"Militarization increases violence and perpetuates violations of Human Rights and of the territories of the Peoples."
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SIPAZ is an international observation program created in 1995, after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to monitor the conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

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

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

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The SIPAZ International Team in Chiapas:

- Maintains an international presence and accompanies processes that are working towards the construction of a culture of peace in Mexico.
- Provides trustworthy communication that integrates the voices of local actors and mobilizes the local, national and international community in the search for alternative solutions to the causes of violence in Mexico.
- Joins together with organizations, movements and networks in order to share and strengthen the processes that are leading towards building a just peace.
- Maintains contact and dialogue with the many different actors that are present in the conflict.

SIPAZ recognizes and respects the principles of non-intervention and sovereignty of the Mexican State and its citizens upon whom must depend the negotiation and initiative that are necessary in order to achieve an eventual solution to the conflict.

The coalition members of SIPAZ represent many years of experience in international non-governmental peacemaking and conflict resolution. Building on that experience, SIPAZ seeks to play a facilitative role enhancing the context in which Mexicans are working to solve largely Mexican problems.

International Coalition

- Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (YMCA) (Argentina)
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- Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men’s Institutes
- Peace and Justice Committee (Washington DC, USA)
- Centro Memorial Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (La Habana, Cuba)
- Christian Peacemaker Teams (Illinois, USA)
- Church of the Brethren (Washington DC, USA)
- Dominican Sisters of San Rafael (California, USA)
- Episcopal Peace Fellowship (Washington DC, USA)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation/EEUU (New York, USA)
- FOR Austria (Austria)
- Franciscan Friars, Santa Barbara Province (California, USA)
- Franciscan National Justice, Peace and Ecology Council (Washington DC, USA)
- Global Exchange (California, USA)
- IF/When (California, USA)
- Illinois Maya Ministry, United Church of Christ (Illinois, USA)
- Iniciativa Ecuménica «Oscar Romero» (CIPFE, Montevideo, Uruguay)
- International Committee for the Peace Council (Wisconsin, USA)
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation (Alkmaar, Holland)
- Jubilee Economics Ministries (USA)
- JustaPaz (Bogotá, Colombia)
- Kentucky Interfaith Taskforce on Central America (USA)
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious (Washington DC, USA)
- Loreto Community Latin America / Caribe Committee (Colorado, USA)
- Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas (California, USA)
- META Peace Team (Michigan, USA)
- Movimiento Ecuménico de Derechos Humanos (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
- National Benedictines for Peace (Pennsylvania, USA)
- Pax Christi (Pennsylvania, USA)
- Pax Christi International (Brussels, Belgium)
- Peaceworkers (California, USA)
- Presbytery of Chicago (Illinois, USA)
- Racin Dominican Sisters (USA)
- Resource Center for Nonviolence (California, USA)
- Servicio Paz y Justicia en América Latina (Montevideo, Uruguay)
- Sojourners (Washington DC, USA)
- Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Florida, USA)
- SweFOR (Sweden)
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (Massachusetts, USA)
- Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) (USA)
- Western Dominican Province (Arizona, USA)
- Witness for Peace (Washington DC, USA)
In September, the Chamber of Deputies approved the initiative of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) that grants the Ministry of National Defense full control of the National Guard. The following day, a journalist asked Lopez Obrador why he had changed his mind when, during his campaign, he made his position against militarization clear and promised to return the military to their barracks in six months. “I changed my mind on seeing the problem that they left me,” AMLO acknowledged.

Civil organizations spoke out against this decision, for going “against the will of the people who elected him, who, among other things, voted for him hoping that he would act to pacify the country, stop the megaprojects against the communities and put an end to militarization. It is an act against the Constitution and the civil government.” The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif expressed her concern, especially about the lack of accountability of the armed forces. In addition, she said that this strategy has not been able to reduce crime in the country, but rather complaints of serious human rights violations have increased. According to the media, “so far this six-year term there have been more than 130,000 intentional homicides, 33,000 disappeared and 3,615 femicides; of which, 98% remain unpunished.” However, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) said the decision “can be and is admissible, from the point of view of human rights” as long as its intervention is limited in time and subject to exceptional cases. Therefore, “it will not promote any action of unconstitutionality.”

Another aspect that also leads to questioning the decree is an investigation by the Network for Digital Rights (R3D) and various media which revealed that Pegasus spyware has continued to be used during AMLO’s six-year term. This malware is supposedly only sold to governments to prosecute terrorists and criminals; however, in the case of Mexico, its use has been detected since 2017 to monitor human rights defenders, journalists and citizens. The most recent investigation details that the phones of at least three journalists and human rights defenders were spied on with Pegasus between 2019 and 2021. The investigation reveals that SEDENA is the structure that established the 2019 contract. AMLO declared that “we would have no reason to because, in addition to being improper, contrary to our principles, our convictions, we who have been spied on for years, persecuted, could not do the same.”

