



# SIPaz



REPORT

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Pilgrimage of Pueblo Creyente  
of the Diocese of San Cristóbal  
de las Casas, January 2024  
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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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# 2024 Elections Under fire?

In January, the report *"Voting Under Fire: Understanding Political-Criminal Violence in Mexico"* was presented, which documents that in 2023 there were 574 incidents of political-criminal violence. 264 of them were against public officials or candidates for elected office, says Data Cívica, the consulting firm behind the report. 91 occurred in Guerrero, 64 in Guanajuato, 43 in Zacatecas, 42 in Veracruz, and 38 in Michoacán and Chiapas each. In December alone, 42 events associated with political-criminal violence occurred, including attacks, kidnappings, armed attacks or murders. According to the consulting firm, from 2018 to 2023, there have been 1,610 attacks, murders and threats against people associated with the political or government sphere or against government or party facilities. In that period, 105 candidates, aspiring and former candidates were murdered ▀

In February, the Colegio de México presented the investigation *"Ballot Boxes and Graves"*, in which it analyzes electoral violence and the reasons behind the 32 murders of candidates for popularly elected positions in the 2021 elections. In the main characteristics of these cases, the investigation details that *"lethal electoral violence is eminently local, because 85 percent of the 32 victims were competing for municipal positions. (...) These attacks are normally against opponents of the current mayor, as occurred in 25 of the 32 cases."* Strikingly, only 11 of 32 homicides can be clearly attributed to criminal organizations that *"have effectively limited Mexican democracy, having the ability to decide who has the right to compete and who does not. (...) Not only are the parties not up to the challenge, but they themselves are resolving the struggle for power with bullets. In other words, they have not only let criminal organizations fill power vacuums, especially local ones, but they are replicating their techniques to resolve the fight for public power,"* the investigation emphasizes.

*"Such high levels of violence are clouding the quality of democracy and governance in the country. In particular, electoral violence, that intentionally implemented by perpetrators to modify both the results and the electoral processes, distorts the virtues of a democratic regime. (...) If we take into account that one of the greatest achievements of the Mexican transition to democracy was its peaceful nature, the growing electoral violence is increasingly disturbing,"* the investigation warned when raising strong concerns about the 2024 elections.

## **"Alarming crisis regarding human rights"**

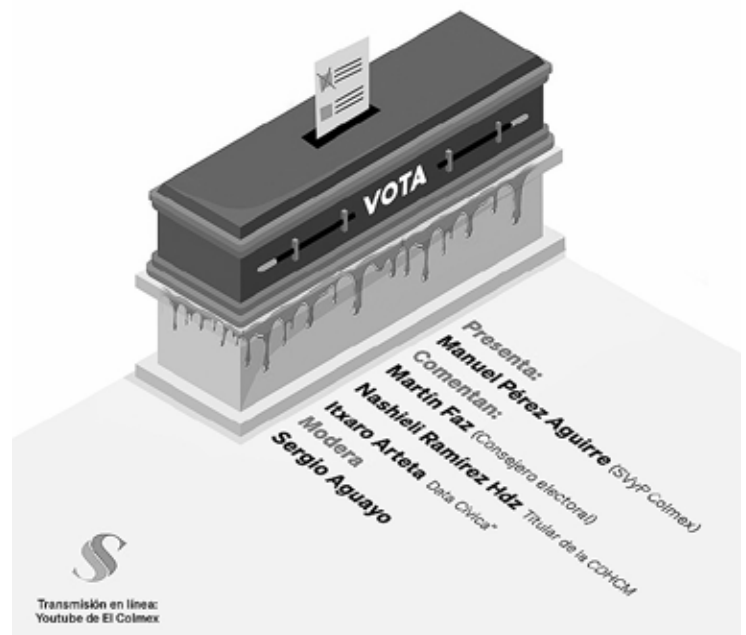
In November, more than 300 national and international organizations issued 18 reports with recommendations to reverse the *"alarming human rights crisis"* in Mexico, which *"has deepened"* since 2018, when President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) took office. They denounced the closure of civic space in the coun-

## Urnas y tumbas:

análisis de los 32 homicidios a candidatos durante el proceso electoral de 2021.

14 de febrero / 11:00hrs

Auditorio Alfonso Reyes  
de El Colegio de México



Presentation of  
the report *"Urnas  
and Tombs"*  
© Colegio de México

try, militarization, widespread violence and impunity, structural poverty, espionage, disappearances, extrajudicial executions, among other serious violations, in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Mexican State.

When this review was carried out in January, Mexico received more than 300 recommendations to improve the human rights situation in the country. The main ones revolved around violence against women, journalists, human rights defenders, children, adolescents and youth, as well as disappearances, and the management of the migration crisis, among other topics. Likewise, the issue of militarization in the country and its impacts on respect for human rights was questioned. For the first time, Mexico received specific recommendations to ensure that public security is civil. It is important to emphasize, however, that all these



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recommendations are not binding. Mexico will have until June to respond to them and decide whether to accept them.

