

REPORT



S!Paz

Vol. XXXI N° 1 – March 2026

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Santiago





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In 1994, after the armed uprising by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), social and civil organizations, as well as Mexican religious leaders, recognized the need for a permanent international presence in Chiapas to help to avoid or lessen the risks of violent ends to conflict. In this context, in 1995, a group of international organizations with a long history of work in the areas of peace building, human rights, and nonviolent activism responded by creating a coalition consisting of members from the United States, Europe, and Latin America. They shared not only concerns about the situation in Chiapas, but also the hope that they could help to build a just, long-lasting peace in the state. From this came the project of SIPAZ, the International Service for Peace.

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 Southern Mexico. 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 ■

The SIPAZ International Team in Chiapas aims at:

- Protecting and expanding the spaces of action for organized social groups in defense of human rights and towards the construction of positive peace.
- Informing and equipping national and international stakeholders to carry out diplomatic actions for peace in Southern Mexico.
- Promoting spaces of exchange and networking towards the defense of human rights and the construction of a culture of peace.
- Maintaining relationships that allow appropriate support, aimed at expanding the scope of action of organized local groups in the defense of human rights and towards the construction of positive peace.
- Informing and empowering grassroots actors to strengthen non-violent actions to defend their rights and to promote a culture of peace.

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 ■

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SIPAZ Activities
From mid-November 2025 to
mid-February 2026



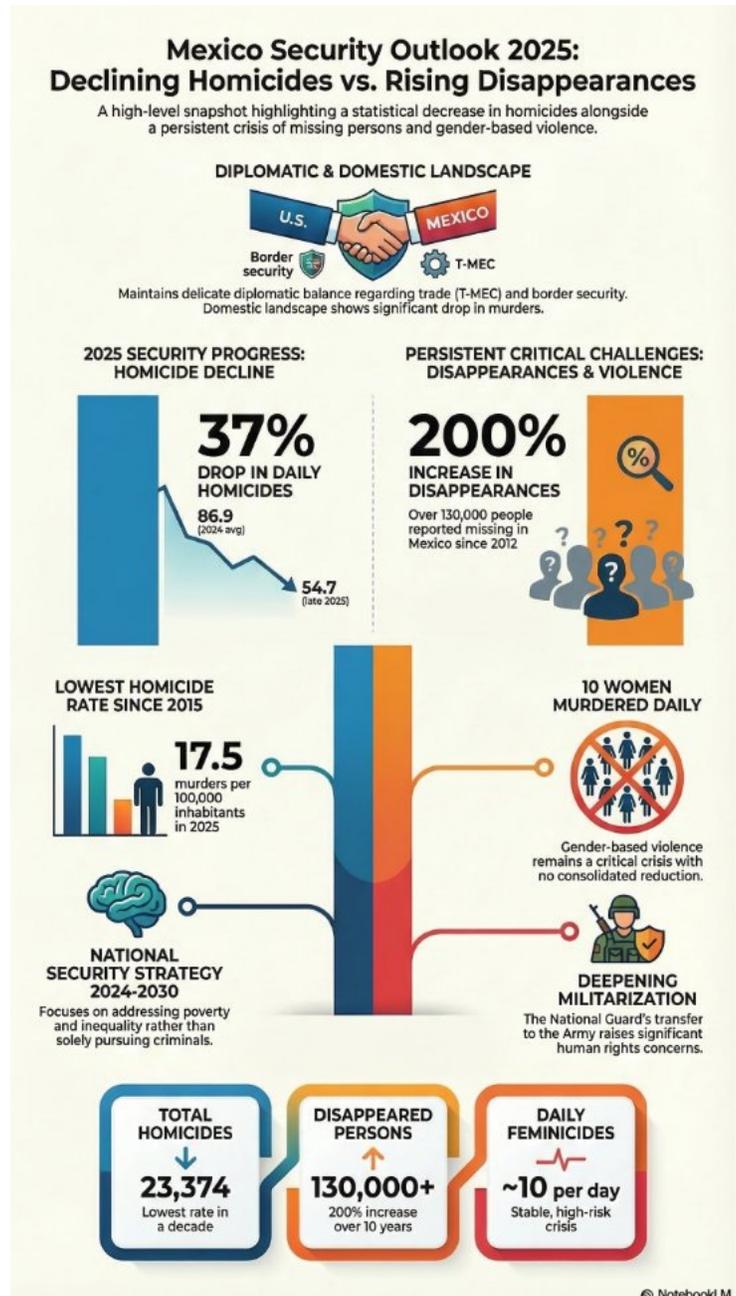
Security in Mexico

Mitigated Progress

Migration and border security have been central issues in relations between Mexico and the United States, although they don't always appear in the news spotlight. Historically, they have influenced the tone of the relationship and represent a significant element of pressure on Mexico. Certainly, bilateral trade remains very important (with Mexico as one of the main U.S. trading partners), which necessitates maintaining channels of dialogue, even when disagreements exist, particularly in light of the upcoming review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in July.

On the other hand, tensions have arisen. A supposed temporary closure of the El Paso airport, due to a possible drone linked to cartels, generated diplomatic tension. The U.S. attributed the closure to a drone; the Mexican government indicated it could have been a military exercise. Likewise, the country sent humanitarian aid to Cuba in the context of U.S. sanctions against the island. This has

placed the administration in a diplomatic balancing act—trying to maintain relations with Cuba without antagonizing Washington. In multiple areas, President Claudia Sheinbaum's administration is attempting to project firmness without disrupting relations with the U.S., striving to



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Memory that looks for truth, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, September 2025 © SIPAZ

avoid direct confrontations despite disagreements on several issues, including statements by President Donald Trump proposing or threatening direct intervention in Mexico.

Mexico can boast some progress in addressing insecurity, at least in reducing homicides: in 2025, Mexico registered approximately 23,374 homicides, a reduction compared to recent years, with a rate of approximately 17.5 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest since 2015, according to preliminary official estimates. The daily average of homicides decreased from 86.9 per day in 2024 to about 54.7 per day by the end of 2025, representing a drop of approximately 37%. However, organizations

like Mexico Evalua point out that disappearances have increased considerably, with figures showing increases of over 200% in the last decade, although official data varies depending on the counting method. It is estimated that more than 130,000 people have disappeared in Mexico since 2012. Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California Sur are listed as the states with the highest rates of missing and disappeared persons in 2025, although the problem extends beyond areas traditionally associated with organized crime. Likewise, isolated incidents of armed violence continue to occur in several states (for example, attacks against convoys and clashes between criminal groups). Finally, Mexico continues to face high

levels of violence against women: although complete official figures for 2025 are not yet consolidated, estimates indicate that around ten women are murdered every day.

