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

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

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

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

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

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



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Human Rights Pending agenda for candidates for the 2024 elections



In September, the National Peace Dialogue was held in Puebla, after talks and Justice and Security Forums were held in the states in which more than 18 thousand people participated in the last ten months. The National Peace Agenda was announced, which seeks to “transcend a culture of violence towards a culture of care and peace.” It is intended that this Agenda be made known to society in general, as well as to the presidential candidates for the 2024 elections. The agenda includes proposals for actions that can be implemented “in families, schools, communities, institutions, companies, universities and others” and that allow us to demand “governments to fulfill their role effectively and transparently.” “Peace is a joint effort of different levels

and of all social sectors, it implies the sum of wills, coordination of efforts and the generosity of everyone to overcome the fear of the indolence and inefficiency of the authorities,” it further states.

Human rights: a long list of pending issues

In August, human rights organizations reported that in the last year they recorded 128 human rights violations against human rights defenders. 31 of the cases were concentrated in the Mexican capital, 18 occurred in Michoacan and 12 in both Chiapas and Oaxaca. The major trends include: an increase in the number of organizations and communities attacked; an increase in human rights violations by governments of the National Regen-

eration Movement (MORENA), and an increase in those committed by the federal government, among others.

In September, Amnesty International (AI) denounced the disproportionate use of the justice system to dissuade, punish and prevent defenders from protesting to demand their rights. “Mexico is among the countries where the most murders of environmental defenders are committed, while far from the State addressing and preventing this violence, other serious violations of their human rights are being added, such as stigmatization, harassment, assaults, attacks, forced displacement and disappearances,” it declared. It stressed that “the right to protest is a fundamental means that defenders of land, territory and the environment have used to demand their

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rights, particularly when other institutional mechanisms have failed or have not been accessible.” This same month, Global Witness reported that, in Mexico, 31 environmental defenders were murdered in 2022, making it the third most dangerous country to be a natural resources activist.

In September, Article 19 documented 272 cases of attacks on journalists and communicators in the first half of 2023: one attack every 16 hours. With half of the cases, coverage of corruption and politics is clearly the riskiest. According to Article 19, *“the State continues to be the main aggressor against the press in Mexico. During these first six months of 2023, the authorities were responsible for perpetrating 140 attacks, that is, one in every two attacks.”* So far, the NGO has counted 2,941 cases in the current government of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO).

In September, a representation from Mexico appeared before the Committee against Forced Disappearances (CED) of the United Nations (UN) to review progress on previous recommendations. The official Mexican delegation highlighted actions regarding human identification and “strategies” in the search for vulnera-

ble groups such as women, children, adolescents, and migrants. The CED requested several details about the so-called National Registry of Missing and Unidentified Persons (RNPDO). For the relatives of the more than 111 thousand victims and civil organizations, the new registry seeks to reduce the figures that already exist without solving the underlying problem, to manipulate the facts for electoral purposes. The Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (ProDH) stated that it is very striking that, with so many pending issues regarding disappearances, energy is used on that, instead of putting the National Forensic Data Bank into operation or preventing the commission of these crimes. The CED declared that in the immediate future *“the efforts are not giving results,”* that the forensic crisis remains and was concerned about the risk that families face when searching. It also regretted the low number of criminal cases and sentences given the crisis of disappearances.

Earlier this month, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention conducted an official working visit to Mexico in September, after which it concluded that *“arbitrary detention remains a widespread practice*

in Mexico and is too often a catalyst for ill-treatment, torture, forced disappearances and arbitrary executions”. They also pointed out that the Armed Forces, the National Guard, and state and municipal police are frequently involved in arbitrary detentions (see *Focus*).

Likewise, in September, the Washington Office on Latin American Affairs (WOLA) published a report titled *“Militarized Transformation: Human Rights and Democratic Controls in a Context of Growing Militarization in Mexico.”* It points out: *“Mexico is experiencing a process of increasing militarization of civilian tasks inside and outside the scope of public security. While previous presidents presented militarization as a temporary process that would strengthen the role of civil institutions—although in practice military deployment became the permanent model, largely at the expense of prioritizing other security and justice strategies and institutions—, the current government promotes a broad long-term militarization of civilian tasks, including through the militarization of the National Guard. As their capacities and power grow, the Armed Forces do not have effective civilian controls over their actions. In terms of human rights, in the period after Felipe Calderon’s six-year term of office, there has been a reduction in the levels of serious violations attributed to the Armed Forces. However, these continue to occur. More broadly, Mexico continues to experience historic levels of violence, and the vast majority of crimes go unpunished.”*

EZLN: Changes in autonomous structures and other proposals

For several weeks now, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) has been sharing statements on various topics and considerations. They are signed by the now Insurgent Captain Marcos or the Insurgent Subcommander Moises and state that the Zapatista struggle must be for the freedom of future generations, *“for some-*

one we are not going to know.” “We can now survive the storm as Zapatista communities that we are. But now it is about not only that, but about going through this and other storms that will come, going through the night, and reaching that morning, 120 years from now, where a girl begins to learn that being free is also being responsible for that freedom.”

Subsequently, Subcommander Moises announced that they made changes to their autonomous structures when their more than 40 autonomous municipalities and the Good Government Councils (JBG) disappeared. He reported that within the framework of the 30th anniversary of the armed uprising, public celebrations will be held in the months of December 2023 and January 2024. However, he stressed that “it is our duty, at the same time as inviting you, to discourage you” because “The main cities of the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas are in complete chaos. The municipal presidencies are occupied by what we call ‘legal hitmen’ or ‘Disorganized Crime’. There are blockades, assaults, kidnappings, protection rackets, forced recruitment, shootings. This is the effect of the patronage of the state government and the dispute over the posts that is in process. They are not political proposals that are presented, but rather criminal societies.”

