LATEST:
Concern over Ongoing Militarization in Mexico

FOCUS:
Megaprojects in the Mexican Southeast
Resistance of the Original Peoples in Defense of Territory and Life

ARTICLE:
Disappearance
Indelible trace of absence, tireless search. Seed of struggle, brotherhood and memory

SIPAZ ACTIVITIES:
From mid-February to mid-May 2023
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

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Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (North Carolina, USA)
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CAREA (Berlin, Germany)
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Centro Memorial Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (La Habana, Cuba)
Christian Peacemaker Teams (Illinois, USA)
Church of the Brethren (Washington DC, USA)
Dominican Sisters of San Rafael (California, USA)
Episcopal Peace Fellowship (Washington, DC, USA)
Fellowship of Reconciliation/EEUU (New York, USA)
FOR Austria (Austria)
Franciscan Friars, Santa Barbara Province (California, USA)
Franciscan National Justice, Peace and Ecology Council (Washington DC, USA)
Global Exchange (California, USA)
IF/ When (California, USA)
Illinois Maya Ministry, United Church of Christ (Illinois, USA)
Iniciativa Ecuuménica «Oscar Romero» (CIPFE, Montevideo, Uruguay)
International Committee for the Peace Council (Wisconsin, USA)
International Fellowship of Reconciliation (Alkmaar, Holland)
Jubelee Economics Ministries (USA)

JustaPaz (Bogotá, Colombia)
Kentucky Interfaith Taskforce on Central America (USA)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious (Washington, DC, USA)
Loretto Community Latin America / Carribbean Committee (Colorado, USA)
Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas (California, USA)
META Peace Team (Michigan, USA)
Movimento Eucumenico de Derechos Humanos (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
National Benedictines for Peace (Pennsylvania, USA)
Pax Christi (Pennsylvania, USA)
Pax Christi International (Bruselas, Belgium)
Peaceworkers (California, USA)
Presbytery of Chicago (Illinois, USA)
Racine Dominican Sisters (USA)
Resource Center for Nonviolence (California, USA)
Servicio Paz y Justicia de América Latina (Montevideo, Uruguay)
Sojourners (Washington, DC, USA)
Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Florida, USA)
SweFOR (Sweden)
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (Massachusetts, USA)
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) (USA)
Western Dominican Province (Arizona, USA)
Witness for Peace (Washington DC, USA)
Concern over Ongoing Militarization in Mexico

Last March, Amnesty International presented its annual report, in which it address- es the human rights crisis in Mexico and highlights the lack of government action to address it. It reported that, in 2022, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) received 476 complaints against the National Guard (GN) and 404 against the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) for human rights violations, such as torture, homicides, forced disappearances and arbitrary arrests. It stressed that an excessive use of public force continues to be observed. In addition, it pointed out that last year the GN occupied 227 areas that were normally the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, of which 148 (65.1%) had nothing to do with public safety.

Putting a stop to this trend, in April, there was a resolution of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN) that declared invalid the operational and administrative transfer of the National Guard (GN) to the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA). This measure was considered unconstitutional because it implied that the GN lost its character as a civilian police force. This transfer had been approved by Congress in September 2022. The SCJN also determined that the Executive has until January 1st, 2024 to return the National Guard to the command of the Secretary of Security and Citizen Protection. Since this ruling, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) has attacked the ministers of the SCJN. In addition, he informed that he will present a constitutional reform proposal in September 2024 to allow the GN to once again be under military command.

For his part, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico, Volker Türk, urged the authorities to comply with the Supreme Court ruling. He reiterated the importance of guaranteeing the civilian nature of the GN "in accordance with
the Mexican Constitution and international human rights standards.” This is when the armed forces should only be deployed “in exceptional circumstances, subordinate to the civil authorities and always under the effective supervision of independent civil bodies.”

One of the new fields in which the Mexican Army is having a greater presence is construction, protection and exploitation of megaprojects promoted by the federal government, and stopping expressions of non-conformity towards them.

However, in March, a hearing by the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature in the Yucatan peninsula was held “for the misnamed Maya Train, a rail transport megaproject that puts Maya ecosystems and communities in grave danger of destruction.” Affected communities and experts pointed out, among other things, the deforestation of almost nine million trees; the growth of agro-industries; direct impacts to the water of the ecosystem of the peninsula; the violation of the Escazu agreements on environmental protection; and the privatization and division of ejido territories.

“We demand the immediate demilitarization of the territory, we make an urgent call to the state, to all human rights defenders in Mexico and to regional and international organizations (...) to guarantee the lives of all those who question the Maya Train and the connected projects”, ruled the court that requested the immediate suspension of the Maya Train due to the ecocide and ethnocide alert.

Regarding mining companies, in May, the reforms to the Mining Laws were published in the Official Gazette of the Federation; of National Waters; Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection. They determine that from now on concessions will be valid for a maximum of 80 years (instead of the 100 years foreseen in the law that was reformed). In the advances, the granting of concessions in protected natural areas, where the population is at risk, and in areas without water availability, will be prohibited. The preferential nature of mining activity over any use or exploitation of the land was also eliminated. However, the Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA) questioned the approved laws, considering that it was nothing more than “legally leveling the conditions to make mining a ‘better managed’ business or ‘fairer’. It stressed that “any reform to the mining law that does not propose the prohibition and planned closure of this harmful activity in the country (...) is a simulation that will only continue to legitimize and give rise to the expansion of the extractive model.”