The federal government is promoting the 2024-2030 National Public Security Strategy, which posits that peace is built by addressing the structural causes of crime: poverty, inequality, exclusion, and lack of opportunities, rather than simply pursuing criminals. Official discourse emphasizes inter-institutional coordination and social programs linked to the well-being and development of young people as part of the preventative approach. However, since Claudia Sheinbaum took office, changes have



Memory that looks for truth, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, September 2025 © SIPAZ

been observed in the arrests of members of organized crime, the fight against extortion, drug seizures, and the destruction of laboratories in various parts of the country. At the same time, the emphasis on the punitive and militarized component continues. In several states, this more confrontational strategy has generated increased violence. In this regard, a recent case of the kidnapping and murder of miners in Sinaloa raised concerns about the effectiveness of federal security policies.

The armed forces continue to be deployed in citizen security tasks and the fight against organized crime. This military involvement is the subject of constant criticism from human rights organizations, which point out that when the army assumes prolonged public security functions without effective civilian oversight, abuses, extrajudicial killings, and obstacles to accountability arise. The transfer of control of the National Guard to the Army has been consolidated, a change that, according to its critics, deepens the militarization of public security in Mexico.

In any case, the implementation of the federal vision and strategies faces structural challenges due to the magnitude of the violence, the presence of cartels in many regions, and the levels of

impunity, despite the judicial reform promoted by Sheinbaum in 2025.

In November, Alejandro Gertz Manero resigned as Attorney General of Mexico, leaving the post after nearly seven years, despite his term being scheduled for nine. Before leaving, he set in motion the transition within the Attorney General's Office (FGR), which was placed in the hands of Ernestina Godoy—legal counsel to the President and a close associate of Claudia Sheinbaum—while the Senate selects the person who will permanently fill the position.

Several civil society organizations criticized Gertz for leaving the institution *“without being held accountable,”* noting that his departure was marked by a lack of transparency. Furthermore, he left numerous high-profile investigations unresolved, without reaching a verdict or firm conclusions. These include cases of corruption, fuel smuggling—known as *“fiscal fuel theft”*—, irregularities in customs, money laundering operations, possible acts of embezzlement, and cases involving high-profile individuals and companies, among others.

Human Rights: Concerns and Recent Cases

On December 10th, in the framework of International

Human Rights Day, more than one hundred organizations, networks, collectives, and human rights defenders warned about the persistence of serious structural problems that impede the full exercise of human rights in the country and presented a comprehensive assessment of current challenges.

One of the main concerns raised was the situation of human rights defenders and journalists, who face a context of escalating violence. In 2025, at least six journalists and fourteen human rights defenders were murdered for their work. Impunity, the lack of institutional responses, and the absence of protection policies with gender, intersectional, and territorial approaches increase the risks, especially for Indigenous communities and organizations that defend the environment, water, and collective rights. The signatories also criticized the criminalization of journalism through legal mechanisms such as cyber harassment and crimes against honor, as well as recent laws that, due to their broad wording, threaten freedom of expression and the use of digital media.

They also noted that enforced disappearance remains one of the most serious human rights crises. Although legislative initiatives exist, they are insufficient given the magnitude of the

problem. As of September 30th, 2025, more than 132,000 people were registered as missing and unaccounted for, with an alarming average of 45 disappearances per day in September of that year alone. The crisis is exacerbated by the lack of prevention policies, the absence of a comprehensive search strategy, and the severe forensic crisis, with more than 72,000 unidentified human remains. In this context, women searchers have taken on tasks that belong to the State, facing extreme risks; at least 30 relatives of missing persons have been murdered, most of them women.

The lack of robust regulations on business and human rights was also highlighted, which is essential to prevent the impacts of megaprojects and extractive activities on ter-

ritories and communities. This omission is especially concerning given the push for new investments through Plan Mexico, which was not consulted with the affected communities and promotes projects with negative impacts on economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights.

Likewise, the approval of a General Law on Internal Forced Displacement remains pending, despite the increase in this phenomenon in several states of the country, the statement denounced.

Social protest continues to face repression, excessive use of force, and restrictive legal frameworks, in addition to stigmatization by those in power. The organizations also questioned the federal security strategy, noting that militarization and the permanent deployment of the National

"For the Right to Truth, Justice and Reparation" of families of disappeared persons, San Cristóbal de las Casas, September 2025
© SIPAZ



Guard have not improved security and have alarmingly expanded the power of the armed forces without adequate controls.

Regarding historically vulnerable groups, deficiencies persist in the protection of children, youth, LGBTTTIQ+ people, Indigenous peoples, and women. In the case of the latter, the figures for femicides, homicides, and disappearances reflect a sustained crisis of violence, aggravated by impunity and the lack of comprehensive prevention policies, despite some recent institutional progress.

Finally, concerns were expressed regarding access to justice, judicial reform, the persistence of torture, the excessive use of pretrial detention, the criminalization of migration, and inhumane conditions in prisons. Given this situation, the organizations demanded that the next National Human Rights Plan incorporate international recommendations, establish concrete actions, and guarantee permanent spaces for dialogue, evaluation, and accountability, with the aim of structurally transforming the human rights situation in Mexico.

CHIAPAS: Clashing Perspectives on the Situation in the State

In December, the governor of Chiapas, Eduardo Ramirez

Aguilar, presented his First State of the State Address and stated that in just one year his administration had achieved progress that many considered impossible: restoring peace, the rule of law, and good governance in a state that had been mired in a wave of violence fueled by disputes between organized crime groups.

He commented that before his arrival, Chiapas was plagued by murders, shootouts, bodies found hanging, decapitated, and highway robberies. Ramirez attributed the change to the new security strategy implemented in conjunction with

President Claudia Sheinbaum, Federal Security Secretary Omar Garcia Harfuch, the Armed Forces, and state and federal law enforcement agencies.

He reported that during his first year, approximately 6,000 people were arrested, of whom 5,000 remain in custody. He commended the state's judiciary for not releasing alleged criminals, as he said had been happening previously. A video was also presented showcasing the investments made: a Black Hawk helicopter, armored vehicles, drones, surveillance cameras, mobile bases, and

Pilgrimage of Pueblo Creyente of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, January 2026
© SIPAZ





salary increases for police officers.

In addition to security, the governor highlighted progress in education, health, the environment, tourism, and infrastructure. These included a literacy program, the start of construction on the Palenque–San Cristobal de Las Casas highway, road reconstruction, the creation of the airline Balam to connect Chiapas with other states, and scholarship and food assistance programs for vulnerable populations.

