



SIPaz



The presidential candidate of the ruling MORENA party, Claudia Sheinbaum, addresses her supporters after securing victory in the elections, in Mexico City, Mexico, on June 3, 2024
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SIPAZ is an international observation program created in 1995, after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to monitor the conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

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

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

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- Maintains an international presence and accompanies processes that are working towards the construction of a culture of peace in Mexico.
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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 ■



Calle Las Flores #1,
Barrio de San Diego
CP 29270, San Cristóbal
de Las Casas
Chiapas, Mexico
(+52.967) 631 60 55

chiapas@sipaz.org
www.sipaz.org



sipaz.chiapas



@sipazchiapas

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Elections amid High Levels of Political Violence

In March, the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations (UN), Volker Türk, said that the electoral process underway in Mexico “*must be safeguarded from violence.*” On June 2nd, these elections will lead to the appointment of more than 20,000 public officials, including the head of state, as well as members of both chambers of Congress and a wide range of representatives and state and local authorities. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) minimized the risk, stating that “*fortunately there is nothing serious.*” He stated that “*the High Commissioner is very (with all due respect), very biased; he is against us and joins forces with those who want to show that Mexico is a very violent country. You see what our adversaries do and the means of manipulation.*” Lopez Obrador denounced that “*there is that environment*” in which his “*adversaries*” promote the narrative “*of violence, insults to journalists and candidates, that is, seeking to strain*” the atmosphere and talk about “*state elections.*” ▲

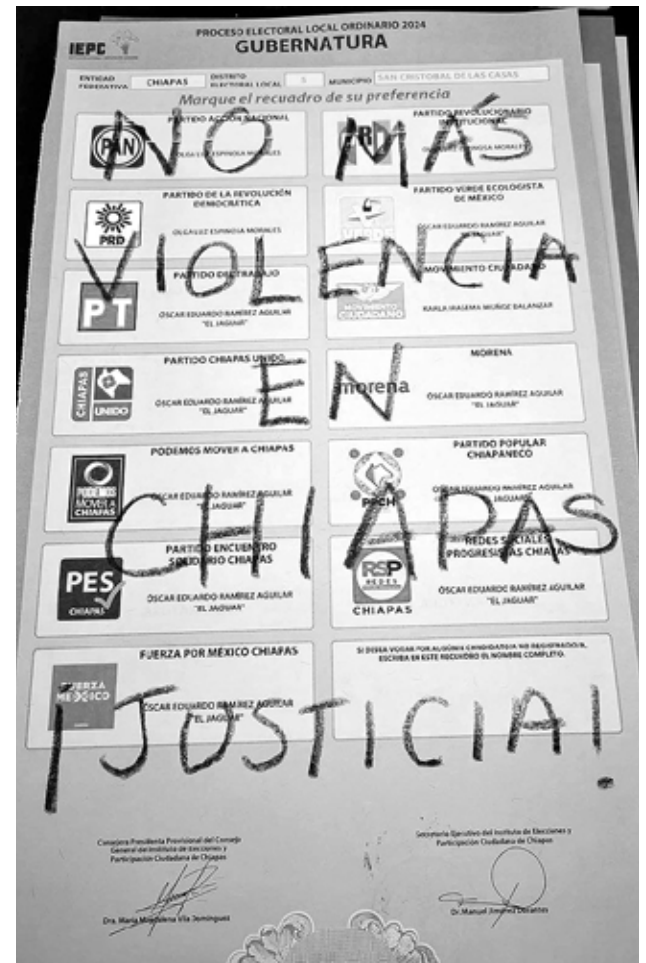
Shortly before the elections, there were already more than 500 candidates who had federal protection, being escorted by more than three thousand elements of the Armed Forces. The authorities recognize that 15 candidates have been murdered since the beginning of the electoral process, although the citizen organization Data Civica counted 30, while the consulting firm DataInt documents 39 and a total of 149 political murders when considering advisors, officials and family members. The government also announced that on election day the country would be guarded by more than 260,000 members of the Armed Forces and the National Guard.

In April, Data Civica, Mexico Evalua and Animal Politico presented a new study titled “*Democracy Violated: Organized Crime in Elections and in Public Administration in Mexico.*” They conclude that political-criminal violence in Mexico not only affects parties and candidates, but that violence against all types of political

players causes citizen participation to drop by three percentage points. Likewise, for every attack on candidates, the absence of polling station officials increases almost 1%. The study confirms that political-criminal violence is more frequent at the municipal level: 77% of victims aspired to or held a position at that level of government. “*The interest of criminal organizations is at the local level, since this is how they build their territorial controls: locality by locality, to consequently control municipalities and entire regions,*” the study states.

Violence in Mexico: Disagreements over Diagnosis

In March, the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate (CEM) met with the three presidential candidates in the 2024 elections, Claudia Sheinbaum, Xochitl Galvez and Jorge Alvarez Maynez to sign the “*National Commitment for Peace.*” This document includes 117 proposals on security,



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justice, human development and human rights, which were developed through forums in the states in which more than 18 thousand people participated in 2023. It seeks to “*build a route to effectively address effective collective action that can address the crisis of violence and social decomposition that afflicts our nation.*” With reservations from the MORENA candidate Claudia Sheinbaum, the three candidates for the Presidency of Mexico signed the agreement to seek peace if they win the election. Sheinbaum’s disagreements stem from the fact that she does not share the diagnosis included in the document.

“*I come to commit myself not only in a personal capacity, the Citizen Movement takes up this document and our candidates (...) are going to be forced to support this vision of a change in strategy, a change in the security model that the country urgently needs. We need to*



CEMDA report
on environmental
defenders
© CEMDA

get out of this horror and I congratulate this effort to begin that path,” the candidate of the Citizen Movement, Alvarez Maynez, said. He acknowledged that he is not ahead in the electoral preferences and described it as worrying that the two leaders have been part of the failed strategies.

The candidate of the Strength and Heart for Mexico (PRI-PAN-PRD) coalition, Xochitl Galvez, declared that, “it finds a perfect harmony and coincidence with what I have been saying during the days we have been campaigning, and 15 security proposals and for me the most important is the demilitarization of the public administration.”

The presidential candidate for MORENA, PT and Green Party, Claudia Sheinbaum, listed several points on which she disagrees: the “pessimistic” diagnosis, “the references to an alleged militarization or militarism in the country, and with the points where minimizes or relativizes the function of the State” or the fact that “common crime has increased in Mexico, fueled by marginalization and the search for recognition and social justice.” The next day, AMLO declared “of course I respect the churches a lot, but politically I do not agree that they want to create

an environment that does not exist.”