In March, Article 19 presented its annual report “Voices against Indifference.” It documented that “in the last four years of the government that established itself as a “transformer”, the panorama of freedom of expression continues with a marked tendency of deterioration.” In 2022, the organization registered 696 attacks against the press (...). The 12 murders recorded last year also closed the deadliest year for the press along with 2017.” 42.53% of the cases of aggressions were committed by the authorities. In addition, Article 19 documented that “on at least 176 occasions the Executive made stigmatizing comments to the media, journalists, and even civil society organizations.” The report also notes “concerns about the militarization of the country and the opacity that surrounds the armed forces, particularly around espionage actions as a tool for intimidation and threats against journalists and human rights defenders.” Impunity is another axis of concern: “from 2010 (...) to December 2022, of a total of 1,592 inquiries for crimes against journalists, only 32 sentences have been obtained.”

During the month of April, Front Line Defenders released its 2022 annual report, which reveals that 45 human rights defenders were reported murdered in Mexico. In the same month, the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA) reported that during the past year at least 24 cases of murdered environmental defenders were registered. These tragic events add to a total of 82 environmental defenders murdered since the beginning of President AMLO’s administration. Of the 582 documented attacks, 56% were directed against members of indigenous peoples and comparable communities. Among the entities with the most lethal attacks are Guerrero, followed by Chihuahua and Oaxaca. 45% of the attacks were perpetrated by some authority. Organized crime represented 13% of the cases, while in 21% of them the perpetrator is unknown.
Migration: Another “Tragedy”

In March, a fire broke out at the facilities of the National Migration Institute (INM) in Ciudad Juárez, a city on the border with the United States, with a death toll of 40. AMLO declared that the migrants, arrested this same day for alleged disturbances on public roads, decided to burn mats in protest when they thought they were going to be deported. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a thorough investigation as the US State Department warned that “this tragedy is a heartbreaking reminder of the risks migrants and refugees face around the world.” For its part, Refugees International affirmed that “INAMI [INM] has a long history of abuses against migrants in Mexico, and greater accountability for these abuses could have prevented this tragedy.”

In April, approximately four thousand migrants from Central and South America and other countries left Chiapas, on a Via Crucis heading to Mexico City, to “highlight the ordeal of migrants in Mexico.” Among the demands of the Via Crucis was that the INM be demilitarized; to ensure that those guilty in the case of the violent death of 40 migrants in Ciudad Juárez are tried, along with INM commissioner Francisco Garduño; and that the “immigration prisons” be closed.

Search To Build Alternatives in the Midst of Adversity

Despite a dark outlook, several sectors are seeking to continue building alternatives. In March, the National Peace Conference convened by 206 organizations, collectives and universities took place, in which the participants shared concerns and proposals in the context of violence. “Here is the urgent agenda of a country riddled with violence: break the isolation and unite those who suffer from it and resist it despite everything. It is not and cannot be an electoral agenda. It is a task for groups and organizations that perhaps, hopefully, will begin to recognize and embrace each other”, declared Mauricio Merino, coordinator of Nosotrxs and one of the main promoters of this initiative.

Between April and May, different organizations of indigenous peoples, most of them part of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) began a National and International Caravan El Sur Resiste (The South Resists) in Pijijiapan, Chiapas, to meet in the territories they defend and to join their processes of struggle. After Oaxaca, it passed through Veracruz, Tabasco, Yucatan, Quintana Roo and Campeche. The tour ended in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, where an international encounter was convened with representatives of other indigenous communities in Mexico and the continent (see Focus).

In April, the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate (CEM), the Society of Jesus in Mexico and the Conference of Major Superiors of the Religious of Mexico (CIRM) called for a National Dialogue for Peace, which will take place in September in Puebla, with the objective of elaborating a National Peace Agenda. They declared that “it is time to convene specialists, to learn about the best local practices, listen to the victims, the indigenous people, the migrants, take into account those who have managed to sustain low crime rates in the territories, the churches.”

CHIAPAS: Surge of Complaints Due to General Increase in Violence

In April, the bishops of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas expressed their “concern about the social decomposition that is increasing due to generalized violence.” As regards elements of concern, they spoke of “the territorial dispute that is deteriorating the social fabric more and more, the excessive exploitation of natural resources (reactivation of mining extraction; illegal sale of wood, stone material, gasoline, etc.), the manipulation and the stripping of the dignity of our peoples, psychological warfare, femicides, the detriment of community strength, the criminalization of peaceful struggles and resistance, as well as the pastoral activities of our diocese.”

The diocese also pointed out “the strong impunity that prevails in the state, the increase in insecurity and violence overwhelmed by crime cells, the political-legal system that criminalizes human rights defenders, the lack of access to full justice, the infiltration of people in acts of worship and in meetings of servants, the fabrication of crimes, the lack of interest in the reconstruction of the social fabric by the authorities.”
In this same sense, Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) and Front Line Defenders shared the conclusions they drew from a visit to Chiapas at the end of March. They declared that they had identified “a clear pattern of criminalization against indigenous defenders who defend environmental rights, territory, autonomy and self-determination.” They also observed “the lack of lasting solutions to agrarian and territorial conflicts in the communities, which continues to represent a high risk for defenders and continues to perpetuate the decomposition of the social fabric (...). This has been aggravated by the current situation of land dispossession in the context of the militarization of the region and by the dispute over territorial control (...) by organized crime groups.” On the other hand, they noted with concern “the lack of timely interventions by the authorities” in “a context of proliferation and diversification of armed groups, which has worsened a complex situation inherited from the paramilitary authorities.”

