

07 July 2017

## Update - Mexico: Further attacks against UPVA 28 de Octubre following killing of Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna

On 6 July 2017, a son of **Rita Amador López**, leader of the *UPVA 28 de Octubre* (Popular Union of Street Vendors October 28) received death threats over the phone from an unknown caller. This death threat comes one week after the killing of UPVA 28 de Octubre member **Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna** during an armed attack on the organisation's offices.

Rita Amador López is a leader of the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre – UPVA*, an organisation based in Puebla that defends the rights of street merchants as well as labour rights. The human rights defender has been subjected to repeated violations, such as defamation and smear campaigns, in addition to death threats. Rita Amador López is currently facing fabricated [criminal proceedings](#) along with other members of *UPVA 28 de Octubre*.

On 6 July 2017, the son of human rights defender Rita Amador López received a call from an unknown number. An unidentified woman gave him the following threatening message: "*Just tell Rita that similar to the daughter of Simitrio, we are going to kill one of her children*". Ruben Sarabia "Simitrio is the partner of the human rights defender. On 29 June 2017, human rights defender Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna was killed inside the office of *UPVA 28 de Octubre* in Puebla. During the same attack, the gunmen fired at another UPVA member, **Fredy Barrientos Corona**, who is currently in critical medical condition.

The UPVA has faced ongoing and escalating [repression](#) since its founding, with its members having been subjected to constant attacks, death threats, stigmatization and judicial harassment, including the recent killing of Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna. In April 2016, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders [highlighted](#) the difficult situation faced by UPVA's members. Particular concern was expressed about the risks faced by human rights defenders Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna and Rita Amador López. In a meeting, the Initiative also [warned federal authorities](#) of the increased risks faced by Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna, who had been beaten and threatened with a gun on 05 April 2016, as well as of the criminalization, death threats and smear campaigns against Rita Amador López. At the same meeting, they requested the inclusion of these defenders in the Mexican Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. This demand that was not met.

The threats against Rita Amador López, attack against Fredy Barrientos Corona and the killing of Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna are the latest in a wave of repression against social leaders and human rights defenders in Mexico. The government has not only failed to protect human rights defenders, but in many cases its agents have been directly responsible for the violence. This year has been a particularly violent one, with over 30 human rights defenders and journalists having been killed in the first half of the year, according to Mexican organization [Comité Cerezo México](#).

Front Line Defenders expresses its deep concern at the death threats and the judicial harassment against Rita Amador López and other members of the organisation, as they appear to be linked to their legitimate work in defence of human rights. Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of Rita Amador López, her family, as well as all members of *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre*, and to carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna.

#### Front Line Defenders Board of Trustees

Denis O'Brien, Noeline Blackwell, Jim Conway, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real, David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga

#### Front Line Defenders Leadership Council

Hanan Ashrawi, Robert Badinter, Bono, His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, Indai Lourdes Sajor, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Desmond Tutu

#### Front Line Defenders Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani, Maina Kiai