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Statement – Mexico: Concern over recurrent violence against land and human rights defenders and communities in the Juan C. Bonilla municipality, Puebla

Human rights defenders from the Nahua communities of the municipality of Juan C. Bonilla in the state of Puebla, who are part of the organisation **Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca y de los Volcanes**, have been the target of attacks in recent years for their defense of their territory. The most recent development involved the repression of protestors in the town of San Lucas Nextetelco on 2 October 2023 when they attempted a peaceful manifestation in defence of their territory, and against the construction of a public security complex in the community.

[The Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca y de los Volcanes](#) is an organisation made up of 20 Nahua communities of the Puebla valley who have historically advocated against the human rights violations and dispossession caused by the presence and implementation of extractive projects in their territories. As indigenous communities they place a strong emphasis on self-determination in the way they govern themselves, and strive to exercise this autonomy in the defence of their land and territory. In the town of San Lucas Nextetelco, The Pueblos Unidos and the community have been specifically active in challenging the human rights implications of the building of a security facility. This would allow greater police capacity and increased presence within the vicinity of San Lucas Nextetelco.

On 2 October 2023, individuals who claimed to be employees of DECOSA, the company allegedly responsible for carrying out the construction of the security complex, arrived in the town of San Lucas Nextetelco. When local residents of the community produced the minutes of their assembly in which they had concluded to reject the project, these workers left the vicinity. Later the same day, at around 4:00 pm, these same workers returned to San Lucas Nextetelco, this time with a bulldozer, and accompanied by members of the Puebla State Police. They broke the gate (of the prospective building site) and began their work. This led to residents alerting the rest of the community, who came to peacefully protest and try to prevent the construction of the security complex from proceeding.

Subsequently, a group of people alleged to have been mobilised by the municipal government of Juan C. Bonilla also arrived on the scene. These people were previously known to the community as "golpeadores"(groups that are paid to threaten and physically assault). They began to physically attack members of the community, including young and elderly people who were demonstrating peacefully. Members of the San Luchas Nextetelco community who arrived to support the protesters clashed and, eventually managed to remove the "golpeadores" and the State Police. As a form of protest, the community decided to close the federal highway at San Lucas Nextetelco for almost 6 hours.

Front Line Defenders has previously denounced the violence against human rights defenders and communities defending their land and territory in the municipality of Juan C. Bonilla, including through a detailed report following an International Observation Mission to the area

On 30 June 2023, Alejandro Torres Choclatl, member of the Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca y de los Volcanes [was arrested by ministerial agents of the Attorney General's Office of the State of Puebla](#) (FGE). The human rights defender was released without the FGE having heeded the call to present him at a hearing and to issue a non-binding order to make his release

official. Previously, on 2 June 2023, Front Line Defenders had already [reported](#) that the human rights defender had been the victim of harassment and intimidation by members of the Puebla State Ministerial Police.

On 28 November 2022, various [national and international organisations expressed concern](#) about attacks, threats of physical harm, [repeated raids](#) and acts of surveillance, intimidation and harassment suffered by human rights defenders, lawyer and member of the FPDTA - MPT, [Juan Carlos Flores Solís, throughout 2022](#).

On 10 June 2021, an operation with approximately 100 officers and 60 vehicles of the Puebla State Police [intimidated and interrupted a peaceful demonstration](#) in Santa María Zacatepec. During the events, human rights defender and community journalist [Alejandro Torres Chocoalt](#) was assaulted by state police who, upon seeing him taking photographs of the events, forcibly took his mobile phone and threw it to the ground.

On 3 December 2019, national and international organisations visited the Nahua community of Santa María Zacatepec, belonging to the Municipality of Juan C. Bonilla, Puebla, as part of an International Observation Mission where they [documented a series of human rights violations perpetrated against individual human rights defenders and groups in the community of Zacatepec](#). This came to a head during the clamp down on protests on 30 October of that year, when police officers from the state of Puebla, and the Mexican National Guard, fired tear gas and rubber bullets, attacking human rights defenders and members of the community who were opposing the construction work. They also documented attacks, harassment, discrimination, death threats and criminalisation against human rights defenders and journalists by various public officials. This was recounted in more detail in the [Report by the International Observation Mission to the Metlapanapa River, Zacatepec, Puebla, published on 17 January 2020](#).

Just two months after the International Observation Mission took place, on 24 [January 2020](#), [Miguel López Vega](#), human rights defender and member of the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Puebla, Morelos y Tlaxcala (FPDTA – MPT), [was arrested](#) by agents of the Attorney General's Office of the State of Puebla as he was leaving the Government Offices premises. It was not until 16 March 2023 that two of the three charges against human rights defender [Miguel López Vega](#) were dropped, after the judicial proceedings against him were resumed on 16 March 2023. He is awaiting a date for a final hearing where the final charges are to be dropped.

The construction of the public security complex takes place against a backdrop of increased militarisation and a growing construction of security complexes and military barracks in communities in Mexico. These megaprojects have faced resistance, particularly where there has been no free, prior and informed consultation. [Front Line Defenders has previously denounced](#) that this has often been accompanied by the criminalisation and repression of human rights defenders who have led such peaceful opposition movements, as well as an increased presence of security forces within their communities.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the systematic violence against human rights defenders from the Nahua communities of the municipality of Juan C. Bonilla in the state of Puebla and the members of the organisation Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca y de los Volcanes, as the organisation believes that these violations are directly related to their peaceful and collective human rights work in defense of their autonomy, land and territory. Front Line Defenders call on the local, state and national authorities to immediately cease the repression and systematic targeting of human rights defenders members of the organised Nahua communities working in defense of their land, territory and autonomy in the municipality of Juan C. Bonilla. Front Line Defenders urges the authorities to carry out the necessary measures to guarantee the safety and security of human rights defenders and the Nahua communities.