Regarding the vulnerability of human rights defenders, in January, the non-governmental organization Cerezo Committee Mexico reported that, during the year 2023, 14 extrajudicial executions against human rights defenders were recorded in Mexico, 11 of them in Oaxaca. There are 93 cases so far in the current government. The reasons for which the executed human rights defenders fought were mainly for the right to territory, for a decent life, decent housing, and for the self-determination of indigenous peoples. Of the victims, only one did not belong to an indigenous group. *"The difference from previous reports is that we only found two cases in which the beneficiary was the Federal Government, in this report there are four cases,"* said the Cerezo Committee.

As regards freedom of expression, in January, Article 19 warned that 2024 will be an *"extremely violent"* year for the press due to political disputes linked to the electoral context. Despite the drop in murders of journalists in 2023 (five compared to 13 the previous year), it pointed out that,

in the last year, there has been an intensification of the stigmatization of and discrediting campaigns against communicators by local political actors, who have replicated AMLO's *"virulent"* discourse against the press. *"There is actually a political class that is extremely intolerant of criticism and what the president has done is provoke that intolerance,"* it explained.

In January, several civil society and journalistic spaces denounced the violation of privacy and vulnerability implied by the leak of personal data of more than 300 journalists who have covered AMLO's morning press conferences. The Civil Society Organizations Space (Espacio OSC) warned about the fact that what happened implies *"significant risks that can have various consequences. These include damage to reputation, financial losses, acts of discrimination, profiling by alleged aggressors, as well as attacks on their homes or routes, among other serious implications. This is especially relevant when considering that Mexico is positioned as one of the most dangerous countries for the press, with 163 journalists murdered and 32 missing."*

## Another crisis, migration

In December, the Mexican Refugee Aid Commission (COMAR) reported that asylum requests broke a new record in Mexico with 136,934 requests. It is worth remembering that in 2013 only 1,296 requests were counted and since 2018 they have increased year by year. Chiapas is where more than 60% of the applications are registered and it is important to emphasize that asylum seekers must remain in the federal entity where they began their process. At the same time, the acceptance rate has been reducing, mainly affecting people from Haiti, with only 13% of applicants admitted to the country in 2022. It is worrying that a quarter of the registered applications are from minors, warned the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), a figure that exacerbates the humanitarian challenge on the country's southern border. These children and adolescents mostly flee due to violence, persecution and armed conflicts, according to UNHCR.

In January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on Mexico to reject an agreement with the United States that could restrict the right to asylum and increase summary deportations. According to analysts, Republicans, who have a majority in the House of Representatives, have conditioned the approval of a \$106 billion military aid package for Ukraine and Israel in exchange for new anti-migrant measures, including closures of part of the border, further limit asylum applications and increase mass deportations. These migration measures *"would contravene international human rights standards and expose thousands of people and asylum seekers to dangerous situations,"* HRW warned. Currently, nearly 10,000 people are arrested a day at the border between the United States and Mexico as the Biden administration is adapting the Republican Party's xenophobic anti-immigration discursive framework ahead of the 2024 elections, according to the research center Feminisms and Democracies.

Likewise, in January, the South-

ern Border Monitoring Collective demanded the *“immediate and definitive closure”* of the immigration stations, after the death of Jean “N”, of Haitian nationality, who died at the Siglo XXI immigration center, in Tapachula, Chiapas. It stated that this case is not isolated, but rather joins a long list of migrants who have died inside Mexican immigration centers. It stated that they have documented that in these spaces migrants are subjected *“to conditions of overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, lack of medical services, poor nutrition, physical and psychological abuse, and sexual abuse, which together constitute torturous environments.”* It also reported *“cases of riots, protests, self-harm and suicides,”* which show *“the degree of desperation and suffering experienced by people in immigration detention.”* It denounced that the Mexican State intends to hide, and even deny, the reality of these centers.

## CHIAPAS - Civilians “human shield” in the dispute between groups linked to organized crime

In December, the Diocese of San Cristobal in its statement titled *“A Cry for Peace Silenced by Weapons,”* noted that *“in the state of Chiapas we are living in the midst of criminal groups that dispute the territory, putting civil society as a human shield in said dispute, without enforcing the right of the people to security, free transit, peace and others.”* The area most affected by this situation has been the Border.

In November, it was announced that thousands of residents of the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa were forcibly displaced after organized crime groups invaded the region and kidnapped the municipal president, Zoel Lopez Gutierrez, and one of his colleagues. The upsurge in violence in this region in recent months was attributed to the battle between two organized crime organizations that seek to control border territories that are strategic for their businesses.

In January, residents of the munic-



ipality of Chicomuselo, in the Sierra de Chiapas, denounced *“the increase in violence that is occurring without, to date, a response from the state.”* They pointed out a confrontation that occurred on January 4<sup>th</sup> between two organized crime groups in the Nueva Morelia ejido, belonging to the same municipality, which reportedly left at least 20 people dead, including two civilian residents who fell in the cross-fire. The *“Civil Society of the People of Chicomuselo”* affirms that *“we have seen hundreds of families leave Nueva Morelia and neighboring communities for fear that confrontations will continue, since in this area there are large interests such as mining and control of the border,”* they stressed. They questioned: *“why don’t the army, the national guard and the state police act? What are you waiting for to dismantle and disarm these criminal groups that are using people as a human shield?”*

Dozens of families continued to leave their homes in the municipalities of Chicomuselo, La Concordia and Socoltenango in subsequent weeks. The state Civil Protection Secretariat reported that it provides humanitarian aid to displaced residents, although it did not recognize this status, but rather considers them as *“people in a*

*vulnerable situation.”* AMLO asked the residents of these communities to stay in their places of origin and to place their confidence in the National Guard to confront crime groups. He declared that *“the National Guard is to protect the people, it is not infiltrated by crime, they should be trusted. And if they do not want the Guard to be there, it is because they are protecting criminals.”* The Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) estimates that at least 2,300 people have been forcibly displaced from more than 30 communities in this episode.