Multiple Pending Issues in Human Rights

In April, the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA) published its 2023 report on the situation of environmental human rights defenders, in which it revealed that 20 people with this profile were murdered last year. There have 102 environmental defenders murdered during the current six-year term of office. In this same period, 282 attacks were recorded against 416 people and communities defending environmental human rights, in a total of 123 different incidents. The main aggressor was the government, having a participation in 61 of the 123 events, followed by organized crime, with 37 cases, and private companies, with 19. Regarding the 18 cases related to megaprojects and works related to highways communication, all were for the authorization of railways. Of these, 12 incidents are related to the “Maya Train” megaproject and six to the Tehuantepec Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor. 57.7% were against indigenous people.

In April, the All Rights for All Network (Red TDT), rejected “the crim-

inalization carried out by President AMLO in his morning press conferences to delegitimize the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human in Chiapas and the Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center in Mexico City.” “This discourse aggravates reality, since Mexico continues to be one of the most dangerous countries for journalism and the defense of human rights. According to the UNHCHR, between January 2019 and February 2024, at least 103 murders of human rights defenders, 41 journalists, seven media workers have been recorded in possible relation to their work; additionally, 38 defenders or journalists were disappeared, 25 regained their freedom and 13 are still missing,” it denounced. Shortly before, AMLO said of the two organizations “you are seeking to create an environment of violence, which does not have the dimensions that you are registering.”

According to the National Militarization Inventory, there have been at least 291 occasions in which the three levels of government have transferred civilian functions and budgets to the armed forces between the years 2006 and 2023. This, through two constitutional reforms, 12 federal legislative reforms, 19 presidential decrees and agreements and 258 private agreements signed between the armed forces and federal, state and municipal civil authorities. The Inventory concludes that AMLO’s government is the one that has militarized Mexico the most since 83% of agreements with armed forces have not had to do with security. The Inventory documents the signing of 19 military agreements issued in the current six-year term of office. The majority create state-owned companies under the control of the armed forces and allow them to participate in priority government works, such as the Maya Train. The Inventory argues that militarization is problematic: “First, because it is a process that goes against the Constitution. Second, because the armed forces are managed under a special regime and, therefore, are not subject to the same obligations and controls as civil institutions (...).

Third, because empirical evidence from Mexico demonstrates that the participation of the armed forces in public security tasks has not only failed to contain violence, but has contributed to exacerbating it.”

CHIAPAS: Between Electoral and Criminal violence

In May, the bishops of Chiapas expressed their concern about the situation in some regions of the state affected by violence generated by organized crime groups, where, they considered, there are not the conditions to carry out the elections. They spoke about “the wave of violence present in our dioceses, which destabilizes society and which is often generated by organized crime; the presence of corruption at all levels of government, which generates so much damage to the well-being of communities and families.” Likewise, they identified other challenges, such as migration, payment of extortion, insecurity, widespread poverty, backwardness in education and health, lack of job opportunities and gender inequality. They also noted that candidates at all levels appear to lack concrete proposals to address these challenges. By that date, there were 15 attacks against electoral aspirants and candidates in Chiapas, of which four died.

Although black spots continue to multiply in almost the entire state, the areas with maximum levels of violence occur in the Border and Sierra regions. In April, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba) responded to accusations from President Lopez Obrador who accused said center of “magnifying” the violence in Chiapas. It reaffirmed that “with concern, we have confirmed and made visible that, at least since June 2021, the situation of violence has deepened like a cancer in our state, within the framework of the criminal dispute for control of the territory. This situation is characterized not only by armed confrontation between criminal groups, but also by the attempt to control, to a large degree through terror strategies, the so-



cial, economic and political life of the communities. Consequently, the Chiapas and mobile population is experiencing serious impacts, with emphasis on the Border and Sierra regions, with a trend of expansion to other regions of the state.”

The other, more serious incident occurred in May when eleven people were murdered in Nuevo Morelia, municipality of Chicomuselo, in the context of clashes between the Jalisco New Generation (CJNG) and Sinaloa (CS) cartels that intensified in the previous days. AMLO acknowledged that “that area has insecurity problems.” However, he assured that there were conditions for the elections to be held in Chiapas on June 2nd.

Impacts of Growing Violence

The levels of violence are having increasing impacts on the population. In February, Melel Xojobal warned about the fact that more than 2,507 children and adolescents from the Chiapas Highlands are at risk of being recruited by organized crime. It stated that the majority of victims of forced recruitment have an average age between 15 and 21 years and are indigenous. Once inside, the young people are forced to

run errands, sell and transport drugs, recruit other people and carry out surveillance or coyote work. In the case of women, they are forced to do cleaning and be waitresses in canteens or bars, until they become victims of sexual exploitation. Also, young people can be forced to participate in confrontations against rival groups, as well as carry out gang activities or be hitmen.

In March, within the framework of International Women’s Day, thousands of women marched in different cities of Chiapas to demand justice for the victims of femicides and for an end to violence against women. According to figures from the state’s Gender Violence Alert (GVA), in 2023, 2,302 crimes were documented in investigation files. The majority corresponds to family violence (899), followed by pedophilia (387), rape (288), failure to comply with family assistance obligations (282), sexual abuse (154), sexual harassment (92), crimes against sexual privacy or bodily intimacy (52), and femicide (35), among others.

In April, Frayba presented its most recent report “Touching the Void”, whose objective is to carry out a first x-ray of the problem of disappearances, a phenomenon that has been growing exponentially in the state. “In

International Women’s Day in San Cristóbal de las Casas, March 2024 © SIPAZ



March for Peace in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, April 2024
© Melel Xojobal

2019, a total of 68 missing people was registered, by 2022 the figure was 244 missing and year after year it has been increasing, in this period the phenomenon increased by 358%," it specified (see Focus). In May, within the framework of Mother's Day, thousands of mothers in Chiapas carried out symbolic acts demanding truth, justice and guarantees of non-repetition, in the face of forced disappearance, femicides and murders of their sons and daughters.

Complaints and Responses Facing an Adverse Context

Despite an adverse context, actions have been taken in favor of life, peace and security. In March, more than a thousand Tseltal indigenous people from the Community Government of Chilon marched to demand an end to the violence generated by political parties and criminal groups. They declared that they will continue to "build paths of life from our autonomy," promoting "the collective over the individual" and fighting "for Mother Earth in the face of the extractive threat."

In March, within the framework of World Water Day, residents and activists protested in San Cristobal de

Las Casas in defense of water and life. They stated that "Mexico faces serious problems and challenges due to the lack of availability and quality of water for human consumption. The severe drought that is shaking us has multiple interconnected causes: climate change, deforestation, population growth, the lack of a culture of water care, the implementation of public policies that respond to the laws of the globalized market, a model of water management that gives rise to overexploitation, hoarding, contamination, dispossession and privatization of the vital liquid."

In March, the Communal Property Authorities of the municipality of Nicolas Ruiz called on the surrounding towns to form an "Alliance for the Security and Good of our Territories." They explained that "together we can take care of ourselves because we do not want more events like what happened on March 1st, 2024, when a group of people from organized crime entered our territory to carry out their illicit work." They denounced that "the Mexican State is well aware of what is happening and we demand that it control its people because government institutions and high officials allow and protect the actions of these groups."

