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Mexico: Concern about the attacks and harassment of the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua

Members of the **Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua** have been subjected to harassment and aggression due to their collective work to protect human rights by contesting the construction of the Chemours Laguna plant. This was a mega industrial chemical facility for the production of sodium-cyanide, which was built in the town of Dinamita, Durango in 2017. Despite the fact that the chemical facility has been dismantled, the [Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua](#) continues enduring reprisals due to its human rights work.

On 2 February 2023, armed individuals forced their way into the house of human rights defender Cristóbal González Estrada, a member of the group [Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua](#). The armed individuals raided his home and physically assaulted his 14 and 12 years old children.

The aggressions committed against Cristóbal González Estrada and his family come after another member of the same group, the human rights defender, Servando Delgado Rentería, was kidnapped on 25 January 2023. Since 2017, the affected communities have been victims of repeated intimidation and harassment by armed individuals. These perpetrators have been seen around these communities, driving in white vans without license plates.

Since 2017, 21 affected communities in the municipality of Gómez Palacio, Durango, have formed the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua, with the aim of protecting their territory from the construction of the sodium cyanide plant in the town of Dinamita, Durango. The Chemours Laguna chemical plant is a project that was developed by The Chemours Company Mexicana, whose purpose, according to the company and local authorities, was to "[reduce the time and distance of supplying inputs to the Mexican industry](#)" by reducing sodium cyanide imports. They also sought to support the growth of the gold and silver mining industry in Mexico. The Chemours Laguna plant was intended to produce 65,000 tons of sodium cyanide annually.

[The Chemours Company Mexico made two attempts to install the plant in the state of Guanajuato in 2016](#). However, civil society response and the denial of the land's use permit by municipal authorities led the company to submit its proposal to a different municipal authority, the ones of the state of Durango (Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales-SEMARNAT) in March 2017. Two months later, the project was approved, and on June 24, 2017, its starting was announced without the prior knowledge or consent of the affected communities.

In July 2017, the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua was formed and in August of the same year, they came before the Federal Court of Administrative Justice and filed a nullity lawsuit against the resolution that approved the project. In the absence of a response from the Court, on 9 March 2018, the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua peacefully protested against the construction of the plant. This demonstration was made up of around 1,000 people. The local administration,

responded by repressing this protest, which resulted in [49 arbitrary arrests, of which 5 were minors, 10 were women, and as a result of which, 10 people were hospitalized.](#)

On March 13, 2018, a constitutional appeal was filed before the **Third District Court in La Laguna, who ordered the definitive suspension of the project.** This suspension order was subsequently revoked by a Collegiate Court of Torreon, and the company resumed its work in May 2020. Despite the fact that the municipal permits had expired during the suspension period, this work carried on. Faced with this situation, the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua established two protest camps on the site, to prevent the continuation of the project's work.

Finally, in October 2020, the Federal Court of Administration ruled by unanimous vote the nullity of the environmental impact authorization of the Chemours Laguna Project. On December 1, 2021, The Chemours Company announced the [sale of the company](#) to a Czech company specializing in the production of cyanide, Draslovka Holding a.s.

While no irremediable incidents have occurred since the events of the 2017 protest, the members of the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua, continue to be persecuted, harassed and attacked by local authorities. These authorities have promoted a narrative in which they have referred to the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua as backwards and anti-development, and as opposing a project that claimed to be beneficial for the improvement of job opportunities for the community. In light of the dismantling of the plant and the departure of the company from the territory, Front Line Defenders reiterates the importance of guaranteeing the safety of the members of the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua who are carrying out legitimate work in defense of their territory and denouncing the negative environmental impact of this project.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the aggressions towards, and harassment of, the Frente Unido de Pueblos de la Laguna en Defensa de la Vida, el Territorio y el Agua, as it is presumed that these are linked to their legitimate activity in defence of human rights and environmental rights. Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern regarding the climate of impunity and lack of protection for human rights defenders in Mexico.