In May, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center presented the report “Chiapas, a Disaster. Between Criminal Violence and State Complicity”. “We are in the midst of a context of continuity of generalized violence, of wars that hurt humanity. In Chiapas this is reflected in a myriad of notable interactions between organized crime, armed groups, and obvious links to governments and businesses. Its impacts reproduce systematic violations of human rights, in a context where the State (...) is ignorant, permissive and acquiescent in the face of the current generalized violence and the multiple layers of impunity that historically add up”, the report states.

In this last aspect, not even the touristic San Cristóbal de Las Casas turned out to be an exception: in April, in a video recording shared on social networks, a group of around 50 hooded, armed and uniformed men indicated that San Cristóbal, Chamula and Betania are free and do not want any cartel in this area. They indicated that they are already watching and that, as self-defense groups, “will take care of and guard peace.” “We have already located all the leaders who have sold themselves and we know who they are. So stop supporting organized crime or you will have to face the consequences”, they said.

In mid-April, the murder of Geronimo Ruiz Lopez, leader of one of the groups of artisans in the Santo Domingo market, was reported. He and his cousin Narciso Ruiz headed the Association of Traditional Market Tenants of San Cristóbal de Las Casas (ALMETRACH). It is suspected that both were linked to shock groups known as “motonetos”. For more than eight hours, there were mobilizations of armed people and firearms were used at various points in the city. The burning of houses, blockades in some streets and the murder of two people were also reported.

Subsequently, 25 civil organizations and networks expressed their “deep concern” at the “excessive violence” in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, linked to the growing presence of armed groups, a situation in which “it is evident that factual powers use them through acts of terror, to control the population and strategic territory for the legal and illegal economies of organized crime.” They regretted that after what happened, the Municipal President of San Cristóbal de Las Casas broadcast “a discriminatory message against indigenous people and young people from the periphery, who he held responsible for the violence, thereby promoting stigmatization and criminalization.” In addition, they warned about the fact that there are “various signs of collusion, minimization, or inaction [on the part of the authorities], which increase the risk and defenselessness for the victims and society in general.” They called on the Mexican State to “generate alternatives from society with a view to building lasting peace.”

**OAXACA: The Isthmus, Main Hot Spot**

In recent months, communities, organizations, and activists denounced the criminalization and threats against “the indigenous people of the Tehuantepec Isthmus of who fight for their rights, and who have been mobilizing in the area of Mogoño Viejo, municipality of San Juan Guichicovi, Oaxaca, who have repeatedly been harassed by elements of the Secretary of the Navy”, this in the framework of their fight against the Transisthmic Corridor, industrial parks and for the defense of the territory. They expressed particular concern for the safety and integrity of Carlos Beas Torres, leader of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the North Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI), whom journalists have pointed out “as responsible for the mobilizations and linking his organization with the organized crime.”

In April, the environmental defender and municipal agent of the 20 de Noviembre El Morro community, municipality of San Francisco Ixhuatan, Felix Vicente Cruz, was murdered. The Office in Mexico of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) stressed that he is the second defender assassinated in San Francisco Ixhuatan of which it is aware. UCIZONI highlighted the work carried out by Vicente Cruz in defense of land and territory in the Isthmus, in particular his participation in actions against the high electricity rates and in rejection of the Transisthmic Corridor project. Likewise, the Assembly of the Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory declared that “this act of violence against those of us who defend the land, territory, and rights occurs in the context of the imposition of the Interoceanic Corridor, to the detriment of the organizations that reject the imposition, the dispossession, looting, contamination and death of our natural assets and territory that this project will bring to the Isthmus.”

In other aspects of concern, in April, Consorcio Oaxaca denounced that “almost five months after Salomon Jara Cruz’s administration began, in Oaxaca femicides continue to increase in total impunity, institutional indif-
ference and under the protection of the State Executive, who with his omission as current ruler has perpetuated a State policy that not only forgets and revictimizes women, but also overlaps gender violence.” It documented that from December 1st to date, “at least 50 murders of women have been recorded.”

In May, Consorcio Oaxaca urged the state government to guarantee freedom of expression in Oaxaca, the state in fifth place for the most murders of journalists and second for the most murders of human rights defenders. It highlighted that Oaxaca ranks second at the national level for people incorporated into the federal Protection Mechanism, with a total of 155 people: 131 defenders and 24 journalists. Despite this, the insecurity faced by defenders and journalists remains critical and the role of the state government, instead of helping, has contributed to their stigmatization and vulnerability. In particular, Consorcio condemned that “from the state administration public statements are made that violate the exercise of journalism.”

GUERRERO: “Shipwreck for the Truth”

In February, La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center presented its report “43: The Shipwreck for the Truth”, in reference to the case of the forced disappearance of 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa in 2014. Given the most emblematic case of the human rights crisis in Guerrero, the director of Tlachinollan, Abel Barrera, explained: “Unfortunately, there is a shipwreck for the truth. There has been a turnaround in recent months. (...) the political will of the authorities is needed, the commitment of the Attorney General of the Republic to deepen the investigations and of the elites of the Mexican Army to be able to provide all the information related to the disappearance of the 43. We see that there has been reluctance, there are already reports from the Undersecretariat for Human Rights as well as from the IGIIE that give more elements of responsibility that point to the Army as the presumed perpetrator (...). However, the doors remain closed.”

