



# S!Paz

Migrants of various nationalities prayed before starting their caravan to the US, carrying a cross and a blanket. The exodus of poverty.  
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**SIPAZ** is an international observation program created in 1995, after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to monitor the conflict in Chiapas, Mexico.

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

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

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

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

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



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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# “Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States” ...

The elections in the United States revive the saying: “*Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States.*” The elected candidate, Donald Trump, has declared that he will impose a 25% tariff war against Mexico if Claudia Sheinbaum’s government fails to contain the flow of migrants and fentanyl trafficking across the 3,000 kilometers of border that both countries share. Trump arrives with stronger than in his first term: the Republicans have achieved control of Congress, and the conservatives dominate the Supreme Court. In addition, he has an additional element of pressure: the review of the Treaty between Mexico, the United States and Canada (USMCA), scheduled for 2026, with the United States being Mexico’s main trading partner ▀

**D**uring Trump’s first term and with Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in the presidency of Mexico, Trump announced a general tariff of 5% in response to what he considered inaction by the Mexican authorities to stop the migrant caravans. Faced with this threat, the Lopez Obrador administration, initially more permissive, reinforced the northern and southern borders with a strong military deployment, a strategy that has been maintained to date with disastrous results in terms of human rights. Currently, Mexico already operates as a safe third country, accumulating thousands of migrants awaiting asylum in the United States on its northern and southern borders.

Claudia Sheinbaum has insisted that transnational migration must be addressed through social solutions in the countries of origin, an initiative that clearly does not coincide with the Trump agenda.

For his second term, Trump has promised to carry out the largest deportation of migrants in history, in-

cluding undocumented immigrants, their spouses, children and other relatives. Remittances sent by Mexicans in the United States are one of the pillars of the Mexican economy, ranking, according to official figures, between the second and third source of income after tourism and oil sales. If only a part of the promised “*mass deportation*” were to materialize, there would be sufficient reason for concern in Mexico. Currently, it is estimated that five million Mexicans reside in the United States in an irregular situation.

Another point of tension will be the policy of combating drug trafficking. Even as a candidate, Trump said that the Mexican cartels have such power that “*they could remove the president in two minutes. They are the ones who run Mexico.*” Among his plans, he contemplates classifying the Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations, which would give him the power to intervene beyond his territory. Trump has promised to bomb fentanyl laboratories and block ports that transport its chemical precursors. Although Claudia Sheinbaum has not commented on these



initiatives, they could be interpreted as direct interference in Mexican sovereignty.

In the face of threats, Sheinbaum has sent messages of reassurance to preserve stability in bilateral relations. However, the Mexican peso has fallen to its lowest level in more than two years, reflecting the uncertainty. Added to this are internal factors that have accentuated this trend, in line with pessimistic predictions about the performance of the Mexican economy.

## Claudia Sheinbaum, between Continuity and Change

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, Claudia Sheinbaum was sworn in as the new president. She won the election with 36 million votes, beating her main competitor, Xochitl Galvez, by 30 percentage points. Sheinbaum begins her mandate with a qualified majority in Congress, the support of allies in 24 governorships, a weakened opposition, and a recently approved judicial reform that will allow the ruling bloc to reconfigure the

Migrants carry a cross at the front of a caravan that aims to reach the border between Mexico and the United States, leaving from Tapachula, Chiapas state, on March 25, 2024  
© Isaac Guzmán/AFP via Getty Images



Claudia Sheinbaum, surrounded by women from different indigenous communities, during the ceremony to hand over the baton of command  
© Nayeli Cruz / El País

Judiciary. The 100 points of her government plan propose to continue the themes of the outgoing government, such as austerity, the fight against corruption, and the expansion of social programs, in addition to establishing new priorities such as the promotion of women, education and science, the protection of the environment, and the fight against machismo and racism.

The period analyzed in this report has been marked by a wave of reforms, a trend that began at the end of AMLO's term, who sought to cement his legacy, and accelerated with the arrival of Sheinbaum to power thanks to her majority in Congress.

Among the most relevant reforms, still under the presidency of Lopez Obrador, the approval in September of the initiative that incorporated the National Guard (GN) into the National Defense Secretariat (SEDENA) both administratively and operationally stands out. The Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Centro Prodh) described this measure as “a

*point of no return towards militarization.”*

Concern about the implications of this reform was illustrated in October, when six migrants died and ten more were injured after a chase in the municipality of Villa Comaltitlan, Chiapas, at the hands of members of the Mexican Army. According to SEDENA, the military detected a vehicle traveling at high speed that tried to evade them. Faced with alleged shots, two soldiers fired. SEDENA reported that the members involved were removed from their duties and “*as this was an incident in which civilians were affected, the Attorney General's Office was informed so that it can carry out the necessary legal proceedings.*” The Southern Border Monitoring Collective demanded justice for the victims, pointing out that this incident is a “*direct consequence of ordering military deployment to contain migratory flows under a logic of persecution and not protection of people on the move.*”

In September, the reform on indigenous and African-American peoples

was approved. Among the most notable advances, they are recognized as subjects of public law and not only as objects of public interest, which will allow them to receive and manage budgetary resources directly. In addition, the reform establishes the obligation to provide them with adequate jurisdictional assistance through interpreters, translators, defenders and specialized experts. However, opposition deputies described the reform as insufficient. This perception was shared by experts and organizations, who considered it “*superficial*” as it was limited only to the Article 2 of the Constitution, and pointed out that “*it will not have any practical effect.*” Criticism focused especially on the lack of progress regarding the issue of land and territory, considered fundamental for the exercise of self-determination.

