

28 August 2018

Mexico: Disappearance of indigenous and lands rights defender Sergio Rivera Hernández

On 23 August 2018, indigenous and lands rights defender **Sergio Rivera Hernández** disappeared while riding his motorbike in the municipality of San Pablo Zoquitlán, Puebla.

[Sergio Rivera Hernández](#) is a human rights defender of indigenous Nahua origin and member of **Movimiento Agrario Indígena Zapatista (MAIZ)**, a national organisation working since 1996 on environmental, indigenous and lands rights in different regions across Mexico. He has also been active in protecting the rights of indigenous communities in the region who are exposed to human rights violations as a consequence of the construction of Coyolapa-Atzatlán hydroelectric system in the Sierra Negra region of the state of Puebla, a project consisting of two dams lead by the Mexican company Minera Autlán.

On 23 August 2018, just after 6 p.m., Sergio Rivera Hernández disappeared while travelling with his motorbike from his home in Coyolapa to his community in Tepexilotla, 20 minutes away. Approximately one hour later, some members of the community stated that they had identified a white pick-up truck speeding away from Tepexilotla. Another person from the community reported seeing the human rights defender's motorbike abandoned near the road with some white pieces of papers lying around it, however they did not see the defender.

Sergio Rivera Hernández has previously been subject to several threats and attacks in relation to his work as a human rights defender. On 29 June 2018, he was beaten by four men linked to the municipal government of Zoquitlán, who told him that the attack was a consequence of his role in opposing the Coyolapa-Atzatlán hydroelectric project. Some days earlier, he received a death threat via a Whatsapp voice message. He was also threatened by a relative of the Zoquitlán Mayor, who, before the local elections held on 1 July 2018, told him "pray to god that the PRD (Revolutionary Democratic Party) does not lose. I will make sure something happens to you, I know people in Coyolapa". On 9 February 2018, while returning from an advocacy trip in Mexico City with a number of other defenders, armed men burned the bus they were travelling in after evacuating it at gunpoint.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the disappearance of human rights defender Sergio Rivera Hernández and believes the attacks he has been subject to are retaliatory measures for his role in denouncing human rights violations linked to the Coyolapa-Atzatlán hydroelectric project, which is affecting both his and others' communities in the Sierra Negra region, Puebla. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern over the lack of a safe environment in Mexico for human rights defenders to carry out their valuable work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Take all necessary measures to determine the whereabouts of Sergio Rivera Hernández and guarantee his physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of his family and community and the members of MAIZ;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the disappearance of Sergio Rivera Hernández, as well as the threats and attacks against him, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Cease all forms of harassment by local authorities against Sergio Rivera Hernández, as it is

believed that it is solely related to his legitimate human rights activities.

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mexico are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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