In January, called on by the Believing People (Pueblo Creyente), thousands of parishioners from the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas made a pilgrimage to San Cristobal, a setting in which they denounced drug violence and other forms of injustice they experience. The auxiliary bishop, Luis Manuel Lopez Alfaro, stressed that the construction of peace is *“an urgent task in the face of the shadow of death that is covering our state of Chiapas, and that in recent days has become darker along the entire border with Guatemala”.* *“This darkness has been generated by criminal groups that fight to see who will control the border with Central America, in their fight they*

Migrant Caravan in Mexico  
© AP Archive





Beginning of  
the Jubilee Year,  
November 2023  
© SIPAZ

*have passed over the communities; they have forced them to align themselves with them or have to leave their place, losing everything they have worked for during their lives. (...) this has brought pain, suffering, extortion, death, missing persons, displaced communities, communities without free movement, decimated communities.” Referring to the response from the authorities, he*

*said that “it is not possible to continue denying reality and say that nothing is happening in Chiapas, everything is happening here and we cannot remain silent or be indifferent in the face of so much pain, frustration, helplessness when we see ourselves invaded and governed by those who use weapons and violence. We see the increase in militarization, but we do not see results.”*

30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Zapatista  
armed uprising  
© SIPAZ



## EZLN: 30 years after the armed uprising

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was celebrated from December 30<sup>th</sup> to January 2<sup>nd</sup> at the caracol “Resistencia y Rebeldía: A Nuevo Horizonte” in Dolores Hidalgo, municipality of Ocosingo. Thousands of attendees, including groups and organizations, both national and international, media, militia and support bases, participated in the celebration in which cultural days were held through which they recreated the history of their autonomy, the violence of the current context and criticism of the system and “bad government” (see Article).

In January, more than 40 members of the Ocosingo Regional Coffee Growers Organization (ORCAO) forcibly displaced 28 Support Bases of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (BAEZLN) in the La Resistencia community, Moises y Gandhi region, municipality of Ocosingo. They destroyed the Autonomous Primary School, burned homes, stole property and stripped the community of animals, tools and food. In February, members of ORCAO attacked the Moises y Gandhi community again. According to the National Network of Civil Human Rights Organizations “All Rights for All” (Red TDT), they fired a series of approximately 100 shots with heavy-caliber weapons. Red TDT asked that “respect for the territory of the BAEZLN, its free determination and autonomy, as well as a life free of violence be guaranteed. An immediate and diligent investigation be carried out to generate a route where ending this climate of violence is prioritized.”

## OAXACA - “Between the PRI and MORENA: Setbacks, Impunity and Simulation”

In December, a group of civil organizations, defenders and journalists presented shadow report in Oaxaca prepared within the framework of the UPR about the human rights situation

in the state. This report covers the period 2018-2023 and was titled *“Between the PRI and MORENA: Setbacks, Impunity and Simulation.”* *“Despite the fact that there was a political alternation at the federal and state level between the PRI and MORENA, in Oaxaca the violations of human rights have deepened, coupled with the fact that setbacks, simulation, omission, negligence, corruption and lack of autonomy of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers,”* the organizations stated. They also stated that *“the lack of political will has been the main obstacle to facing the serious situation that the state is going through. ‘Peace’ is just a government narrative and part of the simulation.”*

The last few months have been marked by cases of criminalization and persecution of human rights defenders, mainly in the Tehuantepec Isthmus. In January, a group of citizens and community members made up of the Mixtequillense Civil Resistance installed a two-day road block on the La Ventosa-Mixtequilla highway to demand information and transparency regarding the industrial park called *“Polo de Bienestar”* that the federal government intends to install in the municipality of Mixtequilla. After an assembly agreement, residents of Santa María Mixtequilla also expelled elements of the Navy Secretariat from their lands and burned the camp of the Tehuantepec Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor for not having been informed of the damage that the project may cause. Subsequently, a police operation was carried out made up of elements of the National Guard and the ministerial police that sought to comply with ten searches and nine arrest warrants for the alleged theft of a municipal patrol car. Relatives of the detainees (seven men and two women) reported that the arrests were violent, including the use of sexual violence and threats inside the homes.