In April, more than 300 people

marched for peace and security in San Cristobal de Las Casas. This march was called after, a few days before, an eleven-year-old boy was kidnapped. Although the minor was rescued safe and sound by state police the night before the march, it was decided to go ahead with it. The protesters, many of them children from neighborhoods in the northern area, carried white flags and balloons. The case of the kidnapping of the minor is added to the 2,476 cases of girls, boys and adolescents who disappeared between 2018 and March 2024, of which 40% have not been located.

In April, Tsotsil Catholics from the municipality of Chalchihuitan made a pilgrimage to the capital of this municipality to demand the closure of canteens and that voting at the door "be done in peace, without weapons or violence; that the vote is free and secret." More than a thousand participants joined in this pilgrimage "For Life and Peace."

OAXACA: Concerns in and outside the Electoral Context

Although the levels of electoral violence are not comparable to that of other states, in April, the National Network of Indigenous Lawyers expressed its concern about the recent appointments of indigenous candidates since they observed a "utilitarian tendency of identity through qualified self-ascription." It called on the electoral authorities to implement mechanisms to eradicate the usurpation and simulation that allows "opportunistic" people to occupy indigenous affirmative action. It assured that the majority of the candidates have no real connection with the indigenous communities, "they only placed themselves in that situation with the purpose of obtaining an improper candidacy to claim." In Oaxaca, "under the protection" of affirmative actions, it explained that 233 people were registered; of which, 16 are older adults, 12 young people, 162 indigenous people, 29 Afro-Mexican people, 16 people of sexual diversity and 24 people with disabilities.

In March, the Forum for the Defense of Territory and Social Property was held in Santa Maria Atzompa. In a final declaration, the participants denounced “the growing attempts to privatize land, as demonstrated by the failed proposal of the MORENA state government (...) with the program for land certification, which due to pressure and disagreement had to throw it back; without this meaning that it will be the only and last attempt, considering the policy of imposing large megaprojects by private companies in collusion with the State.” They also denounced the “policy of looting and war of extermination against our native peoples and communities, our ways of life and organization,” indicating that looting policies are accompanied by social assistance programs, which promote individualism and destroy the community. They ratified that they will continue to build “resistance and organizational movements in search of defending and protecting our lands, natural assets, territories and preserving our traditional way of life.”

In April, eleven Zapotec communities in the Central Valleys organized in the No Mining Front for a Future for All reported that they achieved the outright suspension of mining concessions in their territories, affected by the Fortuna Silver Mines (FSM) mining project in San Jose del Progreso. They recalled that in itself “our decisions are expressed in our declarations of prohibited territory for mining.” They denounced that “far from recognizing, respecting and guaranteeing our rights, both levels of government tried to promote mining in our territories, violating our right to self-determination.”

In March, within the framework of International Women’s Day, hundreds of women marched in Oaxaca to demand justice for cases of raped, missing or murdered women in the state. According to the registry of the “Rosario Castellanos” Women’s Studies Group, 126 women have died victims of femicide since the beginning of the administration of Governor Salomon Jara in 2022. Prior to the demonstrations, women’s organizations and



groups denounced the “stigmatization campaign and criminalization against protests and marches (...). We condemn the construction of a narrative that points to, accuses and judges women who, in their legitimate right to protest, will take to the streets today to denounce the femicidal violence that has increased under the protection of the State.” They expressed their concern because “feminist collectives and groups are targeted and singled out—even those organizations where children will participate—in order to confront them with citizens.”

GUERRERO: State with Highest Number of Victims of Political Violence

So far in the 2024 electoral process, by mid-May, Guerrero was positioned as the state with the highest number of victims of political violence, registering at least 80 cases. Among the murdered people are Ricardo Taja, candidate for the municipal presidency of Acapulco, and Tomas Morales Patron, candidate for the municipal presidency of Chilapa, both from MORENA. Jaime Damaso Solis, candidate for the municipal presidency of Zitlala for the National Action Party, has also been

murdered; Marcelino Ruiz, candidate for the municipal presidency of Atlixac for the Party of the Democratic Revolution; and Alfredo Gonzalez, candidate for the municipal presidency of Atoyac for the Labor Party. The municipalities of Taxco, Chilpancingo and Coyuca were those in which the most attacks have been recorded. Likewise, 22 municipalities reported cases of political gender violence, affecting both men and women.

During the period, there has also been greater frustration and despair due to the lack of progress in the case of the forced disappearance of the 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014. In March, a group of students from Ayotzinapa forcibly broke down one of the doors of the National Palace. The students were in the main square of Mexico City along with relatives of the 43 missing people in protest against the lack of responses from the government about the case. The fathers and mothers of the 43 student teachers recalled that Lopez Obrador promised in his presidential campaign to conclude the Ayotzinapa Case, but months before the end of his administration he has not fulfilled it and, on the contrary, announced that it will not be resolved in this six-year term of office.

Defense of Territory and Social Property Forum in Santa Maria Atzompa, March 2024 © EDUCA



Ayotzinapa
© Regeneración archivo

In March, Yanqui Kothan Gomez Peralta, a student from Ayotzinapa, died and another was injured: the police opened fire when they did not stop when passing through a checkpoint. The Secretary of Public Security of Guerrero described what happened as “a fortuitous event.” La Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center declared: “given a serious violation of human rights, the minimum that a government that calls itself democratic should do is guarantee an objective, impartial investigation, proceeding to protect the crime scene and make it available to the competent authority to the police. They did the opposite, they let the police put together their own version of the events and let their superiors endorse their criminal actions. (...) With their fallacious version they encourage the media lynching against the student teachers. They incite violence and harsh positions. They focus their attack on the

student teachers, placing them as the causes of chaos and violence, when the perpetrators of serious human rights violations are agents of the state.”

In more hopeful factors, in April, the Me’phaa people of the municipality of Malinaltepec inaugurated a new indigenous security and justice system based on autonomy, self-determination and the recognition of town authorities. The so-called Indigenous Territorial Security and Justice System (SERTI) will seek to consolidate itself in the face of the threat of criminal organizations taking over the lives of people, against the installation of mining companies and in the face of the governance crisis in the region ■

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ESPECIAL: Elecciones 2024

The presidential candidate of the ruling MORENA party, Claudia Sheinbaum, addresses her supporters after securing victory in the elections, in Mexico City, Mexico, on June 3, 2024
© REUTERS/Raquel Cunha



The biggest and most violent elections that Mexico has ever had

On June 2nd, 2024, more than 98 million Mexican citizens were called to vote in the largest elections Mexico has held to date. More than 20,000 public positions were contested throughout the country, including the Presidency of the Republic, the 128 seats in the Senate and the 500 in the Chamber of Deputies of the Congress of the Union, the governments of eight states (Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Puebla, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatan), the Head of Government of Mexico City, as well as the municipal presidencies or city councils in 29 federal entities. Additionally, in the country's capital, the new heads of the 16 mayoralties were elected ▲

Unfortunately, this electoral process also turned out to be the most violent that Mexico has had in its recent history. The Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (SSPC) acknowledged the murder of 22 candidates, but various independent organizations recorded higher figures: Data Cívica reported 31 murdered candidates, Causa en Común 32, Integralia 34, and DataInt 38.

Even more alarming are the figures if current or former officials, politicians, family members and collateral victims are also considered: Integralia reported a total of 231 homicides. The same source indicated that, between September 2023 and May 26th, 2024, they had recorded 749 victims of violent attacks related to the electoral process, which represented an increase of 150.5% compared to the 2021 midterm elections. The spectrum of attacks included not only murders, but also armed attacks, threats, kidnappings and disappearances.

Although President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) minimized political violence in the electoral process at all times, he acknowledged that 560 candidates who requested it received protection from more than 3,400 security elements. On the same day of the elections, June 2nd, 260,788 members of the Army, the Mexican Air Force, the National Guard and the Secretary of the Navy participated in the National Public Security Strategy to safeguard the environment of peace during the election. Both protective measures are unprecedented in their magnitude.

A final indicator: facing several situations, mainly risk of violence, the National Electoral Institute (INE) reported that 222 polling stations were not installed in 11 states of the country. Chiapas

led the list with 108 stations not installed, followed by Michoacan with 84 and Oaxaca with nine. These damages represented approximately 0.1% of the total number of planned polling stations.

MORENA and allies sweep the presidential and Congress elections

Despite the high levels of violence during the campaigns, election day took place relatively calmly, apart from a few isolated incidents. Participation was a little more than 60% of the electoral roll.

The results of the presidential election were not surprising compared to surveys conducted by media and consulting firms. Claudia Sheinbaum was elected as the first female president of Mexico, obtaining an advantage of 30 percentage points over the candidate Xochitl Galvez (from the PRI, PAN and PRD, historical parties in Mexico). Additionally, Sheinbaum's party, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), along with her allies, achieved a legislative majority in both Chambers of the Congress of the Union. This will allow her to carry out the constitutional reforms of the so-called "Plan C", inherited from President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, as well as consolidate the flagship megaprojects of the current administration.

According to the Quick Counts of the National Electoral Institute, Sheinbaum received between 58.3% and 60.7% of the votes, with citizen participation varying between 60% and 61.5% of the electorate. With an electoral roll of 98.3 million registered people, this means that Sheinbaum would have obtained between 35 and 36 million votes, representing a significant increase compared to the 30.1 million votes that Lopez Obrador obtained in 2018.

As for the Senate, the estimates from the statistical exercise carried out by the Technical Committee of the Quick Count (CO-TECORA) of the INE indicate that MORENA and its allies from the PVEM and the PT would have at least 76 of the 128 seats, which brings them closer to the qualified majority of two thirds, necessary to reform the Constitution. In the Chamber of Deputies, these same actors would take between 346 and 380 seats, which would far exceed the 334 votes required to reform the Constitution in the lower house.

Chiapas, one of the states that suffered the greatest electoral political violence

On June 2nd, in addition to the federal positions, the new governor, 40 deputies, 123 municipal presidents, 875 councilors and 123 trustees were elected in Chiapas. The high levels of political-electoral violence during the campaigns placed Chiapas among the most affected states, only surpassed by Guerrero.

At least 15 political murders were recorded, five of them of candidates. In addition, 515 candidates for various elected positions, belonging to 11 parties and two coalitions, resigned. According to the State Institute of Elections and Citizen Participation, the majority of the affected candidates were women.

Likewise, 108 of the 6,977 planned polling stations could not be installed. This affected the possible participation of about 61 thou-

sand people, considering an electoral roll of four million, three thousand 327. The municipalities affected by this decision were: 12 in the municipality of Tila, 28 in Pantelhó, four in San Cristobal de Las Casas, three in Bella Vista, 45 in Chicomuselo, two in Ocozacoatl de Espinosa, one in Villaflores, four in Amatenango de la Frontera and seven in Honduras de la Sierra.

Eduardo Ramirez wins as governor in Chiapas with a wide margin

On June 2nd, without major surprise, Eduardo Ramirez Aguilar (ERA), candidate of the Let's Keep Making History coalition, won the race for state governor with a wide advantage over his closest contender, Olga Luz Espinosa Morales, candidate of the Strength and Heart Alliance for Chiapas. She obtained about 80% of the votes cast. 62.7% of voters went to the polls. Just two hours after the polls closed, the MORENA member thanked the people of Chiapas for their support at the polls and for "the great hope they have placed in me as their next governor."

The municipal link, the most disputed, giving rise to multiple post-electoral conflicts

Compared to the levels of violence during the campaigns, election day was relatively calm in the places where polling stations could be set up. However, this tranquility was interrupted in the case of Rincon Chamula, where at the end of election day, an armed attack on a polling station resulted in the death of Jose Manuel Jimenez Gomez from MORENA and Manuel Hernandez Moreno, a PT activist. In addition, five polling station officials were injured. The armed group also set fire to the ballots that were being counted at this location before fleeing.

The results at this level show some variety. The distribution of City Councils by party was as follows: MORENA obtained 39; the PVEM, 27; the PT, 15; Progressive Social Networks, 15; We Can Move Chiapas, five; PRI, four; Chiapas Unido, four; MC, two; and one independent. In addition, the We Will Continue Making History coalitions (MORENA and allies) obtained four, as did Strength and Heart for Chiapas (PAN, PRI and PRD). The PAN, the PRD, the Chiapas Popular Party, Solidarity Encounter and Force for Mexico did not obtain any mayoralty.

According to data obtained by the media, at least 12 incidents of post-election conflicts have been recorded after June 2nd. Groups dissatisfied with the results have set fire to municipal headquarters of the electoral body and have been involved in clashes ■



Working on the disappearance of people is entering the realms of the emptiness of the soul. Disappearance bursts into the course of a person's life to alter it completely and definitively. For this reason, the organizations and people who work on this problem cannot address it without fully entering into the dimension of the heart, of everything that moves in the emotions and relationships of the people who are shaken by it.

"Touching the Void" Report

An Unstoppable Crisis

For some years now, various human rights organizations and groups of searching families have been documenting and denouncing the crisis of disappearances in Mexico. In 2023, people spoke with surprise about the alarming figure that had been reached: 100 thousand missing people; today there are more than 116 thousand.

