



# SIPaz



March of mothers searching their missing family members, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, May 2025  
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**SIPAZ** is an international observation program created in 1995, after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to monitor the conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

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

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

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### **The SIPAZ International Team in Chiapas :**

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

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

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



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### **International Coalition**

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**Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men's Institutes**

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**FOR Austria** (Austria)

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**Franciscan National Justice, Peace and Ecology Council**

(Washington DC, USA)

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**JustaPaz** (Bogotá, Colombia)

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**Leadership Conference of Women Religious** (Washington, DC, USA)

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# Mexico Faces Multiple Human Rights Challenges amid Global Instability

The relationship between Mexico and the United States has historically been complex, with strong aspects of cooperation and interdependence, but also with trade tensions and sovereignty disputes that have been particularly significant since Donald Trump returned to the presidency in January, 2025 ▀

In February, the Mexican Senate approved a constitutional reform seeking to strengthen the principles of non-intervention and non-interference. The proposal was submitted by President Claudia Sheinbaum after the Trump administration designated the Mexican cartels of Sinaloa, Jalisco New Generation, the Gulf Cartel, the Northeast Cartel, Nueva Familia Michoacana, and the United Cartels as terrorist organizations, raising concerns about possible intervention by US agents on Mexican soil. It was stipulated that “interventions, interferences, or any act from abroad” will not be accepted, particularly “coups d’état, interference in elections, or the violation of Mexican territory, whether by land, water, sea, or airspace.”

Another key point of the reform is the toughening of penalties for arms trafficking. It establishes that any person—national or foreign—involved in the illegal manufacture, distribution, transfer, or introduction of weapons into Mexican territory will receive the harshest possible sentence and face pretrial detention. Given that more than 70% of the weapons used by Mexican cartels come from the United States, the measure appears to be primarily aimed at citizens of that country.

## Judicial Branch Election Campaigns Begin

Judicial election campaigns began on March 30<sup>th</sup> and will culminate on June 1<sup>st</sup>, when nearly 100 million voters will have the opportunity to elect 881 positions in the federal judiciary from among 3,422 candidates. This is the result of the constitutional reform enacted in September by then-President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024). In response, President Claudia Sheinbaum declared that “Mexico will be the most democratic country in the world” because it will vote for all three branches of government. However, the opposition and several national and international human rights defense mechanisms have warned of the risks this change will entail, particularly the potential interference of the Executive Branch and organized crime in the Mexican justice system. Two weeks after the campaigns began, the organization Defensorxs, on its website “Justice in Sight” (Justicia en la mira), identified at least a dozen candidates accused of having ties to drug trafficking, sexual offenses, murder, or participation in political-religious sects. It also documented that various campaign strategies are based on the cultural and symbolic appropriation of Indigenous peoples. For its part, the

**El pueblo elegirá a MINISTROS, MAGISTRADOS Y JUECES**

La reforma propone:  
**Elección extraordinaria EN 2025**

**SE PROPONDRÁN 30 perfiles** para que el pueblo vote

- Ejecutivo: 10
- Legislativo: 10
- Judicial: 10

**1,633 MAGISTRADOS Y JUECES** serán electos en su circuito judicial

**El Senado verificará CUMPLIMIENTO DE PERFILES**

**INEC realizará la elección**

**60 días de campaña**  
Sin financiamiento privado ni público  
No participan partidos políticos

**TRIFE resolverá impugnaciones** (excepto en su proceso)

**Más justicia, democracia y austeridad**

28 de junio de 2024

GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO

Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) expressed concern about the judicial election: “We fear that they could fall into the hands of organized crime, of the people who are candidates, that people who are not the most suitable could be elected.”

## The Crisis of Disappearances Continues

In March, demonstrations took place across the country as part of the national mourning for the disappeared after the discovery of the “extermination” center in Teuchitlán, Jalisco. The site, allegedly used by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) to dispose of bodies and train recruits, was initially inspected by the National Guard in 2024, but the investigation was incomplete. The ranch was “rediscovered” on March 5<sup>th</sup> by the Guerreros Buscadores collective of Jalisco following an anonymous tip. Members of the collective found cremation ovens, human remains, and various personal items such as shoes, backpacks, and clothing. A suspected survivor of the Izaguirre ranch revealed that people who did not comply with orders or

Information on  
judicial campaigns  
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© CEMDA

were considered weak were killed.

In the 2024 National Guard operation, ten people were arrested. However, the National Guard members did not see a single one of the 1,300 objects found so far. Evidence shows that the remains were already there at the time of their inspection by the Jalisco Prosecutor's Office. The Attorney General's Office confirmed that the state prosecutor's office committed multiple omissions in its investigation.

Claudia Sheinbaum reacted to the case by urging caution before drawing conclusions. She was criticized for downplaying the number of disappearances and for pursuing an approach that marginalizes groups of mothers of the disappeared. Her strategy appears to seek to prevent the case from becoming a major political scandal, similar to that of Ayotzinapa, and to minimize the government's responsibility for the disappearance crisis.

In April, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) activated Article 34 of the Convention against Enforced Disappearances for the first time in history, requesting urgent information from Mexico and opening the door to intervention by the UN General Assembly. The article states that "if the Committee receives information that, in its opinion, contains well-founded indications that enforced disappearance is practiced on a widespread or systematic basis in

the territory under the jurisdiction of a State Party, and after having requested all relevant information on this situation from the State Party concerned, it may bring the matter urgently to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly." Olivier de Frouville, president of the Committee, emphasized that Mexico is in a "worrying situation" and, consequently, it was deemed necessary to take precautionary measures.