Later, he announced the formation of the Local Autonomous Governments (GAL) that will both allow to address different social needs and “increase the defense and security of the peoples” and of Mother Earth. Several GALs will be organized into Zapatista Autonomous Government Collectives (CGAZ). The Assemblies of Collectives of Zapatista Autonomous Governments (ACGAZ) continue. The proposal, he explained, is that “we have prepared ourselves so that our people survive, even if isolated from each other.”

Another statement explained why they decided to remove the previous structures. “It was seen that the structure of how it was governed, a pyramid, is not the way. It’s not from below, it’s



Pilgrimage for Peace in the Southeast area, Comitán, August 2023 © SIPAZ

from above. If Zapatismo were only the EZLN, well, it is easy to give orders. But the government must be civil, not military. Then the people have to find their way, their way and their time. Where and when. The military should only be for defense,” said Subcommander Moises. Another consideration was that they analyzed that the previous structure was not adequate for the new situation: “If you see that it is going to rain or that the first drops are already falling and the sky is black like a politician’s soul, then you take out your plastic and look for where you can shelter,” he said, explaining that “with MAREZ and JBG we won’t be able to face the storm.”

CHIAPAS: Violence continues to spread

The dispute over the territory located on the border with Guatemala and the Sierra de Chiapas, which began more than two years ago, has intensified in recent months. Armed confrontations, murders, disappearances, forced displacement, road blockades, forced recruitment and protection rackets are a constant in that area. Highlighting the seriousness of the situation, in September, some five thousand teachers who serve just over 150

thousand students of all educational levels in the municipalities of the mountain and border areas decided to suspend work. “Given the negligence and absenteeism of the competent authorities to confront criminal acts committed by criminal groups (...) until they guarantee us the necessary social security conditions, we will not return to our daily work,” they declared.

Other areas also filed complaints and demanded the intervention of the authorities due to violence linked to an apparent heating up of the turf wars in their territories. That was the case of the Nueva Palestina community in the municipality of Ocosingo in September (it is located on the border line with Guatemala, but further north than the previously mentioned areas); and from the municipality of Tila (even further north of the state) in October.

Other conflict situations seem to respond to a logic that is more of an electoral political nature. In September and for several weeks, residents of the municipality of Oxchuc, belonging to the “Community Front for Self-Determination” partially or totally blocked the stretch of road between San Cristobal de Las Casas and Ocosingo. They denounce that for months the



Pilgrimage for Peace
in the Southeast area,
Comitán, August 2023
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ruling issued by the Electoral Court of the State of Chiapas has not been complied with, “indicating the reinstatement of elections under internal regulatory systems of the municipality of Oxchuc.” Something similar —between a blockade and other forms of violence— occurred in October in the municipality of Altamirano, where two groups have disputed municipal power since the 2018 elections.

Seeking alternatives to violence

Complaints from different sectors, marches and pilgrimages have multiplied to call for a stop to violence. In August, thousands of the faithful of the Catholic Church from the Ch’ol and southeastern areas of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas made a pilgrimage for Peace in Palenque and Comitán. In the case of the Ch’ol area, the pilgrims questioned the Maya Train Project: “Who will be the true beneficiaries of the project? (...) How will the families of our peoples benefit? Will there be a true respect and care for our Mother Earth?” Likewise, they denounced the failures of the health system, “the impunity and corruption of the judicial system” and the fact

that in “political parties, the search for satisfying personal or group interests prevails, which perverts the noble goal of politics and distances them from the true needs and legitimate expectations of the people.” In the case of the Southeast Zone, the Believing People pointed out “the presence of organized crime that operates with total impunity, with the objective of controlling the territory, exploiting its natural wealth and collecting protection money, violating human rights. of the communities”; as well as “the conversion of our territories and communities into battlefields.”

In September, several human rights networks denounced the violence that has worsened in Frontera Comalapa and other border municipalities. They stated that “it is notorious that far from conflicts being resolved (...), the conditions for the growth and expansion of these criminal groups continue to be allowed.” Consequently, “the population (...) currently lives hostage to criminal groups: the circulation of people and vehicles is controlled through checkpoints and blockades placed on the roads; Adolescent men, from the age of 13, are recruited for scouting activities (surveillance and information collection); young women from the locality and from Central American countries

are victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation.” In addition, the networks said that “since the arrival of the Armed Forces to the scene, there is no certainty of their role in the context. (...) The abandonment and repeated omissions of the State at all levels to guarantee the integrity and security of the population of the region and the minimization of the situation by the federal administration, place the civilian population, journalists and human rights defenders at greater risk and vulnerability.”

Similarly, in September, the Dioceses of San Cristobal de Las Casas and Tapachula expressed their concern about what is happening. “Criminal groups have taken over our territory and we find ourselves in a state of siege, with social psychosis, under narco blockades that use civil society as a human shield,” they denounced in Tapachula, while in San Cristobal, the statement was issued titled “Chiapas Torn by Organized Crime”, in which the lack of response from the authorities was denounced that “puts human integrity at risk and shows us a failed state that has been overcome and/or colluded with criminal groups.”