For next year, he announced new initiatives: boosting the Welfare Hubs, support for coffee, corn, and fish producers, scholarships for students and athletes,

incorporating artisans into the social security system, restoring micro-watersheds, programs for women, and public works projects carried out with local companies and under transparent criteria. Ramirez affirmed that *“Chiapas has awakened”* and that the state is progressing toward becoming the *“giant of the south.”* He acknowledged that historical challenges still exist—poverty, inequality, agrarian conflicts, educational backwardness, deficiencies in basic services, violence, and discrimination against indigenous communities—but assured that his government will continue working to address them.

This hopeful outlook clashes with the perception of human rights organizations, which point out that violence persists and that the militarization of security has not resolved the structural conflicts. In December, the Border Region Working Group, formed by several civil society organizations, published the preliminary report *“Chiapas 2025: The Pending Peace.”* *“The state government has opted for the Pakal Immediate Reaction Force (FRIP) as the cornerstone of its pacification strategy; its actions have deepened the militarization of the region and generated new risks for the civilian population, such as arbitrary detentions and abuses of power,”* the report

Zapatista
Encounter *“Of
Pyramids,
Histories, Loves
and, of course,
Heartbreaks”*,
December 2025
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LATEST

states. Furthermore, it details that forced displacement remains a constant, the organizations assert. Between 2023 and 2024, more than 8,000 people were displaced from their communities; although many returned in 2025, they did so without any real guarantee of safety. Others remain displaced or experience intermittent displacement, moving between their communities and other municipalities or even Guatemala, due to persistent threats and the presence of armed groups. Another critical issue highlighted in the report is the increase in forced disappearances. In 2025, at least 29 people were reported missing in border municipalities, primarily in Frontera Comalapa and La Concordia, although significant underreporting is acknowledged due to fear of reporting. *“Peace in Chiapas remains elusive. The persistence of violence, disappearances, forced displacement, and the lack of reliable official data render victims invisible and hinder the development of effective public policies, leaving border communities in a climate of fear, uncertainty, and institutional abandonment,”* the report concludes.

From this same region, also in December, the Pueblo Creyente (Believing People) of Chicomuselo expressed their concern about the normalization of violence and the contradiction between the official



discourse of pacification and the daily reality faced by the communities. They stated that the state *“is bathed in the blood of innocent people,”* victims of massacres, disappearances, kidnappings, forced displacements, and murders resulting from the territorial struggle between criminal groups. *“The narrative that peace has arrived in Chiapas is not supported by reality. Peace is not imposed by decree, but rather built with justice, truth, and the recognition of the dignity of the people,”* they said.

More broadly, on January 25th, the traditional Pilgrimage of the Faithful People of the Diocese of San Cristobal took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas to honor the memory of Samuel Ruiz Garcia, known as Tatik Samuel, on the 15th anniversary of his death. More than 10,000 people from different municipalities in Chiapas demanded peace and justice for their communities. They declared, *“We continue to denounce the violence perpetrated by organized crime in some municipalities of our state of Chiapas, including armed confrontations, murders, disappearances, kidnappings, extortion, intimidation of residents in these communities, and the forced attendance at public events or the manning of fake checkpoints, with fines imposed for refusal. All of this leads to internal displacement. People*

remain silent out of fear of losing their lives."

Between December and February, multiple violent incidents were reported, including murders, clashes, vehicle burnings, and disappearances in Villaflores, another area. These incidents are believed to be related to a conflict between two organized crime groups vying for territorial control of this region, which connects the Sierra Madre mountains with the center of the state. Disembodied bodies were also reported in the state capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez. The state government implemented several operations and made some arrests; the most sig-

nificant was that of a man known as "El Espiritu" (The Spirit), whom authorities identify as a "turf boss" in several areas of Chiapas. The promise to reinforce checkpoints and security checkpoints in Tuxtla Gutierrez and throughout the state has not completely quelled fears that the turf war will reignite with greater aggression.

Organized Processes Continue to Mobilize

In addition to the pilgrimages already mentioned, a series of activities were carried out in November in San Juan Cancuc as part of the 12th anniversary of the Movement in Defense

of Life and Territory (MODEVITE). During these activities, they demanded, among other things, that the Mexican State respect their right to self-determination, autonomy, and their own normative systems; that the San Cristobal-Palenque highway project be definitively canceled; that extractive megaprojects be halted throughout the Maya, Zoque, and Chol territories; and that the voices of Indigenous peoples be heard in international forums such as COP 30, and that their fundamental role in the defense of Mother Earth be recognized.

From December 26th, 2025, to January 1st, 2026, the Zapatista Army of National Liber-

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12th anniversary
of the
Movement in
Defense of Life
and Territory
(MODEVITE), in
San Juan
Cancuc,
November 2025
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Pilgrimage of
Pueblo Creyente
of the Diocese
of San Cristobal
de las Casas,
January 2026
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Pilgrimage of the Diocesan Coordination of Women (CODIMUJ), San Cristóbal de las Casas, November 25, 2025
© SIPAZ

ation (EZLN) celebrated the 32nd anniversary of the Zapatista uprising at the CIDECI in San Cristobal de Las Casas and later at the Caracol of Oventik. Sub-commander Moises and Captain Marcos participated in all the sessions of the workshop *“Of Pyramids, Histories, Loves, and, of course, Heartbreaks.”* They asked their guests to speak about *“pyramids and the manipulation of history within the economic system, bad governments, laws and the judicial structure, resistance movements, the left and progressivism, human rights, the feminist struggle, and the arts.”*

The program included a series of meetings with intellectuals, activists, and members of civil society. The central moment of the celebration took place on December 31st at the Caracol of

Oventik, where the 1994 uprising was commemorated.

Groups particularly Vulnerable to Violence: Women, Children, and Human Rights Defenders

On November 25th, 2025, as part of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, approximately 800 members of the Diocesan Women's Coordinating Committee (CODIMUJ) marched in San Cristobal de Las Casas to demand an end to violence against them. In Tuxtla Gutierrez, they denounced the fact that, despite institutional campaigns and official pronouncements, impunity, femicides, disappearances, and systematic violence against women and girls persist in Chiapas.

By December, the feminist collective 50 plus 1 had registered at least 31 cases of femicide in 2025. On the other hand, according to the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS), in 2025 the State Attorney General's Office issued approximately 460 missing persons reports for children and adolescents, representing more than one case per day. The data indicates that the most affected group is 15-year-old girls (seven out of ten reports). REDIAS also highlighted that during 2025, 16 homicides, nine femicides, 328 reports of child sexual abuse, the deportation of 635 children and adolescents from Chiapas from the United States, and the detention of 8,656 migrant children in the state were documented, of whom 876 were returned to their countries of origin.

Finally, in January, the discussion *“The Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Chiapas: The Challenges of Their Protection”* brought to light the vulnerability of this sector. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, participated and, after meeting with human rights defenders, stated, among other things, that “there is no security for human rights defenders in Chiapas,” because the Mexican government *“is merely painting a picture of peace”*

and “militarization, organized crime, megaprojects, and the criminalization of human rights defenders put them at risk.” She also noted that there are many people in the state who “want peace, but are paralyzed by fear.”

In the most recent case illustrating this vulnerability, in February, human rights defender Poulette Celene Hernandez was the victim of physical attacks, death threats, and acts of harassment in the

municipality of Tonalá. According to documentation from the Digna Ochoa Human Rights Center, on February 8th, three people went to her home, where they insulted, threatened, and physically assaulted her. The day before, on February 7th, possibly due to the presence of other people in the house, four men on motorcycles arrived outside her home and made threats before leaving, in what is considered a prior

act of intimidation. Poulette Celene Hernandez is a lawyer who works with women on the coast of Chiapas, supporting victims of violence and promoting training in human rights, community health, and agroecology. Her work takes place in a context of high social conflict, recently marked by complaints related to the Interoceanic Corridor and alleged collusion between authorities and criminal groups ■

Meeting with
the UN Special
Rapporteur on
Human Rights
Defenders,
Mary Lawlor,
San Cristóbal de
las Casas,
January 2026
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Megarailway Projects in the Southeast

Human Rights Violations, Socio-environmental Impacts, and Militarization in the Name of Development



Over the past two decades, Mexico has promoted large infrastructure projects under the guise of regional development, modernization, and well-being. The Maya Train (connecting Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan) and the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (of which the Trans-Isthmus Train is a part) are emblematic examples of this policy. While authorities have promoted these projects as drivers of economic growth and social cohesion, various reports by civil society organizations, experts, and human rights defenders of the land and the environment have documented systematic violations of the rights of Indigenous and local communities, severe environmental impacts, and a pattern of harassment and criminalization of communities defending their land ■

Maya Train

This mega-railway project was originally launched by the government of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO, 2018-2024) with the intention of connecting the states of Campeche, Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Oaxaca, covering approximately 1,500 kilometers, to promote tourism, employment, and regional integration.

According to historian Lorenzo Meyer, this project is designed to “compensate for the lack of economic growth that occurred primarily in the 20th century in northern and central Mexico. The southeastern region has always been neglected, and the Maya Train

is the first major infrastructure project in more than half a century.” For this reason, it is considered one of the flagship projects of the AMLO administration, in which at least \$20 billion has been invested.

The project has been promoted as a strategic and priority infrastructure project for the country; however, it has been embroiled in numerous controversies due to its planning and execution. In response to criticism, AMLO repeatedly stated that it “was simply due to the envy and anger of the opposition,” and in 2023, faced with lawsuits and injunctions filed by environmental organizations, he declared the project a matter of national security. “It has already been decided that this is a matter of

national security and that we will not stop a project that benefits the people because of the interests of a group of corrupt individuals and pseudo-environmentalists.” For this reason, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) announced that technical information related to the environmental impacts of the Maya Train construction would remain confidential for a period of five years.

The Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT)

This infrastructure project that aims to compete directly with the Panama Canal. It seeks to modernize the existing rail line between Salina

Cruz (Oaxaca) and Coatzacoalcos (Veracruz) to facilitate the transport of goods and people between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as create industrial zones and hubs for logistics development, port infrastructure, and energy infrastructure. The official objective is to transform this region into a global logistics center and facilitate the transport of goods, gas, and products such as minerals and oil with reduced time and cost compared to other traditional routes. This aims to attract foreign investment and strengthen Mexico's role in international supply chains. While it has been presented from the outset as an innovative project that will bring significant benefits to the country, its progress has generated conflicts with local communities and

indigenous peoples who inhabit the region.

Development Hubs for Well-being

Both projects have been presented as engines of regional economic development and are part of a broader public-private investment strategy. They are aimed at “*integrating*” isolated regions and boosting the economy with large-scale infrastructure. They also include Development Hubs for Well-being (PODEBI): These are delimited geographic areas that will enjoy special conditions and tax advantages, with the objective of attracting investment and improving regional productive capacities. During his administration, AMLO projected ten hubs along the Interoceanic Corridor of the

Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and in December 2023, two more were announced for Chiapas. Currently, under the government of Claudia Sheinbaum, the PODEBI appear as the spearhead of infrastructure development aimed at fostering new productive investments in the industrial sector in different states of the Republic.

While the government sees the PODEBI projects as an opportunity for Mexico to revive an industrial policy strategy that fosters regional development based on production, their future remains uncertain. To date, some of the companies contracted to build them have withdrawn, there has been no progress, and the promised jobs have not been created. Furthermore, information about these projects is very limited ■

Dispossession and Irregularities in Consultation and Implementation Processes

In both the Maya Train and the Interoceanic Train projects, the lack of “*prior, free, informed, and culturally appropriate*” consultation with Indigenous peoples and local communities has been denounced, in accordance with international standards such as those established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ratified by Mexico.

In the case of the Maya Train, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs sent a letter to the Mexican government, pointing out not only the lack of adequate consultation, but also the risks of eviction, displacement, and expulsion, as well as the environmental impacts and the potential cultural and historical loss that the affected communities could suffer.

In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, testimonies gathered by organizations have reported the dispossession of Indigenous communities of their lands, which has also resulted in forced displacement. They have denounced the pressure to accept insufficient financial compen-

sation and the community divisions caused by the imposition of projects without genuine consent or fair negotiation.

"We have the right to live in our territory, to live off our forests, our seas, our lands. We don't want their projects, we want our lives," declared Betina Cruz, a Binniza (Zapotec) land defender and member of the Assembly of Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory (APIDTT).

In addition, several organizations have denounced flaws and irregularities in the construction. In this regard, the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI), following the derailment of the Trans-Isthmus Train between the towns of Nizanda and Chivela in Oaxaca on December 28th, 2025, recalled that *"the irregularities and violations of the rights of Indigenous peoples in the design and execution of the Tehuantepec Isthmus Railway (FIT) works of the Interoceanic Corridor were denounced at different times between 2019 and 2025, including the use of 'poor quality' materials and the volume of the ballast layer in the project."* This accident resulted in 14 deaths and 98 injuries.