Sheinbaum denied the existence of enforced disappearances from the State and identified disappearances as a phenomenon related to organized crime, while the government is doing everything possible to combat it. The president of the Senate's Board of Directors, Gerardo Fernández Noroña, also criticized the president of the UN Committee and announced that they will demand sanctions against the official.

The following day, relatives of missing persons and search groups symbolically closed the Senate headquarters in Mexico City. "Closed due to lack of commitment to the families of missing persons" or "Denying and Hiding is Disappearing 127,000+ Missing" could be read on the vinyl signs hanging on the fences surrounding the Senate. They also reported that family members searching for their loved ones have also become targets of threats and attacks, with at least

27 people murdered since 2010. Three more searchers are missing.

## Human Rights Defenders and Journalists: Sectors at Risk

In April, Article 19 presented the report "Information Barriers: Challenges to Freedom of Expression and Access to Information," which exposes the main obstacles facing Mexico in terms of freedom of expression, access to information, and violence against the press. It documented that 639 attacks against the press were recorded in 2024, including five murdered journalists. It reported that this number represents a 13.9% increase compared to 2023 and is equivalent to one attack every 14 hours. It lamented that, despite the seriousness of the situation, "last year the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Committed against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) only received 84 investigations." The organization also warned about the rise of judicial harassment as a method of censorship. The Mexican state remained the main aggressor (44.91% of the total).

In April, the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA) presented its eleventh Report on the Situation of Individuals and Communities Defending Environmental Human Rights in Mexico, reporting that 25 environmental and territorial defenders were murdered in 2024. Forty-five percent were Indigenous peoples. During the last five years of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration and the first three months of Claudia Sheinbaum's, from 2020 to 2024, 1,428 attacks on environmental defenders were recorded, including 189 homicides. The report also documents the increasing involvement of authorities as perpetrators of these attacks. The states with the highest rates of violence were Oaxaca, Mexico City, and Chiapas.

## CHIAPAS: “We have built peace, now we are moving towards development and progress,” ERA

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, in Tapachula, the government report for the first 100 days of Eduardo Ramírez Aguilar’s (ERA) administration was held, titled “100 Days of Living in Peace.” During his speech, he highlighted the issues of security and megaprojects. Regarding security, he stated that Chiapas is the second safest state in the country and that the President of the Republic even recognized the security strategy implemented and invited him to a meeting with other governors to discuss ways to replicate this model. Businesspeople and producers in Chiapas stated that they had noticed “a change in the first few days; there were operations and increased surveillance, but crime is still there. As long as that happens, the economy will remain stagnant.”

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba), in the framework of its 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary, declared: “It is important to insist that there will be no peace until armed groups linked to organized crime, linked to power groups that have been rooted for decades in the state of Chiapas, are dismantled, prosecuted, and disarmed. (...) Peace is not a pause or respite with fewer confrontations; it is about building processes of justice.”

### Among ERA’s priority economic projects: the San Cristóbal-Palenque Highway

In February, in Bachajón, Chilón municipality, Governor Eduardo Ramírez Aguilar participated in the Public Consultation for the construction of the Palenque-Ocosingo Highway, a project that was approved “unanimously” by the ejidos present.

Later, the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE), made up of Tseltal, Tsotsil, and Chol people from 13 municipalities in the Highlands and Jungle regions of Chiapas, expressed their opposition to the highway: “We do not want any



more destruction of Mother Earth and our culture. Today we are once again demonstrating against a project that seeks to strip us of our territories rich in water, trees, and vast natural resources. A project that hides the same old story: colonialism, racism, and favoring the interests of large transnational corporations, extractive companies, drug traffickers, and the government.”

For its part, the community government of Chilón reported that “some communities have received threats from engineers taking soil samples, warning that if they do not allow it, they will be accompanied the next time” by agents of the Pakal Immediate Reaction Force (FRIP), “thus generating fear and dread in the population.” It also stated that the project “has been rife with irregularities and violations of our rights as indigenous peoples, as they have conducted soil studies without our consent and without prior information about why and for what purpose it will be used.” It added that “some of the community authorities, who are the voice of the people, are actually making their own decisions without consulting the communities, and they are not submitting reports on the highway construction process, thereby violating the internal regulations of our ejidos.” It clarified that “we are not against progress; as Indigenous peoples, we under-

stand and believe in *lekil kuxlejal* (good living), which is not possible by trampling on us, destroying and dispossessing us of our territory.”

In March, a public consultation called “The Highway is Ours, the Route of the Maya Cultures” was organized by the government in the municipalities of Palenque, Ocosingo, Chilón, Salto de Agua, and Tumbalá. Authorities reported that, with more than 39,000 votes in favor, the construction of the first section of the San Cristóbal-Palenque Highway was approved. It is important to emphasize that this was a public and not an Indigenous consultation, with the requirements that this entailed.

In response, members of MODEVITE and the Community Government of the municipality of Chilón expressed their rejection of the project, as well as of the popular consultations. They reported that they filed two injunctions due to legal loopholes in the right to consultation and the lack of public information about the project itself. They pointed out that the communities that will be directly affected by the highway were not consulted, and that the majority of those who voted were residents of the municipal capitals.

Press conference of MODEVITE and the community government of Chilón, San Cristóbal de las Casas, April 2025  
© SIPAZ





Zapatista gathering of art, rebellion and resistance, April 2025  
© SIPAZ

## Pilgrimages, Complaints, Events, and Other Organizational Efforts

From April 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) hosted a gathering of art, rebellion, and resistance. It began in the Jacinto Canek caracol (the official municipality of Tenejapa) and then at the CIDECI Uni-Tierra facilities in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

More than 1,000 artists from 28 different locations participated, presenting various art forms such as dance, singing, circus, and crafts, among others. At the closing event, Sub-commander Moisés denounced the presence of agents from the National Guard and the Pakal Immediate Reaction Force (FRIP) outside the CIDECI Uni-Tierra facilities.