OAXACA: Conflicting views on the situation in the state

In November, the governor of Oaxaca, Salomon Jara Cruz, presented his first government report, highlighting among his achievements that for the first time in the history of the state there is a joint cabinet and that he has presented initiatives to revoke the mandate and austerity to eliminate the luxuries and excesses of previous governments. The event took place in the Guelaguetza Auditorium as the venue had to be changed due to teacher protests. Jara Cruz reported that in his first year in office he visited 376 of the 500 municipalities in the state to directly address the needs of the people. He also declared that “in the framework of the awakening of the south-east of Mexico, while the country grows at an average rate of 3.6%, our state presents rates of economic and industrial activity above 10%.” As

regards security, he affirmed that his government has managed to reduce the growth rates of many of the most common crimes.

On the other hand, in October, civil organizations were concerned about security policy, the lack of state mechanisms to confront the migration crisis, violence against human rights defenders, and the links between organized crime and armed groups that defend political, agrarian and economic power, and the dispute for territorial control between organized crime groups. They stressed *“the urgency for the State’s actions to be from an intersectional, multicultural perspective and action and not from a sexist, racial and discrimination logic. They demanded that the Mexican State guarantee access to justice, truth and comprehensive reparation with the effective participation of the victims.”*

Likewise, in October, the organization EDUCA; Services for an Alternative Education C.A. (Servicios para una Educación Alternativa A.C.) reported that Oaxaca is the state with the most defenders murdered in the country between December 2018 and October 2023, with 41 cases. Guerrero appears in second place (29), Michoacan in third (18) and Chiapas in fourth (14). In Oaxaca, of the total of 54 incidents registered since December 2022, the Isthmus region stands out, with 46 attacks ranging from harassment, criminalization, to physical attacks and murders. The main reported aggressors are state authorities with 44% of the cases and federal authorities with 22% (*“the Navy and National Guard are players reported mainly in the Isthmus within the framework of the imposition of the development project of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec”*, they stated).

GUERRERO: “a State without Health, Education or Security”

In August, the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center published a bulletin on the situation in Guerrero titled *“A State without Health, Education or Security.”* It says that *“our State is in second place [in poverty] after Chiapas, with two*

million 173 thousand people living in poverty.” Although the figures reflect a decrease in the number of people in poverty or extreme poverty, *“the concrete situation is that the majority of families in Guerrero face extremely serious problems because they barely survive daily”* due to the rise in prices of the basic foodstuffs. The situation of access to health and education services is equally critical. *“The ancestral abandonment of governments is not reversed with social programs, because they do not fundamentally attack the inequality that is rooted and that requires a more comprehensive and long-term treatment,”* the bulletin emphasizes. Likewise, Tlachinollan lamented the *“serious security crisis due to the collusion of municipal governments with organized crime. (...) In Guerrero the poor population dies due to lack of medical care; children and youth sink into illiteracy and we are all left defenseless before the de facto power that criminal groups that are embedded in the spheres of public power are exercising.”*

In November, Tlachinollan also denounced that *“the territorial dispute that is taking place between rival groups in the main cities, especially in Acapulco, is spreading to small municipalities (...) Several murders have occurred in the municipalities and there are several cases of missing persons. Even though the municipal authorities are aware of this situation, they remain on the sidelines, lower their guard and choose to establish an alliance with criminals in exchange for protection.”* Furthermore, several agrarian authorities commented to Tlachinollan that *“the presence of the National Guard was no guarantee that the violence would abate; on the contrary, it would represent a risk for the population organizing to defend their territory. They are very aware that, in other years, the*

army entered the communities, detained heads of families, tortured and murdered several people.”

Impunity remains another deep-seated problem. On the ninth anniversary of the disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School in Iguala, in September, AMLO held a meeting with parents of the missing student teachers that ended in a disagreement. AMLO acknowledged that the relatives did not want to receive the report and accepted *“differences”* because they insist that the Army is not cooperating. *“I do not agree with them because the Army has provided all the information they have and has helped a lot,”* he declared. The mothers and fathers of the 43 continue to demand the information that they believe the Mexican Army has hidden and that those responsible be punished so that justice is done.

In terms of response to violence, in October, the Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities-Community Police (CRAC-PC) celebrated



© Educa Oaxaca



28th anniversary of
the CRAC PC
© Tlachinollan

its 28th anniversary, during which an event was held in the municipality of Tlacoapa. Tlachinollan recalled: *“The peoples of the Mountain Coast (...) were the ones who took this difficult task of guaranteeing the life and safety of the people of the communities into their hands. They rescued their legal customs*

that are community laws, recovered their regulatory systems and promoted community organization. Its community justice system is supported by regional and community assemblies, from which the rules and guidelines emanate that are fully complied with by the coordinators of the CRAC-PC and

other authorities. With this great task on its shoulders, the community police have managed to reduce the high crime rates that existed in the region and be a successful experience of what it means to serve and defend the rights of the people.” ■

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Arbitrary detentions frequent practice, pain and injustice in Mexico

“Arbitrary detention remains a widespread practice in Mexico and is too often the catalyst for mistreatment, torture, forced disappearances and arbitrary executions, to obtain confessions and incriminating statements”,

Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions (November 2023)

According to various reports from Mexican and international human rights organizations, arbitrary detentions are a recurring practice in Mexico. This phenomenon involves the arrest of individuals without valid justification or illegally, violating the principles of due process. This conduct is a cause for great concern, since, in addition to violating fundamental rights such as freedom and the right to an adequate legal process, it facilitates the perpetration of other violations, such as extortion, threats, torture, forced disappearance or extrajudicial executions. It is crucial to emphasize that this practice predominantly affects people in situations of extreme poverty, belonging to indigenous peoples or people on the move ▀

According to the National Observatory on Arbitrary Detentions, between May 2018 and June 2020, 1,359 arbitrary detentions were recorded nationwide, with the most affected states being Chiapas, Veracruz, Baja California and Chihuahua.