Although “the central theme of this book is forced disappearances in Guerrero, those of the past and the current ones”, the report addresses other issues. Violence in the first place, when “we see an expansion of organized crime groups and a weakening of security institutions, not to say a retreat, which prevents the population from being guaranteed security. In the seven regions of the state there are more than 22
organized crime groups that are usurping power in terms of territory and presence in the municipalities.”

Similar to the case of Ayotzinapa, in February, on Army Day in Mexico, relatives of victims of the Dirty War protested in front of the facilities of the Sixth Battalion of Combat Engineers, in Chilpancingo. Their demands: that the Mexican Air Force disclose the names and the number of people who were thrown into the sea on the death flights in this context of repression; and punish those who ordered these actions that, they estimate, led to the disappearance of more than 600 people. They also demanded the dismissal of the current Attorney General of the Republic, Alejandro Gertz Manero. They declared that, to date, “investigations into the facts are not advancing, because the Secretary of National Defense prevents it and protects the criminal soldiers who are still alive.”

On questions of greater hope, in March, a sentence of 20 years in prison was handed down against a member of the Mexican Army for the crimes of torture, rape, robbery and trespassing committed against Ines Fernandez Ortega, an indigenous woman from the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres 21 years ago. In 2010, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights handed down a sentence against the Mexican State, forcing it to punish those responsible and make full reparation for the damage. A small victory when, during all these years, Ines and her family were victims of threats and reprisals, even her sister was murdered, a case that to date remains unpunished.

On another note, in April, in San Luis Acatlan, an assembly of the Regional Council of Agrarian Authorities in Defense of the Territory (CRAADET) was held. It decided to deny permits that could enable prospecting, exploration and exploitation of mining concessions. The Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA) highlighted that the peoples of the Mountains and the Costa Chica have been in dialogue for ten years in building a collective defense of territory, unlike the “false consent processes” organized by the government where in four hours decisions are made that “change the lives of the communities forever.” It recalled that in Guerrero there are five mines operating, 12 cartels involved and at least 35,000 people displaced by mining disputes.
Megaprojects in the Mexican Southeast
Resistance of the Original Peoples
in Defense of Territory and Life

“The South resists, it exists because it resists”
“The Isthmus is not for sale, it is loved and defended”
Slogans of the El Sur Resiste Caravan, Mexico 2023

“With the megaprojects of the Maya Train, and the
Transisthmic Corridor and the Morelos Integral
Project, which have been managed as separate
projects, today we openly know that they are
connected to an even larger project that encompasses
several foreign countries, not only Mexico, for the
imposition of the aforementioned they have put
them at the disposition of the more intensified and
violent armed forces, in this case the Navy, the
Army, the National Guard, the paramilitaries, local
and state police, and organized crime, as if that
were not enough, they have legalized the territorial
dispossession with the armed forces, justifying that
they are of national security and public utility.”
Statement from El Sur Resiste at the end of the
Caravan

El Sur Resiste (The South Resists) is a movement
that unites different organizations and people
from the southern and southeastern states of
Mexico (mainly from the National Indigenous
Congress - CNI), who fight against megaproj-
ects. Between April 25th and May 4th, 2023, a Caravan con-
vened by this movement toured the states of Oaxaca, Ve-
racruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, Quintana Roo and
Chiapas, documenting the effects of megaprojects in the
territories, such as the Transisthmic Corridor and the Maya
Train, and ending with an International Encounter in San
Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.

Oaxaca: Resistance in the
Tehuantepec Isthmus

On the night of April 25th, the Caravan arrived at Puente
Madera, a place that has been known for the fight against
the installation of an industrial park that is part of the Inter-
oceanic Corridor project. For this reason, it has witnessed
multiple sit-ins and blockades. Seeking to be heard, people
from the community welcomed the caravan with torches
and applause. “The Isthmus is not for sale, it is loved and de-
fended”, they shouted.
In this place, the communities have resisted against the installation of one of the seven industrial parks that the federal government is trying to build with the same logic. There are more than 350 hectares that are intended to be used in the construction of this work. Through the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the 4T government has carried out consultation processes that, denounced by the communities, are not “real”, since they have resorted to forging signatures and direct threats against those who oppose this project.

“On this mountain there is a biodiversity of flora and fauna, for them this space is unproductive land, but for us it means a lot, for many years it has given us sustenance, as indigenous communities, for example, the mezquite is a tree that provides the firewood to prepare the products that we eat and sell and the famous tortilla chips from Puente Madera and San Blas Atempa. Deer, wild horses, iguanas, and coyotes live in this place”, said one of the community leaders during a thanksgiving ceremony held in El Pitayal.

For the communities in this area, the territory goes beyond the physical space, it implies the social, the community, the history they have lived and is considered something sacred for the Zapotec peoples who inhabit it. By destroying places like El Pitayal, irreparable damage is being done to the community, affecting their way of living and coexisting with nature. This is an aspect that has been ignored by the Mexican government, denounced the inhabitants of the area.

UCIZONI, for its part, has denounced that this project intends to build roads, gas pipelines, oil pipelines, refineries, factories, mines and ten industrial parks, which implies dispossession and displacement of many communities in the area. “From June 2019 to March 2023, we have counted around 69 mobilizations of peoples to prevent work from advancing and damage to these projects. On February 3rd, 2023, three communities were mobilized together: Palomares, Mogoñe Viejo, and Sarabia. The Mexican Navy was present at the three mobilizations trying to intimidate. This is the 4T response to our demands.”

The day after the Caravan passed through this point, the camp was evicted by members of the Navy and the police, who detained six Mixe indigenous people who were later released. The Caravan, which was in Veracruz at the time of the events, blocked the federal highway belonging to the municipality of Oteapan for more than an hour, in rejection of the eviction.

This community denounced that, since 2022, the Government has tried to remove seven neighborhoods: La Dina, Tierra Colorada, Tapalan, Porvenir, Ranchon Alegre, Predio Viveros, and El Naranjal; These lands are located in the place where the tracks of the Transisthmic Train that connects with Oaxaca intend to pass.

Since 2013, in the municipality of Jaltipan next to Oteapan, an open-air coke dump has been installed. This place
receives oil refining waste from the General Lazaro Cardenas Pemex plant in Minatitlan, Veracruz. The communities have denounced the impact it has on the environment and human health, but so far, no State agency has responded. They have held sit-ins demanding that the federal government allow them to live freely in their territories and not continue to destroy the social fabric of their communities.

Tabasco
Colonia El Bosque, disappearing due to global warming

In this community you can see how the sea has gradually destroyed houses, the kindergarten, what was once the pier, all due to climate change. The residents fear for their lives and the future of their families, who have historically lived from fishing. In Mexico, this is one of the first known cases of displacement for this reason. The destruction of this colony also puts an end to years of folklore, of social fabric, of community practices that have allowed them to maintain themselves over time.

The residents observe the ruins nostalgically and remember their neighbors who have been displaced to survive. They demand that the federal government help them relocate because they don’t think they can stay much longer in this place. Since February 2023, SEMARNAT has been in contact with the community to start the relocation process, although it is not yet known how long the process may take, nor the place to which the residents will be transferred.

The case of the Forest is a wake-up call at the national level on the public policies that the states are producing against the reality of climate change. It is a global concern that governments do not have among their priorities the attention to this phenomenon that is increasing more and more.

Candelaria, Campeche

One of the Maya Train stations will be located here. The construction of the new roads is already well advanced. The Caravan listened to testimonies that pointed out different effects: more than 300 houses have been evicted and those who resisted selling their land were threatened or forced to accept the money they were offered. They also claim that stomach infections and respiratory difficulties have increased due to constant exposure to construction materials and water pollution. Other communities denounce that the project has brought division: on the one hand, there are those who support the construction of the train for the supposed economic benefits that it will bring; and, on the other hand, there are those who oppose it because of the irreparable damage it is causing at an environmental and social level.

The Candelaria River, which has given life to the communities through which it passes, is disappearing due to the materials that are part of the construction of the train. The Caravan was able to observe how one side of the river looks immense, surrounded by trees, while the other has been largely filled in and currently there are only ten meters left for the water to circulate. The communities denounce that they were not consulted about the works that involved the river, and this constitutes a violation of Mexican laws, including the self-determination of native peoples.

Xpujil, Campeche

The jungle in this state is being illegally devastated by the Maya Train, denounced the communities of this area that for the same reason have filed injunctions and legal recourse to stop the construction of the section in their territory. Legally, only investigative tasks should be carried out, because in 2019 the temporary suspension of the work was achieved, a decision that was later ratified by the Collegiate Court, granting the definitive suspension. Despite this, the Mexican Army has begun construction of a hotel in the middle of the jungle and the tracks for the train to pass through. “The indifference of the different government bodies to the demands of the communities is evident”, said a community leader.

Valladolid, Yucatan

Jungle yes, train no! Water yes, train No! Cenotes are not for sale; they are loved defended! That train is not Maya, that train is military! The participants of the Caravan shouted during their passage through Valladolid. A representative of the Xpujil Calakmul council shared that they currently have an injunction that has stopped construction in that sector, but added that the National Guard and Army are building a hotel that threatens to destroy one of the protected jungles of the American continent. On the other hand, they denounced that more than nine million trees have...
been felled between Merida and Xpujil for the construction of different tourist attractions.

**Quintana Roo**

Ejidal towns from the town of Nicolas Bravo, belonging to the municipality of Othon P. Blanco, denounced that Section 7 of the Maya Train is crossing their territory and that they were not consulted about the passage of this work. They spoke about the legal actions that they have carried out, but affirmed that they have not received any response from the three levels of government. One aspect that worry them a lot is the construction of an eco-tourism hotel that is affecting the Maya Jungle and threatens to destroy a sacred territory for the original peoples.

In Cancun and Playa del Carmen, the tourism model that is being promoted by government bodies has greatly increased the rates of violence, problems such as drug trafficking and consumption, forced disappearances, and femicides have been on the rise. The famous development that is being talked about is destroying the social fabric in the communities. The cartel turf wars also puts the lives of the inhabitants of this territory at risk, the communications team of elsurresiste.org affirms in its report. “That model has been about taking away people’s access to the beach, the territory has been taken over by large tourism capital, what FONATUR wants is to carry out this scheme of large investment by businessmen, and the government is the one that opens the way so that these entrepreneurs can enter. The environment, the organization in defense of the territory, human rights, are an obstacle for this scheme”, affirmed a member of the community.

**Chiapas**

In El Progreso ejido, Pijijiapan, they have been resisting against high electricity costs for more than 30 years. Its inhabitants assure that, although in Chiapas there are companies that produce energy, for many of them it is a privilege to enjoy this service. “Why do we have to choose between eating, buying clothes or paying a bill that is between 1,500 and 3,000 pesos? We are peasants, workers, fishermen, we don’t have enough money to pay those fees”, said a community leader. The communities demand that the current government fulfill the promises made in the election campaign. They say they feel used, since they have not received a government response to the demands they make.

In Tonala, members of the Oaxacan communities, the Otomi community of Mexico City and other people from Veracruz, rejected the megaprojects that are offering an idea of progress that is convenient for the government and companies, but that in many ways destroys the lives of those who they inhabit the territories where they plan to build. They demand a stop to the environmental massacre that the Mexican South and Southeast are experiencing. The rights of the original peoples are being violated and those who raise their voices in defense of life are intimidated and killed, they affirmed.

Militarization and migration were also very important issues on this tour. In Chiapas, there are currently 147 military camps, which indicates a strategy for territorial control, and the communities experience it as a direct threat to their lives. During the journey between Tonala and Puente Madera, the Caravan was detained at least seven times by personnel from the Mexican Army, the National Guard, the State Police and the National Migration Institute (INM). It was also possible to observe groups of migrants who, upon seeing a checkpoint, decided to run into the bush to avoid being detained.

In Palenque, where according to official reports 80% of the work corresponding to Section 1 of the Maya Train that will reach Escarcega, Campeche, is already completed, the communities stated that they were not consulted about this construction. They demand that the government invest in health and education, they affirm that the real beneficiaries of this project will be great international economic powers, while the local inhabitants will receive misery, dispossession and destruction of the territory they have historically inhabited.

**THE SOUTH RESISTS INTERNATIONAL ENCOUNTER 2023: World Corporate Capitalism, Planetary Patriarchy, Autonomies in Rebellion**

More than 900 people from approximately 30 countries and 33 indigenous peoples of Mexico met at the CIDECI Indigenous Center for Comprehensive Training, located in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, to analyze everything encountered during the Caravan, listen to experiences of other countries that have similar struggles and seek networking strategies that strengthen community processes that continue to struggle for life. During the event, letters from different parts of the world were read showing support for the resistance and the original peoples.
In the meeting, some common problems were identified, such as the presence of organized crime in different territories, cooption of young people and children by crime, division in communities through economic offers or assistance programs, deterioration of lands due to monoculture, fumigations, water pollution and the fact that the water is being destined for large companies and not for communities.

**Resistance of the Original Peoples in Defense of Life and Territory**

As a sign of memory and hope, the communities recalled some historical victories that they have had as a result of the organization of the peoples. They mentioned that they have held different meetings to encourage the heart, strengthen the struggles, the recovery of lands and to stop projects through injunctions in different states of the country. They highlighted the struggle of women in all territories and the strengthening of autonomy through support networks between Zapatista Caracoles and organizations that support the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN).

“You have to recognize two lights of current hope; the struggle of women in all its forms, although men are concerned that they break windows and damage monuments, insignificant things in the face of the violence they experience. The other light is the light of the Original Peoples who fight to defend the territory; you have to feed these two lights, make them grow and bring them together”, it was proposed.

During his speech, Raul Zibechi, a Uruguayan writer and activist, who was invited as a speaker, recalled the importance of looking at drug trafficking as a perfect symbol of capital, which represents dispossession through violence. He affirmed that it is very difficult to identify the line between drug trafficking and power because there is an alliance between criminal groups, governments and large companies. He also recognized the growth and multiplication of autonomies in Latin America, which is a victory full of diversity, colors and strategies that permeate each original people from their ancestral knowledge.

For her part, Ana Esther Ceceña, a Mexican economist, carried out a geopolitical analysis of what is happening in the Mexican Southeast given the dispute for power between the United States and China, which leaves Mexican territory in the middle due to its geographical characteristics and economic production. This has gone hand in hand with the destruction of ecosystems, the displacement of communities and the appropriation of culture for economic benefits. However, the point was not to get overwhelmed, but to seek strategies to continue defending the territories and cultural practices that must remain. “There is also a strategy of dispossession of everything symbolic, spiritual, cultural; an example is all this destruction of archaeological treasures on the route of these trains, the excavator breaks them, destroys them, and those that they don’t are taken away, they are stolen. All this that is found is history, and it is being destroyed, for the sake of a progress that is actually not”, she concluded.

At the end of the meeting, a statement was read that stated: “The Caravan allowed us to meet the jungle that resists. Where the trees are cut down, life springs up again. We listened to the birds and their messages, we drank the crystalline water from the wells and we breathed the clean air of rurality. We find peoples and communities that organize, resist and do not allow dispossession or even the entry of companies into their territories. They also take measures to recover ways of life that build hopeful autonomies for humanity. On the other hand, we find rebellious cities that build collectivity and autonomy in the midst of urban monsters, where love for the land and territory flourishes again. We affirm loud and clear and from our hearts that fight and organize, that we will continue to meet and join them with other struggles throughout the world. Neither with the National Guard, nor with the Navy, nor with the Army. They will not stop us! While you destroy, we build.”
Disappearance
Indelible trace of absence, tireless search. Seed of struggle, brotherhood and memory

To disappear, is it a verb that can be applied to people? Thinking logically, the answer would be no, at least not beyond the realm of illusion and magic. Nevertheless, reality has surpassed the unimaginable.