In May, after several national and international mobilizations, two EZLN support bases, José Baldemar Sántiz Sántiz and Andrés Manuel Sántiz Gómez, were released. They had been detained on April 24<sup>th</sup> in the municipality of Aldama. The EZLN published: *"This achievement of the release of our two innocent compañeros was the result of a triple effort: that of human rights defenders, that of national*

*and international solidarity and support, and that of the autonomous justice system."*

In April, both the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS) and the Community Feminist Pronouncement denounced the femicide of two Tsotsil women, ages 14 and 18, whose bodies were found in San Juan Chamula. They affirmed that it was a femicide and categorically rejected the position of the State Attorney General's Office, which has referred to it as a *"crime of passion."* They considered that these types of classifications revictimize victims and ignore gender-based violence as a structural cause of murder. They reported that, during the first three months of the year, 452 investigation files were reported for crimes against women, including seven homicides, four attempted homicides, four femicides, and four attempted femicides.

In May, as part of the commemoration of the first anniversary of the massacre of 11 people by criminal groups in the Nuevo Morelia ejido in Chicomuselo, a pilgrimage was held with the victims' families and more than a thousand members of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. A statement emphasized: *"We are living through difficult*

*times with great pain, indignation, and helplessness in the face of the reality of the violence we have suffered and continue to be victims of. For many years, we have been denouncing the wave of injustices, violations of our human and collective rights, and the plundering of mining materials, and we have never been heard."* *"Our voices were silenced by weapons, we were forced to act as a human barrier during clashes between criminal groups, we were beaten by those who were supposed to guarantee the security of our people, we were forced to flee our communities to save our lives, we returned, not because there were security conditions guaranteed by the state, but for fear of losing our heritage,"* they added. *"Much has been said about peace having come to our people, but from our faith and our hope, we know that peace is not just a word, but rather springs from justice (...) as the people of Chiapas, we need true peace, which is not synonymous with militarization, a peace where people can be free from violence, threats and intimidation, where the rule of law is restored for each and every one,"* they pointed out.

## OAXACA: One of the States with Most Attacks against Human Rights Defenders

In February, the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI) announced the temporary closure of its offices due to threats and the climate of violence prevailing against its lawyers in the region. This followed the ambush of three people who were murdered on February 13<sup>th</sup> during the agrarian conflict between Santo Domingo Petapa and San Juan Mazatlán Mixe. It also demanded an end to the stigmatization campaigns against their work in defense of human rights.

Likewise, in February, Cristino Castro Perea was murdered in Barra de la Cruz. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) highlighted that since 2023, his collective *"Environmental Defenders of Barra de la Cruz"*

has been a beneficiary of the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. She called on authorities to guarantee the protection of the collective's members, as well as to conduct a prompt and effective investigation. Castro's murder is not the first attack against defenders in the area: in 2021, community leader José Castillo Castro was also attacked; and in 2018, Noel Castillo Aguilar of the Committee for the Defense of Indigenous Rights (CODEDI) was murdered. Both crimes remain unpunished.

In March, Zapotec defender Silvia Pérez Yescas reported multiple attacks and threats by local armed groups. Likewise, the founder of *"Indigenous Women for the Conservation, Research, and Use of Natural Resources"* (CIARENA) reported that the organization remains closed for the same reason.

In April, the bodies of Mixe Indigenous activist Sandra Estefana Domínguez Martínez and her husband, Alexander Hernández Hernández, were found in Veracruz. They had been missing since October 2024, shortly after Sandra reported Oaxaca government officials for gender-based violence against Ayuuk Indigenous women. Following the news, Sandra's relatives and supporting organizations declared, *"After 206 days of anguish, endless nights, and a tireless struggle to demand her return, today with a broken heart, we confirm that we have found Sandra. (...) She will always be recognized as a tireless defender. As an Ayuuk woman, she embraced the defense of her people and all Indigenous women who suffered violence or discrimination."*

Similarly, in April, Emelia Ortiz García, a member of the Unifying Movement of Triqui Struggle (MULT), reported that her home had been raided and evidence of cases of violence, as well as personal belongings, had been stolen. She highlighted that on two other occasions, unknown individuals entered the places where she keeps her belongings, stealing documentation related to cases of murdered or missing members of the MULT.



Also in April, more than 20 national and international organizations demonstrated to demand an end to the harassment and criminalization of 24 members of the Ayuujk and Binizaa communities, who oppose the imposition of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Interoceanic Corridor. *"Given the lack of attention to their demands, they have taken legitimate actions to defend their territories and life projects, which is why today they face unfair judicial processes that seek to silence their resistance,"* they said.

In April, the Second Forum in Defense of Territory and Social Property in Oaxaca was held in Santa María Atzompa, with the participation of representatives from 30 social organizations and 72 communities. They denounced that *"the Second Floor of the Fourth Transformation operates with a double standard. On the one hand, it speaks of development and well-being for the people, when in reality it has only deepened the advance of industrial development for extractive purposes."* They added that *"we are experiencing open-air plunder where legality is combined with the violence of organized crime."*

## **GUERRERO: "Unstoppable Violence, Untouched Impunity"**

Sandra Martínez  
is finally home  
© Consorcio Oaxaca

In April, Marco Antonio Suástegui, leader of the Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to the La Parota Dam (CECOP), was injured after a man shot him in Acapulco. He died a few days later from his injuries.