According to an article from the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota, *"the disappearance crisis has developed as part of a larger pattern of criminal violence in Mexico, driven by the activities of organized crime and the involvement, support or consent of state players in these*

criminal activities." It also states that *"even when the State is not directly involved with a disappearance, it has a positive responsibility to prevent and punish the perpetrators, as well as to search for the disappeared, which is why the context of impunity that exists in Mexico has contributed to the disappearance crisis."*

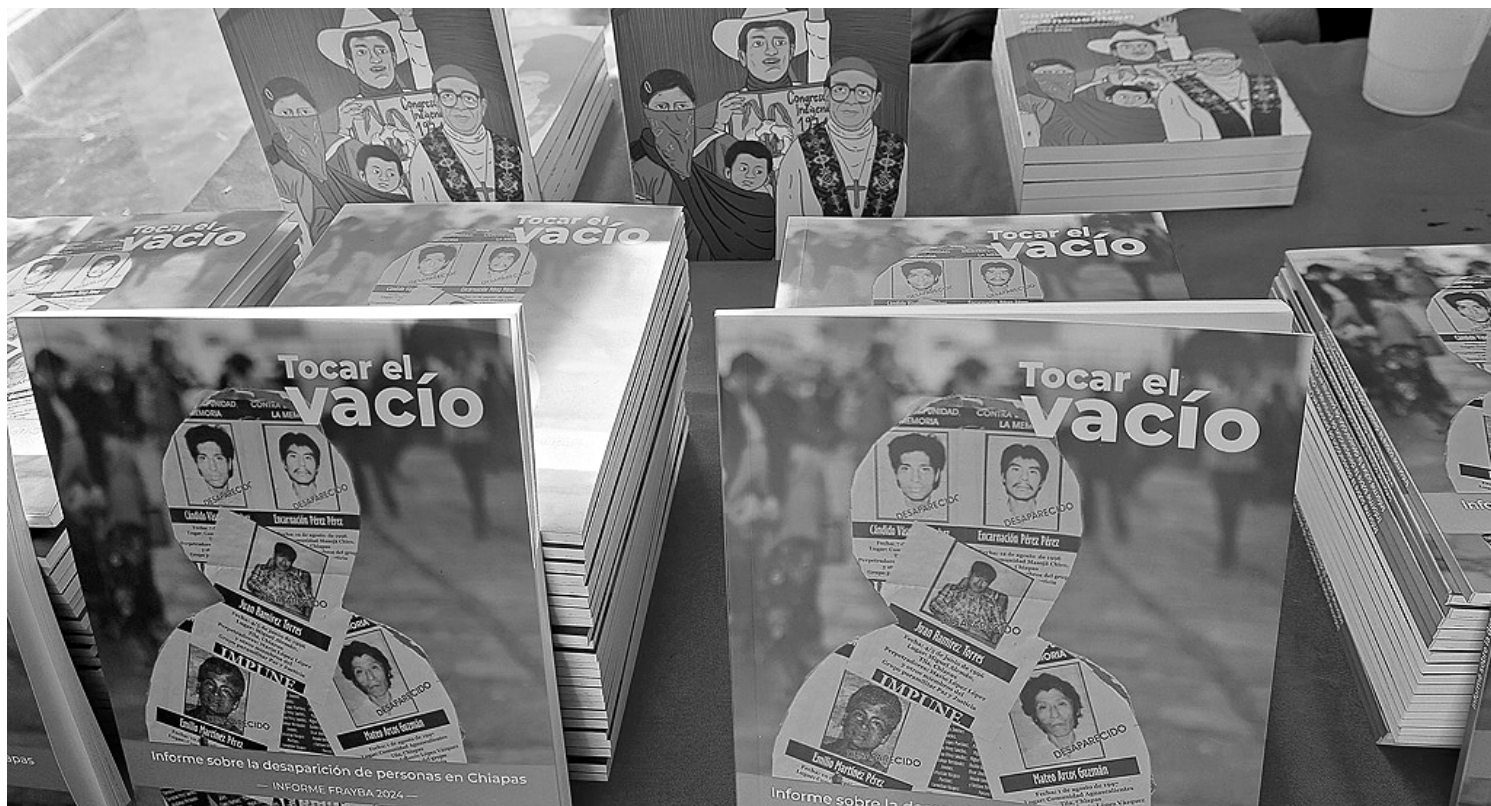
Touching the Void

In April, the Working Group against Disappearance in Chiapas, consisting of the organizations Mesoamerican Voices, Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba), Services and Consultancy for Peace (SERAPAZ) and Melel Xojobal presented the report *"Touching the Void"*. It intends to do an x-ray of the situation of disappearance in Chiapas, about which they mention that *"it is a historical problem that, currently, is going through an exponential increase derived, mainly, from a critical dispute for territorial control and social by organized crime."*

The National Registry of Missing and Unlocated Persons (RNPDO) recorded a total of 68 missing and unlocated persons in Chiapas in 2019, 87 in 2020, 162 in 2021 and 244 in 2022. This indicates an increase of 358% between 2019 and 2022.

However, the report states that *"beyond any official fig-*

Activities for our missing people within the framework of Mother's Day, San Cristóbal de las Casas, May 2024
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Presentation of the report "Touch the Void", San Cristóbal de Las Casas, April 2024
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ure, from the documentation of the Working Group against Disappearances in Chiapas, we observe that this phenomenon has been increasing and the figure is, by far, higher than that reflected by any State body."

The report talks about the crisis that is currently being experienced in the state due to the dispute over territorial control and the impact that this has on the crisis of disappearances. In this regard, it mentions that *"this confrontation has left, to date, thousands of civilians in the middle of a war, under the constant threat of being victims of crimes, such as forced disappearance, related to homicides and femicides; forced recruitment; or human trafficking. The silencing of entire territories, added to state denialism and reductionism, prevents us from knowing the real dimensions of this situation. At least since June 2021, the Highlands region and the Border region stand out for the intensified violence caused by the dispute over territory between organized crime groups, and the diversity of armed players, who exercise population control based on threats, extortion and the disappearance of people."*

Another important point that is highlighted in this report is the diversity of situations and contexts in which disappearance occurs and how it differently affects the various populations that are victims of this crime. They speak of disappearance linked to territorial control of organized crime, to the context of political-electoral violence, or in the context of arbitrary arrests committed by state agents, among others. Regarding the victims, they mention the special vulnerability of people on the move, women, girls, boys and adolescents and human rights defenders.

In the case of the disappearance of women, and people belonging to sexual and gender diversity, *"according to figures recovered by the UN Committee against Forced Disappearances (CED), after its visit to Mexico in 2021, Chiapas is one of the states where the disappearance of women far exceeds the national average of 25%, and reaches more than 60%, mostly affecting girls and adolescents between ten and 19 years old. According to what is documented, these cases would correspond to disappearances linked to the abduction of minors, to disappearances as a means to hide sexual violence and feminicide; to recruitment and reprisals. Disappearances that were aimed at trafficking and sexual exploitation were also reported."*

The report details that in our state there is a differentiation in the disappearance of women and men according to age range. While the majority of disappearances of men are concentrated between the ages of 25 and 44, in the case of women there are a greater number of disappearances of those who are between ten and 24 years old.