Also in September, the judicial reform was approved, perhaps the most controversial and questioned at international level. In November, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) expressed its concern about this reform, warning that it could put judicial independence at risk. For its part, the Mexican government argues that citizens must have the right to elect judges, and defends the constitutionality of the reform, approved by a large majority in Congress. However, members of the judicial branch denounced the Executive's interference in the Justice system, alleging that it violates the labor rights of judicial officials and the independence of the administration of justice. Before the IACHR, the Mexican government has argued that “*this reform was necessary to regain public confidence in the courts and in the justice system in general, since in Mexico judges [...] have released common and dangerous criminals, drug traffickers, have issued sentences without a gender perspective, have legalized the dispossession of indigenous peoples' lands, and the nepotism of the judicial powers is widely documented.*”

In October, already under Claudia Sheinbaum's mandate, more than one hundred civil organizations asked to

reject a reform that sought to eliminate transparency bodies. They argued that this change would open the door for “the delivery of information and transparency to be subordinated to the Executive, in a context in which denials of information and reservations to it have increased.” They asked to “generate an open process that allows improving the current institutional framework that ensures society’s right to know.” However, this reform was approved in November without further debate.

## Human Rights: Continuing Concerns

In October, EDUCA presented a study on Serious Attacks on Human Rights Defenders in Mexico. Between December 2018 and October 2024, 252 attacks on the lives of human rights defenders were recorded: 225 murders and 27 disappearances. Of these cases, 42 were classified as extrajudicial executions. The most dangerous struggles were for the defense of territory and civil rights (80%). The South-Southeast is the most dangerous region, accounting for 51% of the cases. 62% of the murdered defenders belonged to an indigenous people and 57% were peasants. In addition, 20% of the victims were women or people of sexual diversity. “The data show that there is a failed security strategy at the national level. We note the weakening of protection agencies and autonomous human rights organizations. What was reinforced in this government was the culture of impunity; the militarization of public security; access to justice became the exception and not the rule,” the study highlighted.

In November, the Senate approved the reelection of Rosario Piedra Ibarra to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), despite being the worst evaluated candidate among fifteen. Already in September, a hundred civil organizations had pointed out that the administration of Rosario Piedra Ibarra, which started in 2019, “has faced serious criticism for not fully, objectively and comprehensively addressing the crisis of serious human rights

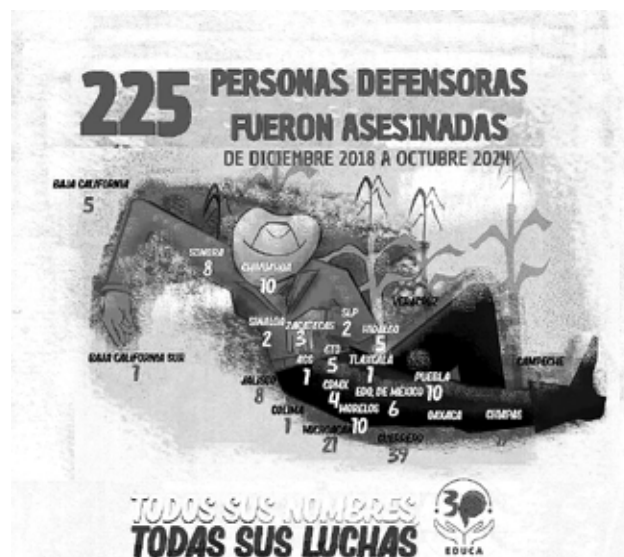
violations that the country is going through.” “The deliberate surrenders and omissions reflect a partiality in her actions in accordance with the administration [of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador] that left aside serious human rights violations.” There is concern that this trend will continue during a new term, now under the presidency of Claudia Sheinbaum.

## CHIAPAS: Advance of Criminal Violence Continues to Be Cause for Concern

In September, thousands of people called by the Ecclesiastical Province of Chiapas went on a pilgrimage to Tuxtla Gutierrez to denounce the lack of peace and security in the state. They pointed out that “the violence generated by organized crime groups, at war for control of the territory, has been advancing considerably in several municipalities.” They added that “the cause of this violence is due to the interests that drive the construction of an infrastructure of plundering of natural resources (...); this developmental economy requires lands and territories free of settlers (...) The exponential increase in insecurity has increased murders, disappearances and forced displacement.” They demanded that the authorities “consolidate the rule of law, respect for human and collective rights, as well as the establishment of social order without putting civil society at risk; the dismantling and immediate disarmament of criminal groups,” among other measures.

The main hotspots continue to be the Sierra and Border area, which has become “a battlefield over the dispute over territory between criminal groups that force men to go to the front, to take care of the pens, to close roads,” declared bishops from Chiapas and Guatemala in August.

Another hotspot is Pantelho. In September, the outgoing Congress of Chiapas appointed a municipal council, which includes the brother of Daily de los Santos Herrera, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the intellectual authorship of the murder



of indigenous prosecutor Gregorio Perez Gomez in 2021. The inhabitants of the municipality affirm that this new council is made up of people close to the leaders of “Los Herrera” cacique group, linked to murders and organized crime. For their part, sympathizers of the self-defense group “El Machete” warned that they will not recognize the council appointed by Congress. Since 2021, after an armed uprising against “Los Herrera”, this cacique group and communities organized in “El Machete” have been fighting with arms for power in Pantelho, leaving dozens dead and wounded, as well as displaced families.

Another source of conflict arose in October, when the Zapatista village “6 de Octubre”, in the municipality of Ocosingo, was attacked by armed people from the community of Palestina. They settled on recovered lands threatening residents with eviction. Since June, “the threats have escalated to include the presence of people from Palestina with high-powered weapons, threats of rape of women, burning of houses and theft of belongings, crops and animals,” said Sub-commander Insurgente Moises. For this reason, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) initially suspended all information and communication about the “Encounters of Resistance and Rebellion 2024-2025”. However, the first dates were later confirmed for late December and early January.

Report on Serious Attacks on Human Rights Defenders in Mexico © EDUCA



Tomb of Father Marcelo Perez, San Andres Larrainzar, November 2024  
© SIPAZ

## Attacks on Journalists and Defenders: Upward Trend

Another worrying trend has been the increase in attacks on journalists and human rights defenders. In August, armed men shot journalist Ariel Grajales Rodas in Villaflores. This journalist reported on both official information and acts of violence, including the charging of protection money for all commercial activity in the Frailasca region.