*"The murder of Marco Antonio Suástegui Muñoz is a disastrous event for the social movement in Guerrero and a wake-up call for the social activists who are in the trenches fighting to defend the rights of the forgotten and persecuted population of our state. This context of violence that engulfs our state and has placed us hostage to crime is a serious indicator of the breakdown of state institutions and the capitulation of authorities who have lowered their guard to uphold the rule of law,"* stated the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center in the bulletin *"Unstoppable Violence, Untouched Impunity."* Shortly after, Samantha Valeria Colón Morales, wife of the disappeared activist Vicente Suástegui, reported death threats following the murder of her brother-in-law, Marco Antonio Suástegui. She was told that her husband, Vicente, had already been disappeared, that





Marco Antonio had already been murdered, and that she would be the next victim.

In another struggle to defend land and territory, tension has resurfaced in recent weeks between the people of Carrizalillo and the mining company Equinox Gold, the third transnational company to extract gold during the 20 years of mining in this area. According to the ejido, this measure seeks to pressure the community into signing a new occupation agreement, which would reduce rent payments by 65% and eliminate social benefits, including support for the purchase of medicines for people sickened by air pollution and other factors resulting from mining exploitation. The ejido (community) asked the company to “expeditiously begin the pro-

*cess of restoring and rehabilitating our lands, flora and fauna, and the mitigation measures required to contain the increase in emissions and environmental damage, all in accordance with the regulatory framework.”*

Nearly 100 organizations from Canada, more than 66 networks and organizations from Mexico, and another 31 from 12 countries sent a letter to Equinox Gold expressing their concern about the threats, violence, and legal persecution directed at the Carrizalillo community in the context of the renegotiation of the lease agreement. They stated that “Guerrero state officials have participated in the pressure tactics and imposition of the agreement, failing to protect the community’s rights.”

In the context of International Women’s Day (8M), thousands of women marched in Guerrero to demand an end to violence and femicides. According to the Guerrero Association against Violence against Women, from 2022 to 2025, 432 homicides against women were committed in the state. In the case of La Montaña, Tlachinollan stated that “municipal, state, and federal authorities are not interested in violence against women. Tlachinollan has recorded 130 femicides from 2006 to 2025, but the institutions have not conducted investigations. On the contrary, they have denied justice to the victims. The killers walk free, with complete impunity.” ■

#### **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!*

#### **In North America:**

*Donations can be sent by  
check or money order to:*  
SIPAZ, INC.  
3849 17<sup>th</sup> Ave S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55407, USA  
E-mail: [info\\_sz@sipaz.org](mailto:info_sz@sipaz.org)

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Name of Bank: ING Bank  
In the name of ‘Servicio  
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IBAN: NL75INGB0004602969

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# “Chiapas in the Spiral of Armed and Criminal Violence”

*“Our pens become swords,  
our verses fight against oppression.  
We shout to the entire world: Enough violence!  
because we deserve to live in peace and dignity.”*  
**Juana de Ibarbourou**

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, in the framework of its 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Fray Bartolome de las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) presented its report *“Chiapas, in the Spiral of Armed and Criminal Violence (Between Governmental Chaos, Organized Crime and the Paths of Struggle and Resistance)”*, which aims to leave a record of what happened in the state during the period from January 2023 to June 2024. Based on documentary data from direct sources, it analyzes the context in which resistance movements and alternative processes are fighting against structural and criminal violence, as well as the main human rights violations they suffer ▀

## Forced Displacement: An Omnipresent Open Wound in Chiapas

© Frayba

**I**n Mexico, various forms of violence have reached alarming levels, resulting in serious human rights violations. This situation is exacerbated by factors such as corruption, marginalization, impunity, and ineffective mechanisms for access to justice. These conditions lead to people being forced to leave their places of origin.

In Chiapas, one of the states historically most affected by this problem, families not only experience the pain of leaving their homes, their belongings, and the land on which they live, but they must also see their families and communities separated, seriously impacting their physical and mental health as well as their way of life. They are often forced to start over in hostile environments. In its report, Frayba documents 20 Internally Forced Displacement (IFD) events, with approximately 15,780 victims of this phenomenon. These individuals are originally from the municipalities of Pantelho, Frontera Comalapa, Chicomuselo, Oxchuc, Las Margaritas, Huixtan, Chenalho, Ocosingo, La Trinitaria, Socoltenango, La Concordia, Bella Vista, and Tila. In the Frontera y Sierra region of the state alone, 8,190 people have been displaced by organized crime (OC).



Presentation of the report "*Chiapas, in the spiral of armed and criminal violence*"  
© Frayba

Between June 2024 and May 2025, the silenced zones imposed by criminal violence, widespread distrust of authorities, and the disintegration of the community fabric have made it difficult for organizations like Frayba to directly contact families and obtain an accurate number of displaced people. From the outset, these events caused people to disperse rather than concentrate them in a single location: some sought refuge with family or friends in urban areas, others survived by renting spaces or even living on the streets, which has made locating them and monitoring their cases very difficult.

Furthermore, it has been documented that some people trying to return to their territories currently have to pay fines ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 pesos, amounts difficult to obtain for people who have experienced forced displacement and have not had access to healthcare, education, or a decent life. Guarantees for a safe and dignified return do not exist. While police-military operations have been deployed, they are not permanent and are not addressing the underlying situation: that is, the criminal groups that continue to maintain a presence and control in the territories to this day are not being disarmed or dismantled.

## Missing Persons in Chiapas: A Growing Problem

In November 2023, Frayba released the report "*Touching the Void*", which addresses the growing problem of missing persons in Chiapas. According to the data presented, between 2019 and 2023, cases of forced disappearance in the state had increased by 358%. This is mainly due to the intensification of territorial disputes between criminal groups, which seek to exert control over the social, economic, and political life of communities, using fear as a tool to curb any form of social organization or territorial autonomy. Although this phenomenon is not new in the country, it is now becoming more prevalent in Chiapas, particularly in the Sierra and Border regions.