In February, David Hernandez Salazar was sentenced to 46 years and six months in prison, a fine of \$182,818 and a payment for damages in the amount of \$1,000,001,500, for opposing the construction of an industrial



park in the Interoceanic Corridor. The indigenous Binniza defender has been criminalized since 2017 for his fight to defend the Pitayal Common Use Lands, Puente Madera, for which he faces three judicial proceedings. Social organizations from the Tehuantepec Isthmus repudiated the sentence and demanded its revocation when *“these sanctions are a clear example of criminalization and persecution for his work as Defender of Territory, Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples.”*

Gender violence is another constant concern. In February, 13 cases of murders of women were recorded since the beginning of the year. This brings the total to 122 crimes against women in the administration of Governor Salomon Jara. The Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP) notifies that, in 2023, 38 investigations were initiated for the crime of femicide in Oaxaca, which places the state in sixth place nationally last year. For its part, GES Mujer recorded 95 violent deaths of women in 2023, most of these occurring in the Isthmus and the Mixteca.

## **GUERRERO - “The Truth Dressed in Olive Green”**

In January, La Montaña Tlachinolán Mountain Human Rights Center presented its XXIX report titled *“The Truth Dressed in Olive Green,”* in which it stressed that *“at this end of the six-year term, the President of the Republic, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, positioned the Army as the main security body that has a legal framework, contrary to international recommendations. It has a large federal budget and enjoys multiple prerogatives with the new functions assigned to it by presidential decree. The armed institute is the Secretariat that has the greatest recognition, support and protection from the President of the Republic, to the extent that he has become its spokesperson and defender at all costs. He insists on exonerating them of crimes against humanity and at all times separates them from their involvement in the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students.”*

On another note, Tlachinolán stressed that *“the authorities of Guerrero have succumbed to organized crime. Although Governor Evelyn Salgado Pinda has the full support of the President of the Republic, there are no*

David Hernández  
Salazar  
© Frontline Defenders





Presentation of the report "The Truth Dressed in Olive Green"  
© Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre

tangible results, two years into her administration. The presence of the National Guard is far from being a shield for the population that is defenseless in the face of the growing power of criminal groups. Violence has broken out in the main tourist cities and in Chilpancingo. In the eight regions, extremely serious cases have been recorded that show the weaknesses of a security model designed by military commanders who have subordinated civil authorities." Given this, "the aggrieved population has been left on the sidelines, the victims are mocked and the families' cry for justice is not heard. There is a distancing between the state author-

ities and the multiplicity of civil society players who do not find an effective dialogue to present their demands and proposals."

Another aspect of concern addressed by the report has to do with the fact that "governments, instead of triggering development with the participation of communities that have known how to care for and respect nature, have implemented an extractivist model based on the predatory exploitation of forests, in the plundering of natural wealth, the destruction of habitat with open-pit mining and the decapitalization of the countryside."

In this framework, the vulnerable situation of human rights defenders and communicators continues to be critical. In November, armed men shot four reporters in Chilpancingo. Three were injured. The previous week, criminals kidnapped three journalists in Taxco, as well as their relatives. After a few days they were released,

but they kept the son of one of them captive. "Violence against journalists has increased exponentially during the electoral period," stated Article 19. It urged the authorities to combat impunity: "It is impossible to maintain protection mechanisms for journalists in perpetuity while investigations into threats and attacks do not advance, an effective strategy is necessary that gives results and detiers the perpetrators of threats and crimes against the press." In February, searcher Noe Sandoval Adame, a member of the María Herrera Family Search Collective, was shot to death in Zumpango, who was searching for his son Kevin Sandoval

Mesa, 16, who disappeared on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The crime was condemned by groups and organizations that constitute the National Search Brigade who demanded investigation and justice for Noe and his family ■

### COLLABORATE ECONOMICALLY WITH SIPAZ

Your donations make it possible for SIPAZ to continue offering international observation and presence in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero.  
**We need your help!**

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## Southern Border and Sierra trapped in the middle of relentless terror



© Chiapas Paralelo

“When these people arrived and later, when the blockade was in place, there was silence in the community, neither cell phones nor modular phones were ringing, the only thing that could be heard, it even sounded sad, was the singing of the birds, the chickens, that normal noise of nature...”

### A cry of demand and a call to action

Civil society organizations in Chiapas joined their voices to highlight and demand that the situation of violence that has been experienced since 2021 in the border and mountain region of the state be recognized and addressed, which, in the report *“Siege on Everyday Life, Terror for the Control of Territory and Serious Violations of Human Rights”* they classify as a non-international armed conflict and urge the authorities to deal with it as such.

This report briefly reviews the beginnings of the conflict and how it has been increasing, recounts the control strategies exercised by the groups in dispute, collects testimonies from inhabitants of the area and the human rights violations that they experience every day, it points out the control and collusion of state authorities and institutions

with organized crime and finally makes some recommendations to the state regarding the recognition of the seriousness of the situation and some strategies for caring for the vulnerable population.

“The border of Chiapas with Guatemala is marked by an unrecognized armed conflict based on the territorial dispute of organized crime structures for the control of goods, services, people, legal and illegal products, as well as the life itself of the local population (...).”

The municipalities of La Trinitaria, Frontera Comalapa, Chicomuselo, Siltepec, Honduras de la Sierra, Motozintla, Mazapa de Madero, El Porvenir, La Grandeza, Bejucal de Ocampo, Amatenango de la Frontera and Bellavista are so far the main ones affected by the dispute.

“Serious violations of human rights and international law affect both the local population and defenders of human rights and territory, for whom the risks of exercising freedom of expression and their defense actions are very high.”



