



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MEXICO AND THE GOVERNEMENT'S FAILURE TO PROTECT THEM

“We want to keep the case of Julian Carrillo alive and on the public agenda: The offenders must be punished – both the direct perpetrators and those who gave the orders. The authorities must not deviate from the obvious line of investigation: Julian was victimized for his activity as a human rights defender.”

Isela González from the organization Alianza Sierra Madre A.C. (ASMAC) in Chihuahua

In Mexico, individuals and groups who stand up for human rights face considerable risks. In retaliation for their activities, they are harassed, threatened, assaulted, or even murdered. The media and public officials contribute considerably to these risks through public defamation of human rights defenders. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 14 human rights defenders were killed in 2018.

innocence. Their cases are delayed and they are denied access to their files and legal assistance.

Members of indigenous and rural communities who fight to protect their lands and the environment – and thus their livelihoods – against large-scale economic projects are especially at risk. Businesses often do not live up to their responsibility to avoid contributing to human rights violations through their business activities.

In 1998, the UN General Assembly adopted the “UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”

According to this document, human rights defenders are people who advocate for human rights, regardless of whether they work for an organization or as individuals. The Declaration highlights governments’ responsibility to create a safe working environment and to investigate and prevent violations against human rights defenders.

Human rights defenders are often arrested and imprisoned arbitrarily in order to prevent them from working. This sequence of events provides a gateway to further human rights violations, such as mistreatment and torture. Confessions coerced under torture may even lead to human rights defenders being imprisoned for years, despite their

Another high-risk group are journalists who cover corruption cases or report on the participation of security forces and organized crime in human rights violations. According to Reporters Without Borders, Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for media professionals: In 2018, nine journalists were murdered because of their work. Constant aggressions, threats, and attempts to intimidate journalists are part of their everyday working life. The entanglement of politicians and organized crime is a forbidden topic for media coverage in some regions. Some journalists give up their profession completely, move away, or leave the country.



Foto: © David Paniagua/Amnesty International



Foto: © David Paniagua/Amnesty International

In 2012, the government established a protection mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists. However, this mechanism does not do justice to the task of tackling the multiple dangers faced by these groups. Responsibilities within the protection mechanism are unclear. There is no prevention strategy; this aspect is especially necessary in regions where threats are increasing. The efficiency of this mechanism will depend on effectively combatting the structural causes of the country's human rights crisis. The legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders must be recognized publicly, and perpetrators of attacks against them must be prosecuted and punished. As long as the attacks on defenders do not have consequences, the risk will continue to exist.

The German Human Rights Coordination for Mexico recommends

to the Mexican government:

- publicly recognize the importance of human rights defenders' work as a tool for the advancement of human rights, the rule of law, and sustainable development;
- fully and independently investigate all attacks on human rights defenders and hold perpetrators responsible;
- strengthen the national protection mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists so that their safety is guaranteed and they can work effectively;
- drawing on civil society participation, develop and implement a state policy that protects human rights defenders and journalists and supports their work;
- implement the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression.

to the German government:

- discuss attacks against human rights defenders, especially land and environmental defenders, with the Mexican government, and follow up on individual cases through the German Embassy until they are solved;
- support measures to strengthen the protection mechanism within a holistic strategy and in coordination with human rights organizations;
- bring up concerns about the prevailing levels of impunity with the Mexican government and demand the full and independent investigation and prosecution of perpetrators;
- view the protection of human rights defenders as a cross-cutting component of foreign policy and implement the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders coherently and systematically;
- actively integrate human rights organizations into international cooperation and development activities, supporting human rights defenders and incorporating their expertise into human rights due diligence;
- ensure that German companies in Mexico respect the rights of human rights defenders and are not involved in human rights violations.

to the EU and its member states:

- seek the systematic implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and structural improvements by Mexico in the protection of human rights defenders;
- publicly denounce threats and violent attacks against human rights defenders, support defenders who are victims of defamation campaigns, and give particular support to criminalized defenders through continuous observation of court proceedings by the EU delegation;
- drawing upon input from representatives of Mexican civil society, develop a strategy and an action plan for the involvement of the EU and its member states in the protection of human rights defenders, and evaluate its implementation every six months.