Of particular concern is the disappearance of women in the state, which is much higher than the national rates, far exceeding the national average of 25% and reaching more than 60%, mostly affecting girls and adolescents. Many of these disappearances are due to trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The situation of children and adolescents facing this phenomenon is equally alarming. The most common age for disappearances is 15 years old, and adolescent girls are the most frequently reported missing. Another detail that

# Chiapas, en la espiral de la violencia armada y criminal

## —INFORME FRAYBA—



speaks to the serious situation in Chiapas is that, nationally, two out of every ten people in this age range remain missing, but in the state, this figure rises to three out of every ten. The most affected areas are Tuxtla Gutierrez, San Cristobal de Las Casas, Tapachula, Comitán de Domínguez, and Palenque. According to the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS), between 2020 and 2024, the number of missing children and adolescents was 2,223. That is, an average of 1.5 disappearances of minors per day.

### Continuing Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

*“The defense of human rights, the fight for truth and justice, turns those involved into targets for attacks by various actors. On many occasions, the justice system itself is used to place obstacles in the way of activists. Thus, in Chiapas, as in previous years, we observe the criminalization of people who, through their demands and struggles, stand in the way of the interests of both the State and other private actors, both legal and illegal,”* the report states, giving several examples of this trend.

It must also be recognized that due to the constant fear of reporting and the impunity that characterizes these events,

for every attack made public, there are countless cases that never come to light.

Defenders of land and territory are among the most affected, and the level of severity of the attacks is often greater. An example of this was the massacre that occurred in Nueva Morelia, municipality of Chicomuselo, on April 12th, 2024, against 11 people, including a family whose members had opposed criminal violence and mining exploitation. As the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas emphasized in its statement following the events, this territory has been devastated *“by the violence generated by the control of the territory and the latent interest in continuing mining exploitation by criminal groups that have operated with total impunity.”*

Religious leaders have also been targets of attacks. In the most serious cases addressed by the report, on October 20th, 2024, the priest Marcelo Pérez Pérez, a human rights defender and peacebuilder, was extra-judicially executed in San Cristobal de Las Casas, despite having received precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

Communicators and journalists have also seen their scope of action limited due to the increase in violence. Journalist Angeles Mariscal stated that *“what we are experiencing in Chiapas is one of the worst instances of violence that, at least I have experienced in more than 20 years of journal-*

Presentation of the  
report “Chiapas, in  
the spiral of armed  
and criminal violence”  
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*istic experience. This may not be possible to put into figures; perhaps other parameters for measuring violence should be used, but there is no doubt that these conditions mean that in Chiapas we are experiencing one of the worst moments in terms of freedom of information and expression.”*

Defending the right to migrate is also a source of aggression. Criminal organizations operating in Chiapas use human trafficking, specifically that of people on the move, as one of their main sources of income. Those who dare to defend the dignity of people on the move and denounce human rights violations and violence against them find themselves in the sights of violent criminal organizations. Unfortunately, on more than one occasion since the beginning of 2023, threats against them have materialized. Frayba itself, like other organizations, human rights defenders, and journalists, has been the target of multiple security incidents, along with the disparaging remarks of former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) during his morning press conferences. This is of utmost concern, as these types of accusations reach an extremely broad audience, potentially influencing the rest of society. All of this reduces the political cost of threats or potential attacks against Frayba, other organizations, human rights defenders, and, in general, organized civil society.

### **Criminal Violence and Impact on the Population**

The report recounts the increase in criminal presence in the state, particularly in the border area, and the growing control of key areas for controlling routes for human trafficking, drug trafficking, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, among others. This has gone hand in hand with the capture of civil and organizational structures; the formation of their own organizations; and the usurpation of local power structures, including community, communal, and municipal structures, in order to determine the election of their representatives.

Among other forms of control, in addition to the impact of direct confrontations between criminal groups, recruitment strategies have been identified—both persuasive and forced; sexual violence; control and restriction (narco-blockades); and the restriction of services and shortages as a form of pressure. *“While much of the attention has focused on the border with Guatemala, the trend is toward the expansion of the conflict and, with it, the transfer of population control methods to other regions, in an attempt to open and maintain routes for crime,”* Frayba warned.

*“To date, it is impossible to quantitatively estimate the social impacts of these disputes. Thousands of displaced people remain anonymous out of fear, still afraid to share their testimonies, with no sign of interest from the State. Cases of disappearances, murders, sexual violence, or recruitment follow a similar path. All of this also causes serious psychological effects on the same population with consequences for the social fabric,”* it also denounced.

### **The Continuity of the War Against Indigenous Peoples**

The report raises several trends, sources of concern, that continue to outline a continuity in the war strategy against Indigenous peoples in the territories where Frayba operates.

It affirms that the pact of impunity persists in cases of human rights violations, and that a *“deliberate”* absence of government structures is observed, allowing organized crime to expand its territorial control. *“This action is carried out premeditatedly, tolerated, and in complicity with the institutions,”* it denounces. It also states that, during the period covered by the report, the armed forces played the role of mere observers of the attacks against indigenous peoples, while non-state actors, such as the DO, exerted their power and created a climate of fear and terror among the population. The report also analyzes the continued territorial dispossession of indigenous communities, with the modernization of neoliberal projects such as The South Also Exists, Puebla Panama Plan, and the Mesoamerica Project, which have gone hand in hand with the criminalization of those who fight against these megaprojects.

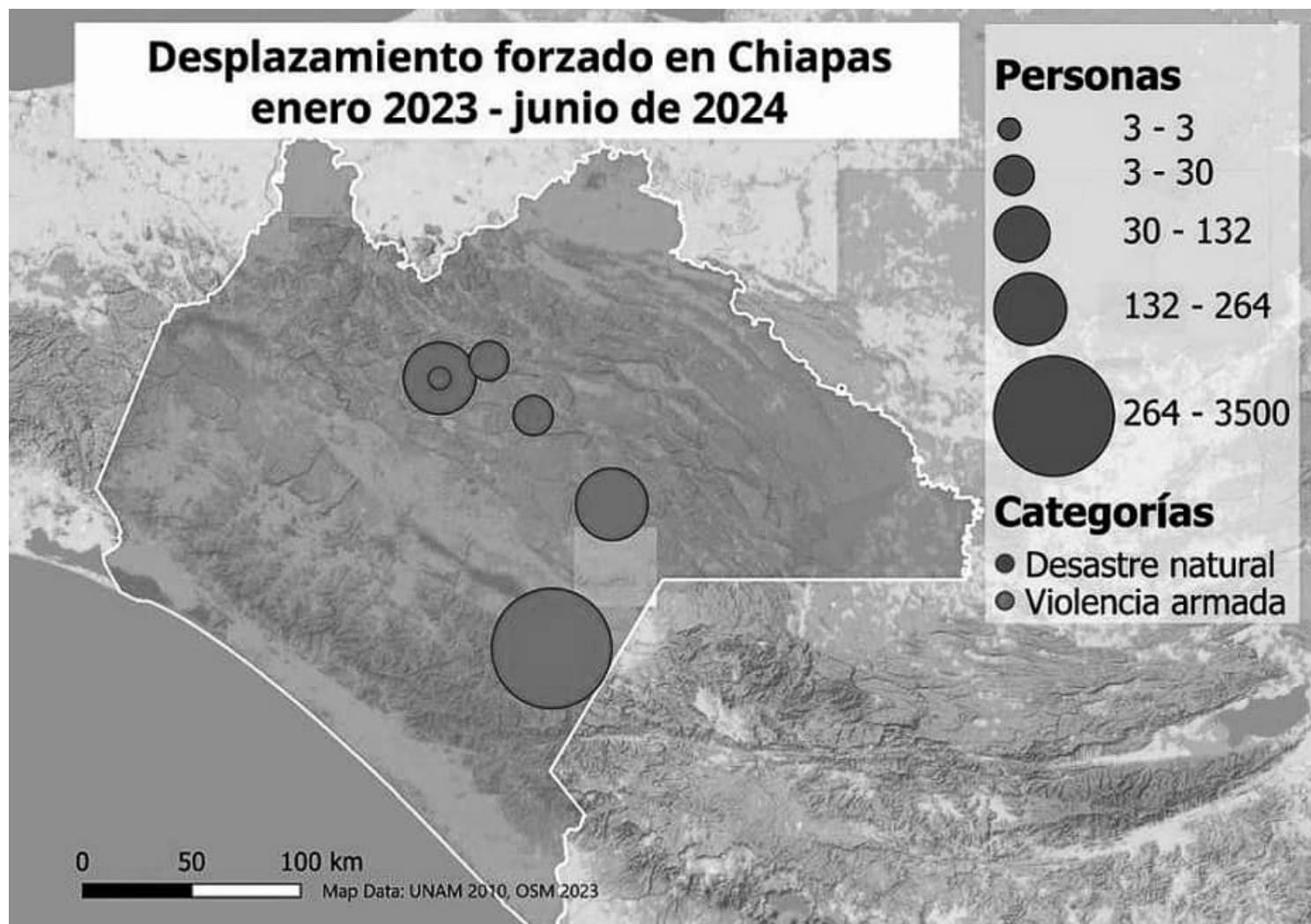
It points to the use of social programs as a clientelist tool to avoid resistance. These programs *“have a completely individualistic and capitalist domestication perspective, and they confront forms of collective organization and community assemblies in the decision-making process of the communities where they decide on their life plans.”* This has led to the destruction of community organization and further fractures in the community fabric.

### **A Still Uncertain Future**

The report covers the period prior to the changes in government at the state level (with the arrival of the new governor Eduardo Ramirez Aguilar) and the federal level (with Claudia Sheinbaum). It highlights the major issues that the new authorities will have to address.

In the press conferences and media interviews through which Frayba presented the report, the Center shared some reflections on the strategic changes brought about by the changes in government: *“For us to be able to live peacefully in the territories, to have a dignified life, and security for the peoples and communities, something more than militarization and the creation of special police-military groups is necessary,”* Frayba stated. It also stated: *“It is important to emphasize that there will be no peace until armed groups linked to organized crime, linked to power groups that have been entrenched for decades in the state of Chiapas, are dismantled, prosecuted, and disarmed. (...) Peace is not a pause and a respite with fewer confrontations; it is about building processes of justice.”*

## Desplazamiento forzado en Chiapas enero 2023 - junio de 2024



### ***“In underground rivers, the paths to freedom always meet.”***

In its report, despite the complexity and violence of the context, Frayba has not lost hope for another kind of horizon and suggests some paths toward it: *“The crucial point is to generate conditions for peace, so that communities can return to living their daily lives peacefully, so that they can continue and build their life projects, based on their culture and identity, for a peace that walks, that moves, that transforms, that spirals, that permeates the most remote corners of the territory.”*

To achieve this, it states: *“What is essential is to promote open organizational capacity, to reclaim the spaces ceded by fear. There are many ways to defend life in the territories. (...) What is essential is the reconstruction of the community’s social fabric.”*

