPs warned that “the rhetoric of abuse and stigmatization generates an environment of incessant agitation against independent journalists” and called on the Mexican government “to refrain from any communication that could stigmatize journalists and media workers.”

In response, the Mexican president declared: “Enough of corruption, lies and hypocrisy. It is unfortunate that they join like sheep in the reactionary and coup strategy of the corrupt group that opposes the Fourth Transformation.” It is far from the first time that the President’s speech refers to the supposed “conservative forces” in the country that, he considers, want to attack his government and represent a threat to democracy. In these groups he has also included civil society groups, such as feminist collectives, human rights defenders, among others. In addition, the president stated in his statement to the European Parliament: “Here no one is repressed, freedom of expression and the work of journalists are respected. The State does not violate human rights as happened in previous governments, when you, by the way, kept an complicit silence.”

In this way, he denied the violations of freedom of expression and human rights by the Mexican State, in strong contrast to reports that national and international organizations have been publishing on this subject. The reactions to the Presidency’s statement were immediate, several media outlets, officials, academics and society in general lamented the lack of diplomacy and professionalism in the writing, many even thought it was a joke and some even

apologized to the European Parliament for the speech that President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador confirmed he had written.

A Protection Mechanism: urgent and necessary reform

“Mexico has official organizations for the protection of journalists, either with active measures, or through a special Prosecutor’s Office for crimes against them. But in reality it is just a very inefficient large bureaucracy (...) that gets used to this situation and does little to avoid it”, lamented the general secretary of RSG, Christophe Deloire. He considered the situation of the press in the country a “hecatomb” and asked the authorities for radical measures to put an end to it.

Since 2012, Mexico has approved the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and established a federal Protection Mechanism. This Mechanism has sought to specify responses to the lack of attention on the part of the authorities, including the omissions of the prosecutor’s offices when issuing precautionary measures in situations of risk. However, as has already been mentioned, the attacks against journalists and human rights defenders continued and increased. From 2017 to 2021, seven journalists who had measures from the federal Mechanism were murdered, according to Article 19. Between 2018 and 2021 of the 540 journalists incorporated into the Federal Protection Mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists, 341 suffered some type of aggression despite this, according to the Ministry of the Interior itself.

In 2020, the Undersecretary for Human Rights, Population, and Migration, Alejandro Encinas Rodriguez, stated that *“the Mechanism does not have within its powers to directly implement crime prevention actions, it does not investigate crimes, nor is it its responsibility to combat impunity. Nor does it have powers to eradicate violence in the states.”* This same year, CSO Space called for the approval of a reform of the Law, and at the beginning of 2022 regional dialogues began to promote a new protection law. Encinas stressed that special emphasis will be placed *“on the definition of competencies because in many cases the authorities themselves are the cause of the attacks. (...) it must be a State policy, involving the authorities of the three levels of government.”* However, journalists and activists expressed doubts



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about the law reform initiative, particularly whether it will be able to deliver on promises to prevent and investigate crimes.

The workshops that have been held in various parts of the country can be an opportunity to fine-tune diagnoses, review needs, develop a public policy of comprehensive protection to guarantee the exercise of freedom of expression by journalists, as well as to combat the impunity for attacks against the press and guarantee the right to the truth, among other aspects. Acknowledging the existence of the problem is an essential first step ■



"Against all capitalist wars" Frankfurt, Germany

Imagine there is a war...

Terrifying and shocking images traverse the globe these days: bloodied teddies, facades of buildings destroyed by bombing, frightened people in air-raid shelters, lifeless bodies in the middle of a street, ruins and what used to be, at some point, a flourishing city, with life, art, joy, with peace ▀

This city does not have a name, it has several: it could be Mariupol in the Ukraine or Aleppo in Syria, Marib in Yemen, Duhok in Kurdistan or Gao in Mali. Some frequently appear in the news, others have already fallen into collective oblivion, perhaps deliberately ignored.

Imagine there is a war and no one is watching.

The Escola de Cultura de Pao de Catalunya's report reveals that, in April 2022, there were eighteen serious armed conflicts across the planet. If we include those of low intensity, this

number grows to more than forty.

In addition, according to Amnesty International "*at the end of 2019, 79.5 million people around the world had been the object of forced displacement due to armed conflicts*", a number that, three years later, reaches a much higher level, due to escalating conflicts. The numbers of people affected by famine, torture, murder, lack of stability, education and resources, to name just a few of the consequences of wars and armed conflicts, have yet to be recorded.