Several mobilizations were carried out seeking to stop militarization. Among them, the annual march was held in commemoration of the student massacre in Tlatelolco on October 2nd, 1968. More than five decades later, several demands seem valid: no to
militarization and an end to impunity. “The Mexican Army has repeatedly and systematically committed serious human rights violations, persecution and extrajudicial detention, forced disappearance, torture and cruel and inhuman treatment, rape and execution are the common denominator of a long list of grievances”, the “68 Committee Prolibertades Democraticas” stated.

For its part, the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) convened a “Global Action against Militarization and Capitalist and Patriarchal Warfare against the Peoples of all of Mexico and the World” on October 12th, the 26th anniversary of its founding, “The fight for life has been our collective word for 530 years and the war against our peoples has always been the response of bad governments. For this reason, we raise our voices and mobilize to demand a total halt to the military siege, the paramilitary attacks, and the counterinsurgency war directed against the EZLN [Zapatista Army of National Liberation] and the Zapatista communities; and against the native peoples of Mexico through militarization and paramilitarization, organized crime, mega-projects of death, and the dispossession of our lands and territories”, the CNI stated.

Other Human Rights Concerns

In the last twelve months, there were a total of 118 events that violated the human rights of defenders, according to the report “Defending Human Rights in Mexico: between Omission and Simulation,” presented by Urgent Action for Human Rights Defenders. (ACUDDEH), the Mexico Cerezo Committee and the National Campaign Against Forced Disappearance. Although, compared to previous governments, the number of human rights violations against defenders has decreased, the AMLO government “has not complied with the responsibilities it has with respect to the rights to memory, truth and justice for the victims.” 69% of the acts were carried out by commission with an increase in participation in other human rights violations by governments led by MORENA, and the increase in these other violations by the federal government; the increased participation of the armed forces in events; and the slowness in the development, improvement and refinement of a general law initiative for the respect and promotion of the rights of people who defend human rights and journalists”.

On another note, according to the Global Witness report, Mexico ranked first in 2021 on the list of countries with the most murdered environmental activists, with a total of 54 victims. Almost half of them were indigenous. “Over the last ten years, the country has quickly become one of the most dangerous places for land and environmental defenders, with 154 documented cases during this period”, the report states.

In another aspect of growing concern, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, was in Mexico from August 29th to September 9th. She visited Mexico City, Chihuahua, Guerrero and Chiapas. At the end of her visit, she highlighted that “the causes of displacement are diverse and multifactorial. Among them are different types of violence, often originated by organized crime, sometimes related to development projects, mining and illegal logging, or electoral, religious and agrarian conflicts.” She mentioned that “the federal government does not have statistics, but that some organizations, academics, and local authorities, gave estimates that there would be between 350,000 and 400,000 internally displaced persons.” She recommended creating a law that protects internally displaced persons, as well as a federal registry of victims. She urged the government to allocate an adequate and sustained budget to be able to provide displaced people with care, protection and lasting solutions.

CHIAPAS: Numerous Hot Spots against a Background of Increasing Violence Due to Fighting between Criminal Groups

In September, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) expressed its concern over the approval of the reform of the National Guard. “The barracks have been installed in the territories of Original Peoples who oppose the dispossession of their living spaces through the megaprojects of the Federal Government, such as the Maya Train, the Interocenic Corridor, the Dos Bocas Refinery or the highway infrastructure
that connects them”, it warned. It also denounced that “in the midst of the current remilitarization of Chiapas, drug trafficking and consumption have intensified; disappearances and homicides persist, which shows that, as in the 1990s, the strategy is unsuccessful. Among the impacts of violence are: communities attacked and forced to move, in others, curfews, silenced areas have been imposed by criminal groups.”

Along the same lines, the Assembly of the Women’s Movement for the Defense of Mother Earth and Our Territories held a meeting in Chapultenango to analyze the situation in Chiapas. “We agree that in all our territories Organized Crime is ruling, we see an increase in the sale and circulation of weapons, drug addiction, prostitution, and alcoholism. In complicity with a militarization process that allows the dispossession and control of our territories. Women being the most affected by the increase in femicides, deaths, hunger and disappearances of girls and young people”, it stated.

Likewise, in September, residents of Santa Marta in the Chenalho municipality reported shooting, burning houses, and displacement of more than 100 people, leaving four people dead. According to testimonies, at the beginning of this year a peace and disarmament agreement was signed, for which the people who wanted to continue being part of the armed group that maintains hostility against their neighbors in the municipality of Aldama were expelled. These same people (approximately 60) decided to take houses and land by force.

This same month, more than a thousand men and women summoned by the Believing People of the Chab Zone, participated in a pilgrimage in Bachajon, Chilon municipality, to demand the immediate release of nine community leaders and defenders; two from this region, five from San Juan Cancuc and two from Pantelho, in addition to requesting the definitive cancellation of the arrest warrant against Father Marcelo Perez Perez. “These arrests try to repress the just denunciation of our peoples and hinder peace in our territories. The criminalization of these brothers has been for defending the rights of the original peoples, as well as their territory and their customs”, they stated.