Displaced people in  
Frontera Comalapa  
© Hola News

The report also points out that the conflict zone has become a silenced zone in which no one can talk and no one talks about it anyway. Hence also the relevance of the report and why we will dedicate this Focus section to it.

### Escalation, diversification and continuation of violence

It is no secret to anyone that Chiapas is a territory rich in natural resources and that, furthermore, it is located in a strategic geographical area. It is the gateway for everything coming from South and Central America on its way north, mainly to the United States. This, as the report points out, makes it a fundamental point for the *“control and promotion of both legal and illegal economies.”*

• *“The entire Chiapas territorial extension is structured by routes that are used for the transport of all types of merchandise, drugs, weapons and illegal livestock to the trafficking of people in international mobility. Since 1998, the jungle area on its border with Guatemala was considered by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as a key corridor.”*

All of the above explains the interest of the different organized crime groups in maintaining control of the area.

• *“These groups operate at the territorial level through complex criminal structures made up of cartel members, local operators and state authorities at dif-*

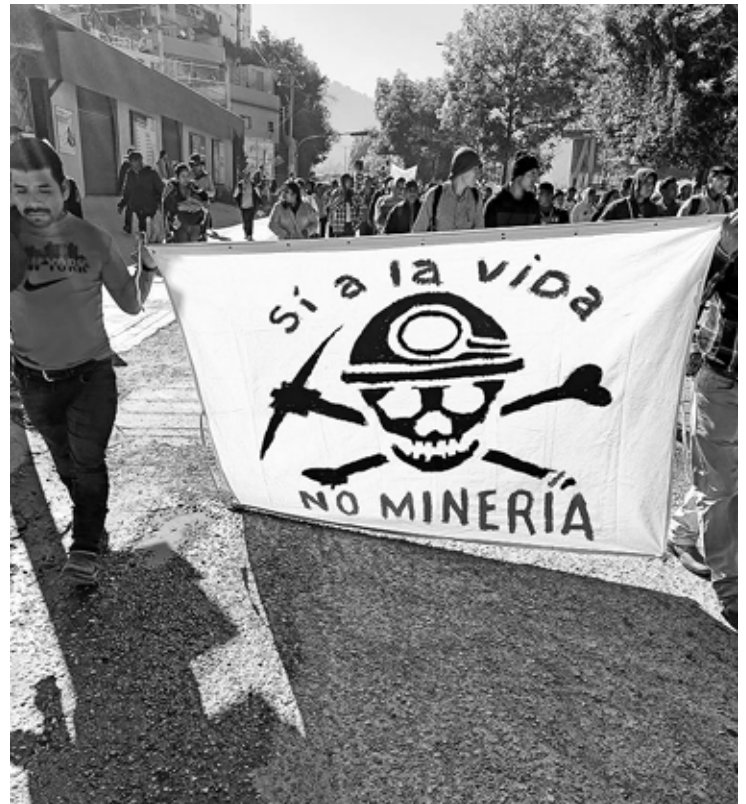
• *ferent levels, establishing criminal governance that goes beyond illicit businesses.”*

As noted previously, this context of violence has worsened since the second half of 2021 when Gilberto Rivera, alias *“El Junior”*, who was the son of one of the operators of an organized crime group that until that time maintained control in the state, was murdered. This murder was claimed by an antagonistic criminal group and since then, from Frontera Comalapa, passing through Teopisca, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Pantelho and up to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, confrontations, executions and turf wars have multiplied, with the border area being the most affected. By 2022, there was a very significant increase in disappearances and displacements in the area. Furthermore, the deployment of surveillance drones and road blockades by armed men or by the same population that is coerced by organized crime groups have become part of everyday life.

• *“We find ourselves in a state of siege as we have reported on other occasions, the town is under siege by organized crime, we cannot move freely, leaving home means leaving with fear of what may happen to us when passing through their checkpoints, searches, harassment and intimidation in all its forms.”*

The year 2023 was no different, as mentioned in the report, it had *“two significant peaks in violence”* in the Border-Sierra region. One was the so-called *“Four Day War”* that took





place in the Nueva Independencia or Lajerio community in the month of May, where organized crime groups clashed relentlessly, also impacting neighboring communities and causing the forced displacement of at least 3,500 people. In September, there were different events in the municipalities of Motozintla, Frontera Comalapa, La Grandeza and Siltepec, where clashes, burning of trailers, deployment of armored vehicles adapted for combat commanded by heavily armed groups that settled in the region were reported on a par with the Armed Forces and National Guard.

Although some critical moments of violence stand out, it is important to note that this is a constant, the reality is that the population of the Border-Sierra region has not had a break since the dispute began.

“(...) the violation of the right to life has become daily in the midst of an official position that minimizes or denies violence and remains indifferent to the worsening of the situation.”

## Living under fire, fear and anxiety

The lives of people in the Border-Sierra region have been disrupted by the violence and control exercised by organized crime groups. Their reality has been transformed rapidly and the consequences are felt. Living day to day in anxiety, in fear, wondering if it is time to leave everything behind, where to go or is it possible to hold on a little longer and wait for something to happen that will return peace to

their territories, this is how they live. now in that region.