In September, the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Human Rights Center (Frayba) denounced the increase in violence against members of its team. It reported that since January it has “recorded four attacks, assaults and delegitimization of our work,” and that, from July to date, its members have received death threats and the home of one of them was raided. Added to this “is extortion, intimidation, surveillance and verbal attacks, and several of them come from players linked to the municipal, state and federal governments,” it denounced. All this despite the fact that the organization has Precautionary Measures granted by the IACHR. It regretted that the government “cannot stop the whirlwind of violence, on the contrary, the risks are increasing and

with them to those who defend human rights.”

Likewise, in September, journalist Dalia Villatoro reported threats against her. She explained that “alleged members of organized crime launched a threat against me, hanging a poster outside my home in which they linked me to publications made through the Facebook pages Notifraylesca and Villaflores.”

As for the most notorious case, on October 20<sup>th</sup>, Father Marcelo Perez was murdered in San Cristobal de Las Casas. Ordained in 2002, he had become a reference as a defender of human rights and the defense of Mother Earth, in addition to being a mediator in various social conflicts. Since 2015, he had received protective measures from the IACHR due to the constant threats he faced for his work. Several organizations, networks, and collectives have spoken out about the murder. President Claudia Sheinbaum lamented the murder and assured that an investigation is already underway to clarify the crime. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Edgar “N” was arrested and charged with criminal proceedings for his probable responsibility as the material author of the homicide. The speed with which the arrest took place makes

many analysts doubt that he is truly guilty and, in any case, they urge that the investigation find the intellectual authors of the crime.

## OAXACA: Still High Risks for Human Rights Defenders

In the EDUCA study on Serious Attacks on Human Rights Defenders in Mexico, Oaxaca tops the list with 58 human rights defenders murdered between December 2018 and October 2024. Attacks continue to be frequent.

In August, the “Participatory Diagnosis: Towards a Public Policy for the Comprehensive Protection of Women Defenders and Journalists in Oaxaca” was presented. The diagnosis documents that, between 2018 and 2022, 14 women defenders were murdered in Oaxaca and that, from 2016 to 2019, 1,063 attacks against this sector were recorded. Women defenders and journalists face the risk of being silenced through “threats of violence, including sexual violence; they also run the risk of being victims of femicide, rape, acid attacks, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment and forced disappearance.” One of the most worrying patterns is criminalization.

In September, the Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño Human Rights Center C.A. (BARCADH) reported a cyber-attack on its social networks. It stated that “our organization supports serious cases of human rights violations against victims and groups that come for our support; that is why we are alarmed and concerned about this situation.”

Also in September, human rights defender Daniel Bautista Vasquez was found dead in Villa de Etla. He was a beneficiary of precautionary measures by the IACHR. In March 2020, his brother Angel was tortured by members of the municipal police of Tlaxiaco. After these events, Daniel and his family reported police abuse, which led to multiple threats and harassment towards them.

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, Mixe lawyer Sandra Dominguez Martinez and her husband disappeared in the Sierra Mixe

of Oaxaca. Sandra was dedicated to defending human rights and, since 2020, had denounced cyberbullying, gender violence and the participation of officials in the WhatsApp group “Sierra XXX”, where pornographic photographs of indigenous women were shared. Since November 6<sup>th</sup>, Sandra’s relatives set up a sit-in in front of the Government Palace in Oaxaca, to demand her appearance. They have reported that both the relatives and their lawyers have been victims of surveillance and intimidation.

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, sisters Adriana and Virginia Ortiz Garcia, indigenous Triqui defenders, were murdered in Oaxaca de Juarez. Both were activists of the Triqui Unification and Struggle Movement (MULT) and had worked intensively in the defense of human rights and in the search for their cousins, who disappeared in 2007.

In more general terms, in October, the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the People of Oaxaca presented a report on internal forced displacement in which it recognized that the victims of this phenomenon are “invisible and without recognition of their rights.” The report shows that the causes of forced displacement in the state are multiple: the imposition and application of community sanctions, not sharing the same religious belief, conflicts over land and territories that are mainly due to the lack of definition of land rights, conflicts in appointments in elections, among other causes. “Recognition of the human rights of displaced people has been slow. For many years, there has been no will on the part of some institutions and public policies in the past were not appropriate. In addition, the lack of legislation to address this social phenomenon has placed victims in a state of vulnerability,” the Ombudsman’s Office said.

In November, 91 women had already been murdered in Oaxaca in 2024. The Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity condemned the escalation of femicidal violence recorded in recent months due to the inaction of the Government of Oaxaca. “We demand that Salomon Jara guar-



Event for the appearance of Sandra Dominguez Martinez alive © Página 3.mx

antee the safety of women and girls in the face of the violence that permeates Oaxaca, which is reflected in 677 disappearances and 204 feminicides during his government,” it declared. According to data from Mexico Evalua, in Oaxaca impunity for the crime of femicide reaches 100%, while in cases of disappearance it is 99.6%.

### **GUERRERO: “Unstoppable Violence”**

In November, the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center warned about the levels of violence that have been reached in Guerrero: “The expansion of crime reaches the point where it comes up against another group that has territorial control. It is the criminal groups themselves that set limits and not the state institutions. The firepower of criminals leads them to challenge the security forces. Their weapons are sophisticated and they are better equipped. They have multiple contacts to supply weapons from the United States. They have properties in strategic places (...). They have resorted to recruiting young people to expand their domain and have human reserves for their armed incursions. The objective is to displace the group that runs the turf. The young peo-

ple are cannon fodder that is discarded without legal consequences or forceful actions to contain this unstoppable violence. Criminal enterprises are very profitable businesses because they have been able to enter into various commercial lines where they launder their money with well-established companies. This is only feasible in states where corruption prevails, where the law is not applied and justice is a commodity that generates large dividends. (...) The weakening of public institutions has led to the overflow of organized crime that has established itself in tourist centers, in the main cities, in municipal capitals and in rural communities. It appears as the monster with a thousand heads, as the de facto power that has been installed within the public administration.”