Highlighting another type of concern, Roberto Flores, journalist and director of the website “Chiapas Denuncia ¡Ya!”, has been missing since September. He was last seen in Comitan, where he is from. Chiapas Denuncia ¡Ya! is a news site that covers citizen complaints against alleged irregularities by authorities. According to the organization for freedom of expression Article 19, Flores had received intimidating messages after publishing information related to the Sinaloa Cartel.

On another note, in October, the San Pedro and San Pablo de Chicomuselo Parish denounced the worsening of the situation in this area, as well as the threats, harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders in that municipality. This is due to the interest of companies and individuals in restarting mining. They report the entry of several cargo trucks to transport mining material. The parish reported that “the environmental complaint has been formally filed with the Federal Attorney for Environmental
Protection (PROFEPA) on the case and the response has been evasive, arguing that there are no security conditions to carry out the investigation in the face of the wave of violence and insecurity that is taking place in the region.”

Finally, in November, feminist groups, relatives of victims of femicide, and the general public gathered in Tuxtla Gutierrez to denounce the increase in violence against women in the state. They recalled that on November 18th, 2016, the Gender Violence Alert (AVG) was declared in the state. However, to the present, reports of this type of violence have increased. They demanded justice, an investigation with a gender perspective that allows the capture of those responsible, decent life opportunities for women, and public institutions capable of preventing, punishing, and eradicating violence against women.

Another issue that feeds the perception of lack of control has been the multiplication of roadblocks, the main ones being led by groups dissatisfied with electoral processes. One of those groups was the residents of Teopisca who, for several weeks in August and September, blocked the federal road section Teopisca-Comitan and Teopisca-San Cristobal. This was done to demand the immediate dismissal of the president of the Municipal Council Luis Alberto Valdez Diaz, who was appointed by the State Congress to replace his brother and at that time mayor of Teopisca, Ruben Valdez, who was assassinated in the month of June. The general assembly made up of 52 communities expressed that this mobilization is for the violation of the rights to democratically elect their rulers.

Another group that has blocked highways is composed of inhabitants of Oxchuc to demand the departure of Luis Santiz Gomez, the current councilor president of the municipality, since his mandate has ended and a new municipal president should be appointed according to uses and customs. Some of these blockades turned violent and led to the arrest of dozens of people.

OAXACA: Attacks against Human Rights Defenders Continue

In September, while they were carrying out cleaning activities in a community primary school, a group of people, including women, girls and boys, was attacked by armed men. The Democratic Civic Union of Neighborhoods, Colonies and Community (UCIDEBAHC) denounced that the human rights defender Gregorio Lopez suffered gunshot wounds. In addition, they mentioned “it is clear to us that this new attack obeys a policy of repression systematically sustained against our social organization and its members and even those who accompany us; since the murder of our comrade Humberto Valdivino Fuentes we have seen an increase in dangerous incidents.” The same day, various feminist groups denounced the harassment and criminalization of which Lucero Rivero Ortiz, spokesperson for UCIDEBAHC, has been subjected. She has demanded the clarification of the murder of her companion Baldovino Fuentes,
an Afro-Mexican community defender of UCIDEBACC in May of this year. Since 2020, Lucero has been part of the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Defenders and Journalists, but she considers that it does not provide her with protection.

In October, Filogonio Martínez Merino, a former municipal agent of Paso de la Reyna, was murdered in the municipality of Santiago Jamiltepec. For fifteen years he led protests against the Paso de la Reina hydroelectric projects. Martínez was commissioner of the Paso de la Reyna Ejidal in the period 2008-2012. Five defenders of the Council of Peoples United for the Defense of the Rio Verde (COPUDEVER) were assassinated at the beginning of 2021, crimes which remain unpunished to date.

On another front, four years after the gender violence alert was issued in 40 municipalities of Oaxaca, no progress is seen. Since the beginning of the year, 100 Oaxacan women have been murdered, the collective “Rosario Castellanos, GES Mujer” denounced. In 2021, GES Mujer registered 87 femicides. In the last six years, 676 girls and women were victims of violent murder. GES Mujer stressed that the same practices of action have continued, which are not paying attention and/or are negligent, investigations lacking a gender perspective or with a clear intention to hide or minimize femicide violence, as well as the revictimization of families that demand justice.

Despite the critical context, two movements for the defense of lands and territories made some progress in their demands. After approximately 15 years of struggle, the General Assembly of the San Bartolo Coyotepec community managed to close the wells that since 2002 had been concessioned to the packaging company Gugar S.A. in the community, considering that the concession was granted on land that is communally owned, and without consultation. On another note, in September, the Unitary Agrarian Court of Tuxtepec ruled in favor of community members from Union Hidalgo who had been in a legal process for nine years against Mexican Windfarm Developments (Desarrollos Eolicos Mexicanos - DEMEX), a subsidiary of the Spanish Renovalia Energy. The annulment of land lease contracts that “were improperly considered private property when in reality they are communal lands” was granted. Some organizations pointed out that this ruling is extremely important since it leaves the decision to enter into lease contracts in the hands of the communities.