Imagine there is a war and we are watching it.

Watching hurts, it implies confront-

ing yourself, not only with frightening and alarming images, such as burned hospitals, young people armed to enter a war that is not theirs, or abandoned bodies; but also with the pandemic, the scarcity of resources and with unequal development. All being indicators of possible future confrontations, and possible wars.

But watching and protesting, given these images and themes, is essential in the process of putting an end to these conflicts. It is the first step for their transformation.

Imagine there is a war and we fight against it.

Different forms of resistance and protest against oppression and injustice have existed and will always exist in the world: from art, boycotts, strikes, public letters and, perhaps the most recurrent, demonstrations. In times of war, this form of expression is risky, since it leads to repression and



Palenque
© EnlaceZapatista

intimidation, but at the same time it takes on huge importance. It serves to feel supported and, not only to minimize fear, but to send powerful messages, to demand changes and show the common aversion towards abuses of power.

Since 1983 there has been a group in Chiapas that fights for changes, watching the wars, positioning themselves against them: the Zapatistas. First with weapons, then with words, and always in collective appearance, demonstrating in massive protests and gatherings, such as the Color of the Earth March of 2001, the International Meeting of Women who Struggle in 2019, or the Journey for Life in SLUMIL K'AJXEMK'OP/Europe. Its most striking demonstration took place in 2012, when thousands of Zapatistas demonstrated in five cities in Chiapas.

On Sunday, March 13th, 2022, they emerged again, collectively. The Zapatistas marched in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Palenque, Las Margaritas, Altamirano and Yajalon in Chiapas, as announced on March

9th, 2022. Their objective: to demand a *"stop to the war waged by capitalist governments"* and *"life and peace in the world"*. They stressed that *"it is not only in Ukraine. Also in Palestine, Kurdistan, Syria, the Mapuche people, the original peoples across the planet, and so many libertarian processes that are attacked, persecuted, murdered, silenced, distorted."*

They called on *"all honest people, groups, collectives, organizations and movements in Mexico and in the world, according to their times and ways -and preserving their independence and autonomy-, to join the activities to demand a stop to the wars, beginning on Sunday the 13th."*

The request was answered by these groups: on Sunday the 13th, in addition to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, different groups and collectives throughout Mexico and the world took to the streets and organized political actions in order to demonstrate their resistance and aversion to wars, and at the same time their strength and solidarity with those affected.

It is worth mentioning that, in the municipality of Altamirano, the Zapatistas invited the population to join the demonstration. Thousands of residents participated in the march, demanding the release of the 37 peasants kidnapped since last December.

According to estimations of Chiapas Paralelo, some 20,000 Zapatistas protested that day in the different municipalities, with what is expected to begin *"a world campaign against the wars of capital"*, organizing *"concerts, encounters, festivals, meetings (. .)"*

The EZLN communiqué ends with a clear call:

"Against all wars: all arts, all resistance, all rebellions!" ■

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT CHIAPAS

Gender

- In February, we attended the demonstration against violence in San Cristobal de Las Casas after the murder of Paula Ruiz de los Santos on February 19th in the same city.

- On March 8th, within the framework of International Women's Day, we accompanied the marches against gender violence that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

Internal Forced Displacement

- In April, we were present at the 15th anniversary of the relocation of displaced persons from Las Abejas de Acteal Civil Society in the community of Nuevo Paraíso, municipality of Pantelho.

Indigenous Peoples

- In March, we attended the presentation of the report *"...Well, It's Torture! Torture against Indigenous Peoples: An Invisible Reality"*, presented by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights in coordination with the World Organization Against Torture (WOAT).

Human rights

- In March, we participated in the online event *"Human Rights and Chinese Business Activities in Latin America"*, convened by the International Service for Human Rights.

- At the end of March and beginning of April, we participated in the online event *"Human Rights in Mexico - A Mid-term of the Lopez Obrador Government"*, convened by the German Coordination for Human Rights in Mexico and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, among others.

- In April, we attended the online event through which the organization in defense of freedom of expression Article 19 presented its 2021 report entitled *"Denial"*. In it, it documents that in 2021 in Mexico, an attack against the press was recorded every 14 hours with a total of 644 attacks.

