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Mexico: Murder of human rights defenders and Jesuit priests Joaquín César Mora Salazar and Javier Campos Morales

On 20 June 2022, human rights defenders and priests **Joaquín César Mora Salazar** and **Javier Campos Morales** were shot dead by gunmen, along with another person inside a church in the indigenous community of Cerocahui, Chihuahua state.

[Joaquín César Mora Salazar](#) "El morita" was a Jesuit priest and human rights defender who for more than 30 years was dedicated to the accompaniment of indigenous communities and worked for the rights of indigenous peoples and the most needy in the Sierra Tarahumara. At the time of his murder he was the Vicar Cooperator in Cerocahui, Chihuahua. [Javier Campos Morales](#) was a Jesuit priest and human rights defender who for more than 34 years was dedicated to the accompaniment of indigenous communities and worked for the rights of indigenous peoples and the most in need in the Sierra Tarahumara. At the time of his assassination, he was the Superior of the Jesuit Mission, a parish priest, Vicar of the Indigenous Pastoral of the Diocese of Tarahumara, Regional Advisor of CEB'S (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base) (Basic Ecclesial Communities).

On the afternoon of 20 June 2022, human rights defenders Joaquín César Mora Salazar and Javier Campos Morales, along with Pedro Eliodoro, a local tourist guide, were murdered in the church of the community of Cerocahui. The murder occurred after the priests tried to protect Mr. Pedro Elioro who was trying to escape from an armed group and was seeking refuge in the temple. After the murder, the group of armed individuals took the three bodies with them. According to reports from the community of the Company of Jesus, the bodies have now been found and have been formally identified.

The Sierra Tarahumara, like other indigenous regions of the country, finds itself in a violent situation by cause of armed groups, in the context of extreme poverty and historical marginalisation by the country's authorities. In these communities, it is the presence of religious communities that often monitors and brings with them the respect of human rights, which is why they are regularly subjected to attacks and threats by armed groups. They often do not receive adequate protection from the government.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of Joaquín César Mora Salazar and Javier Campos Morales, as well as the other victims of the events, as it believes that the defenders were killed in the context of their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of the rights of indigenous peoples. Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern regarding the lack of protection for human rights defenders in Mexico.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Mexico to:

1. Strongly and publicly condemn the killings of Joaquín César Mora Salazar and Javier Campos Morales;

2. Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of the human rights defenders with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all members of the Jesuit Mission and the Pastoral Indígena de la Diócesis Tarahumara, as well as that of the community of Cerocahui, Chihuahua, in consultation with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Mexico are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions.