

Press release

Mexico: Civilian Observation Mission records human rights violations in the context of the Isthmus Interoceanic Corridor megaproject

- **19 national and international civil society organisations document various human rights violations related to the megaproject**
- **The majority of attacks occur against members of indigenous peoples and communities; the Navy and the National Guard are mainly responsible for the violence.**

On 27 July, the Civil Observation Mission that began on 25 July in the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico with the objective of documenting human rights violations and attacks against human rights defenders and communities in the context of the mega-project known as the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT), concluded its work.

19 national and international civil society organisations and eight journalists from national and international media participated in the Observation Mission. During the three-day tour, they visited affected people and communities in the northern region at the "Tierra y Libertad" camp in Mogoñé Viejo, Oaxaca, the Development Zone in Santa María Mixtequilla, and the community members attacked in Santa Cruz Tagolaba and Puente Madera.

The individuals and organisations participating in the Mission concluded that in the execution of the CIIT there are human rights violations of the inhabitants of these areas and of those who defend the collective rights of the indigenous communities; specifically their rights: i) to information, since the communities claim that they have not had access to all relevant information regarding the construction of the megaproject and its effects on their territories; ii) to participation, self-determination, territory, a healthy environment and cultural identity, due to the failure to carry out a prior, free and informed consultation in accordance with national and international standards; and iii) to life, integrity, personal freedom and freedom of expression, among others, due to the physical aggression, harassment and criminalisation they are experiencing, especially those who are leading the struggle for nature, land and territory.

At the press conference held this Thursday, 27 July, in Juchitán, Oaxaca, national and international organisations expressed their concern regarding the acts of aggression registered in the context of the construction of the Interoceanic Corridor megaproject. They indicated that there has been an increase in attacks this year and that the integrity of the defenders who are resisting this

megaproject is at risk. During the Mission, the participants witnessed security incidents such as the constant and vigilant presence of the armed forces.

The members of the Mission insisted that the consultation aimed at obtaining the consent of the indigenous Ayuuk communities affected by the CIIT has not been carried out. On the other hand, there have been violent interventions by the Navy and the National Guard, such as violent evictions, arbitrary detention and criminalisation against defenders in Mogoñe Viejo, Estación Sarabia and Palomares, as well as threats and attempted dispossession of the houses of residents in Boca del Monte, San Juan Guichicovi.

In Santa Maria Mixtequilla, the Mission also documented intimidation of the Community Assembly by the National Guard, as well as several cases of repression against people who have shown resistance to the "Development Zone" that is to be built. Attacks were also documented in the area of Santa Cruz Tagolaba, Tehuantepec, where there have been physical aggression, dispossession, illegal occupation of lands and forced displacement against community members due to speculation caused by the Interoceanic Corridor, as it is located in a strategic point. The indigenous Binniza community of Puente Madera has suffered a campaign of criminalisation and defamation, as well as a series of attacks such as arbitrary detention and fabrication of crimes against 17 defenders for their struggle against the imposition of the "Development Zone" of San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca.

Members of the mission also warned of the existence of attacks and differentiated impacts on indigenous women defenders who face attacks, slander and defamation based on gender stereotypes and sexuality. This also impacts their leadership, community and family roles.

Among the authorities responsible for the human rights violations reported during the mission were the National Guard, the Navy, the Army, the State Police, the Ministry of Communications and Transportation, municipal authorities and the Agrarian Prosecutor's Office. Various companies, armed groups and local chieftains (caciques) were also identified.

According to the *Report on the situation of persons and communities defending environmental human rights in Mexico*, presented by the Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, A. C. (CEMDA), between October 2021 and July 2023¹, 31 events of collective and individual attacks have been registered against communities land, territory and human rights defenders in the framework of the construction of the Interoceanic Corridor, mainly in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. Most of the attacks were committed against people belonging to indigenous peoples or communities.

Beyond the CIIT megaproject, in general, Oaxaca ranked first in number of aggression events between 2019 and 2022, according to the report. Oaxaca

¹ The 2023 data corresponds to information gathered as part of the new 2023 Report.

ranks as the entity with the highest number of documented attacks or aggression events between 2012 and 2018.

Records linked to CIIT indicate at least: 21 cases of intimidation, harassment and threats against defenders, their families or collectives; 11 cases of physical and psychological violence, as well as forced evictions; three homicides of defenders between October 2022 to July 2023; two cases of defamation through far-reaching public media; and 43 cases of criminal complaints against local authorities and community defenders in the communities San Juan Guichicovi, Mogoñe Viejo, Mogoñe Estación, Paso Real, Estación Sarabia, Tagolaba, and Puente Madera.

After concluding its tour and investigation of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec project, the Observation Mission expressed its deep concern for the context of risk for those exercising their legitimate right to defend their territory and reaffirmed that it will follow up on the documented violations; finally, it called on the competent federal, state and municipal authorities to:

1. Recognise and respect the human and collective rights to self-determination, autonomy, territory, participation, free, prior and informed consent, and life of indigenous peoples, according to international law.
2. Guarantee the right of access to justice and stop all forms of threats and attacks against indigenous peoples and defenders of human rights and nature.
3. Take the necessary actions to ensure a safe environment within the framework of Article 9 of the Escazú Agreement so that they can carry out their work.
4. Provide the indigenous peoples with the necessary, sufficient, complete and culturally appropriate information on the megaproject and all its components such as the gas pipeline and the development zones, so that they can exercise their right to self-determination.

Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca, 27 July, 2023

The Observation Mission is composed of:

Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, A.C.
Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (UCIZONI)
Front Line Defenders
Brigadas Internacionales de Paz (PBI)
Asamblea de Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio (APIIDTT)
Corriente del Pueblo Sol Rojo
Resistencia Civil Mixtequillense
Servicios para una Educación Alternativa A.C.
Tribunal Internacional de Conciencia de los Pueblos en Movimiento (TICPM)
Prevención, Capacitación y Defensa del Migrante, A.C. (PRECADEM)
Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz A.C. (SERAPAZ)
Brigada Humanitaria de Paz Marabunta
Brigada Humanitaria de Paz Marabunta Oaxaca

Consortio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca, A.C.
Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, A.C.
Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos Todos los derechos para todas y todos
(Red TDT)
Centro de Información sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos
Artículo 19 México
Espacio OSC
Grupo de Trabajo "Fronteras, regionalización y globalización" del Consejo Latinoamericano de
Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO)
Proceso de Articulación de la Sierra Santa Marta
Indigenous Peoples Rights International IPRI-México
Congreso Nacional Indígena