Environmental Impacts and Violations of the Right to a Healthy Environment and Justice

Since the projects' inception, several lawsuits have been filed alleging violations of the right to a healthy environment. In the case of the Maya Train, it has been denounced that the environmental impact assessment was not comprehensive, with processes fragmented by section, which may obscure the cumulative impact of the project on ecosystems.

Today, the environmental impacts of the Maya Train have become evident. Several reports indicate that the megaproject has caused habitat fragmentation, significant deforestation, and risks to endemic species by

crossing areas of high biodiversity. Environmental organizations have documented that millions of trees have been felled for the construction of the railway, impacting karst soils and groundwater sources such as cenotes and caverns, which are essential for local communities and regional biodiversity. Expert reports and legal claims have warned that the environmental damage caused by the Maya Train could

"We don't want their projects, we want our lives."

extend until 2050, affecting not only the natural landscape but also the daily lives of people who depend on natural resources.

Furthermore, civil organizations have pointed out that environmental authorities have obstructed injunction proceedings even in the face of evidence of profound environmental impacts, weakening the protection of vulnerable ecosystems. Just recently, the Collegiate Court granted a definitive suspension and ordered the Federal Attorney for Environ-

The jungle is not
for sale
© GREENPEACE



mental Protection (PROFEPA) to carry out verification, inspection, and protection measures regarding the construction of Section 5 of the Maya Train, in response to the injunction filed by the organization *“Save Me from the Train.”* In response, spokespeople for the group declared that *“this is not just a legal victory. It is a clear message: nature has rights, and organized civil society can have an impact.”* However, we will have to wait to see the actual implemen-

"Nature has rights, and organized civil society can have an impact."

tation of this ruling for a project that is already underway.

Meanwhile, in the Isthmus, although public data is less extensive than in the case of the Maya Train, reports from civilian observation missions detail that the expansion of the Interoceanic Corridor and its industrial parks is transforming forests, agricultural lands and natural areas, with environmental consequences still under evaluation.

The Isthmus is ours
© SIPAZ



Cultural Impacts and Gentrification Risks

Large-scale infrastructure megaprojects, such as the Maya Train and the Interoceanic Corridor, have profound cultural effects on Indigenous and rural communities. In these cases, southeastern Mexico is home to a great diversity of Indigenous peoples who preserve their languages, ways of life, and ancestral ties to the land. The imposition of these projects threatens to transform not only the physical landscape but also social relations and traditional means of subsistence. Sociocultural research indicates that, with the imposition of develop-

ment models centered on the global economy, communities face an erosion of their cultural identity, fragmentation of community networks, and a loss of control over territorial decisions that have historically been collective.

At the same time, these projects can fuel gentrification and real estate speculation. In areas of Quintana Roo near the Maya Train, increases in land and real estate prices have been reported, which generally impacts the local population and low-income residents who end up moving to the outskirts. There is also a tendency in these areas to transform local markets, driving foreign investment and high-cost tourism that becomes inaccessible to the local and national population.

Militarization and Institutional Control of Megaprojects

A distinctive and controversial feature that has been key in both megaprojects is the direct participation of the armed forces; the Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA) and the Ministry of the Navy (SEMAR) were entrusted not only with the construction, but also with the oper-

"Communities face an erosion of their cultural identity and a loss of control over territorial decisions that have historically been collective."

ation and administration of these projects, as well as the associated benefits.

Independent reports indicate that the military presence has generated a perception of control and occupation of public spaces under the pretext of security, which can limit the capacity of communities and civil authorities to report and monitor these issues. These actions have been described as human rights violations when justified by declarations of national security.

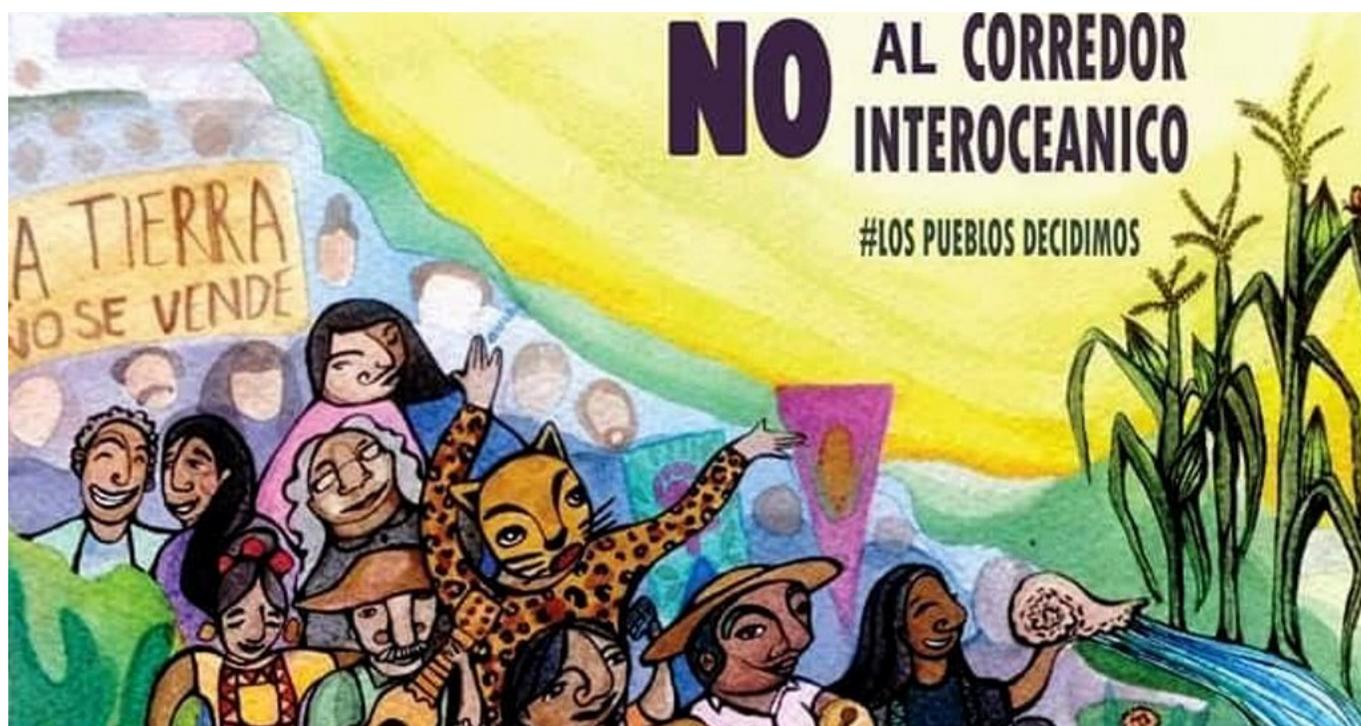
In addition to the military presence, it has been documented how federal authorities have restricted the capacity of environmental agencies to inspect or close projects with serious environmental impacts. A clear example of this was the declaration of the Maya Train project

as a matter of national security, which, as already mentioned, limited or blocked these possibilities, even when there was evidence of damage such as deforestation or illegal land use.