GUERRERO: Walls of Impunity Foster the Exacerbation of Violence

The most notorious case of human rights violations in Guerrero is Ayotzinapa, and although several national and international bodies have been created to help clarify it, impunity has not receded (see Focus). In September, a federal judge acquitted Jose Luis Abarca, former mayor of the municipality of Iguala, for his alleged involvement in the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School, in 2014.

In October, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE) presented a technical expert report that proves that 181 of the 467 screenshots presented by the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice in the Ayotzinapa case (COVAJ) in its report in August 2022 “have no veracity, because they do not guarantee their originality.” The IGIE said that “the attempt by the Mexican government to speed up the results of the Ayotzinapa case (...) generates greater uncertainty and enormous malaise.”

Taking advantage of these doubts, in November, the lawyers of four soldiers imprisoned in the case accused the head of the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice (COVAJ), Alejandro Encinas, of the alleged crime of fabricating evidence to incriminate their clients. In this regard, the Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center, which has been accompanying the relatives of the victims, declared that “the non-verification of parts of the COVAJ report does not detract from the accusation evidence on collusion between drug traffickers and the 27th Battalion.”

Other cases, with a lower media profile, similarly continue without progress. Three years after the disappearance and murder of Human Rights defender Arnulfo Ceron, relatives and colleagues from the Popular Front of La Montaña called to persevere in the search for justice. La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center affirmed that “we have already
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verified that no party of any color is going to commit itself to the victims, they have their economic interests and are not interested in justice. (...) we have (...) continue fighting like the men and women who lost their lives fighting to transform our state.”

Meanwhile, violence is not receding either. In October, at least 20 people were assassinated, including the municipal president of San Miguel Totolapan and his father, who had also been mayor of this municipality on two occasions. According to Ricardo Mejía Berdeja, Undersecretary of Public Security, these attacks are due to a territorial dispute between organized crime groups. “In that region, a group known as Los Tequileros prevailed, who are dedicated to the transfer and commercialization of opium, as well as kidnapping and extortion, the dispute could be with La Familia Michoacana”, he said.

In November, three members of the Guerrero-Emiliano Zapata Indigenous and Popular Council (CIPOG-EZ) were murdered by the criminal group “Los Ardillos” and “the bad governments” in Chilapa de Alvarez. Members of the organization said that they went to the President of the Republic to warn him about the situation but that “as if nothing had been said and we were condemned to repeat the same story, to mourn our dead and our disappeared, on November 5th three of our brothers were killed.” They recalled that since 2015, 50 members of the group have been murdered and 19 more are missing.

Another matter of concern, according to Article 19, is that Guerrero is the second most dangerous state to practice journalism, hosting 16 of the 157 homicides of journalists in the last two decades. With the murder in August of Fredid Roman, director of the media outlet “La Realidad” and columnist for various local media, there have been 15 journalists murdered in Mexico so far in 2022.

Finally, in documents leaked in the so-called “Guacamaya Leaks” information was revealed indicating that the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) identifies Víndulo Rosales Sierras, lawyer in the Ayotzinapa case, as a member of an organization dedicated to collecting protection fees, extortion and deprivation of liberty in Guerrero. In addition, accusations are made towards other social and human rights defenders. In view of this, various organizations declared that “the agreement between the Armed Forces and the President of the Republic guarantees them immunity and they believe they have the right to point out and attack social activists and human rights defenders, meanwhile they allow criminal gangs to act freely and in many cases associate with them to commit crimes.”

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You Will Return Like The Autumn Rain – Fathers and Mothers of the 43

According to the Mexican Federation of Public Human Rights Organisms, 105,871 missing persons have been reported in Mexico since 1964, a figure that includes episodes such as the Dirty War in Guerrero and the Zapatista conflict in Chiapas.

In 2014, the news of the forced disappearance of 43 students from the “Raul Isidro Burgos” Normal Rural School in Ayotzinapa shook the country, not only for visibilizing at national and international levels the human rights crisis that was being experienced, but also for exposing a State that made illegitimate and disproportionate use of force to repress student and social movements.

What happened between September 26th and 27th, 2014, was part of the actions in preparation for the commemorative marches of October 2nd, 1968, the date on which the capital’s riot police and the military brutally intervened in the repression of a group of university students in Tlatelolco, ending countless numbers of their lives. No one could have suspected that a new chapter in the history of the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School was opening on that day.

Government Interest in the Student Teachers

Two months after the disappearance of the 43, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) made a technical assistance agreement with the Mexican...
State and the representatives of the disappeared students official. It appointed the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE) for technical cooperation in the search, investigations, and actions related to the case, in order to punish those responsible; and for assistance to the families of the disappeared.

In their first report they highlight that, like many normal schools in Mexico, the “Raul Isidro Burgos” had a relevant presence in the political and public life of the state. It should be remembered that, for decades, the socio-political context in Guerrero has been characterized by serious human rights violations such as torture, displacement and forced disappearance, linked, among others, to the presence of criminal groups.

Based on the evidence, it was shown that, on the day of the events, the Center for Investigation and National Security (CISEN) was monitoring the students during the entire journey from when they left the school for Iguala. CISEN was informed in real time of what was happening, but did not share this information with the authorities in charge of the investigation, nor is there evidence that any specific search activity had been carried out with it.

However, in February 2022, the group of experts revealed that the students were constantly monitored by the authorities for at least ten years, not only externally, but also that the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) infiltrated intelligence agents, who in turn were students in Ayotzinapa. At the time of the events in 2014, at least three agents were active in the School, one of them disappeared along with the students.

None of the reports from the informants made any reference to possible activities linked to drug trafficking by the students, but rather to control of protest activities, assemblies and other activities carried out by the students. However, the IGIE said that there is a hypothesis that one of those buses was loaded with drugs, which could explain the interest that both authorities and organized crime had in the students.

The “Historical Truth”

During the government of Enrique Peña Nieto, a version was created that the students had been detained by the Cocula municipal police and handed over to members of the Guerreros Unidos criminal group. Later they would have been deprived of their liberty and murdered. The charred remains of the youths were presumably thrown into the river making their identification impossible.

Two key players in the creation of the well-known “historical truth” are former prosecutor Jesus Murillo Karam, who is said to be in charge of disseminating this version based on torture and alteration of evidence, and Tomas Zeron de Lucio, who, as mentioned by La Montaña Tlachinol lan Human Rights Center in Guerrero, was “the instrument that the State used to construct the historical truth.” Murillo Karam is currently in custody, while Tomas Zeron de Lucio is in the process of being extradited from Canada.

Despite the fact that this controversial version was ques-
tioned at the time by the relatives and by an investigation by the IACHR and the IGIE - who pointed out that the bodies could not have been burned in that place - it was not until 2018, with the administration of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, that this version could be discarded and the case reopened. In addition, the identification of the unburned remains of Christian Rodriguez and Jhosivani Guerrero between 2020 and 2021 supported the IGIE version.

On the other hand, in one of the reports of the Commission for the Truth and Access to Justice of the Ayotzinapa Case (COVAJ), the Undersecretary of Human Rights, Population and Migration of the Secretary of the Interior (SEGOB), Alejandro Encinas, said that the "historical truth" was designed by the Presidency of the Republic of Enrique Peña Nieto. Encinas explained that various officials, from all levels of government, participated in meetings led by the federal Executive to operate the official version on the forced disappearance of the students: "That is where it will be necessary to locate not only the design, but particularly the operation and the implementation of these actions, that in many cases there is a presumption of alteration of the crime scene and particularly what is fully accredited is having created a truth based on acts of torture", he stated.

Vidulfo Rosales, lawyer for the parents of the 43, said that the Attorney General’s Office (PGR) carried out a premeditated investigation to "disguise the crime committed in Iguala." He assured that fundamental evidence was erased to cut the threads that led to the responsibility of the highest levels of public power.

"Not only is it an irregular investigation, it is not an investigation in which officials accidentally committed torture, manipulated evidence, separated evidence. Rather, their objective was to cut the threads that led us to the military and to the highest hierarchies of the military authorities; they were the threads that led us to the real culprits and to the true whereabouts of our 43", declared Tlachinollan’s lawyer.

The Army, an Almost Untouchable Power in the Ayotzinapa Case

After the COVAJ report, 83 arrest warrants were issued that included 20 soldiers and Murillo Karam, all accused of crimes such as forced disappearance, organized crime and against the administration of justice. However, 16 of those 20 orders were cancelled. So far, the only soldiers detained for their alleged responsibility in the disappearance of 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa are General Jose Rodriguez Perez, Captain Jose Martinez Crespo, Second Lieutenant Fabian Alejandro Pirola Ochoa and Sergeant Eduarndo Mota Esquivel.

Although the fathers and mothers of the 43 have recognized that there has been progress in the case during the current administration, they consider that Lopez Obrador continues with his commitment to protect the army despite the fact that there is evidence of its participation in the events in 2014. An example of this is the questioning of mothers and fathers "because they are supposedly generating a set of actions with the intention of wanting to discredit a
military institution”, said Vidulfo Rosales, Tlachinollan lawyer. This, after the Secretary of Defense declared that “there are perverse interests in wanting to create distrust in the armed forces because we are saying that they are murderers, that they unfoundedly infiltrate social movements and that they should answer for serious violations of human rights.” Vidulfo Rosales said that these statements are worrying “because it gives a direct message so that the military should not be touched.”