Currently, Mexico is part of numerous instruments for the protection of regional and international human rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States enshrines fundamental rights and universally recognized freedoms. Despite the legal protection that exists and some actions implemented by the Mexican government to comply with these legal requirements, arbitrary detention continues to be a current practice in the country, human rights organizations report.

For its part, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) states that “complaints (which before the CNDH are called ‘complaints’) begin a decline that has reached its lowest point in 2022. If organized by six-year terms, Felipe Calderón’s case accumulated 5,880 files of arbitrary detentions, Enrique Peña Nieto’s case 1,0217, and so far this year, with Andrés Manuel López Obrador, there are 385 files accumulated, a reduction of 93.45% of files on arbitrary detention.

Mobilization for the release of José Díaz, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, November 2023
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Mobilizations in favor of the release of political or unduly imprisoned prisoners, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, November 2023
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And the same with respect to other human rights violations.”

Fabrication of culprits: the case of Chiapas

The Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) has coined the term “*fabrication of culprits*” to describe a practice that consists of a person being illegally detained, the prosecutors anticipate a version of events and those responsible, to then construct—even by illicit means such as torture—evidence that adapts to this version of events. This is not a new practice in Mexico, since it has been carried over from the previous penal system, he states. *“Among the structural causes of this pattern is a demagogic punitive policy promoted by the State, that is, a political discourse that legitimizes the excessive use of the penal system and its bad practices, for which it is necessary to feed the numbers of detained and criminally prosecuted people. As a second factor, the lack of scientific capabilities is observed, which leads to the replacement of research with this simulation practice. Thirdly, it is identified that arbitrary detentions, fabrication of culprits, and torture are institutionalized practices by operators of the investigation system who transitioned from the previous to the current penal system, leading to the transmission of a culture and practices that legitimize this practice,”* says Frayba.

In the practice of fabricating culprits, people are detained in illegal searches or on public roads, accused of a crime in flagrante delicto (to date, the most common is drug possession). While under ministerial detention, they suffer torture, are held incommunicado, and, in some instances, are victims of forced disappearances. During this period, evidence is fabricated against them for a second crime. Subsequently, an arrest warrant is requested, and once obtained, the people are released only to be arrested again for the second crime and transferred to a detention center. Using this strategy seeks to nullify the defense capacity of

the detained people. According to cases documented by Frayba, people “*have commented that at that moment they were very confused and afraid, which prevented them from defending themselves, due to torture (which usually includes threats not to mention what happened in court), change in the crime for which the person is accused, as well as a pattern in which public defenders do not communicate with victims, or advise them to remain silent and not mention what happened.*”

It is worth mentioning that, in 2008, Mexico began the transformation of its criminal justice system, which was implemented in 2016. The new system seeks to guarantee the rights of victims and defendants. According to figures from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) at the national level, by 2021, 53.7% of the heads of state prosecutors’ offices were men and 55% were women, and they had more than ten years in service, which means that more than half of Mexican prosecutors come from the previous penal system.

It is not surprising, therefore, that arbitrary detentions continue to the present. This systematized practice leaves three types of victims. Firstly, there are people subjected to arbitrary detention whose life plan is suspended, in addition to presenting obvious physical, psychological and economic impacts resulting from detention and torture. The second group is made up of their families, mainly women, whose family and personal project is equally altered. Thirdly, we identify that this practice attacks the victims of the crime for which a culprit was fabricated, since they are denied the truth.

Discrimination, trace of pain and impunity

The “*fabrication of culprits*” is indicated as a State policy that mainly affects population sectors that, due to their socioeconomic condition, have fewer legal and political defense capacities. In Chiapas and other states in southern Mexico, such as Oaxaca and Guerrero, it is predictable that this will especially affect the indigenous population, subject to structural discrimination. According to official data, Chiapas and Oaxaca contain 45% of the total indigenous population of the country.

In a report presented by several organizations from Chiapas to the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, during its recent visit to Mexico, they stated that the indigenous population in Chiapas and Mexico is subject to a series of obstacles and differentiated effects that aggravate the condition of risk to arbitrary detention, torture or irregularities in the judicial process, including constant discriminatory treatment by the operators of the system. Some examples are the lack of language and cultural adaptation of detention processes and centers; greater difficulties for family members to make visits due to the distance from their communities or challenges faced, especially by indigenous women, in traveling; faults or deficiencies in the interpretation work during the trial; the stigma-

tization within their communities due to the fabrication of crimes against them, which in many cases even leads to the forced displacement of the family; the loss of agricultural lands that form a core of their identity; the impossibility of returning to their communities once they regain their freedom due to stigma or the loss of their land, as well as the need to become migrant workers; the lack of defense lawyers who speak their language. In the latter case, official data reported that in 2021, 85.2% of imprisoned indigenous people (almost 6,000 people) did not have access to an interpreter. The same year there were only 662 certified indigenous language interpreters: one for every ten inmates. On the other hand, the interpreters themselves suffer frequent episodes of discrimination, such as lack of respect or discrediting of their translations by judges.

Defending human rights has become a motive for arrest

The organization for freedom of expression Article 19 affirms that *“the repressive purpose of unsubstantiated arrests to silence voices of dissent and nullify the work of defending human rights is evident.”*

The criminalization of human rights defenders has the firm intention of reducing, limiting or eliminating their field of action, mainly when their defense is in favor of land and territory, say several human rights organizations. According to the organization Global Witness, which on September 12th, 2023 published its report *“Always Standing Up: Land and Environmental Defenders at the Forefront of the Climate Crisis”*, Mexico is the third most violent country for land defenders. and the environment, after Brazil and Colombia. In Mexico, 31 environmental defenders were murdered in 2022 (16 of them indigenous), making it the third most dangerous country to be a natural resources activist, only behind Colombia and Brazil where 60 and 34 activists were murdered, respectively. These three countries make up 70% of cases worldwide. Another element of concern in the case of Mexico is impunity: 90% of cases go unpunished. In addition, intimidation, threats, forced displacement, harassment and criminalization are other risk factors suffered by defenders.

