



Press Release 008/09

Found Dead: Two Mixtec Leaders “Disappeared” on 13th February.

- *They were in plastic bags and buried 80 cm deep.*
- *Their murder is a result of their activities as human rights defenders.*
- *Widows and bereaved demand that the murder is investigated and those responsible punished.*

Tlapa, Guerrero, on 22nd February 2009. Lifeless, with visible signs of torture and in an advanced state of decomposition, the bodies of Raúl Lucas Lucía and Manuel Ponce Rosas were unearthed. The President (former) and Secretary (latter) of the Organisation for the Future of Mixtec Peoples (Organización para el Futuro del Pueblo Mixteco, OFPM) had been forcibly “disappeared” by alleged of the Ministerial Investigative Police (Policía Investigadora Ministerial, PIM) since Friday 13th in Ayutla de los Libres.

Today, Sunday, in the morning, the wives of the deceased leaders, Guadalupe Castro Morales and Margarita de las Nieves, identified the bodies, which remained at the Forensic Medical Service (Semefo) buildings in Acapulco.

Raúl Lucas, 39 years old and Manuel Ponce, 32 years old, were arrested by three armed men who identified themselves as police on the afternoon of Friday 13th February. They were at Plan de Ayutla secondary school on the boulevard that connects Ayutla with Tecoanapa and Raul was waiting for his wife, Guadalupe Castro Morales, who is Regidora (municipal authority) in Indigenous Affairs from Ayutla Council and was participating in a public act to inaugurate public works.

The aforementioned event was also attended by the Director of Public Security in Ayutla- and ex-soldier- Luis José Sánchez Hernández, who along with the police that were escorting him, withdrew from the place literally minutes before Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce were forced into a vehicle without number plates and taken to an unknown location.

According to official information that was given to Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce’s families, as well as their legal advisors from Tlachinollan, the lifeless bodies were found late last Friday night (20th

February) in Las Cazuelas, Tecoaapa municipality, located at about 30 minutes from Ayutla, in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero.

During the identification of the bodies that were found in plastic bags and buried 80 cm deep, the families verified that they bore visible signs of torture and Raúl Lucas had a bullet-wound to the head, whilst it is assumed that Manuel Ponce could have died from a head injury.

At Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre we are fully convinced that the murder of the indigenous leaders is a “State crime” because the authorities have not granted the necessary guarantees that allow human rights defenders to carry out their work, for example ensuring that they do not suffer reprisals, attacks, threats, disappearances or murder as a result of their work.

We are concerned by the public declarations made by the State Attorney General Eduardo Murueta Urrutia, who says that Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce were *levantados* (i.e. that their abduction was related to organised crime). This is a distraction for the investigation and tries to justify the crime as an “extrajudicial killing.” For the families, members of the OFPM and Tlachinollan “the investigation must be focussed on the attacks, threats and abuses that they suffered for the struggle and their work as indigenous human rights defenders. It is clear that their murder is a consequence of their work as human rights defenders.”

We unite our voice with the widows, bereaved, families and friends of Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce, in order to demand that the state and federal governments carry out an exhaustive and objective investigation in order to shed light on this murder and punish those responsible.

Context

The OFPM, just like the Indigenous Me’phaa People’s Organisation (Organización del Pueblo Indígena Me’phaa, OPIM), is derived from the Indigenous Mixtec and Tlapaneco People’s Organisation (Organización del Pueblo Indígena Mixteco y Tlapaneco, OPIMT), through which 10 years ago they began to document as well as publically and legally denounce the abuses that soldiers had been committing in various communities across Ayutla.

In the Mixtec zone where the OFPM is present you can find El Charco; the community where soldiers from the Army killed 11 indigenous people on 7th June 1998. Similarly, in three communities from this area (Ojo de Agua, la Fátima and Ocotlán) 18 indigenous people were forcibly sterilised by the Department of Health).

On 24th October 2006, Raúl Lucas registered a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos

Humanos, CNDH) against soldiers from the Mexican Army for being illegally held and interrogated on 18th of the same month. For the same incident Raúl Lucas registered criminal complaint number 355/2006 for abuse of authority and intimidation. On 15th February 2007 he suffered an ambush, but survived.

As president of the OFPM, in 2008 Raúl documented four cases of human rights violations consisting of raids, robbery, damage and unlawful arrest and interrogation carried out by soldiers in the Mixtec and Tlapaneco indigenous communities. These cases also warranted the registration of five complaints before the CNDH and criminal reports.

On the night of his and Manuel Ponce's disappearance, Tlachinollan registered two amparos for being held incommunicado, possible torture and unlawful arrest in which it was requested that the Seventh District Judge based in Chilpancingo and the staff at his disposal begin a search for the disappeared men in the buildings belonging to the PIM, the Municipal Preventative Police in Ayutla, the 48th infantry Battalion based in Cruz Grande and the General Attorney's Offices in Chilpancingo and Acapulco.

On Saturday 14th February the families of the disappeared men, the Commission for the Defence of Human Rights (Comisión de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Coddehum) and Tlachinollan presented a request for precautionary measures to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), based in Washington D.C.. The measures in favour of the two indigenous men require the Mexican government to establish all of the necessary measures and actions to discover the whereabouts of the disappeared men and guarantee their physical and psychological integrity, as well as that of their families and all the other members of the organisation; so that they do not suffer the same treatment as a result of their work.

Given the importance of this case Amnesty International released an urgent action expressing their concern for the disappearance of Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce and demanded that the authorities conduct an immediate investigation to discover their whereabouts.