While during his administration, Lopez Obrador also justified the military presence as a way to guarantee security in the areas, the figures indicate the opposite. Various media outlets have reported in recent years an increase in violence, illicit drug use, drug trafficking, and the presence of criminal groups. For example, Proceso reported in its November 2023 edition *"the proliferation of cartels along the Interoceanic Corridor route, between Veracruz and Oaxaca, which means violence for many local residents."* A report by the Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA) acknowledged that three of the main cartels operate in the five states through which the Maya Train passes.

Similarly, the military has been used to repress protests and to incite violence and intimidation against human rights defenders.

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The Maya Train is ecocide and ethnocide
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In February 2024, members of the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) and state police violently evicted nearly 50 retired railway workers, most of them between 60 and 70 years old, who were protesting on the tracks of the Interoceanic Railway in Matias Romero, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. On that occasion, two railway leaders were arrested. A year earlier, in February 2023, residents of Estacion Sarabia, in the municipality of San Juan Guichicovi (Oaxaca), had warned about this and held a protest against the intimidation they had been receiving from the military. These are just a few examples of the power dynamics and violence surrounding these projects due to militarization, which are

concerning because of the impunity and speed with which they are reproduced.

Repression, Attacks, and Threats Against Territory Defenders

One of the most worrying aspects has been the increase in violence against environmental and land defenders in Mexico, with high numbers of attacks directly linked to opposition to megaprojects such as the Maya Train and the Interoceanic Corridor. According to data from the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA), 282 attacks against environmental defenders were documented in Mexico in 2023, including homicides, physical assaults, and threats; 57.7% of these cases affected Indigenous people, often in the context of development or extractive projects. The year 2024 ended as one of the deadliest, with at least 25 environmental defenders murdered, a 25% increase compared to 2023. According to research conducted by the Ibero-American University (IBERO), *“one of the most alarming findings is that the main perpetrator of these attacks is the Mexican state itself, followed by players linked to private companies, and in third place, organized crime.”* According to the research, 44% of the attacks are attributable to state forces, such as municipal and state police, the Army, the National Guard, and the Navy.

In the coastal region of Chiapas, families from communities in the municipalities of Arriaga and Pijijiapan have been criminalized for defending their territories against the construction of Line K of the Interoceanic Corridor's Trans-Isthmus Train, implemented by Ferrocarriles del Istmo de Tehuantepec (FIT)

"The main perpetrator of these attacks is the Mexican state itself, followed by private companies and organized crime."



and the Ministry of Communications, Infrastructure and Transportation (SCT). This has been denounced by the Digna Ochoa Human Rights Center, which has demanded an immediate end to the criminalization. Recently, human rights defender Poulette Celene Hernandez, a member of the Digna Ochoa Human Rights Center, was the victim of physical attacks and death threats that may be linked to her work defending against the train construction.

Another form of violence faced by land defenders due to these megaprojects is criminalization and harassment. In the context of the Maya Train project, in addition to physical attacks, there have been reports of legal sanctions, criminal complaints, and forced evictions as retaliation for resistance.

In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, acts of violence and arbitrary arrests have been reported

against land and territory defenders in the face of the Interoceanic Corridor, along with institutional pressures that affect their freedom and security. Such is the case of defender David Hernandez from the community of Puente Madera, who has faced arrest warrants and arbitrary detentions, in one of which he was sentenced to 46 years in prison. In some cases, defenders have suffered fatal consequences in the context of land disputes linked to the Interoceanic Corridor megaproject. For example, in the Isthmus, the death of Zapotec activist Noel Lopez Gallegos was reported after he questioned the distribution of land payments, which sparked protests and accusations of the project's imposition and the resulting breakdown of the social fabric. A Civil Observation Mission noted that it recorded *"at least 21 cases of intimidation, harassment and threats against*

The land is not
for sale
© SIPAZ



The jungle is not for sale
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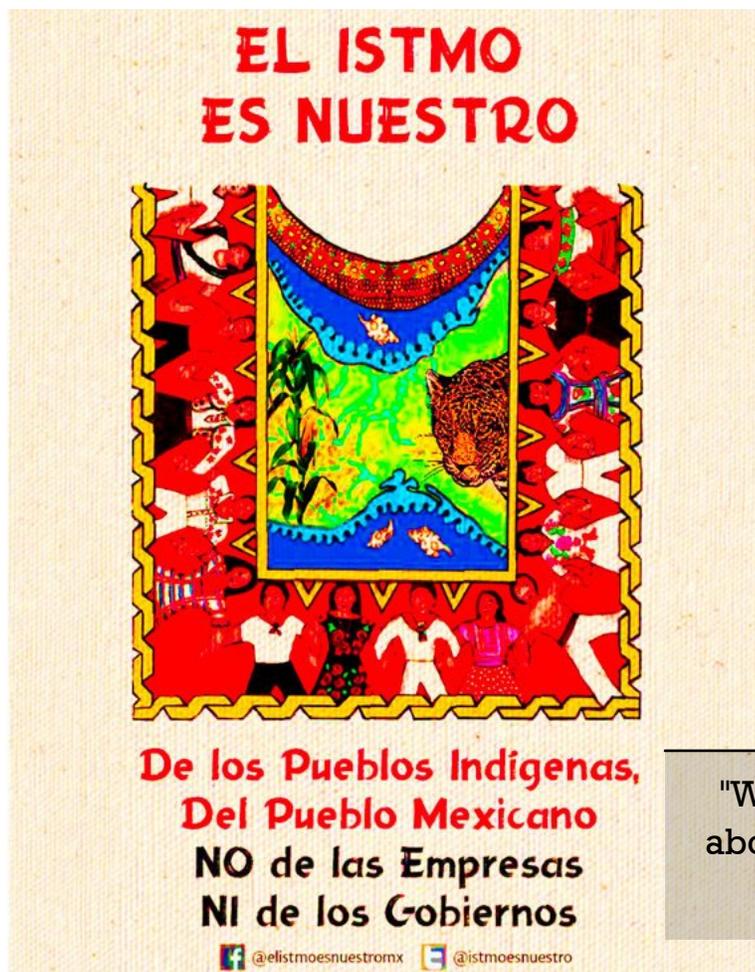
human rights defenders, their families or groups; 11 cases of physical and psychological violence, as well as forced evictions; three homicides of human rights defenders between October 2022 and July 2023; two cases of defamation through widely used public media; and 43 cases of criminal complaints against local authorities and community human rights defenders in the communities of: San Juan Guichicovi, Mogoñe Viejo, Mogoñe Estacion, Paso Real, Estacion Sarabia, Tagolaba, and Puente Madera.”