In Oaxaca, the Assembly of the Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of the Land and Territory (APIIDTT), a grassroots community organization made up of assemblies and authorities; indigenous, traditional and agrarian assemblies in civil resistance, collectives and cooperatives in Zapotec, Ikoot, Zoque and Mixe peoples, in the region of the Tehuantepec Isthmus, has repeatedly denounced the attacks against several of its members. Recently, they reported that there are 17 arrest warrants against their members. In 2023, David Hernandez, who has stood out for his leadership in opposition to the construction of an industrial park that will be part of the Interoceanic Corridor in Puente Madera, has received threats in addition to being arrested this year. *“We take responsibility for the illegal detention of David*



Hernández Salazar, the climate of violence, violation of our rights and any measure of pressure, defamation, threat and aggression against our representatives of Puente Madera, the agencies and people of San Blas Atempa, and our regional organization APIIDT,” they stated. Currently, David is free while facing legal proceedings for a crime he did not commit.

In Chiapas, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights has recently documented two cases where arbitrary detention has been used as a strategy to stop the actions of defenders of land and territory. The first case is that of Manuel Gomez Vazquez, a young Tseltal Mayan, member of the civilian bases of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). According to Frayba, Manuel Gomez was falsely accused of a crime he did not commit by community authorities, tortured by them and then criminally prosecuted by the Chiapas Indigenous Justice Prosecutor's Office, who *“participated in the prolongation of his detention, forced disappearance and fabrication of evidence against him”*. On November 16th, Manuel Gomez, through an acquittal, was released as no responsibility for the commission of a crime was proven.

The second case is that of Manuel Santiz Cruz, Agustin Perez Dominguez, Juan Velasco Aguilar, Martin Perez Dominguez and Agustin Perez Velasco, Tseltal residents of the municipality of San Juan Cancuc, who through several organizations have resisted the militarization of their territory and the installation of megaprojects. Currently, they are detained and sentenced as a result of a crime fabricated by the Indigenous Justice Prosecutor's Office.

International organizations such as Front Line Defenders and Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) have also observed this pattern; after a joint visit to the State of Chiapas in March 2023, they publicly stated the following: *“We met with 30 defenders and indigenous authorities from 12 cases of defender[s] or community processes who face*

Mobilizations in favor of the release of political or unduly imprisoned prisoners, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, November 2023
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Mobilization for the release of José Díaz, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, November 2023
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risks for their defense work (...) We identified a clear pattern of criminalization against indigenous defenders who defend environmental rights, territory, autonomy and self-determination their communities. This pattern is evident in the growing number of cases of fabrication of crimes and violations of due process, with a strong impact on community organization and the fight for collective rights. We observe this in cases such as that of Cristobal Santiz from Aldama and that of Father Marcelo Perez Perez from San Cristobal. We highlight that, in the current context of use of the criminal system against defenders and communities, there is a pattern of criminalization against those who have opposed the militarization of their communities and as part of their fight in defense of their rights. collectives."

Arbitrary arrests in migrant journeys

Dr. Alethia Fernandez de la Reguera, researcher at the Legal Research Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), stated that Mexico is the Latin

American country that has the largest and most strengthened immigration detention system in the region. "Compared to other Latin American countries, Mexico is the one with the most centers for deprivation of liberty for people on the move, with a total of 50, most of which began to be built between 2000 and 2010. And as for the detention of migrants, it noted that in 2021 the National Migration Institute detained 307,679 people, 80.7% from Central America, mainly from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador."