It details several paths to achieve this: building different relationships based on dignity, mutual respect, and justice; having principles of non-polarization, not generating divisions in our environments; promoting dialogues with listening and the construction of collective thinking;

recognizing diversity as a source of richness in human relationships; rebuilding processes of trust and social cohesion; coming together through acknowledgment of differences in political action to promote open, far-reaching movements to recover our humanity; fostering harmony and embracing Lekil Cuxlejal, the *“good life”* in Tseltal, for all ■

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# Documenting to Make Visible – *El Obse* de Chiapas Confronting Violence Against Human Rights Defenders

The situation in Chiapas presents a panorama marked by serious human rights violations. In recent years, the state has experienced an alarming increase in forced displacement, disappearances, the presence of armed groups, drug and human trafficking, and political violence ▴

**A**lthough the government of Eduardo Ramírez Aguilar (ERA) presented Chiapas as “the second safest state in the country” upon completing his first 100 days in office, many residents live a different reality. With the new security strategy, of which the Pakal Immediate Reaction Force (FRIP) is a centerpiece, some progress has been made, such as the reduction of armed confrontations, the discovery of clandestine graves, the lifting of roadblocks, and the arrest of suspected drug traffickers. However, doubts persist due to the lack of arrests of criminal leaders and the absence of legal action against former governor Rutilio Escandón and other former officials responsible for security. Furthermore, human rights violations have been documented during the operations, including reports of arbitrary detentions and torture by the FRIP.

Faced with this situation, those fighting against these violations and defending justice, equality, and peace are human rights defenders, such as activists, members of civil society organizations, journalists, collectives, organized communities, and priests. According to the United Nations (UN), human rights defenders protect di-

verse rights such as: “[...] the right to life, food and water, the highest attainable standard of health, adequate housing, a name and nationality, education, freedom of movement and non-discrimination, [...] the rights of women, children, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons, and of national, linguistic, or sexual minorities.”

Dedicating oneself to the defense of human rights in contexts of violence entails high risk. The TDT Network documented 92 extrajudicial executions of human rights defenders during the six-year term of former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. “[...] the majority of these cases occurred primarily in Oaxaca, followed by Chiapas. Most of the victims were involved in the defense of land and territory, the environment, and the self-determination of Indigenous peoples.”

Faced with this reality, civil society organizations in Chiapas decided to create a tool to document, make visible, and systematize these attacks: the Chiapas Observatory of Human Rights Defenders (*El Obse*). It is a platform promoted by 20 organizations working from different regions of the state. These organizations include the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, Fray Matías, Fray Ignacio Barona, and Digna Ochoa, as well as Tso-

manotik, Colibres, Enlace, IMDEC, SERAPAZ, SIPAZ, Sursiendo, Swefor, Tzome Ixuk, and Voces Mesoamericanas.

The collaboration between these organizations began in 2023 with training processes and exchange meetings, until the platform was launched on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, with a public event in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Since January 2024, *El Obse* has recorded 107 violent acts committed against human rights defenders. In addition to monitoring the most frequent attacks, its website offers information on the profile of those attacked—such as their gender, occupation, and the rights they defend—as well as a geographic mapping of the most affected municipalities, among other things.

Data collection and validation are carried out carefully to ensure the safety of those attacked. Only when cases do not pose additional risks to human rights defenders are they published online in an accessible and geo-referenced manner.

During the launch event, Ximena Ramos, representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico, highlighted the work of human rights defenders in high-risk contexts such as Chiapas, underscoring the Mexican State's responsibility to guarantee their protection and safety, in compliance with international human rights commitments.





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In its first report, El Obse warned that 2024 has been the most violent year of the electoral process in Mexico, particularly in Chiapas. It noted that 15 people linked to the political process were murdered in the state and 515 resigned their candidacies due to fear of violence. Furthermore, 108 polling stations could not be set up for security reasons.

The violence has also forced the forced displacement of at least 2,300 people, primarily from the municipalities of Chicomuselo, Socoltenango, and La Concordia. Regarding disappearances, 568 people were reported missing in 2024, compared to 320 in 2023, representing a 77% increase. This trend has been increasing since 2020 and continues to be minimized or ignored by authorities.

El Obse has identified various forms of aggression aimed at hindering the work of human rights defenders: intimidation, surveillance, defamation, threats, extortion, abuse of authority, physical attacks, and even murder. Of the total attacks recorded, 70% occurred physically and 32% online, reflecting how the defense of rights—especially those related to land, territory, and justice—has become a high-risk activity.

Among those attacked are primarily members of civil society organizations (69%), followed by independent

activists, journalists, community and religious leaders. The main aggressors are unidentified actors, although government institutions, security forces, and organized crime groups have also been identified.

At least four defenders have been murdered in 2024, including Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, who was killed on October 20<sup>th</sup> in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Recognized for his work as a Tsotsil Mayan priest, Father Marcelo was a leading figure in peacebuilding, the defense of land and territory, and peaceful civil resistance against violence.

The Obse report also highlights trends and concerns: the expansion of megaprojects and their associated socio-environmental conflicts; the rise in gender-based violence; more restrictive immigration policies; human rights violations against migrants; the militarization of the territory; the use of surveillance technologies by both the State and criminal groups; the criminalization of social protest; and the stigmatization of youth, particularly Indigenous peoples. Added to this are forced displacement without dignified conditions of return, attacks on journalists, and persistent impunity for violations committed by security forces.

El Obse represents a collective effort to articulate a response to the

growing violence in Chiapas. It arises from the urgent need to make visible the attacks against human rights defenders, in a context where silence and impunity prevail.