Disappeared; it is a concept that is increasingly present in our daily lives. Every day we usually find ourselves in the media and on the streets, with a pitiful amount of search files, with cries for help from desperate families looking for a loved one.

Disappearance is one of the most extreme forms of violence. Entire families have been devastated by the uncertainty and pain of not knowing what happened to their relatives. As Elena Poniatowska mentions, “for a mother, the disappearance of a child means a space without truce, a long anguish. There is no resignation or comfort, nor time for the wound to heal. Death kills hope, but disappearance is intolerable because it neither kills nor lets live.”

Forced disappearance in Mexico has its roots in the so-called “Dirty War” but its practice has been perpetuated and is no longer just an exclusive tool of governments. It now has extremely violent forms and different aims ranging from fear-mongering to recruitment and trafficking. It occurs in multiple contexts and by different players; many times even as a strategy of terror on the State’s part, to which have been added the “disappearances carried out by organized crime groups and drug cartels, in many cases with the collaboration of state officials”; as indicated in the report “Enforced Disappearance in Mexico: A View from the Organizations of the United Nations System.”

Likewise, Human Rights Watch, in its 2023 world report, mentions that “since the start of the ‘war’ against organized crime in 2006, violent crime rates have suffered a drastic increase in Mexico, and reached historic levels during the government of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. While authorities often attribute this violence to criminal cartels, most crimes go uninvestigated and those responsible are never identified or prosecuted.”

During this six-year term, we have also witnessed the increase in the presence of military forces in the country with the justification of fight-
ing organized crime. In this regard, the report mentions: “Soldiers, police officers, and agents of the Public Ministry have committed serious human rights violations in a generalized manner, which include torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions, with almost absolute impunity.” They have registered between 35 and 40 sentences for disappearance of the more than 100 thousand cases.

Currently, it is officially recognized that there are more than 112,000 missing persons in Mexico and more than 52,000 unidentified bodies. If we add to this that, according to statistics, “close to 90% of crimes are never reported, a third of reported crimes are never investigated, and less than 16% of investigations are solved, the figure could still be greater”, according to the same report.

Given this panorama and the need for families to find answers and obtain justice, at least 130 search groups have emerged in the country, the majority made up of relatives of disappeared persons. Many of them are led by mothers who tirelessly search for their children, even doing excavation work in the more than 4,000 clandestine graves that have been found across Mexican territory. They have had to train as they go along in various disciplines, including forensics.

In addition to the tasks of search, dissemination, demand for truth, justice, reparation, non-repetition and memory, the groups of relatives of disappeared persons have found themselves with the need to appropriate public spaces to highlight the serious crisis that the country is going through. In various states of the Republic, we can find memorials, monuments, roundabouts and various spaces where those who are missing are remembered, such as the Glorieta of the Disappeared in Mexico City. Similarly, on some occasions they take to the streets of the cities to remind us that #wearemissingover100 thousand (#nosfaltammásde100mil) and that they will not stop until they find them.

This work has placed families at a high level of exposure, which, in turn, has placed them at enormous risk. To the present, more than ten searching mothers have been killed. But, despite the challenges, threats, and re-victimization they face, relatives of the victims and activists, together with human rights organizations, continue to fight. Thanks to their work and the pressure they have exerted, they have managed to promote networks such as the Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico, among others, that seek to highlight the cases, demand justice, and promote effective public policies to prevent and address this problem.

In addition, mechanisms such as the National Commission for the Search for Persons have been established, and changes have been promoted in the legal field such as the General Law on Forced Disappearance and the Approved Search Protocol. All of them have the objective of coordinating the efforts for the search and identification of disappeared persons.

There is still a lot to change, new laws and organizations that comprehensively address this crisis, but it is extremely important to recognize what families have achieved on their journey.

Chiapas: A critical point of the painful reality of disappearances

Chiapas, one of the poorest and most marginalized states in Mexico, faces a particularly worrying situation in relation to disappearances. In this region, socioeconomic inequality, territorial conflicts, and political tensions have contributed to a climate conducive to violence, the breakdown of the social fabric, and impunity. On the other hand, the strategic location of Chiapas has placed it at the center of dispute for various organized crime groups, which has increased the commission of crimes such as kidnapping and disappearance.

Currently, the figures in the state are not clear, because, as at the national level, due to fear and lack of confidence in the authorities, not all cases are reported. The Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center has registered 1,314 cases; the organization Melel Xojobal has documented at least 1,831 disappearances of children under 18 years of age between 2018 and 2021. For its part, Voces Mesoamericanas Accion con Pueblos Migrantes (Mesoamerican Voices Action with Migrating Peoples), has more than 350 cases of disappeared agricultural laborers from Chiapas. These organizations agree that, in the last four years, disappearances have increased exponentially and steadily. It is estimated that these figures may be much higher.

In Chiapas, once again, it is the families and human rights organizations that are making efforts given this crisis. Thus, in 2010 the Junax K’antik Committee was formed with families of disappeared migrants from Chiapas. Also, the Working Group Against Disappearances in Chiapas, who have urged the authorities to “recognize the problem and work together to find them and stop the crisis.” They have also pointed out the need to create a context analysis unit both in the Enforced Disappearance Prosecutor’s Office and in the State Search Commission, to be clear about what is happening and for what purposes.

The search for truth and justice for the victims and their families is an urgent and necessary task. Search collectives across the country are a reflection of the lack of results from governments; but also, they are a symbol that when there is a will, many things become possible. They are an example of strength, struggle, hope, union and, above all, love.