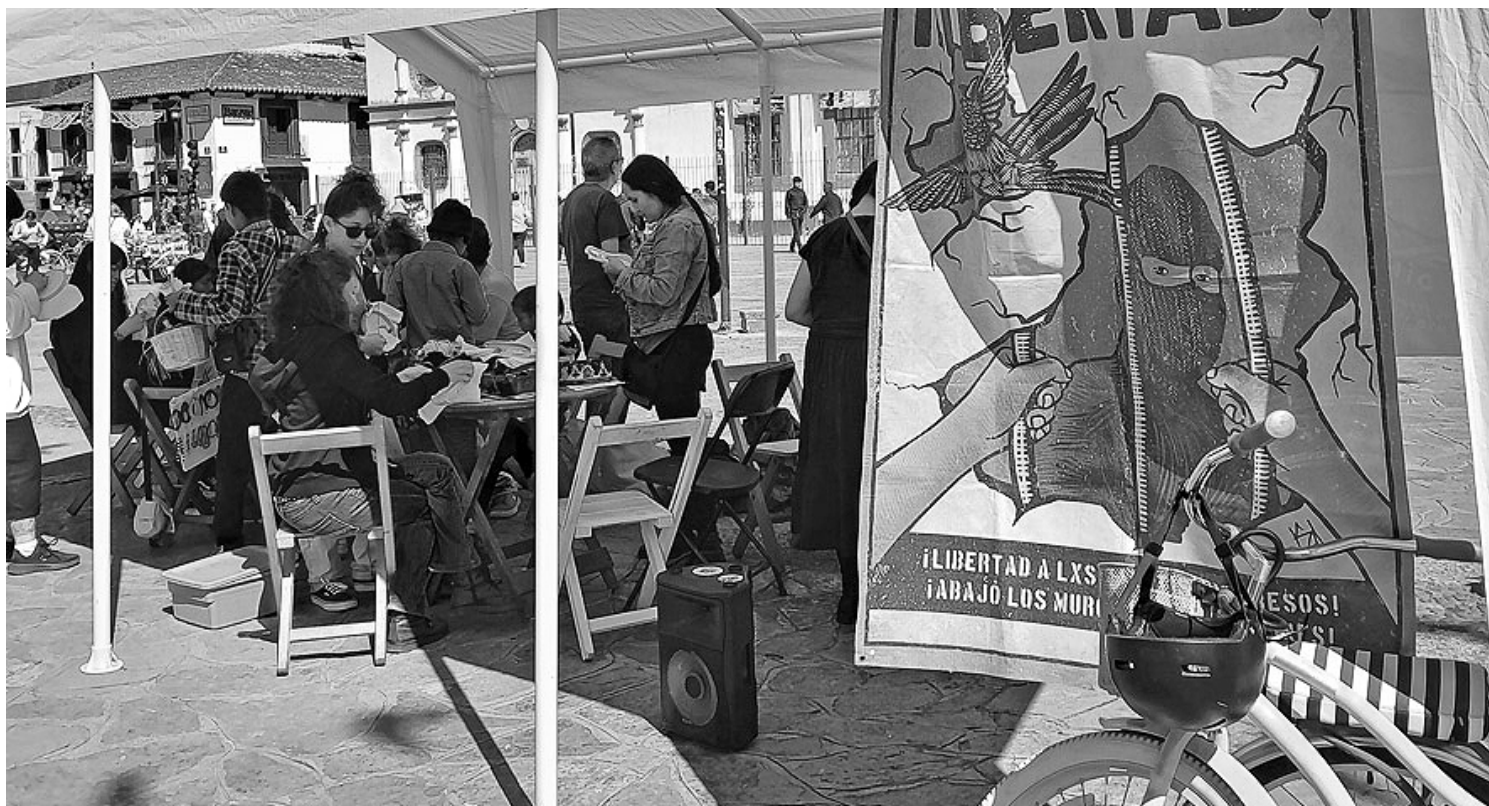
Although migratory caravans to the United States have existed for many years, it was since 2018 that they became massive and public, which resulted in the government's response with the creation of the National Guard and the militarization of the borders. Caravans allow migrants to travel in more protected ways, and they generally travel with people who cannot bear the costs of paying a smuggler. That is why the most vulnerable migrate in the caravans: women, women with their children, pregnant women, unaccompanied adolescents and the elderly. Those who make up the caravans leave their countries of origin not only because of poverty, but also because of criminal violence, state violence and even food insecurity.

The National Immigration Station Survey on Travel Conditions in Mexico 2021, carried out in August and September 2021 by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), shows that 37% of arrests occur on public transportation.

The Mexican State systematically detains and deportes migrants and people in need of international protection. According to the Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons Unit (UPMRIP), in 2021, the INM detained 309,692 people, and by 2022 the figure rose to 441,409. From January to July 2023, 317,334 arrest events have been recorded.

Immigration detention centers are managed by the National Migration Institute (INM). However, other security forces are present, such as the National Guard (GN), as well as private security companies, whose actions are not regulated by the Immigration Law. In these detention centers, euphemistically called Immigration Stations (EM) and Provisional Stays (EP), people are deprived of their liberty and are victims of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, several civil society organizations have documented.

The Driving Group Against Immigration Detention and Torture has described how the prison structure of these spaces of deprivation of liberty, added to the lack of communication with the outside world, and other actions to manipulate conditions aimed at exercising total control over the detained people, in which physical and psychological suffering, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, inflicted, causes a cumulative effect, constitute "torturing environments."



Migrant childhood: detention in the middle of a painful journey

In 2020, the Migration and Refuge Law and the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents were harmonized; from that moment on, the migration detention of children and their families was prohibited and the higher interests of childhood were prioritized over the immigration administrative procedure.

The Southern Border Collective has documented how the Protection System shelters have become new immigration detention centers, in which even adults, mainly women, are deprived of their freedom, since families are frequently separated and men are sent to the immigration stations, this despite the fact that the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN) determined that immigration control at points other than those of formal entry constitutes an arbitrary and discriminatory act, and disproportionately affects racialized people.

UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention voices its concerns

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Mexico from September 18th to 29th, 2023 to speak with authorities and civil society organizations. *“Of the approximately 90 thousand people in preventive detention (referred to as ‘in process’) in 2022, around 50 percent are subject to informal preventive detention, many of them had been subjected to prolonged informal preventive detention, some even*

remained for more than five years since their arrest,” said Ecuadorian expert Miriam Estrada-Castillo.

Matthew Gillett, Ganna Yudkivska and Miriam Estrada-Castillo also expressed that during these two weeks they observed weaknesses, *“including the arrest registration systems; overly broad interpretations of flagrante delicto; insufficient access to effective legal assistance; excessively long periods of preventive detention; attacks on judicial independence and due process; an overly punitive approach to drug policy; and deficiencies in detention conditions.”*

They stated that *“a large number of migrants and asylum seekers are detained in Mexico, which amounted to more than 240 thousand in the first half of 2023.”* They also highlighted the excessive use of force during the arrests by the Mexican military forces.

Furthermore, *“a large number of girls and boys are detained in the context of migration. In 2022 alone, more than 126 thousand minors were channeled to centers managed by the National System for the Comprehensive Development of the Family (DIF).”* Although according to Article 99 of the Migration Law, minors are not allowed to remain in immigration detention, in practice, migrant girls and boys are often deprived of their liberty, either in shelters exclusively for unaccompanied minors, managed by the DIF or in facilities shared with immigration stations, under the authority of the National Migration Institute.