- In May, we attended the Forum Towards the Construction of a Public Policy of Comprehensive Protection for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists online, convened by, among others, CSO Space, Article 19 and Peace Brigades In-

ternational (PBI).

Migration

- In March, we participated in the event organized within the framework of the fourth anniversary of the *"Casa Betania Santa Martha"* refuge for migrants, located in the municipality of Salto de Agua.

Events

- In March, as observers, we accompanied the demonstration called by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas, among other municipalities, against the war between Russia and Ukraine.

- In March, we accompanied the *"Pilgrimage for Peace, for Life, Against Violence and Discrimination"*, which took place in the municipal capital of Margaritas, at the invitation of churches of different religious denominations.

- In March, we were present as observers at the Peaceful Action for Truth, Justice and against Impunity, organized by Las Abejas de Acteal Civil Society and the relatives of Simon Pedro Perez Lopez, in the framework of the intermediate hearing that took place carried out in Cintalapa in the case of Simon Pedro, to demand justice for the murder of the human rights defender.

- In April, we were present at the Stations of the Cross for Life, Justice, Unity and Dignity for Mother Earth and the Peoples, in which around 400 residents from different communities in the municipality of Chilon and belonging to the Believing People participated from the Jet Ha' Pastoral Center, which took place in the community of Pamal-Navil.

OAXACA

- In February, we accompanied the regional meeting *"Women and Dissidence in Defense of Territory. The Isthmus Is Ours"*, organized by the Council of Autonomous Women of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory (APIIDTT) and the Oaxatrans collective. It was held in the city of Juchitan.

- In April, we participated as observers in the activities that the Caravan for Water and Life: United Peoples Against Capitalist Dispossession, made up of organizations and groups from Puebla, Tlaxcala,

Veracruz, Mexico City, Morelos, Mexico City, and others carried out in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

GUERRERO

- In March, we toured Guerrero, an opportunity to meet with partners that work in this state: the Collective against Torture and Impunity (CCTI), the *"José María Morelos y Pavón"* Regional Human Rights Center and La Montaña Tlachinollan Center for Human Rights. Likewise, as observers, we accompanied the demonstration that took place in Acapulco, seven months after the disappearance of human rights defender Vicente Suastegui, a member of the Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposing La Parota Dam (CECOP).

INFORMATION AND TRAINING TOWARDS ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In March, we participated in a meeting that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas with members of the UN Human Rights, with whom concerns were shared about the human rights situation in Chiapas.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

- In March, we presented an analysis at the Meeting of Representatives of the South Zone of the Diocese of San Cristobal that took place in Villa Las Rosas.

- In March, together with the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center and the Swedish Movement for Reconciliation (SweFOR), we facilitated a workshop on risk analysis and security measures with the expanded nucleus of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In April, we facilitated a two-day workshop on analysis tools with Peace and Reconciliation builders from the Commission for Reconciliation and Community Unity (CORECO) from various areas of the state.

- In April, we presented an analysis of the current situation during a meeting of the Pastoral Ministry of Indian Theology of the diocese of San Cristobal that took place in San Andres Larrainzar.

- In May, we facilitated a workshop on risk analysis and security protocols with the *"A Help for You, Migrant Woman"* center in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

- Also in May, we held a workshop on risk analysis and security protocols with the migrant center in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

NETWORKING

- We attended the bimonthly meetings of the Network for Peace, a space for action and reflection, made up of ten organizations that seek to support peace and reconciliation processes in Chiapas.

- In February, we had a face-to-face meeting with the partners that participated in the *"Latin America Project, Between Violence and Hope - Phase III: Accompaniment of Communities in Non-violent Resistance against Extractivism"*, coordinated by Pax Christi International.

- In February, we participated in the discussion of women experts on gender issues, convened by the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC), in order to exchange learning.

- In March and May, we participated in a meeting with representatives of the pastoral areas that are part of the Follow-up Commission of the Congress of Mother Earth, a component of the social pastoral of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In February and May, we were present at two online Meetings of the Platform for Peace in Mexico.

- In March, we had a meeting with the All Rights for All Network (RedTDT), Peace Brigades International (PBI) and the Swedish Movement for Reconciliation (SweFOR) to collaborate in analysis and actions in the areas in which we coincide.

- In April, we participated in a space for analysis of security in San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was attended by various civil organizations with a presence in this city ■