“There are about 20 families who could no longer leave (to seek shelter) (...) I have a niece who endured hunger alone for six days, after six days I went to take her out of her house and she was in great panic. She came out jumping, looking around her and asked me if the men weren't there, I told her no. In the middle of this there also comes a myth that they were recruiting men and more young people. They went to sleep in the mountains, pastures, mountains, caves. A lot of people ran away because of that.” This is one of the many testimonies that the report includes and that shows how difficult life is in the disputed areas.

In addition to living in fear and with the uncertainty of not knowing what's next, mistrust has also settled into the population's feelings. It is difficult to know who you can talk to without later being a victim of retaliation. As noted in the report, “this state of mistrust results in the fragmentation of community ties by distrusting one's own neighbors, even one's own family, which also causes important psycho-social impacts, mainly stress and paranoia.”

Another form of control exercised by organized crime groups has been to seize arable lands and prevent them from being worked, which has caused many families to be left without a livelihood, since their crops have been lost. There is no way to produce even for their own consumption. In addition to this, in the blockades set up and guarded by armed men, they carry out inspections and prohibit the

**Left:**  
Pilgrimage of Pueblo  
Creyente of the  
Diocese of San  
Cristóbal de las  
Casas, January 2024  
© SIPAZ

**Right:**  
“Yes to Life, No to  
Mining”, Pilgrimage  
of Pueblo Creyente,  
January 2024  
© SIPAZ



Presentation of the report in Mexico City  
© Red Tdt

passage of any type of merchandise, this translates into a shortage of food and basic products.

*"(...) I was watering my cornfield when I saw these people about two hundred meters away pointing a gun at me. I wanted to talk to them, but one raised his hand stopping me while still pointing at me. 'What the hell are you doing here?' 'I came to water my corn,' I said. 'Don't come here anymore, if you see us here, don't come, come when we're not here, go home!' I spent the day at home, folding my hands because I couldn't go to work anymore (...) I would go and if I saw them I would return home, if not, I would stay for a while, but I would hear the truck, turn everything off and go back home. I didn't know what to do."*

*"In the municipalities of Motozintla, El Porvenir, La Grandeza, Siltepec, Mazapa de Madero, Bellavista, Amatenango de la Frontera, Bejuclal de Ocampo and Honduras de la Sierra, thousands of farmers have abandoned their crops due to violence."*

In this way, organized crime groups have been taking control of the territory and the population, sometimes with the use of violence that sometimes goes beyond words and, at other times, with actions that try to soften and normalize their presence in the region. In some communities, groups have come to present themselves as the "good guy" who has come to free them from the "bad guy." This is how they have inserted themselves into daily life, co-opting violently or not ("it should be noted that the patience of the groups in the face of community resistance is very little and if co-option is not achieved, the consequences are very serious: physical

attacks, disappearances, exemplary murders, dispossession, among others...") to social organizations, young people and diverse populations.

*"This narrative manipulation of the conflict increases the degree of tolerance towards violence, until it is normalized."*

Another mechanism used by criminal groups in this war for territorial control is that, to prevent the advance of the antagonistic group, they dig ditches that keep towns and communities isolated, fenced, which represents a further impact on going about one's life, as it prevents free mobility and with this a countless number of daily activities are truncated.

*"Classes at the basic and high school levels were suspended and health centers closed due to the risk that moving around the region entails for staff."*

But the control exercised by these players doesn't stop there, another form that has been documented over the last few months is the economic aspect. In the report, it is mentioned that "in the border conflict, a set of economic strategies are deployed that organized crime develops both to strengthen control over the territory and to remedy the operational expenses involved in the dispute. This economy of conflict includes extortion, protection money, and kidnappings, but also the control of prices of agricultural products, income and other transactions of the local population. In addition to the confiscation of properties ranging from houses to crops and livestock."

*"A vendor from the community stood up one day and publicly complained that the sale of corn was free and that they had the right to sell to whoever they wanted... the next day they handed over his body... it was a huge trauma..."*

It is known that groups make use of "borrowed names", which has great legal implications as well as risks of being considered by the antagonistic group as part of the "enemy", which can result in persecution, disappearance and murder, punishments that also occur in case of refusing to do so.

To all of the above, we add the exploitation and control of natural assets and resources such as water and mines found in said territory. The sexual exploitation of women and girls is also a constant, it is known that both women in international mobility situations and women belonging to local communities are victims of temporary forced disappearances and sexually exploited in canteens, brothels and



houses occupied by criminal groups.

• *"The psycho-emotional consequences generated by living in the midst of this context are notorious: fear and despair reign, collective hysteria suddenly arises due to rumors, and mental health problems are aggravated by constant worry, helplessness and frustration."*

## Burying its head in the sand

The situation in which thousands of people now live in the Border-Sierra region has been repeatedly denied by the Mexican government, mainly by the President, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, and by the governor of Chiapas, Rutilio Escandon Cadena.