Resisting Despite Indifference and Repression

Faced with these megaprojects and despite the risks, multiple forms of resistance have flourished, woven from dignity and collective memory. Mayan, Zapotec, Mixe, Zoque, and

peasant communities, among others, have formed community assemblies, community police forces, and networks to defend their territory as a space for life, not as a commodity.

The National Indigenous Congress, local water and land defense organizations, and regional networks in the Isthmus, such as “*El Istmo es Nuestro*” (The Isthmus is Ours), and the Peninsula have denounced the lack of free, prior, and informed consultations and the social and environmental impacts of these projects. Despite criminalization, delegitimization campaigns, and threats from both state actors and organized crime, these communities continue to organize with a profound conviction: “*The land is not for sale, it is loved and defended.*”



"What comes next for us is to resist. We are going to declare ourselves peoples in resistance. If blood is going to be shed, so be it, we have no other choice. And if that's why they're going to kill us, they'll only achieve what they want with us dead," or "We are fighting for life. And it's not just about living for the sake of living, but about living with dignity. That's what we want and that's why we continue, it's what lifts us up in the moments when we say we can't go on anymore," are some of the testimonies that were collected in the process of defending "The Isthmus is Ours." ■

The Isthmus is
ours
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"We are fighting for life. And it's not about just living, but about living with dignity."

COLLABORATE ECONOMICALLY WITH SIPAZ

Your donations make it possible for SIPAZ to continue offering international observation and presence in southern Mexico.
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SIPAZ

Three Decades of Supportive Presence and Blossoming Hope

Interview with Jorge Santiago

*"The work of justice will be peace, and the fruit of justice will be tranquility and security forever."
(Isaiah 32:17) (Verse quoted in the Communiqué of the Believing People, January, 2026) and SIPAZ will be there, raising the banners and tending to the wounds of weary feet."*

— Jorge Santiago



In commemoration of our 30th anniversary, we decided to sit down with people who have encountered SIPAZ along the way. One of them is Jorge Santiago Santiago, a renowned human rights defender, theologian, and pastoral advisor in Chiapas. His life has been deeply intertwined with the social, ecclesial, and Indigenous processes that have shaped the region's contemporary history, especially since the Zapatista uprising of 1994. His imprisonment in 1995, accused of being a leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), lasted just over two months in a high-security prison and was highly politically motivated. Various national and international organizations expressed their solidarity, which contributed to his release. This experience profoundly marked his trajectory, reaffirming his commitment to peacebuilding and the defense of human rights. Currently, he continues to support various processes and organizations in Chiapas. His life is a testament to consistency, resilience, and hope in one of Mexico's most complex contexts.

SIPAZ: Born in Times of War

From a perspective woven with years of commitment, Jorge Santiago recalls that SIPAZ was born in a very specific context: in 1995, Chiapas was a territory gripped by fear; military checkpoints on the roads, communities under surveillance, a constant presence of the Army, infiltrations, paramilitary groups, and massacres like the one in Acteal in 1997 marked an era in which the word *"peace"* was not an abstract ideal, but a vital necessity. In the midst of this context, the International Service for Peace (SIPAZ) was born. Its name was not accidental: it was a stance against violence, a decision to be present as organized civil society wherever life was threatened.

SIPAZ was born in this context, Jorge recalls: as part of a broader network of national and international organizations that understood that a civilian presence could be a factor in

containing violence. Inspired by the pastoral work and mediation efforts spearheaded by figures like Samuel Ruiz García, Bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas and a mediator in the dialogue, SIPAZ undertook a clear task: to accompany, observe, document, and make visible what was happening in the communities.

Thirty years later, SIPAZ has not only witnessed the contemporary history of Chiapas, Jorge Santiago emphasizes, *"but has also been an active part of its transformation. Its constant, discreet yet firm presence has helped open spaces for dialogue, document human rights violations, support community processes, and sustain hope when everything seemed to be falling apart."*

"... but has also been an active part of its transformation. Its constant, discreet yet firm presence has helped open spaces for dialogue, document human rights violations, support community processes, and sustain hope when everything seemed to be falling apart".

The Power of Public Presence

From its inception, SIPAZ opted for a particular strategy, Jorge recalls: visibility. In the 1990s, the presence of international observers functioned as a kind of *"shield."* Wearing a vest, publicly identifying themselves, issuing press releases, and maintaining relationships with embassies could deter aggression.

The logic was simple: if the world was watching, the political cost of repression increased. During the San Andres Accords, organized civil society surrounded the cathedral and the negotiation spaces. There were journalists, cameras, and international representatives.

Peace was not just a matter between the State and the EZLN: it was a collective cause.

SIPAZ understood that its public voice was part of its responsibility, Jorge also affirms: *“Every press release, every report, every visit to embassies contributed to keeping Chiapas on the international agenda. In times when information was fragmented and often manipulated, systematizing data and offering rigorous analysis became one of its greatest strengths,”* Jorge said.

“One of SIPAZ’s most significant contributions has been its capacity for documentation and analysis. It doesn’t limit itself to denouncing isolated incidents; it seeks to understand processes, identify patterns, and place the local within a global framework”.

Today, those who review SIPAZ's thirty-year archives can reconstruct much of the political and social history of Chiapas from 1995 to the present, in Spanish, English, French, and German.

Documenting to Remember; Interpreting to Act

“One of SIPAZ’s most significant contributions has been its capacity for documentation and analysis. It doesn’t limit itself to denouncing isolated incidents; it seeks to understand processes, identify patterns, and place the local within a global framework,” Jorge noted.

This strategic approach has been part of its *“trademark”*: not settling for the surface, but always questioning the structural causes of violence. *“In a world saturated with information, the ability to discern, contextualize, and offer a profound interpretation is, in itself, an act of peace-building,”* he affirmed. *“In an interconnected*

world, peace must also be considered from a global perspective,” he added.

Accompanying without Seeking the Limelight

SIPAZ has cultivated a particular style, Jorge also emphasizes: accompanying without taking over the processes. It has been close to spaces like the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights, has collaborated with church institutions, has participated in peace platforms, and has supported community initiatives, but it rarely seeks the limelight.