At the rally for the anniversary of the disappearance of the students, one of the parents lamented that the minimum progress that could be made with this government fell apart when it got to the point of reaching the army “everyone passed the ball (...). What is the President doing when he sees that the Attorney General of the Republic withdraws the arrest warrants? They blame the judges, they blame the prosecutor, but among themselves they do nothing”, he said.

The confirmation that the disappearance of the students in 2014 was a State crime was thanks to the IGIE report of August 2022, where the participation of CISEN, the Federal and State Police of Guerrero and the 27th and 41st Infantry Battalions of the Army in Iguala was shown, assigned to the command of the 35th Military Zone in Chilpancingo (which depended on the IXth Military Region), as well as commanders of the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) and the Navy.

“We demand that the government arrest those who participated on the 26th and early morning of the 27th in the disappearance of our children. (...) It seems that the military are untouchable. Now a delinquent is taken care of more than the students”, said the mother of one of the disappeared students.

From the Most Recent Findings of the IGIE

At a press conference on October 31st, 2022, the IGIE presented the results of a technical expertise that proves that 181 of the 467 screenshots presented by the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice in the Ayotzinapa (COVAJ) case in its report in August 2022 “have no veracity, since they do not guarantee their originality and therefore cannot be considered as reliable digital proof”.

La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center recalled that this request came from the parents of the 43 students after the strong conclusions presented in the COVAJ report in the middle of the year. The report confirmed that the disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa rural college constituted a State crime; that there was omission and negligence on the part of federal and state authorities of the highest level with respect to the truth of the facts; and “that there is no indication that the students are alive. Rather, all the testimonies and evidence prove that the students were cunningly killed and disappeared”, according to the statements of Alejandro Encinas.

After two months, the IGIE analyzed the screenshots and revealed that the metadata shows a difference in the dates the messages were captured and sent; but also in functions of the versions of WhatsApp that were not yet available between 2014 and 2015. The IGIE said that “the attempt by the Mexican Government to speed up the results of the Ayotzinapa case (...) generates greater uncertainty and “enormous malaise”, and puts the investigation at risk. For this reason, the IGIE reported that a proposal was presented to the Federal Government that means their partial departure from Mexico.

Carlos Beristain, a member of the IGIE, said that “the credibility of the institutions is at stake in Ayotzinapa. Mexico has an opportunity to demonstrate that political will together with the independence and consistency in the investigation are determining factors for the justice that the relatives demand (...)” "Enforced disappearance is not closed until the right to the truth of the victims and to know the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared has been responded to."

In the following days, the lawyers of the four imprisoned soldiers accused the head of the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice (COVAJ), Alejandro Encinas, before the Attorney General of the Republic, for the alleged crime of fabricating evidence to incriminate their clients. In this regard, the Miguel Agustin Pro-Juarez Human Rights Center, which has been accompanying the relatives of the victims, declared that “the lawyers seek to confuse with their statements”, and to do so “with the consent of the command” and affirmed that “the non-verification of parts of the COVAJ report does not detract from the accusation evidence on collusion between drug traffickers and the 27th Battalion”.

The NGO affirmed that “the Army is not incorruptible”, and showed alleged text messages from members of the criminal group, Guerreros Unidos, included in the report of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE)
as proof of their collusion with the military. It also said that this evidence was not used to prosecute the cases carried out by the Special Investigation and Litigation Unit for the Ayotzinapa Case (UEILCA), with which 83 arrest warrants were issued, including those of the four soldiers.

For their part, the lawyers for the military also requested the resignation of Alejandro Encinas for presenting the report of the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice, considering that it “contains false evidence.” In a conference, the lawyer for the military, Cesar Omar Gonzalez Hernandez, described the report as “lack of rigor, prepared with questionable evidence.”

In turn, Alejandro Encinas, through a video, assured: “I must be clear, those who accuse me today are part of those who, linked to other authorities and organized crime, perpetrated the disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal School. Behind them are those who intend to maintain impunity in this case.”

Ayotzinapa, the Right to Truth

The case of the 43 students reveals many realities that are experienced in Mexico, not only the disappeared normal student teachers, but it also gave proof of the degree of corruption and impunity that exists in the country. The complicity of authorities with organized crime groups, transcended to torture, persecution, criminalization of the students for years, extrajudicial executions and forced disappearance.

The coming and going of the investigations has hindered progress in the case. The mothers and fathers of the student teachers have had to live with the weight of a lie gestated by a government where in many cases “there is a presumption of alteration of the crime scene and particularly what is fully accredited is having created a truth based on acts of torture”, said Alejandro Encinas.

Currently, the information regarding the participation of different military commanders and the almost inaction of the Federal Government, judges and the Attorney General’s Office on the arrest warrants of those responsible maintains the indignation of the relatives, the media, civil society organizations and the population in general due to the lack of response and access to the truth. Their concern over the Federal Government’s inclination towards the military makes it increasingly difficult to punish those responsible.