In September, at least 10,000 people, including students, student teachers, university students, academics, organizations, groups, unions and individuals, marched in Mexico City ten years after the disappearance in Iguala of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School. President AMLO had promised to resolve this case during his six-year term, but he failed to do so. “He betrayed the trust that we as parents placed in him and turned his back



on the Ayotzinapa Case in order to protect the army,” said Hilda Legideño, mother of Jorge Antonio Tizapa Legideño who disappeared that night. Mario Gonzalez, father of the missing student teacher Cesar Manuel Gonzalez Hernandez, said that “anyone who covers up or hinders investigations is also an accomplice to forced disappearance.” He warned: “If the incoming government is thinking of doing this, we will continue to fight.”

In this same spirit of struggle, in October, the Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities-Community Police (CRAC-PC) celebrated its 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It stated that “the

CRAC-PC is here, standing, weathering the storms caused by the actions of local bosses and governments. Our justice system has proven to be effective and successful in the face of the humanitarian disaster that criminal groups have caused.” It spoke about the recently approved indigenous reform, questioning that “political representation and the ownership of territories and natural resources were completely left out of the recently approved reform. Without territory, where will we exercise self-determination, autonomy and justice? The backbone of indigenous law: security and justice, government and ownership of our territories and

natural resources were not incorporated into the reform. The historical debt to our peoples continues.” “Social programs are of little use if our rights are not recognized. If they are not accompanied by constitutional recognition, they will ultimately become a patronage and welfare mechanism that will keep us mired in backwardness and marginalization,” it concluded. It announced that it will continue “exercising security, justice and re-education with or without a law (...). We are not bound to a written law, on the contrary, we are governed by words, by dreams, by signs, by another way of being and existing in the world.” ■

**COLLABORATE ECONOMICALLY WITH SIPAZ**

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To the SIPAZ account in Holland Name of Bank: ING Bank In the name of ‘Servicio Internacional para la Paz’ BIC: INGBNL2A IBAN: NL75INGB0004602969

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Go to: [www.sipaz.org](http://www.sipaz.org)



# Violence against Children and Adolescents in Mexico

## The Case of Chiapas

*If we were to keep a minute's silence for every homicide and femicide of children and adolescents in Chiapas during the last six years, we would have to remain silent for two hours and twenty-nine minutes.*

REDIAS, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024



### A Context of Increasing Violence

In recent years, due to its geographical location connecting the north with the south of the American continent, Chiapas has become a territory disputed by different criminal groups, which has led to an alarming increase in violence in the state to which the entire population is vulnerable. One of the most affected sectors has been children and youth. In a press conference in June 2024, the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS) warned: *“We have no record of similar situations in terms of the amount and brutality of violence committed against this sector in Chiapas, all spheres of the lives of girls, boys and adolescents have been disrupted: daily life has been besieged by violence.”*

By November 1<sup>st</sup>, REDIAS and Melel Xojobal had documented the murder of 149 girls, boys and adolescents in Chiapas between 2018 and to the present in 2024. In 2024 alone, 28 murders of girls, boys and adolescents had been recorded, in addition to eight femicides of girls and adolescent women.

On the other hand, according to official data from the National Registry of Missing Persons of the Ministry of the Interior, between January and October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, 663 complaints were filed in Chiapas for the disappearance of children, adolescents and young people. 208 of them are still current (without being found) and 11 of them have already been found dead.

Although the number of complaints reflects a slight reduction compared to 2023 (674 complaints were registered during the same period), the number of unsolved cases increased by 90%. As for the municipalities with the most

complaints, the capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez, is in first place with 130 cases. Next is Tapachula, on the southern border, with 74 cases, of which 39 correspond to missing young women, representing 52%. In third place is San Cristobal de Las Casas, with 51 cases, of which just over half are also young women. Of the total number of missing persons, 52% are between 20 and 29 years old, 30% between 14 and 19 years old, and 19% between 0 and 13 years old.

Action by the Network for the Rights of Children (REDIM) in San Cristobal de Las Casas, San Cristobal de Las Casas, February 2024 © SIPAZ

Con el apoyo de:

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MÈXIC**

Trabajando por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos en México

Con la colaboración de:



Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament



Generalitat de Catalunya

## Diagnóstico Participativo desde un Enfoque de Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes en San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas



melel xOjobal

© Melel Xojobal

Another situation that particularly violates the human rights of children and adolescents is the increase in forced displacement due to criminal insecurity. In a statement released in November 2024, in the framework of the celebration of the anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, REDIAS stated that, since the beginning of the year, *“at least five episodes of mass displacement have been recorded as a result of criminal violence in the Highlands, North, Frailesca and Sierra Mariscal regions. Adding the figures from the cases in January, where 3,780 people were displaced from Chicomuselo and Amatenango de la Frontera; 6,685 people from Tila in June; 105 people from Chenalho and 600 people from Amatenango de la Frontera in July, there is an estimated 11,170 people in the first half of 2024 alone.”* According to these data, approximately 4,300 girls, boys and adolescents were displaced by violence in that period.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has documented that the internal forced displacement of girls, boys and young people have specific and differentiated effects, particularly on their safety, their educational and recreational opportunities and access to health (physical and mental), as well as on their identity construction and sense of belonging.

## Forced Recruitment: Another Phenomenon on the Rise

For more than a decade, there has been growing concern at the national level about the culture that normalizes and glorifies drug trafficking, spread through series, movies, video games, music, clothing and other items consumed daily by children and adolescents. This so-called narco-culture has gained ground, generating imaginaries and expectations of power, success and easy money by getting involved with drug trafficking.

In the context of the expansion of criminal economies in the state, the recruitment of children and adolescents by organized crime has become a growing problem. Some children and adolescents approach voluntarily, influenced by the aforementioned expectations or by the participation of family members in criminal groups. Others are recruited through different mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is debt, whether *“it is about adolescents who are trying to get the resources to pay the “coyote” who will take them to the United States, or young people in vulnerable conditions, to whom they offer an advance payment, weekly payments and economic promises in the future”* (*“Children Facing Criminal Violence in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas”*, Melel Xojobal, February 2024). Another common method is the invitation to join a group under pressure, where they are induced to consume alcohol or drugs. *“In this context, addictions have increased significantly in the adolescent population in Chiapas, with alcohol, marijuana and cocaine being the most consumed substances, while methamphetamines and crystal are present to a lesser extent,”* details Melel Xojobal.