Instead of imposing agendas, it listens. Instead of speaking for others, it amplifies voices. It accompanies educational processes, analytical meetings, and collective reflections. It supports training, systematization, and collaboration among stakeholders. *“This approach has allowed SIPAZ to be perceived not as an external actor that arrives to lead, but as a reliable ally,”* Jorge concluded.

An Organization with a Feminine Face

In recent years, SIPAZ has undergone a significant transformation: its team is now predominantly female. Far from being a mere anecdote, this composition has shaped a work style characterized by collaboration, intercultural sensitivity, and spiritual openness.

In a state where Indigenous women have led community processes and silent resistance, the female presence at SIPAZ has reinforced an ethic of care: care for words, processes, and relationships.

Peace is not built solely at negotiation tables; it is also woven in encounters, ceremonies, spaces for listening, and interreligious dialogue. SIPAZ has successfully created these spaces, welcoming Catholics, Evangelicals, and people without religious affiliation, all united by a common pursuit: a dignified life.

Memory and Future: Between Challenges and Hope

While in the 1990s violence was clearly associated with a conflict between the State and the EZLN, today the landscape is more complex. Organized crime, territorial disputes, forced migration, and illicit economies have transformed the scenario. Faced with this situation, SIPAZ has had to rethink its approach to providing support. Rather than acting as a visible shield, it has chosen to strengthen networks, deepen its analysis, and create spaces for collaboration.

SIPAZ's challenge for the future is *"not to lose what we have gained: that capacity for in-depth analysis, that strategic vision, that commitment to the peoples who are fighting for systemic alternatives to violence and dispossession,"* Jorge reflects.

But it is also *"called to take a further step,"* he adds: to clearly propose its own vision of peace, to create its own spaces where that vision becomes visible, and to transform its

"This approach has allowed SIPAZ to be perceived not as an external actor that arrives to lead, but as a reliable ally".

accumulated experience into a framework that illuminates national and international debates. *"The hope that SIPAZ has helped to sustain is not empty optimism. It is the conviction, built day by day, that another reality is possible,"* he concludes ■



Jorge Santiago Santiago
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SIPAZ Activities

(From mid-November 2025 to mid-February 2026)

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND SUPPORT

CHIAPAS

NOVEMBER

- ◆ We visited the San Juan Cancuc prisoners in San Cristobal de Las Casas prison.
- ◆ We participated in the Peacebuilders' Meeting, held in the community of Siberia, municipality of Chanal, at the invitation of the Commission for Support of Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO).
- ◆ We attended the quarterly assembly of Believing People of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- ◆ We attended a meeting convened by the Pastoral Ministry of Mother Earth of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, held in the municipality of Huixtan.
- ◆ We participated in a meeting with representatives of the pastoral zones that 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 participated in activities held as part of the 12th anniversary of the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE), in San Juan Cancuc.
- ◆ We joined the pilgrimage organized by the Diocesan Women's Coordinating Committee (CODIMUJ), in San Cristobal de Las Casas, as part of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

DECEMBER

- ◆ We participated in the 7th Intercultural Meeting for Free and Chosen Mobilities, held in Las Margaritas.
- ◆ We visited the community of San Francisco Teopisca with our Board of Directors.

- ◆ We met with members of the Tojolabal Mission in Comitan de Dominguez.
- ◆ We attended the commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Acteal massacre in the municipality of Chenalho.
- ◆ We attended several sessions of the "Of Pyramids, Histories, Loves, and, of course, Heartbreaks" workshop, convened by the EZLN in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

JANUARY

- ◆ We attended the press conference in San Cristobal de Las Casas, organized by the collective "Somos Fuego Feminista" (*We Are Feminist Fire*), where it was denounced that the Prosecutor's Office has still not delivered justice and has revictimized the complainants in the case of an attempted femicide that occurred in February 2023 in the Don Lauro Mountain area, south of the city.
- ◆ We participated in the discussion "The Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Chiapas: The Challenges of Their Protection," convened by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center (Frayba), at the Law School of the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH), which included the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor.
- ◆ We participated in a meeting with representatives from the pastoral zones that 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 joined the pilgrimage organized by the Faithful of the Diocese of San Cristobal to honor the memory of Samuel Ruiz Garcia, known as Tatic Samuel, on the 15th anniversary of his death.
- ◆ We met with members of the Mothers in Resistance collective.

FEBRUARY

- ◆ We attended the quarterly assembly of the People of Faith of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- ◆ We met with members of the Searching Mothers collective of Chiapas.
- ◆ We were present at the event held to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the Melel Xojobal organization.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS

- ◆ In January, we participated in a private meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, along with other civil society organizations.
- ◆ Also in January, we met with members of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Mexico City.

PEACE EDUCATION

NOVEMBER

- ◆ We shared an analysis with teenagers and young adults participating in the Women of Corn (Mujeres de Maiz) collective, who come from various municipalities in the Highlands and North Jungle regions.
- ◆ We conducted a heart-strengthening workshop with displaced people from the border region, held in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

DECEMBER

- ◆ We presented a paper titled "Paths to Peace in the Context of Latin America and the World" at the Dialectic Space (Espacio Dialéctica) in the j'Tatik Samuel Ruiz Garcia Museum.

JANUARY

- ◆ We shared an analysis of the current situation with the operational team of the Maya Intercultural Seminar (SIM).
- ◆ We co-facilitated a workshop with nearly 200 volunteers from the Las Margaritas parish, in collaboration with the organization El Rebozo.

INTERNAL TRAINING

- ◆ In December, we participated in a Regional Workshop on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders held in Uruguay, organized by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Carolina Foundation.

NETWORKING

- ◆ We attend plenary and committee meetings of the Chiapas Peace Articulation (Slamalil Kinal) at least once a month.
- ◆ Every two months, we attend operational meetings of the People's Movement for Peace and Justice (MPPJ).
- ◆ We held meetings with organizations collaborating on the project entitled "Strengthening the Self-Protection Capacities of Human Rights Organizations and Communities in Chiapas," which we coordinate together with Voces Mesoamericanas and Huridocos.
- ◆ As members of the Platform for Peacebuilding in Mexico, we participate in monthly meetings for analysis and reflection based on best practices.
- ◆ In January, we participated in the meeting of partners of the German volunteer program Welthaus, held in Mexico City.
- ◆ In January, we participated in a meeting of partners of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). - In January, we participated in the follow-up meeting to the Second Conference on Youth, Peace and Security convened by the EEAS.
- ◆ In February, we participated in the meeting of the Latin American Youth, Peace and Security Coalition, where the organization Dame un Chance (Give Me a Chance) shared its experience in peacebuilding in Panama ■