In the section on human rights defenders, the report states that *"from 2019 to date, at least 46 cases of disappearance of defenders belonging to an indigenous people in Mexico have been recorded, many of them in retaliation for the territorial defense... in the majority of cases of homicide and disappearance, the hypotheses point mainly to organized crime groups, intertwined with economic and political power, for whom the defense of human rights represents an obstacle."*

Regarding people on the move, the Mesoamerican Voices organization points out that, of the total number of missing people in Mexico, at least 2,781 are foreigners,



Presentation of the report "Touch the Void", San Cristóbal de Las Casas, April 2024 © SIPAZ

that is, transnational migrants, mainly Central Americans. Unfortunately, there is no real record of missing national migrants in Mexican territory. The report mentions that, in June 2010, national and international civil society organizations carried out a first survey, in the state of Chiapas, to make visible and give a statistical approach to the problem of disappearance of migrants, not only in transit, but also the local population that suffered disappearance on their migratory path. Over the course of ten months, it was possible to register 90 cases of disappearance of national migrants, mostly belonging to indigenous peoples. *"In that context, the United Families Committee of Chiapas Looking for Our Migrants, Junax Ko'tantik ("Junax Ko'tantik" Committee) emerged, present to this day, demanding truth, justice, comprehensive reparation, non-repetition and collective memory"*, the report states.

Regarding the disappearance of children and adolescents (NNA), the organization Melel Xojobal reports that Chiapas is in fourth place nationally in the disappearance of children and adolescents. In its own records, it recorded 2,144 cases of disappearances of children and adolescents as opposed to the 1,476 officially reported by the RNPDNO. They affirm that Tuxtla Gutierrez, Tapachula and San Cristóbal de Las Casas concentrate the largest numbers, however, this last municipality has the highest rate of disappearance in the state, that is, it is the place where there is a greater risk of disappearance for children and adolescents. The report indicates that, of the total number of disappearances, 30% are of children and adolescents belonging to some indigenous people and the most common age is 15

years for men and women. It highlights that disappearance mainly affects girls and adolescent women who represent 70% of the cases. It also mentions that it is a phenomenon that has increased in the last two years and continues to grow.

As with Frayba regarding defenders and Mesoamerican Voices regarding people on the move, Melel denounces that *"in the face of these alarming figures, we do not observe any interest on the part of the authorities to investigate the causes and patterns of the disappearance of children and adolescents in Chiapas."*

"Despite the different documentary difficulties such as the lack of reliable official information and the silencing of multiple territories where forced disappearance exists, we were able to say that in Chiapas there are various lines or patterns of disappearance of people, all of them denied, hidden and neglected by the Mexican State", the report concludes.

"I'll swap my vote for my missing person"

On June 2nd, we witnessed the largest electoral process that Mexico has ever had. In this framework, groups of relatives of missing persons promoted the campaign *"Vote for a missing person"* through which they invited the population to place the name of one of the more than 116 thousand missing people in the space on the ballots designated for unregistered candidates.

This was done in order to make them visible and draw the attention of the authorities to their constant demand for justice. *"We want them to look for them, it is their right. We*



Photos Pages 14-15:

Activities for our missing people within the framework of Mother's Day, San Cristóbal de las Casas, May 2024
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want justice for our daughters even if they are not there. As a family, we deserve to have that peace that was taken from us," explained relatives participating in this initiative.

According to the electoral authority, a vote is considered null when one of the boxes containing the name of the candidate or party of choice is not clearly marked or is completely crossed out or filled in with some slogan or demand.

On the other hand, ballots that contain the name of a person in the unregistered or independent candidacy box are considered valid: *"the difference is that polling station officials are obliged to register the names of unregistered candidates, that is, the names of the missing people will appear in the official counts, making them visible,"* according to what the campaign page explains.

On social networks, the campaign had a lot of traction and was shared with various slogans that emerged around it. *"I'll swap my vote for my missing person,"* *"#VotaXUnDesaparecidx"* and *"Vote with dignity"* were some of these.

Election day was no different, social networks were filled with photographs of ballots with the names of missing people and messages like *"Today I vote for the missing. There is no democracy without them,"* *"I will swap my vote for my missing brother,"* *"Until we find them,"* *"Searching mothers are not a political campaign. Find your children!"*, *"Justice and truth,"* *"Ayotzinapa 43,"* *"Today I voted for you,"* *"Today my vote was for the disappeared of our Mexico"* and *"There is no democracy if they are not here!"*, among others.

In Chiapas, searching mothers joined the campaign and also protested on several occasions at the Government Palace in Tuxtla Gutierrez, with banners, pink crosses and

photographs of their relatives. They demanded that the candidates for the government of Chiapas pay attention to the problem of missing people in the state.

"We hope that the new government has empathy, that it is not indolent, that it welcomes the mothers, that we have the doors open in this Palace where we have been intimidated, rejected, violated and re-victimized by public servants. They must receive us with dignity. We want a fundamental change because corruption prevails here," the mothers said.