According to the same study, the population at greatest risk of being recruited is made up of adolescents between 12 and 14 years old. However, some indicators show that recruitment can begin in children between seven and nine. This risk increases for those who live in areas controlled by criminal groups, experience domestic violence, do not attend school, have precarious jobs or are unemployed, and/or have problematic drug or alcohol use.

Once inside criminal groups, adolescents perform various tasks: running errands, selling and transporting drugs, recruiting other young people, performing surveillance or coyote work. In the case of women, they usually participate in cleaning activities, work as waitresses in bars or taverns, or are victims of sexual exploitation. In addition, they are forced to participate in confrontations against rival groups, carry out gang activities or even perform contract killings. It is common for girls, boys and adolescents involved in these groups to be used for high-risk activities that compromise their lives and integrity or expose them to arrest. *“This responds to the logic that they are seen as expendable pieces that can be easily replaced,”* explains Melel Xojobal in its study.

Given this scenario, it is not surprising that the records of the Specialized Prosecutor’s Office for the Attention and



Press conference  
 “Unprecedented  
 Violence against  
 Girls and Boys in  
 Chiapas”, June 2024  
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Investigation of Crimes Committed by Adolescents in Chiapas report an increase in the number of adolescents in conflict with the law. Currently, the main crimes committed by adolescents include rape, robbery of passersby, intentional injuries, sexual abuse, burglary and drug dealing. The judicialization of these cases poses another series of risks of violation of the rights of children and adolescents.

Finally, in the most violent area of the state (Sierra Frontera), there is increasing talk of the forced recruitment of young people over 18 years of age, who are threatened with being displaced, shot, killed and/or disappeared if they refuse to participate. These people are forced to carry out blockades, participate in marches, confront criminal groups and even confront the army or the National Guard.

Given this scenario, it is not surprising that the Network for Children’s Rights in Mexico (REDIM) has concluded that homicides are today one of the main causes of death among adolescents aged 12 to 17 in Mexico.

### **It Never Rains but it Pours: Cultural and Structural Violence as a Breeding Ground for New Phenomena of Violence**

Perhaps the levels of violence against children and adolescents today would not be the same without the background of a series of historical trends that have affected their access to basic human rights. This begins from birth when *“in the middle of 2024, the lack of timely birth registration of girls, boys and adolescents persists. This implies a serious problem because the right to identity represents a key right that opens the door to other rights,”* REDIAS denounced in its November 2024 statement, published in the framework of the celebration of the anniversary of the In-

ternational Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The same statement raises a series of challenges in matters of access to health and education that have not yet been overcome. In the area of health, it recalls that by 2020, 40% of the population under 18 years of age was in a situation of lack of access to health services. Likewise, Chiapas continued to occupy first place nationwide in deaths of children under five years of age due to diarrheal diseases. According to CONEVAL, by 2020, 1.6 million children and adolescents in Chiapas lived in poverty, and only the municipality of La Libertad had less than 50% of the population under 18 years of age in poverty. This situation is closely related to problems such as malnutrition and lack of access to a healthy and adequate diet.

Regarding education, according to official sources, the average level of schooling is 7.9 years and illiteracy is 12.9%. Of every 100 people aged 15 and over, 13 have no level of schooling, and only 55 have completed basic education. Schools in poor condition, overcrowded classrooms, lack of furniture and lack of basic services such as drinking water and electricity are a reality for thousands of children and young people in Chiapas. The presence of drug trafficking and the associated violence generate a climate of insecurity that makes access to education even more difficult and puts the integrity of students and teachers at risk. Today, there are even areas where it is impossible to continue studying, because the towns have been taken over by criminal groups that do not allow the free movement of the inhabitants of these regions.

*“It is also necessary to point out that the figures continue to show a high incidence of poverty and evident structural discrimination in the indigenous population, especially in access to their fundamental rights. Girls, boys and adoles-*



“Impune Death”,  
San Cristobal  
de Las Casas,  
November 2024  
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*cents who live in poverty and extreme poverty who were born in indigenous towns, that is, they are indigenous, up to 60% of these children are in poverty and extreme poverty compared to 30% who are not. Poverty is very clearly distributed among indigenous children and adolescents and we need to deactivate that correlation,”* declared REDIM in response to another trend that reinforces the problems when combined with discrimination.

**Migration: An Alternative or Another Source of Human Rights Violations for Children and Adolescents?**

*“The scenario of shortages, lack of opportunities and extreme violence has triggered the migration of children and adolescents to other states and internationally. Therefore, for 2024, Chiapas occupies first place in the repatriated child and adolescent population from the United States,”* explained REDIAS in its November statement. This data helps us to measure the number of girls, boys and adolescents who migrate annually from their communities to the neighboring country, although many others can do so within Mexico. *“In the complexity of this network of violence and violation of human rights, the outlook is not very optimistic: migration and criminal involvement summarize the life horizon for thousands of children and adolescents in the state of Chiapas,”* says Melel Xojobal in his report *“Children Facing Criminal Violence in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas.”*

Irregular migration routes pose countless physical risks,

especially for children who are accompanied or unaccompanied in transit. In addition to crossing dangerous terrain such as jungles, rivers, railways and highways, minors also face the possibility of suffering violence, exploitation and abuse during their journey and at their destination.

It is also worth mentioning that Chiapas is a point of origin, transit and destination for migrants. From 2018 to 2022, 90,259 arrests of children and adolescents from other countries were made in Chiapas. This figure placed the state in first place nationally in terms of arrest figures (SEGOB, 2023). One in four people on the move in Latin America and the Caribbean is a child or adolescent, the highest proportion worldwide.

**Hopes for Change and Growing Protagonism of Children and Adolescents**

Several organizations and networks mentioned in this article have been working to generate and position diagnoses, as well as proposals for collective actions to *“weave alternatives for life and peace, with and for the more than two million girls, boys and adolescents who move around or live in Chiapas.”* *“It is essential to continue building spaces for meeting together with children and adolescents for political and ethical training where processes of critical awareness are possible to understand why and how reality happens, with information, respecting their rhythms and forms different from those of adults, in dialogue with other girls, boys and adolescents, as well as intergenerational dialogues that generate movement and a sense of future,”* says Melel Xojobal.

Seeking to promote the participation of children and adolescents as subjects of the necessary changes, organizations and networks have helped in the realization of marches and rallies, such as the march against violence and inequality towards girls and adolescent women in San Cristobal de Las Casas in October; or the *“Impune Death”* held in this same city in the framework of the Day of the Dead, in memory of the girls, boys and adolescents who *“should not have died.”*

In the October march, the girls and adolescents denounced *“school violence, violations of our rights, inequality, domestic abuse, being forced to marry at an early age, not being able to fulfill our dreams, sexual exploitation, emotional and physical abuse by our relatives, not being able to express our opinion because we do not have the same working con-*

ditions, discrimination and exclusion, child pornography, we cannot continue with our studies because they limit us to those opportunities. Machismo is also something that worries us because they do not let us be free, because they harass us, because they do not let us make decisions, because they consider us inferior and that they can order us around. The changes that we need as girls and adolescents are: that the government listen to us and take our word into account, that we have a dignified life free of violence. We demand recognition of the seriousness of the situation and that they give us immediate attention. We demand more security in the streets, in schools, in our homes, that they listen to us no matter how old we are, that they respect our language and skin color.”

The change of authorities at the municipal, state and federal level can be an opportunity to respond to the problems faced by children and adolescents in Chiapas from a rights-based approach, with a gender perspective and an intercultural approach. Hopefully they will assume their role as guarantors of the rights of children and adolescents and guide their public policies in the best interest of children.

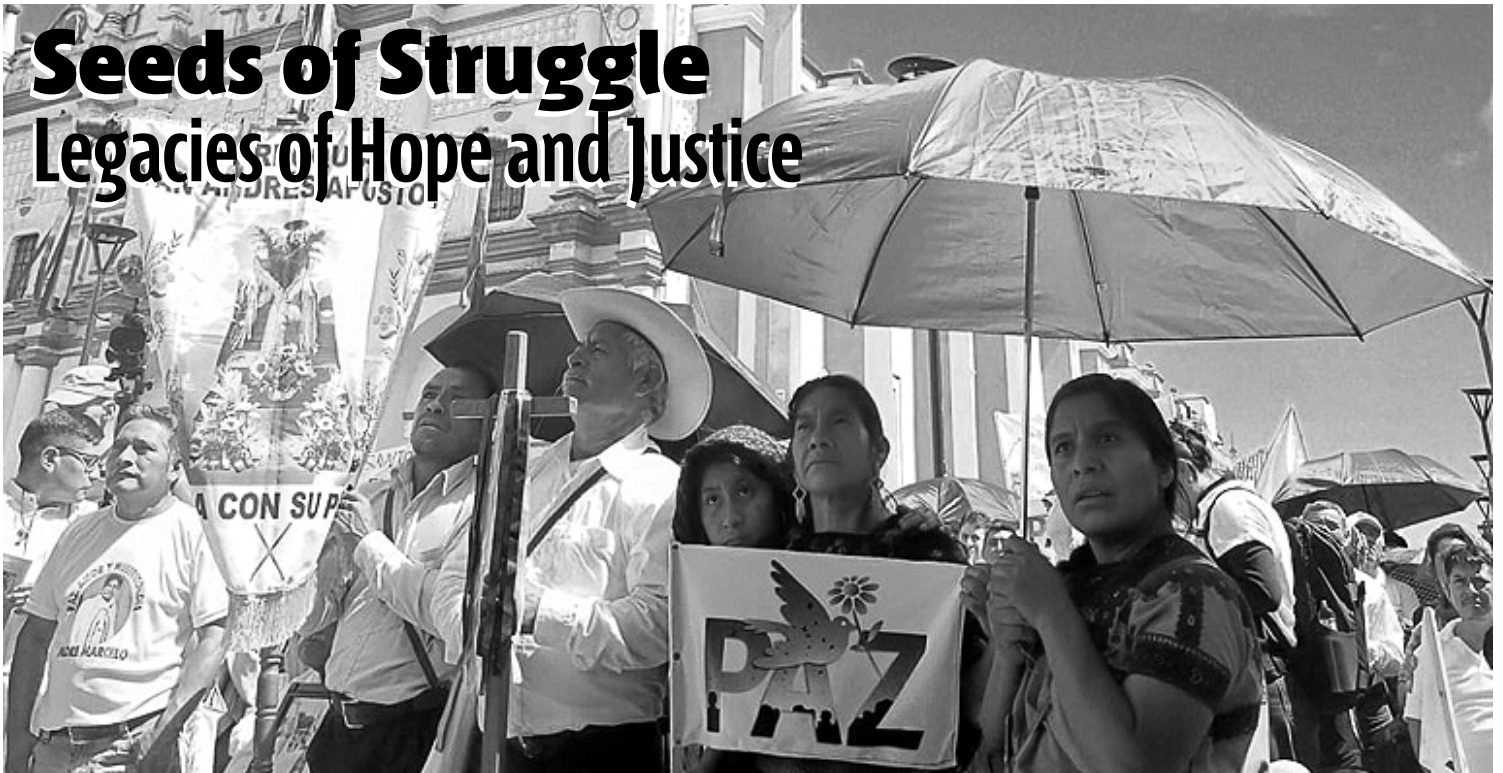
“There is a concern that the 100 points of the campaign and 100 points of action and priority for children and adolescents are contemplated, but not according to the standard and with the particularity that in our opinion this deserves. It is not enough to simply provide scholarships or support, which can be very important when it comes to overcoming nutritional deficiencies or malnutrition, but which do not end up structurally solving this enormous inequality,” REDIM said in October 2024.