#Hastaencontrarles
SIPAZ ACTIVITIES mid-February to mid-May 2023

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT CHIAPAS

- In February, we attended the Regional Days for disappeared migrants that brought together groups of relatives and human rights organizations in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.
- In March, we accompanied the marches that were organized in San Cristóbal de Las Casas within the framework of International Women’s Day to demand equality, and a dignified and secure life.
- In March, we attended the discussion “Women in Migration - Voices from the Chiapas Highlands” convened in San Cristóbal de Las Casas by Voces Mesoamericanas.
- In April, we accompanied as observers the demonstration held in front of the Highlands Court of Justice, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, in which dozens of people, mainly from the municipality of San Juan Cancuc, demanded the release of five prisoners from this same town currently incarcerated in Prison No. 5, San Cristóbal.
- In April, we accompanied as observers the simultaneous action of protests at national level, being present in the mobilization organized in front of the offices of the National Institute of Migration (INM) in San Cristóbal de Las Casas; which was organized after the fire at the INM facilities in Ciudad Juárez, a city on the border with the United States, which left at least 38 dead.
- In April and May, we accompanied the route of the “El Sur Resiste” Caravan through Chiapas, convened by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).
- In May, we were present at the International Meeting “El Sur Resiste 2023 – Global Corporate Capitalism, Authorities in Rebellion”, convened by the CNI and held at CIDECI-Unitierra in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.
- In May, we attended the event in which the annual report of the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba), entitled “Chiapas, A Disaster. Between Criminal Violence and State Complicity of the State”, was presented.
- In May, within the context of Mother’s Day, we accompanied a public gathering of searching mothers that was held in San Cristóbal de Las Casas to demand justice and highlight the disappearance of people, convened by the United Families Committee of Chiapas Looking for Our Disappeared Migrants “Junax Ko’rantik”.

OXACAXA

- In April, we accompanied the aforementioned Caravan during part of its passage through the Tehuantepec Isthmus. Within this framework and during the Encounter that was held at the end of the Caravan, we had the opportunity to talk with several of our co-workers and partners in Oaxaca.

GUERRERO

- In April and May, we held online meetings with Teodomiria Rosales Sierra, director of the Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon Human Rights Center, with whom we discussed the situation in Guerrero.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In recent months, we have participated in several preparatory meetings with human rights organizations throughout Mexico to prepare a joint report before the next Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to Mexico from the United Nations Organization (UN).
- In March, we met with the international organizations Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) and Front Line Defenders in the framework of their visit to Chiapas to “document the situation of risk and violence experienced by indigenous defenders, organizations and communities in the state.”
- In May, we had a meeting in San Cristóbal de Las Casas with the Swedish Ambassador as part of a visit to Chiapas.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE FEBRUARY

- We organized three sessions on basic elements of Positive Conflict Transformation (TPC) with the preparatory level of the Colegio Libre de Chiapas.
- We held a two-and-a-half-day workshop on “Interventions in Conflict Situations and Mediation” with seminarians and pastoral agents from the dioceses of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

MARCH

- We facilitated a space for the analysis of the reality of the Estrella Region, belonging to the parish of Ocosingo, which was attended by more than 80 people.
- We facilitated a space for a situational analysis with members of the parish of San Juan Cancuc.

APRIL

- We facilitated an analysis with women artisans who participate in the Mujeres de Maiz collective from various municipalities in the Highlands and the Northern Jungle.
- We gave a two-day workshop on Security, Protection and Non-violent Strategies with representatives of the Pastoral of Mother Earth from the Southeast area of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.
- Together with organizations specialized in digital security Surisingando and the Guardian project, we co-convened a digital security workshop that was held with CSOs working in Chiapas.
- Following up on a space opened last year, together with Sursiendo, we held a workshop with a dozen journalists and communicators in which training and networking proposals for greater security for the group continued to be defined.
- We facilitated a workshop on institutional strengthening with members of the community government of the municipality of Chilón.
- We held a two-and-a-half-day workshop on “Peace Building” with seminarians and pastoral agents from the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

MAY

- We facilitated a space for analysis with various organizations that work on aspects of education with adults in Chiapas.

NETWORKING

- In February, we participated in the National Assembly of partner organizations of the Mennonite Central Committee (CCM) that took place in Morelos.
- In February, we attended the Summit for Peace that took place in Mexico City, an initiative that brought together civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and the general public from Mexico and the United States to discuss the impacts of violence, generate strategies and take joint actions to combat its causes.
- In February and April, we had a face-to-face meeting of our partners that participated in the “Latin America Project, between Violence and Hope - III Phase: Accompaniment to Communities in Non-violent Resistance against Extractivism”, coordinated by Pax Christi International.
- In March, 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 ministry of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.
- In March, we attended a meeting of partners of the German volunteer program coordinated by Welthaus/Casa del Mundo.
- In March, we participated in an online meeting of all the members of the Platform for peacebuilding in Mexico and outside of Mexico.
- In March, we attended various plenary meetings and commissions of the Siamalí Kinal Association for Peace in Chiapas.
- In April, we had an online meeting of our partners from the North American region of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC) to outline the actions that will be carried out this year.
- In April, the formal opening of the project that we will develop with Mesoamerican Voices and Huridocs entitled “Strengthening the Self-protection Capacities of Human Rights Defender Organizations and Communities in Chiapas” was launched. We had a new session with the organizations that will participate in the project in May.