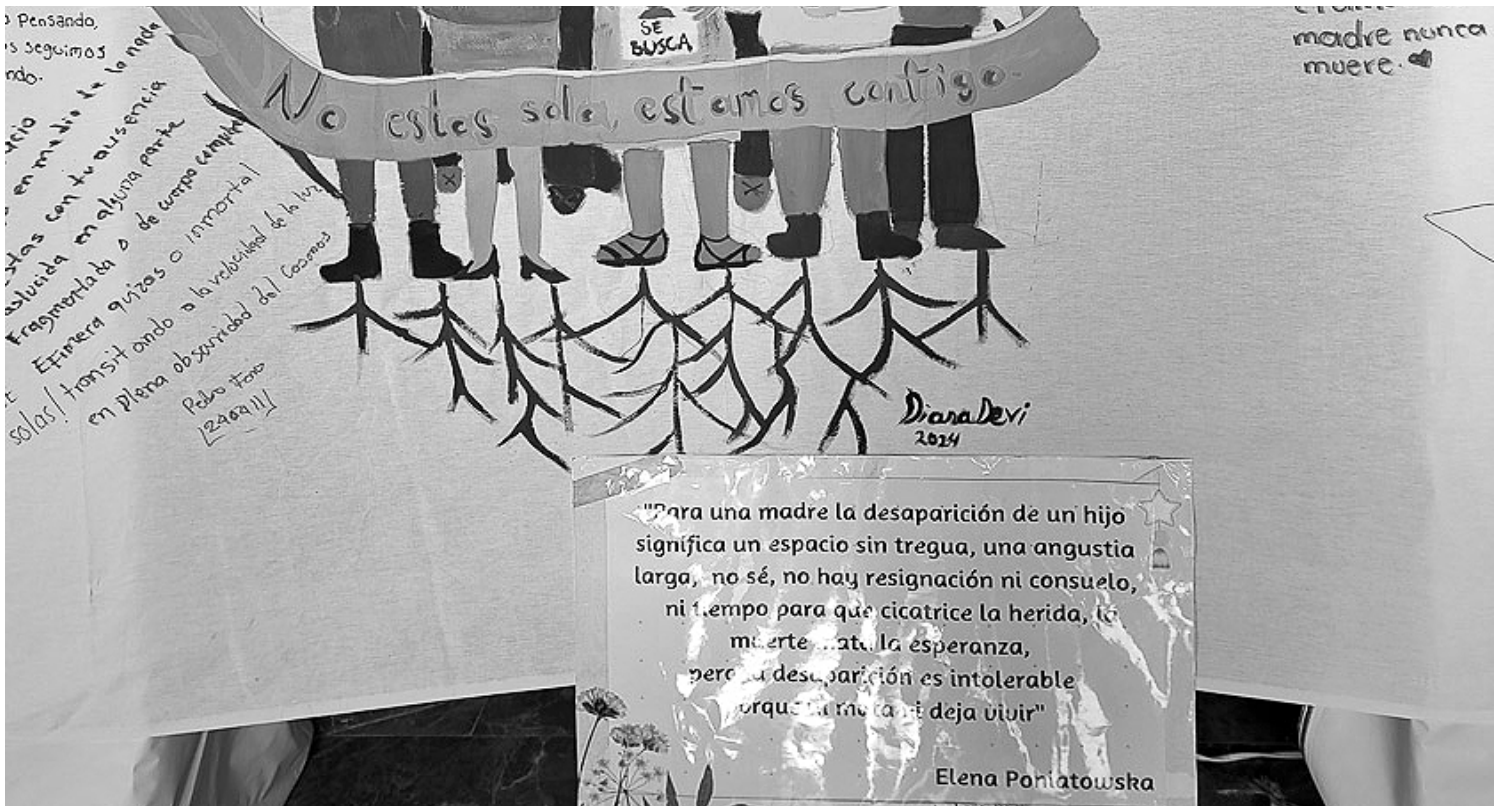
Finally, according to data from the Preliminary Electoral Results Program (PERP) of the National Electoral Institute (INE), with 95% of the polls counted, more than one million 340 thousand people canceled their vote, of which 85 thousand 689 people voted for an unregistered candidate, of these, the *"vote for a missing person"* initiative counted that at least 3,511 of these were for missing people.

Facing Disappearance, We Sow Flowers of Hope

Another cry for attention from the relatives of missing people in Mexico occurs every May 10th, when groups of mothers of victims of disappearance and femicide reaffirm that they have nothing to celebrate because their children have been taken from them.

On this occasion in Chiapas they did it through the *"Flowers of Hope"* event, through which they demanded that the authorities of the three levels of government search for their missing relatives.

"This action, called Flowers of Hope, responds to the sim-



ple reason that our lives today are dedicated to sowing hope in the midst of evil, corruption, hatred and the lack of interest on the part of the authorities in generating true change”, the Working Group against Disappearances in Chiapas said.

In their statement they mention: “the situation we are going through in Mexico and specifically in the state of Chiapas is complex, because on the one hand we have a growing wave of disappearances that is linked to unprecedented violence. And on the other hand, a silencing of reality, well planned and orchestrated by the authorities, who constantly deny the social and political crisis in the state.”

Therefore, “we sow flowers of hope with our daily actions of protest and denunciation, linking ourselves with other spaces and groups and networks that accompany families and searching mothers.” ■





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Ecumenism and Networking, Paths of Hope for Chiapas

I believe that today more than ever the strength of networking is needed, we are living a season of divide and conquer, but the more isolated we are, the more vulnerable we are, we need to articulate to continue advancing in the construction of peace.

Ernesto Martín Guerrero Zavala

In April 2024, at the facilities of the Institute of Intercultural Studies and Research C.A., a change of direction of the organization was made. Ernesto Martín Guerrero Zavala left office and Gerardo Torres Estrada took over as the new director.

In an interview, Pastor Martín Guerrero shared with us part of his experiences and learning, both personal and professional, during the time he was serving the communities and leading processes organized by this

institution between 2004 and 2024.

Early years

Martín Guerrero was born in Mexico City, the son of a man from Veracruz and a woman from Chiapas. At the age of ten, his family moved to the state of Oaxaca, where he became familiar with the difficulties, pains and struggles of indigenous peoples and campesinos in their search for truth and social justice. At age 19, he married and began his journey into pastoring

Christian churches, a role he continues to play to this day.

In 1985, he arrived in Chiapas at the invitation of a pastor who requested his help to serve the congregation. During that time, he witnessed numerous episodes of religious intolerance, which affected evangelical or Protestant people. These people suffered water and electricity service cuts, insults, threats, the impossibility of children attending classes and, in many cases, the expulsion of their families from their communities of origin due to their faith.

At that time, Chiapas was a complex state due to the historical abandonment to which it had been subjected. The indigenous and peasant communities did not receive attention from the government or justice. Ar-

living in Chiapas meant facing that reality, which still persists: *“the same demands that the people had continue in the present,”* Martin explains.

Zapatista Uprising

Martin remembers that in 1994 he lived in Tuxtla Gutierrez, where fear and uncertainty prevailed due to the difficulty of communication and access to information, since technology was not as developed as it is today.

Religious intolerance changed with the armed uprising, as the government stopped supporting exclusively Catholic communities and began linking up with Christian groups. To address these conflicts, a dialogue was established between Catholics and evangelicals, which led to the creation of the Interreligious Council of Chiapas, a body in which Martin has collaborated.

Arrival at IESII

Martin and his wife learned about the Institute through a workshop given by a volunteer at the church where he was pastor. In another workshop, Miriam, Martin's wife, was deeply impacted by sharing with people from the Catholic church in a space with recreational activities, coordinated by both evangelicals and Catholics. Crying, she told him *“it is very difficult to explain it with words, but I can tell you that I discovered that Catholic people, who I thought were not Christians, have a profound experience of God that I do not have, and that I cannot deny that it was God who granted it to them, I no longer feel I have the right to judge them.”* Shortly after, Martín joined the Institute as a volunteer, dedicating three days a week between 2004 and 2006. In 2006 he assumed the role of coordinator, which he held until 2014, when the title of coordination was changed to that of direction.