With Ayotzinapa, the massiveness of the attack is evident, the number of victims and the level of aggression were disproportionate compared to the degree of threat that the taking of buses by the students could represent. In addition to a complex and coordinated action by the perpetrators who, according to the investigations, it ranged from municipal police officers to high command of the army and the Federal Government.

Eight years after the unfortunate events, many versions have been put forward about what happened that night in Iguala. However, none of them has led to clarifying the facts, knowing the whereabouts of the students, much less punishing those responsible.
Challenges and Hopes for Peacebuilding in Mexico

“We bring a message of hope and future to our broken and hurt nation. Inconvenient truths that challenge our dignity, a message for everyone as human beings, beyond political or ideological choices, cultures and religious beliefs, ethnic groups and gender.”

Francisco de Roux President of the Truth Commission in Colombia.

On October 25th, 2022, the International Forum Peacebuilding in Mexico: Challenges and Keys in the Current Context, was held in San Cristobal de Las Casas, and was attended by more than 400 people in person and some 300 online. Two and a half years ago, three networks - the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), the Barcelona Forum for Peace in Mexico and the Civil Service for Peace - made up of people and organizations committed to the peace process in Mexico, decided to join forces and begin to meet online due to the deep need to find routes of hope, given the prolonged and alarming increase in violence generated by criminal groups and caused by the Mexican State itself.

Since then, the possibility of being able to meet in person was dreamed of, but the pandemic arrived, so it wasn’t until this year—together with Slamalil Kinal (network for peace in Chiapas)—that this could be achieved. In the introduction to the event, it was noted that the crisis of violence in Mexico has not only not abated, but has deepened, reaching the alarming figures of more than 100,000 disappeared and close to 200,000 murders since 2006 to date. At the same time, an increasingly militarized country was described with a strategy to combat organized crime that has been maintained for three six-year terms of office, which has increased violence without being able to build creative alternatives that respond to both its most visible effects and to the structural causes that sustain it.

In the event, which had numerous national and international speakers, it was emphasized that in order to build peace it is not enough to continue denouncing and demanding effective
responses to face the crisis; and that it is not just about describing the situation but also contributing to processes capable of transforming it, facing the polarization encouraged by political players, moving towards a vision of comprehensive peace with dignified living conditions for all.

Several speakers emphasized that it is necessary to understand what is happening in Mexico within global trends that mark the challenges for peacebuilding. They referred to different experiences influenced on many occasions by common factors from which it is possible to learn.

In particular, various speakers addressed the experience in Colombia as a mirror to understand the context in Mexico and an opportunity to rethink actions. In the Colombian case, it was seen that the internal armed conflict has not been the only violence in the country, but an element that managed to link a large part of the pre-existing violence and the violence that still exists: political, social, cultural (racism, patriarchy) as well as territorial conflicts that have existed for centuries. The conflict in Colombia is not one-dimensional, it has many factors, many layers and many players. Furthermore, Colombia has a long history of seeking peace. As an example of this, the three national pacts for peace that have been made in this country were mentioned: 1958 put an end to the partisan war; in 1991 a partial peace was signed with guerrilla groups; and, in 2016, the peace agreements with FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

Another key that was identified to advance in building a stable and lasting peace is the need to listen to the different voices involved in the conflict, since when all the players involved are not taken into account, it is very likely that violence will reappear. Time was considered as another fundamental element: peace processes in other countries show that years of work are required to advance in the transformation of a society affected by violence.

Another lesson has been the importance of delving into memory, which illuminates the present to generate and build a new dawn with hope. There was an invitation to be builders of solidarity and peace among peoples, to stop being spectators and to be protagonists of social change and not allow military responses to continue to be imposed as the only way to stop violence.

Likewise, it was emphasized that in order to talk about peace it is necessary to take into account that it is a long process and that it is rooted in territories, in the community. Several speakers stressed that when the fabric of community and cultural practices that have helped peoples throughout history to continue resisting inequality and state abandonment are strengthened, the present can be impacted. It was recognized that it is not an easy process; Sometimes it can be very painful, it requires courage, love and a radical conviction not to use violence to combat violence.

Underlining that the Latin American governments have not built institutions focused on peacebuilding, they talked about the fact that it is possible to heal hearts while transforming the structures that enable and promote violence in the territories. Several speakers pointed to the importance of rebuilding the social fabric by cultivating practices of mutual care and care for Mother Earth.

Finally, spirituality was valued as a fundamental axis to resist against the diversification and deepening of violence in different contexts. The lesson is that it is not about homogenizing society, but about learning to live together, looking at the opportunities that life offers us, uniting in the results, not judging others, but looking at hope in the midst of chaos.

