

28 January 2020

Mexico: Land and water rights defender, Miguel López Vega, is detained

On 24 January 2020, **Miguel López Vega**, a human rights defender and member of the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Puebla, Morelos y Tlaxcala (People's Front in Defence of Land and Water of Puebla, Morelos and Tlaxcala - FPDTA-PMT), was detained by agents of the Attorney General's Office of the State of Puebla while leaving the Government Directorate in that state. The human rights defender was part of a peaceful public protest in Santa María Zacatepec on 30 October 2019 which was met with excessive use of force by the state police and national guard.

[Miguel López Vega](#) is a Community Representative of the Nahua community of Santa María Zacatepec, a community broadcaster of Radio Zacatepec, councillor of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and member of the People's Front in Defence of Land and Water of Puebla, Morelos and Tlaxcala (FPDTA-PMT). FPDTA-PMT works together with Nahua communities in the states of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala to protect the rights of the 22 communities affected by several mega-development projects in the area. As a community representative of the town of Santa María Zacatepec, he has worked to protect the Metlapanapa River - which is at risk of being contaminated by discharge of wastewater from the Huejotzingo Textile City industrial park. He also advocates for the right of indigenous communities to self-determination.

Miguel López Vega was arrested at around 2:30 p.m. while he and fellow human rights defenders were leaving a meeting with Víctor Flores Báez, general director of the government of Puebla at the Government Directorate of the state of Puebla. Upon leaving the Directorate of Government, agents from the office of the Attorney General of the State of Puebla asked the group of defenders for Miguel López Vega. The defender identified himself, and was arrested, put into a van with tinted windows and was taken to the State Attorney General's Office and then transferred to the San Bernardino Tlaxcalancingo House of Justice where he is currently detained.

The human rights defender is charged with opposition to the execution of a public work, and attacks on general communication routes and transport facilities. He was denied bail because the judicial authorities of the state of Puebla maintained that he used or intended to use weapons and explosives in the crimes for which he was charged. This was based on statements given by two persons linked to the government of the state of Puebla who said that Miguel López Vega was in possession of a Molotov cocktail during the peaceful protest on 30 October 2019. Authorities also alleged that he was in possession of a stone. As a result, he was placed in preventive detention.

Front Line Defenders believes that this detention may be related to a broad strategy of intimidation and harassment against the defenders of the Community of Santa María Zacatepec in Juan C Bonilla, in relation for work protecting the Metlapanapa River. As part of the Metlapanapa River International Observation Mission, Front Line Defenders has been aware of physical violence, repression, harassment, death threats and stigmatization directed against defenders of Santa María Zacatepec in recent months. Death threats and harassment specifically targeting Miguel López Vega have also been documented.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern about threats and violence towards land and territory, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights defenders, particularly against members of FPDTA-PMT and the CNI. In February 2019, Samir Flores, human rights defender and member of FPDTA-PMT and CNI, was murdered in relation for his environmental work and his opposition to the Huexca thermoelectric plant and the Morelos Integral Project (Proyecto Integral Morelos PIM).

Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:

1. Withdraw the charges against Miguel López Vega and release him immediately from detention;
2. Initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the crimes charged against human rights defender Miguel López Vega, in order to guarantee his protection and release, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the protection of the members of the FPDTA-PMT, CNI and the defenders of Santa María Zacatepec, guaranteeing their physical and psychological security and integrity;
4. Ensure that all human rights defenders, in the development of their legitimate activities in defence of human rights, can operate freely in Puebla and Mexico.