This task is not the exclusive responsibility of the authorities but of society as a whole. It is up to all of us to contribute to “building spaces for collective life from tenderness where girls, boys and adolescents can grow up in a safe and dignified way... it is urgent to denaturalize the situations of violence that are experienced in Chiapas, as well as to avoid falling into discourses that criminalize this population” (Melel Xojobal, June 2024) ■



.....  
 March against violence and inequality  
 towards girls and adolescent women in San  
 Cristobal de las Casas, October 2024  
 © SIPAZ

# Seeds of Struggle Legacies of Hope and Justice



Pilgrimage on  
November 3<sup>rd</sup>  
in San Cristobal  
de Las Casas  
© Rubén Moreno  
Méndez

## Jubilee Year, 100 Years of jTatik Samuel

Jatik samuel, father marcelo perez, seeds, struggle, justice, rights, indigenous, dignity, community, equality, congress, mother earth, violence, pilgrimage, spirituality, legacy, reconciliation, peace, agroecology, reforestation, cultures, colonization, spirituality, sustainability, resistance, social movements, environment

November 2023 marked a significant moment for the Diocese of San Cristobal, celebrating 100 years since the birth of Samuel Ruiz Garcia, a bishop who dedicated his life to defending the rights of indigenous peoples and who, to this day, is fondly remembered as jTatik Samuel. His legacy lives on, reminding us of the importance of social justice and human dignity.

November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the date of his birth, was the day chosen by the Diocese Day to begin the jubilee year, during which a series of events have been held that will culminate with the traditional pilgrimage of the Believing People on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

The jubilee year, entitled “jTatik Samuel, Traveler in the Heart of the Peoples”. “Memory and Horizons” framed, throughout 2024, the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Indigenous Congress of 1974 and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mother Earth Congress of 2014. However, the violence that plagues the state in different regions was a constant during this period, also motivating a series of pilgrimages in several municipalities. Among these, the one on September 13<sup>th</sup> in the state capital Tuxtla Gutierrez stood out, which was particularly impressive due to the number of participants and the union of the three dioceses of Chiapas, something unprecedented.

As a further example of the criminal violence that prevails in Chiapas, on October 20<sup>th</sup> the celebrations of the jubilee year were overshadowed by the terrible murder of Father Marcelo Perez. An event that shocked and outraged entire communities, both in Chiapas and internationally. Following this unfortunate event, another mass and pilgrimage took place on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, which, in addition to commemorating the birth of Don Samuel,

was marked by demands for justice for Father Marcelo. Although the event was expected to attract thousands of people, attendance far exceeded expectations, demonstrating once again that injustice and pain rekindle in the hearts of people the flame of long-awaited peace with justice.

In this context, the jubilee year has not only been a celebration of the life and work of jTatik Samuel, but also an opportunity to reflect on the progress and challenges that still persist in the defense of land and indigenous rights in Chiapas and throughout Mexico. The legacy of jTatik Samuel and, now, that of Father Marcelo invites us to continue working for a more just world, where the voice of each community is heard and respected.

## 50 Years of the Indigenous Congress

One of the most important milestones in jTatik Samuel’s career was the Indigenous Congress of 1974, held in the city of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas. This event brought together representatives of the Tsel-

tal, Tsotsil, Tojolabal and Ch'ol indigenous peoples, under the motto "Equality in Justice." For four days, the communities discussed the need for social change, working around four main axes: land, trade, education and health. jTatik Samuel played a fundamental role in the organization of this Congress, which became a space for dialogue and vindication for the indigenous peoples. It was a historic moment that laid the foundations for future social movements.

Fifty years after this unprecedented event, once again in San Cristobal de las Casas, and after a series of pre-congresses in different regions of Chiapas, more than 1,200 people from the Tsotsil, Tseltal, Tojolabal, Ch'ol, K'anjobal and mestizo communities met at the CIDECI facilities to commemorate the Congress of 1974, reflect on its legacy and analyze current problems in the territories. During three days of dialogue and analysis, the communities pointed out that "today, facing a new stage of colonization, where the way of life of our native peoples is attacked, breaking community relations and the wisdom of our cultures; we need to walk together as peoples, with our own face and with a single heart." They also agreed to continue working in an organized manner in favor of life, care for Mother Earth and the search for peace with justice and dignity.

## Mother Earth Congress

Since mid-2023, the Mother Earth Pastoral of the Diocese of San Cristobal began working for the commemoration of the 2014 Congress. Through pre-congresses held in the different pastoral areas, actions and reflections on the care for the Earth and the work carried out in the last ten years were shared. Finally, in June, the communities met in Naichen to celebrate a decade of walking together in the defense of Mother Earth.

At this meeting, they recalled the words of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, where he states: "Mother Earth, the beautiful mother who protects us and welcomes us, is crying out

and crying out because of the damage we are doing to her, we have grown as if we were owners of the Earth, we have forgotten that we are part of the earth, but it is not ours." Regarding this reflection, the communities added: "Let us look at the symptoms of our Mother Earth, because she is sick, but we must not only look at the symptoms, but also at the causes, the root of why Mother Earth is sick and dying, look at the causes and do something, some of these are over-exploitation and pollution. The power structures, the governments, the companies of this capitalist system that imposes a way of producing, imposes "Maya Trains", imposes mega projects. These power structures are the ones that are contributing the most to Mother Earth becoming sick and dying."

"We have also contributed, we have stripped our Mother Earth bare by cutting down trees, we have burned her, we have polluted her with the drains that go to the river and the garbage we throw away. We have also poisoned her when we work with chemicals, herbicides and we also poison ourselves," they added.

During the meeting, the efforts that are being made in each area to protect and heal Mother Earth were shared. These initiatives include garbage collection, a ban on the use of disposable items at parties and religious celebrations, reforestation, a ban on logging, and the creation of agroecological projects, as well as reconnection with ancestral spirituality. Finally, they pledged to continue working as a community to defend and care for Mother Earth.

## We are not afraid

"I am not afraid of death or jail, because the body can be imprisoned, but the fight for ideals never is," said Father Marcelo in an interview with the media outlet Desinformemonos, words that he used to repeat in various spaces when he was questioned about the threats he received.

The death of Father Marcelo deeply upset the hearts of the people. Pain, rage, helplessness, indignation and

fear were some of the feelings that invaded thousands upon hearing the news of his murder. However, when remembering his words, his presence and the way he walked with the people, these feelings were transformed into seeds of unity and strength to continue the struggle. "He moved our hearts and those of our community, it was an impulse to wake up. He leaves us the task of continuing to build peace, justice and truth," members of the Believing People stated.

