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Mexico: Reinitiation of the judicial process against water and land defender Miguel López Vega

A new hearing in the case of water and land rights defender, **Miguel López Vega** will take place on 29 March 2023. On 16 March 2023, he was notified by the Oral Criminal and Enforcement Court of San Andrés Cholula, Puebla, of the re-initiation of the judicial process against him. The human rights defender had been acquitted in January 2020, as it was found that there was insufficient evidence to support the charges against him.

[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.

On 16 March 2023, the Criminal Oral Hearing and Enforcement Court of San Andrés Cholula, Puebla, notified human rights defender Miguel López Vega and his lawyer, [Juan Carlos Flores Solís](#), that the order that had released him on 29 January 2020 was revoked by the Court. The Puebla High Court of Justice also announced a new hearing for 29 March 2023.

The judicial process against human rights defender Miguel López Vega was initiated by the State Water and Sanitation Commission (CEAS) following demonstrations by the community of Santa María Zacatepec in 2019, which were against the industrial and pluvial drainage works of the Ciudad Textil Industrial Park. The human rights defender was arrested on 24 January 2020, charged with the offences of opposition to the execution of a public work and attacks on general communication routes and safety in modes of transport. On 29 January 2020, Miguel López Vega was conditionally released after a hearing at the House of Justice in Cholula, Puebla. Two of the three charges against him were also dropped for lack of sufficient evidence. However, on 26 January 2021, the State Water and Sanitation Commission (CEAS) filed an appeal, arguing that it had not been informed of the 29 January 2020 hearing. The appeal resulted in the 16 March 2023 decision of the Superior Court of Justice of Puebla to revoke the 29 January 2020 decision and summon a new hearing for 29 March 2023.

The re-initiation of the judicial process against human rights defender Miguel López Vega put him at risk of being ultimately condemned on charges that had previously been dropped, as well as at risk of a new immediate arrest warrant being issued at the end of the hearing.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the re-initiation of the judicial process against Miguel López Vega, as it believes that it is solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. The organisation expresses its particular concern with the apparent lack of protection and guarantees of due process. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern that this hearing may result in his deprivation of liberty and the negative impact this action has on his legitimate work as a water and land defender, in particular in defence of the Metlapanapa River.

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Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:

1. Drop the charges against Miguel López Vega and guarantee his right to due process;
2. Initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the crimes alleged against human rights defender Miguel López Vega, in order to guarantee his protection, publish the results and bring 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 security and physical and psychological integrity;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders, in carrying out their legitimate human rights activities can operate freely without fear of restrictions or reprisals in Puebla and Mexico.