“Peace requires the commitment to continue working, using dialogue, accompanying others, walking together with the certainty that God loves us, recognizing others as humans and children of God, valuing their dignity and respect for the common good”, affirmed Rodrigo Aguilar, Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas in his speech.

Beyond Mexico, Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel declared for his part: “We continue to believe that another world is possible, but we cannot make it alone, it is possible if we join hands and have the capacity for resistance, indignation against injustices, to transform reality. Hasta la Victoria siempre.”
SIPAZ ACTIVITIES

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

CHIAPAS

- In August, we accompanied the rally that took place in front of the Palace of Justice of the Chiapas Highlands, in San Cristobal de Las Casas, to demand the immediate release of Marisela Lopez Bautista, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2019 for qualified homicide, when she defended herself from her partner who tried to murder her and her children, two minors and one in her womb.

- In November, we were present at the event in which groups of activists and relatives of victims of femicide placed a Day of the Dead offering in San Cristobal de Las Casas in their memory.

INTERNAL FORCED DISPLACEMENT

- In September, we accompanied groups of displaced people who met in Acteal to talk with the UN Special Rapporteur on forced displacement, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary.

- In November, we accompanied displaced families from Banavil, Tenejapa municipality, when they provisionally returned to their lands as part of the Day of the Dead.

EVENTS

- Within the framework of International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, on August 30th, 2022, we accompanied the Colembij collective in Susuculmil in the northern zone of Chiapas, in the act of commemoration of the victims of disappearances, extrajudicial executions and forced displacement.

- In the same context, we attended the Foro “Disappearance in Chiapas”, convened among others by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights, Voces Mesoamericanas and Melil Xojobal, which took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas. The next day, we also accompanied the political-cultural activity “Memory Tree” in which it was intended to make the faces behind the problem more visible.

- In September, we accompanied the pilgrimage that took place in Bachajon, in the municipality of Chilon, with the objective of demanding the immediate release of nine community leaders and defenders.

- In November, within the framework of the Day of the Dead in San Cristobal de Las Casas, we were present at the activities through which the organizations Melil Xojobal and the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS) commemorated to the boys, girls and adolescents who lost their lives due to various acts of violence (by femicide, suicide, disappearance, forced displacement or murder with firearms).

- In November, we attended an event organized in the Sacun Palma community, Chilon municipality at the invitation of the communities that participate in the community government of this region.

- In November, we participated online in the Sixth Peacebuilding Congress with a gender perspective, convened by Ibero.

OAXACA

- In August, we attended the “Dialogues for the Defense of Life and Territories - Revolutions, Resistances and Autonomies of the Southeast”, convened by the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Tehuantepec Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory (APIIDT).

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In September, we participated in several activities carried out within the framework of the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on forced displacement, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary. Some SIPAZ contributions were taken up by different media.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

AUGUST

- Together with the organization specialized in digital security issues Sursiendo, and following up on a meeting in May, we held a new workshop with 15 journalists and communicators in which training and networking proposals for greater security for the group continued to be defined.

SEPTEMBER

- Together with the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights, we held a two-day workshop with representatives of the Mother Earth pastoral ministry of the Southeast area of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas on analysis tools, non-violent strategy and security protocols. 35 men and five women attended.

- Together with the Commission for Reconciliation and Community Unity (CORECO), we began a process that will include four training sessions of two and a half days with seminarians and pastoral agents from the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas using the methodology of Positive Transformation of Conflicts.

OCTOBER

- We facilitated a two-day workshop on “Nonviolent Strategies” with Peace and Reconciliation Builders from CORECO from various areas of the state.

NOVEMBER

- We facilitated the reality analysis block at the 17th Meeting of Peace and Reconciliation Builders, which took place in the community of Winikton, municipality of Tenejapa.

- In an event convened by the networking process of Slamalil Kinal, we supported the facilitation of the meeting of “Young Walkers for Peace”.

INTERNAL TRAINING

- In September, we attended a two-day workshop by ALUNA, a civil society organization that, from a psychosocial approach, contributes to strengthening people and organizations affected by socio-political violence so that they can continue their work in defense of human rights in Mexico.

- In September, we participated in a workshop on psychosocial approach and trauma management facilitated by the Institute of Intercultural Studies (INESIN).

- In October, we participated in the first module of the Diploma in Positive Conflict Transformation organized by CORECO in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

NETWORKING

- In September, we were at the webinar that marked the launch of the second “Water for Life” campaign in the Americas, which is coordinated by Pax Christi International partners in the region.

- In October, 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.

- In October, we participated in the preparation and implementation of the International Peacebuilding Forum “Challenges and Keys in the Current Context”, convened by the Platform for Peace in Mexico, as well as in the first face-to-face meeting of this network. We did the same with the “Dialogue between Peoples, Weaving the Word” meeting, convened by the Platform for Peace and the Slamalil Kinal Network.

- In October, we had a face-to-face network meeting of partners from the North American region of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC) in Chiapas.