The struggle for the defense of the land and in favor of peace and justice has never been free of challenges and tragedies. His death was a painful reminder of the risks faced by those who defend justice and equality.

Father Marcelo's work focused on the search for peace, mediation and reconciliation between peoples, as well as the defense of Mother Earth. As a Tsotsil indigenous person, he knew firsthand the pain of those he accompanied until his last days. "I firmly believe that true peace is achieved through dialogue, not by shooting, killing or beating. The one who does that has lost his mind. By recovering reason, peace is possible," he used to say. It is essential to remember that the struggle for social justice has been and continues to be a path that requires commitment and courage. jTatik Samuel and Father Marcelo are living examples of this dedication. Through their journey, their struggle and their love for the people and the construction of a peace with justice, they taught us how faith and action can come together to transform realities and build a more hopeful future ■

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"We are not afraid; we are not afraid. We will never be afraid again. I want my country to be happy with love and freedom."

## INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

### CHIAPAS

#### AUGUST

- We attended the anniversary of the relocation of displaced families from Agua Clara, municipality of Salto de Agua.
- We attended the quarterly assembly of the Believing People of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- On August 30, the day in which the victims of forced disappearance are commemorated, we were present at various actions that took place in the center of San Cristobal de Las Casas, which was coordinated by the Working Group against Disappearance in Chiapas.

#### SEPTEMBER

- We accompanied the pilgrimage of thousands of people called by the ecclesiastical Province of Chiapas made up of three dioceses that marched in the city of Tuxtla Gutierrez to denounce the lack of peace and security that prevails in the state.
- We were present at the public event organized by families from the Banavil community, in the municipality of Tenejapa, displaced since 2011 by a cacique group that is also accused of being responsible for the forced disappearance of Alonso Lopez Luna.

#### OCTOBER

- We attended the discussion “*Violence and Human Rights: An Assessment from Chiapas*” organized by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba).
- We attended the Congress held in San Cristobal de Las Casas on the occasion of the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Indigenous Congress, 100 years after the birth of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia and ten years after the Congress of the Pastoral of Mother Earth, in which approximately 1,200 people participated, speaking Tsotsil, Tzeltal, Ch’ol, Tojolabal and Spanish.
- We accompanied the march against violence and inequality towards girls and adolescent women held in San Cristobal de Las Casas in the framework of International Girls’ Day.
- We attended the discussion “*Implementation of the International Recommendations on Human Rights of the*

*Universal Periodic Review in Chiapas – Challenges and Opportunities at the State Level*” that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

- We were present at the burial of Father Marcelo Perez Perez in San Andres Sakamanchen de Los Pobres, as well as at several events organized after his murder.
- We were present at the “*Regional Days for Our Disappeared*” in which groups of relatives of missing persons and accompanying organizations of 15 groups from Mexico, Central America and the United States met in San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- We attended the discussion “*Unjustly Imprisoned Women and Men in Chiapas – Perspectives following the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention after its Visit to Mexico*” that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

#### NOVEMBER

- In the framework of the Day of the Dead, we accompanied the public action “*Impune Death*” that took place in the center of San Cristobal de Las Casas in memory of the girls, boys and adolescents who “*should not have died*,” which was convened by the organizations Melel Xojobal C.A. and the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas (REDIAS).
- We were present at the pilgrimage that took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia, as well as to demand justice in the case of the murder of the priest Marcelo Perez Perez in October.
- We participated in the Meeting of Peace and Reconciliation Builders convened by the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO), which this year took place in a community in the municipality of Ocosingo.

#### OAXACA/GUERRERO

- In October, we attended the Regional Meeting of Women Defenders “*Embroidering Resilience from the South*” which brought together women defenders from Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas and Veracruz and took place in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca.
- In November, we participated in the Global Meeting for Climate and Life that took place in Santa María Atzompa.

## INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR ACTION PUBLIC RELATIONS

- In September, we participated in a meeting with representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHRC) and the Women in Resistance Collective in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

- Also in September, together with other organizations, we were in an online meeting with the rapporteur for Mexico of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Andrea Pochak.

### EDUCATION FOR PEACE

#### AUGUST

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

#### SEPTEMBER

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

#### OCTOBER

- We participated with two presentations in the Forum “*Young People Talk about Peace*” that was organized by the Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO) with young students from the Intercultural University of Chiapas (UNICH) in San Cristobal de Las Casas.
- We gave a workshop on risk analysis, security and protection measures with promoters of the Fray Pedro Lorenzo de la Nada Human Rights Committee of the municipality of Ocosingo.

- We share a contextual analysis with representatives of the Believing People of the highlands Tzeltal pastoral area that took place in Huixtan.

### NETWORKING

- At least once a month, we attend plenary meetings and commissions of the network for Peace in Chiapas, Slamail Kinal.
- On a bi-monthly basis, we attend operational meetings of the People’s Movement for Peace and Justice (MPPJ).
- In August and October, we had a meet-

ing of organizations that collaborate in the project entitled “*Strengthening the Self-protection Capacities of Human Rights Organizations and Communities in Chiapas*”, which we coordinate with Voces Mesoamericanas and Huridocs.

- In August, we attended the II Regional Meeting on Physical Protection convened by the Acceso Foundation that took place in Costa Rica.
- In September, we participated in a virtual meeting of the members of the Platform for the construction of peace in Mexico. In November, a face-to-face meeting of this same platform was held in Oaxaca. The space was opened to the participation of about 50 young people from various states of the country to reflect together on diagnosis and proposals. From this same platform, we attended spaces of analysis in which several other networking efforts converge in September and October.

- In November, we participated in the event “*Networks of Hope: National Meeting of Women Human Rights Defenders*” organized in El Salvador, to which women defenders from Mexico and Colombia were invited.

- In November, we participated in the coordination and implementation of the International Meeting for the Exchange of Experiences of Indigenous Peoples from Mexico, Canada and Norway, convened by the Global Platform for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), to which we belong, which took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas. A meeting of counterparts from the North American region of this same platform was also held ■