When Lopez Obrador has been questioned about the violence in Chiapas, he generally responds that it is not the case, that in Chiapas all is calm. In recent statements he has mentioned that, yes, there is displacement, but the number of displaced people (which currently exceeds 10,000 people) is not significant and that they would soon return to their homes. Taking into account what is documented and the testimonies collected in the report, it is evident that there are no conditions for this to happen. Even in his most recent statements after the public presentation of the report, AMLO maintained that his government has met its promises in the Southeast, that Chiapas is well below the national average in intentional homicides and even that non-governmental and civil society organizations present in Chiapas were stuck with the idea of confrontation from the time of the Zapatista uprising and that clarifying lies takes a long time, that surely everything was due to a media campaign against MORENA now that the electoral campaigns are about to begin.

This refusal only aggravates the situation, since there is no will to implement actions that put a stop to violence and control by organized crime.

*"One of the State's responses to the armed conflict has been the deployment of elements of the armed forces throughout the entire border territory (...) militarization has been a frequent strategy in Chiapas directly linked to crimes against humanity, to the creation of paramilitary groups and the accelerated deterioration of security,"* the report states. Added to this is corruption at all levels of government and armed forces, which culminates in links with criminal groups and the creation of silenced zones, it also states.

• *"(...) organized crime interacts with government officials forming criminal structures that intervene and aggravate tensions and conflict over territorial control. Such is the degree of insertion into government structures that in some municipal seats it has been reported that the entire city council is within criminal structures and that they are at their service."*

The widespread situation of violence brings with it a serious deterioration of society, the systematic violation of human rights, *"basic rights such as peace, life, dignity and personal integrity are put at risk and violated."*

## Solidarity and union in the face of silence and emergency

In different municipalities of Chiapas, including those hardest hit by this wave of violence, thousands of people have gathered in numerous pilgrimages and marches to demand peace.

Likewise, both the Diocese of San Cristobal and civil society organizations have spoken out to highlight that *"the civilian population was taken hostage, used as a shield, forced to participate in mobilizations, blockades and confrontations in favor of one of the sides in conflict. Basic supplies such as food, gasoline, gas, electricity and telephone company services were cut off, keeping the population in suspense and anxiety, incommunicado, with food shortages and even with the impossibility of moving for fear of reprisals."*

Also, after the latest clashes that have caused the forced displacement of thousands of people, both the population, churches and civil society organizations have organized to collect and deliver food, clothing and basic necessities.

The latest effort made to highlight the violence and the effects that it entails on the population is the report cited throughout this article, which culminates with a series of recommendations to the Mexican state and the international community, which are focused on the recognition and visibility of the conflict, the protection of the civilian population, guaranteeing the population access to their rights and investigation and access to justice for the victims ■





## 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising

Photos:  
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**A**fter much speculation and rumors, the official invitation to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armed uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was finally published on December 24<sup>th</sup>, after a series of 20 communiqués that explain its reading of the moment and the strategic option of the movement for the future. The invitation, however, was accompanied by a warning regarding the risks of participating due to the current insecurity situation in Chiapas.

For those who chose to participate despite this, the anniversary cele-

bration took place in Caracol Dolores Hidalgo, municipality of Ocosingo, between December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024.

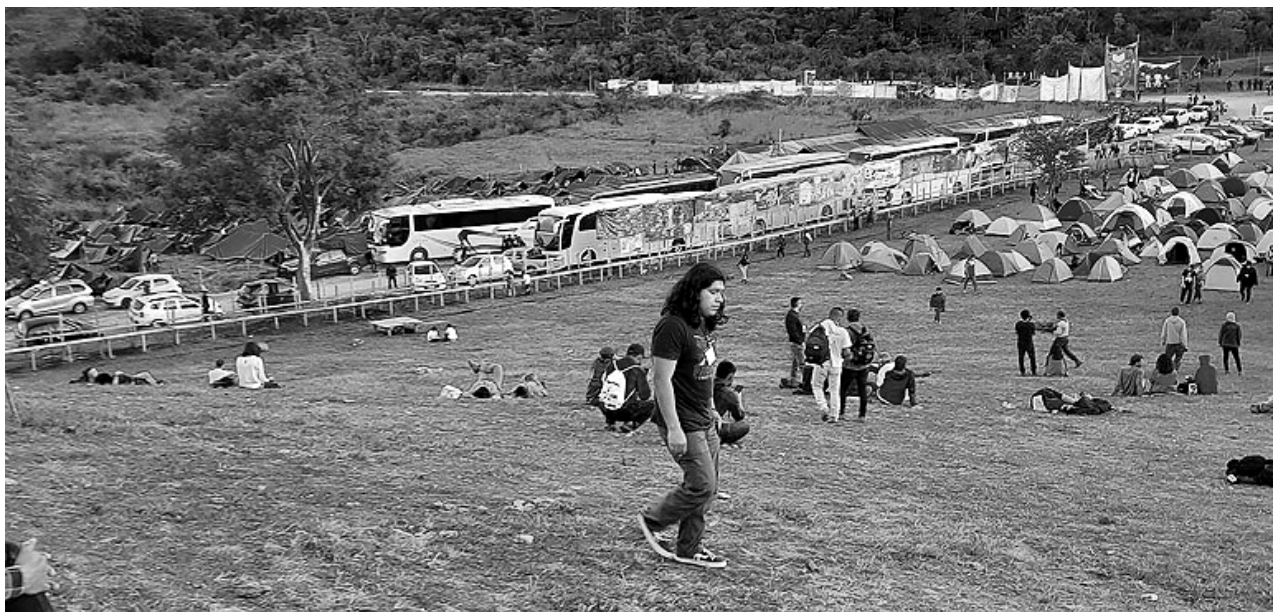
Of the 5,000 to 6,000 people who participated, the vast majority were Support Bases and militia. Others came from further afield, including 20 countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Slovenia and Iran.