The platform is a tool for protection and memory, built by organizations that face risks daily for their work. Its existence reinforces the right to defend rights and contributes to strengthening collective memory.

In the article *“The Chiapas Observatory: A Community Documentation Response to Violence,”* the organization HURIDOCs, which contributed to the development of the platform, highlights: *“The development of El Obse demonstrates the fundamental role of collaboration and collective action in addressing the unique challenges faced by human rights and territorial defenders in Chiapas. Through ongoing partnerships and capacity building in documentation practices, the project will continue to evolve to respond to the specific needs of those on the ground.”*

■

## INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND SUPPORT

### CHIAPAS FEBRUARY

- We attended the press conference convened by the Melel Xojobal organization, in which they spoke out against the increasing violence against children and adolescents in Chiapas and demanded greater attention and protection for children from all three levels of government.

- We attended the inauguration of the chapel built in San Andres Larrainzar, the birthplace of Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, where he was buried four months after his murder.

- We attended the discussion “*Challenges of International Solidarity in Chiapas*,” convened by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) in the framework of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civilian Observation Brigades (BriCOs).

### MARCH

- We participated in the public event organized by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civilian Observation Brigades (BriCOs).

- We accompanied the marches held in Tuxtla Gutierrez and San Cristobal de Las Casas to commemorate International Women's Day (8M).

- We attended the event held in San Cristobal de Las Casas as part of the national mourning for those who disappeared after the discovery of the training camp in Teuchitlan, Jalisco.

- We participated in the presentation of the report “*Chiapas, in the Spiral of Armed and Criminal Violence*,” published by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) to commemorate its 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- We attended the press conference where members of the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE) and the Community Government of the municipality of Chilon expressed their rejection of the construction of the San Cristobal de Las Casas-Palenque superhighway, as well as the popular

consultations held in several municipalities that will be affected by this project.

### APRIL

- We attended the activities planned for the Encounter of Art, Rebellion, and Resistance, convened by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), first in the Jacinto Canek caracol (Tenejapa municipality), and then at the CIDECI Uni-Tierra facilities in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We were present at the event where feminist and citizen groups demonstrated in San Cristobal de Las Casas to demand justice for the femicides that occurred in the state and to denounce the inaction and lack of results on the part of authorities in addressing gender-based violence.

### MAY

- On Mother's Day, we attended the opening of the exhibition “*Weaving Memory - The Legacy of Those Who Never Stopped Searching*,” organized by the Regional Delegation for Mexico of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We participated in the event “*Mothers Will Reach the Truth*,” organized by the Working Group on Disappearances, which also took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In this same context, we accompanied the march of the Mothers in Resistance collective, under the slogan “*Mothers Have Nothing to Celebrate*,” which took place in Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

- We attended the quarterly assembly of the Believing People of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

## INFORMATION AND TRAINING TOWARDS ACTION

### PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In March, along with other members of “*El Obse*,” we held a meeting with members of the Swedish Embassy and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico (UNHCHR).

- In April, we held a meeting with members of the International Red Cross and participated in a workshop we held with other organizations.

- In May, we met with the Norwegian Ambassador to Mexico during her visit to Chiapas.

### PEACE EDUCATION FEBRUARY

- We facilitated an analysis with members of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Intercultural Studies and Research (IESII).

### MARCH

- We conducted an analysis of the situation with representatives from pastoral areas who are part of the Monitoring Commission of the Congress of Mother Earth, a component of the social ministry of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We facilitated an analysis with members of the community government in Chilón.

- A member of the team participated with a presentation in the discussion convened by the Space for Conscience and Memory in the framework of the International Day against Discrimination.

### APRIL

- We shared an analysis with women artisans who participate in the Mujeres de Maiz collective, from several municipalities in the Highlands and the Northern Jungle.

- We conducted a situation analysis at a parish assembly in Chalchihuitán.

### INTERNAL TRAINING

- In February and March, we participated in online training sessions on security, protection, and psycho-social impacts facilitated by the Access Foundation.

- In February, we participated in the training series “*Political Advocacy in International Spaces for the Protection of Human Rights*,” convened by the Peace and Human Rights Platform, with the participation of organizations from Mexico and the European Union.

- In March, we participated in a “*workshop of workshops*” designed for facilitators on Positive Conflict Transformation, organized by the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO).

- In April, two team members attended another session of the diploma course on Positive Conflict Transformation, convened by CORECO.

## NETWORKING

- At least once a month, we attend plenary and commission meetings of the Chiapas Peace Network (Slamalil Kinal).

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

- Monthly, we hold virtual meetings of the Accompaniment of Unarmed Civilians (USP/A) – Community of Practice.

- We held several meetings with organizations collaborating on the project titled “*Strengthening the Self-Protection Capacities of Human Rights Organizations and Communities in Chiapas*,” which we coordinate with Voces Mesoamericanas and Huridocs. We co-convened the press conference held in March to publicly present the Observatory of Attacks on Human Rights Defenders in Chiapas, “*El Obse*” (see Article).

- In February, we participated in a security analysis forum in San Cristobal de Las Casas, attended by several civil society organizations present in the city.

- In February and March, we participated in online meetings of the Peace and Human Rights Platform, with the participation of organizations from Mexico and the European Union.

- In March, we held a meeting with the German Coordination for Human Rights in Mexico.

- In March and May, we participated in meetings of the Peace Platform in Mexico.

- In April, we participated in a meeting of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partners in Mexico, held in Morelos.

- In May, we participated in a meeting with representatives from pastoral areas who are part of the Mother Earth Congress Monitoring Commission, a component of the social ministry of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In May, representing the North American region, we attended a meeting of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) in Jordania ■