Current IESII Projects

Since its creation, the IESII has worked on several topics ecumenically

and towards an ecumenical audience: Transformative Ecological Spirituality; Food Sovereignty and Resilience. In all formative processes, ecumenism has been sought to prevail, following the slogan of former bishop Don Samuel Ruiz at the beginning of IESII: *“create an organization so that people of different confessions can meet and share, but not to talk about religious issues because that already divides them; bring them together to talk about needs they have in common, ensuring that in the process people come to respect and love each other.”* Martin considers this a very wise vision. Currently, activities are carried out in the municipalities of Bellavista, San Juan Chamula, Chenalho, San Cristobal, Huixtan, Ocosingo, Altamirano, Teopisca San Fernando and Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Impressions on the heart 20 years later

The encounter with people of other confessions and the understanding that God does not belong to any specific denomination have opened paths of hope and consolidated alternatives. Martin feels grateful for having met and walked alongside many committed people. The most profound spiritual moments for him have been those in which he has participated in encounters with the Mayan worldview, and with the indigenous peoples guided by their leaders: *“I am deeply grateful that they have opened their hearts to allow me to participate, welcoming me and letting me know that the way is respect, that, if you ask for permission to speak, people not only let you speak, they open their hearts to you.”*

“It is important to remember Jesus incarnate, who walks and cries with people, putting himself in the shoes of those who suffer, and that should be the guide for everyone. We must understand that the version of God that each human being has is incomplete, and that the only thing we can aspire to is to fill those gaps through dialogue with our neighbors. God is in the word of my neighbor and it will always be so. Do I give myself permission to listen to

God in the word of my brother when he is making a claim, when he demands social justice, when he is crying for his missing loved one? Every theology is an idol in itself, unless it has the ability to enter into dialogue with other theologies, this is really what can help us find the path to building peace,” Martin reflected.

Hopes in the current context of violence

Despite the challenges of the environment, Martin maintains a constant positive attitude: *“There is hope in people, churches or organizations that rise up in the face of threats, willing to continue reflecting on the current context and seek paths of transformation, determined not to stop on the path of building peace,”* he told us.

He sees a challenge and multiple opportunities in working with children and youth: *“We have a very strong responsibility with the new generations and to the extent that we are working with youth and children we are cultivating hope, the data that there is on recruitment for criminal groups are alarming due to the number of young people and children who have been affected. It is important to serve this generation from the different spaces in which we find ourselves, taking care of what we sow in the minds and hearts of those around us.”*

From his experience and his commitment to hope, Martin is considering the creation of a peace ministry that involves evangelical pastors, *“on issues that are not such a priority for them but that are fundamental for our context, to see how we add to the connections that already exist and not take away from them, we must strengthen them.”* ■

INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND SUPPORT

CHIAPAS

FEBRUARY

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

- We were at the presentation of the report *"Childhoods Facing Criminal Violence in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas"*, prepared by the Melel Xojobal organization.

MARCH

- We accompanied the marches that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas, within the framework of International Women's Day.

- We attended the Meeting entitled *"Intertwining Hope"*, organized by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba), within the framework of its 35th anniversary.

APRIL

- We attended an event organized as part of the change of coordination of the Institute of Intercultural Studies and Research in San Cristobal de Las Casas (see article).

- We attended the workshop *"The Reality of Religious Freedom in Mexico, Religious Discrimination and the Challenges of Objective Communication"*, facilitated by the organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) 18, in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We attended a hearing as part of the retrial of the trial against five Tzeltals from San Juan Cancuc, defenders of the territory, accused of the murder of a police officer.

- We attended the presentation of the report *"Touching the Void"*, whose objective is to take a first x-ray of the problem of disappearances, a phenomenon that has been growing exponentially in the state. It was coordinated by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center (Frayba).

- We accompanied the more than 300 people who marched for peace and security in San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was called after a few days before an eleven-year-old boy was kidnapped in the northern part of this city.

MAY

- We attended the quarterly assembly

of the Believing People of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We accompanied the activities organized in the event titled *"Flowers of Hope"*, an action for missing people that took place within the framework of Mother's Day in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In February, together with other organizations, we participated in a meeting with the Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations (UN), Francisco Cali Tzay (of Guatemalan origin), on his unofficial visit to Chiapas in within the framework of the 28th anniversary of the San Andres Agreements on Indigenous Rights and Culture.

- In February we held a meeting with several representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during a visit to Chiapas.

- Likewise, in February, we met with members of the Canadian Embassy in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In April, together with other organizations, we held meetings with the State Human Rights Commission (CEDH) and various state authorities (including representatives of the Government Secretariat, the Civil Protection Secretariat, the State Attorney General's Office, the Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection, of the Search Commission and of the Victims Commission). The main objective was to share our concerns about the situation of violence in the Border and Sierra areas.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

FEBRUARY

- We facilitated a space for analysis of the situation with members of the Independencia parish.

- We had a three-day workshop on Peace Building with more than 70 youth leaders from the Diocesan Area of Adolescent and Youth Ministry (ADIPAJ) of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We held a workshop on security and protection measures with representatives of a community in San Andrés Larrainzar.

MARCH

- Together with the organization specialized in digital security Sursiendo, we participated in a space with journalists and communicators in which training and networking proposals towards greater security for the union continued to be defined.

- We facilitated a workshop on risk analysis, safety and protection measures with members of Luna Maya, a midwifery house in San Cristobal de Las Casas where comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services are provided.

APRIL

- We held a work session framed in the strategic planning process of Economic and Social Development (DESMI C.A.).

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

- We facilitated a space for monitoring and evaluation with beneficiaries of the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO)

- We held a new session on risk analysis, security and protection measures with members of the Luna Maya organization.

- We facilitated an analysis with the coordination of the Movement in Defense of Life and Territory (MODEVITE) that was carried out in Oxchuc.

- A member of SIPAZ made a presentation at the Dialectic Forum on *"Memory and Resistance of Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America"* organized by the Jtatic Samuel Museum in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

INTERNAL TRAINING

- In March, the team participated in a self-care space on the topic *"Active Hope."*

- In May we were part of the first module of *"Sprouts in the Ruins"*, a support program in trauma processes facilitated by the Institute of Intercultural Studies and Research C.A., in collaboration with the Brookfield Institute of Massachusetts, which was held in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- In May, we received fundraising training coordinated by the Mennonite Cen-

tral Committee (MCC).

NETWORKING

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

- On a bimonthly basis, we attend operational meetings of the People's Movement for Peace and Justice (MPPJ). In February, we attended an Assembly of that movement that was held in Mexico City. Meetings were held with the campaign teams of two of the candidates for the presidency of the Republic to raise concerns regarding human rights and peacebuilding.

- On a monthly basis, we have virtual meetings on Accompaniment of Unarmed Civilian Persons (USP/A) – Community of Practice.

- In February and May, we participated in virtual meetings of the partners of the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC).

- In March, we had a meeting of organizations that collaborate in the project titled *"Strengthening the Self-protection Capacities of Human Rights Organizations and Communities in Chiapas,"* which we coordinated with Voces Mesoamericanas and Huridocs.

- In March, we attended a meeting of partners of the Mennonite Central Committee (CCM) that took place in Morelos, where the issue of gender violence was addressed.

- In March, we participated in a virtual meeting of the members of the Platform for the construction of peace in Mexico.

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

- In April, we were part of a security analysis space in San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was attended by various civil organizations with a presence in the city ■