Each of the 12 Caracoles or Zapatista regions performed a work. The topics addressed included life on the farms, where their grandparents had to serve in a situation of semi-slavery, the Mayan Train and its effects, and

the new structures of the movement that were presented at the end of 2023.

In the communiqués read on December 31<sup>st</sup>, Subcommander Moises once again presented the new structure of the movement, whose commitment is to “*invert the pyramid*.” He also spoke of the “*Common*”, lands that belong to no one and, therefore, belong to everyone. Only what is grown in the ground belongs to the person who planted it. “*We will defend ourselves*,” added Subcommander Moises ■





## INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

### CHIAPAS

#### NOVEMBER

- We participated in the quarterly Assembly of the Pueblo Creyente of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- We were present at the Action Day *"Needles and Threads for Freedom"*, organized by several organizations and groups *"in solidarity with the political prisoners of Chiapas, victims of the fabrication of culprits and hostages of the Mexican State."*
- On November 25, we were present at the demonstration organized by members of the Diocesan Coordination of Women (CODIMUJ) in San Cristobal de Las Casas. This march was called in commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Women.
- We were present at the event organized within the framework of the tenth anniversary of the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE), which took place in Patria Nueva, municipality of Ocosingo.
- We accompanied the delegation of the *"Mexico-European Union Platform for Peace and Human Rights"* (of which we are part), during their tour through different states of Mexico (Morelos, Tlaxcala, Puebla and Chiapas), as part of your visit to San Cristobal de Las Casas.

#### DECEMBER

- We were present at the inauguration of Murals for Peace, which took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas, an activity organized by Melel Xojobal and the platform for Peace in Chiapas Slamalil Kinal.
- On December 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, we attended the different activities that were organized within the framework of the commemoration of the 25 years of the Acteal massacre.
- Ending 2023 and beginning 2024, we attended the events that took place in Dolores Hidalgo, municipality of Ocosingo, within the framework of the 30th anniversary of the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

#### JANUARY

- On two occasions, we visited displaced people from the Sierra area who are taking refuge in shelters in Comitán, Tzitol

and Socoltenango.

- On January 25<sup>th</sup>, we accompanied the pilgrimage of thousands of people called by Pueblo Creyente that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas, a setting in which parishioners from the parishes that make up the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas denounced drug violence and other forms of injustice they experience, and made a new call for the construction of peace in the state.
- We participated in the Theological Meeting for Peace that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

#### FEBRUARY

- In Mexico City, during the month of February, the presentation of the report titled *"Siege on Daily Life, Terror for the Control of Territory and Serious Violations of Human Rights"* took place. This report was prepared in collaboration between various groups and civil society organizations, in whose documentation process SIPAZ provided its support.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In November, we participated in the 11th High Level Dialogue between Mexico and the European Union on Human Rights.
- In November, the more than 300 national and international organizations that make up the EPUMX Collective presented shadow reports with recommendations for the Mexican State.
- In January, we met with members of the United States Embassy in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

## EDUCATION FOR PEACE

#### NOVEMBER

- We facilitated the session on Active Non-Violence (NOVA), part of the Diploma on Positive Conflict Transformation, convened by the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO).

#### DECEMBER

- We facilitated a workshop with the daughters of artisan women who partic-

ipate in the Mujeres de Malz collective from several municipalities in the Highlands and the Northern Jungle.

#### JANUARY

- We held a work session framed in the strategic planning process of Economic and Social Development (DESMI A.C.).
  - 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.
  - We held a workshop on risk analysis and protection measures with the pastoral team of the Guadalupe Mission, which is based in Comitán and covers seven municipalities.
- #### FEBRUARY
- We held a new work session framed in the DESMI strategic planning process.
  - We facilitate the session on Peace Building, part of CORECO's Positive Conflict Transformation diploma.
  - We facilitated an analysis with parishioners belonging to the Independencia parish.

## INTERNAL TRAINING

- In December, we participated in a workshop on Peacebuilding facilitated by the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP) that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas

## NETWORKING

- With a minimum monthly frequency, we attend plenary meetings and commissions of the Peace Organization in Chiapas, Slamalil Kinal. In November, said platform convened a meeting of civil organizations, journalists and academics that had the participation of 80 people and whose purpose was to share analysis and strategic reflections for the construction of peace.
- On a bimonthly basis, we attend operational meetings of the People's Movement for Peace and Justice (MPPI).
- 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.

- We participated in the preparation and implementation of a Civil Observation Mission coordinated by the Mexico-European Union Platform for Peace and Human Rights, which visited several states in Mexico.
- In January, we participated in a meeting of partners who collaborate with the German cooperation project Welthaus.
- In January, we participated in virtual meetings of the partners of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC).
- In January, we participated in a security analysis space in San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was attended by several civil organizations with a presence in this city