Finally, the experts reported that they will present their report on the visit to Mexico to the Human Rights Council in September 2024 ■

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Weaving Hopes XXIVth Meeting of Black, Afro-Mexican and Afro-descendant



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"If we started from those basic rights, perhaps in some years the census would not be questionable because the birth of an Afro-descendant person would, from there, be the 'resignification' of their identity and life"

Eumelia Yerena Pusla

In November, the XXIV Meeting of Black, Afro-Mexican and Afro-descendant Peoples was held. On this occasion it took place in Tamiahua, Veracruz. The objective of the meeting was "to analyze the progress and challenges of the effective representation of

Afro-Mexicans and their inclusion in the census." This event was convened by different organizations, including Black Mexico C.A. (México Negro A.C.), Afro Tamiahua C.A., the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), among others.

People from states such as: Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, Guanajuato, Veracruz, Morelos, Mexico State, Coahuila, Southern Lower California and countries such as Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras, Cuba and the United States, gathered in this space in order to nurture hope, understand the challenges and design strategies that allow the advancement of black people. They

spent two days where art in its multiple expressions allowed us to take a historical tour, through different samples of painting, typical dances, crafts and books. A different story was told where Afro-Mexicans are authors and protagonists. Boys, girls, and adolescents showed their joy at learning more about their roots.

The first day of the meeting began with an Afro-Mexican ritual dedicated to the people affected by Hurricane Otis in Guerrero. It was a moment of reflection, gratitude and joy that ended with an offering of flowers being thrown into the Tamiahua lagoon, as a sign of the unity and connection that black people have in all parts of the world. Continuing with a march of joy and visibility, the colors, sounds and music flooded the streets of Tamiahua. The happy neighbors came out to watch the route and some joined the march. The drums strengthened the heart while the Afro-Mexican anthem was sung.

On March 14th, 1997, in the state of Oaxaca, the first meeting of black people in Mexico took place. For five days, people from different states shared the reality they lived in their communities and saw the importance of meeting, talking, laughing, planning and dreaming together of a different reality for black people. Since that moment, every year (except during the pandemic), they have met to see the progress and challenges, continue building collective agendas and support the processes that are being developed in different states. As mentioned in their anthem: "Afro-descendants are discriminated against and in our opinions we are not listened to, those two leaders

who gave us our homeland, Afro-descendants Morelos and Guerrero; They fought to give us our freedom, which we must now enjoy" (Catalina Rosaelia Peñaloza).

In Tamiagua, the historian Gabriel C. Reyes was one of the invited speakers: He shared the topic *"Visibility to the Afro-Mexican Peoples"*, speaking about the significance and evolution they have had throughout history, also highlighting the racism and institutional abandonment to which they have been subjected for many years, *"Today things are changing and it is the same protagonists who are taking charge of giving them the place and recognition that they have never had,"* he remarked.

"We talked a little about what we have as identity of our brothers, who arrived from Africa, coming from Java, Guinea, Mandinka, Angola and with a journey in very difficult conditions in maritime vessels, passing through the coasts of Caribento and the Caribbean Sea, who arrived in Tamiagua at the beginning of the conquest to strengthen the coastal population centers of Tampamachoco and Tamyamja. Here they were free and came to have their own towns with fisheries and some others went to work in the sugarcane fields and sugar mills owned by the cattle ranchers of the mountains", he explained.

According to Reyes, recalling oral legend passed down from generation to generation, many of the enslaved ancestors of the Afro-Mexican peoples were brought from the areas now known as Equatorial Africa and Sierra Leone. *"This is the history of black people in Tamiagua, the Always Beautiful, a town where by custom they taught us all to love people without differences based on the color of their skin,"* he concluded.

Different thematic tables were also worked on: 1) effective representation and full rights of Afro-Mexican people; building the 2024 legislative agenda; 2) Youth - Afro activism, national leadership, challenges and opportunities; 3) Women - political-electoral rights of Afro-Mexican women; 4) Census, 2020 - results and problems, heading

towards mid-census 2025; 5) Rights and challenges of the Afro-Mexican LGBTIQ+ community; and 6) International dialogue, affirmative action and the problem of identity appropriation in Afro-Mexican peoples and communities, effective representation as a guarantee for legitimate public policies.

Sergio Peñaloza, first Afro-Mexican federal representative, shared the importance of representation on advocacy platforms. It is a path that opens to manage advancement processes that contribute to the development of the capabilities of Afro-Mexican people, he stated. It is a challenge that begins with the recognition of one's own identity, the acceptance of ancestral heritage and the strength to create and promote vindication processes. Likewise, he thanked the support he has had during his administration and reaffirmed his commitment to the causes of the Afro-Mexican community.

From the international table, they shared the problems experienced by black people in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of the main ones are structural racism, impoverishment, lack of access to rights such as health and education, dispossession that leads to forced displacement, due to the fact that Afro-descendant communities are located in territories characterized by their wealth in natural resources and which are the objective of different national and international

companies. The role of children and youth as main players in the transformation processes was also highlighted, considering that they are not the future, but the present for black people.

On the last day, a hairstyle workshop was held, loaded with a historical component, where people, in addition to changing the appearance of their hair, were able to learn about some of the techniques that exist and how braids were a fundamental part of the path to freedom for black people. This is because through them escape routes were designed and seeds were also placed that would be very useful when reaching their destination. For many of those attending this event, it was important to know the processes that people of African descent are experiencing in different parts of the world. It was also a space for joy, enjoying typical foods, reconnecting, embracing each other with their souls and with their gazes, remembering that along the way they are not alone, that the fight continues, and that very significant progress has been made.

Finally, they said goodbye with samples of typical dances from the different regions and the venue for the next meeting was handed over, which will take place in Temixco, Morelos ■

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INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT CHIAPAS

- In August, we accompanied the pilgrimage organized by parishioners from the parishes in the Southeast area of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas. This activity took place in Comitán with the purpose of denouncing the *"generalized situation of violence and insecurity."*

- In August, we participated in the Forum *"Spinning Alternatives with the Children of Chiapas"*, convened by Melel Xojobal, the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (REDIAS) and Slamail Kinal.

- In August, on the occasion of International Day of Victims of Forced Disappearances, we participated in an activity carried out in Masoja Shucja, located in the municipality of Tila, in the Northern Zone of Chiapas. The purpose of this event was to commemorate and demand justice in response to the forced disappearances and murders of their relatives.

- In this same framework, we accompanied the event *"Embracing absences, raising our voices until we find them"*, convened in San Cristobal de Las Casas by several civil organizations.

- In September, we visited prisoners in San Cristobal de Las Casas prison on two occasions, one of them with members of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions.

- In October, we accompanied displaced people from Banavil, municipality of Tenejapa, in a meeting with authorities that took place in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

- In the month of October, we were part of a meeting of bodies dedicated to international civil accompaniment at a global level, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland.

- In November, we attended the event titled *"Impune Death"*, organized by Melel Xojobal to remember the children and adolescents who have been murdered in Chiapas.

- In November, we participated in the celebration that inaugurated the jubilee year in commemoration of the birth of Samuel Ruiz Garcia, who was bishop emeritus of the Diocese of San Cristob-

al de Las Casas. This event also marked 50th anniversary of the Indigenous Congress, as well as the 20th and 30th anniversaries of the Pastoral Letter *"In This Hour of Grace."*

GUERRERO

- We held several virtual meetings with Teodomira Rosales Sierra, director of the Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon Human Rights Center, with whom we talked about the situation in Guerrero.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In August, we held a meeting with a representative of the United States Embassy that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In September, together with other organizations that have prepared a joint report for the next Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Mexico from the United Nations (UN), we participated in a meeting in which their main conclusions were presented with members of the French Embassy. This same month, we did the same with representatives of the Embassies of Belgium, Italy, the Czech Republic and Romania.

- In October, together with other organizations, we met with members of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions within the framework of their visit to Chiapas

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

AUGUST

- We held a workshop on risk and security analysis with the operational team of the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights C.A.

- We facilitated a workshop with 80 young people from the parish of Huixtan on topics of Positive Conflict Transformation and Peace Building.

- We opened a table to publicize our work and some elements of our work in peace education at an event of the Diocesan Area of Adolescent and Youth Ministry (ADIPAJ) that brought together more than a thousand young people in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

SEPTEMBER

- Together with the organization Economic and Social Development of Indigenous Mexicans (DESMI), we gave a

workshop on risk analysis and security measures with authorities from a community in San Andres Larrainzar.

- We provided a space for analysis within the framework of the integration process of new members of the German Welthaus cooperation program.

- Together with the organization specialized in digital security Sursiendo, we held a workshop with a dozen journalists and communicators in which training and articulation proposals continued to be implemented towards greater security for the union.

- Together with Voces Mesoamericanas, we facilitated a workshop with young people from the Macabeos area, Estrella region of the parish of Ocosingo on topics of Positive Conflict Transformation and Peace Building.

OCTOBER

- Together with the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO), we opened a space for reflection on the construction of peace with seminarians from several states convened in Chiapas within the framework of the event *"Indigenous Peoples and Jesus in the Eucharist and the Care of Mother Earth."*

- We gave a new workshop on topics of Positive Conflict Transformation and Peace Building with young people from the parish of Huixtan.

NOVEMBER

- Together with the organization specialized in digital security Sursiendo, we held a workshop with a dozen journalists and communicators in which training and articulation proposals continued to be implemented towards greater security for the profession.

- We facilitated an analysis of the situation at the Tseltal-Tsotsil Meeting of the Pastoral Care of Mother Earth that took place in San Andres Larrainzar.

- We organized and facilitated a workshop focused on safety and protection issues with members of the Las Margaritas parish.

- We facilitated an analysis of the situation within the framework of the Meeting of Peace Builders convened by CORECO in El Chorro community of the municipality of Ocosingo.

NETWORKING

- With a minimum monthly frequency, we attend plenary meetings and commissions of the Peace Organization in Chiapas, Slamail Kinal.

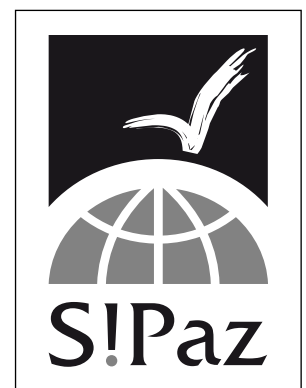
- On a bimonthly basis, we attend operational meetings of the People's Movement for Peace and Justice (MPPJ).

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

- On a monthly basis, we attend virtual meetings of all the members of the Platform for Peacebuilding in and outside of Mexico. We participated in a face-to-face meeting of said platform that took place in Mexico City in September.

- In October, we had an online meeting of the partners who participated in the *"Latin America Project, between Violence and Hope – Phase III: Accompaniment to Communities in Non-violent Resistance against Extractivism"*, coordinated by Pax Christi International.

- In November, we participated in a face-to-face meeting of the partners of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC) that took place in Mexico City ■



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