



Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, Secretary of the Interior

José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, Secretary of Foreign Affairs

Arely Gómez González, Attorney General of Mexico

Luis Raúl González Pérez, President of the National Human Rights Commission

Monte Alejandro Rúbido García, Head of the National Commission of Security

Rogelio Ortega Martínez, Governor of the State of Guerrero

13 March 2015

Re: Joint open letter to the Mexican Authorities: International Organisations express deep concern over increasing risk faced by the families of the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa and human rights defenders accompanying the case

Dear Mr Osorio Chong, Mr Meade Kuribreña, Ms Gómez González, Mr González Pérez, Mr Rúbido García and Mr Ortega Martínez,

The undersigned organizations express deep concern regarding recent reports that members of the Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre, as well as other human rights organisations and the families and friends of the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, continue to suffer security incidents, putting their physical and psychological integrity at risk.

Defamations

In February 2015, several defamatory articles were published in a newspaper, entitled *El Financiero*, which discredited the work of Tlachinollan and other human rights defenders (HRDs),

social leaders and civil society organizations in the state of Guerrero¹. Although these latest articles targeted a broad number of civil society organisations, it is not the first time that both Tlachinollan and other organizations that accompany the families of the disappeared students have been targeted. On December 10, 2014, the Secretary of the Marines (SEMAR), Vidal Francisco Soberón stated during a public interview that the organizations that accompany the family members of the disappeared of Ayotzinapa are manipulating them and seek benefits for themselves in order to reach their own objectives². Similarly, in November 2014, Tlachinollan, the Civil Society Network of Guerrero and the José María Morelos y Pavón Regional Human Rights Center were reportedly the target of public defamation by authorities from Guerrero³ and on December 8, 2014, the digital newspaper *Reporte Indigo* published an article based on leaked information presumably from the Center for Investigation and National Security (CISEN) which links two members of the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center with “subversive groups” from the state of Guerrero⁴. It is worth mentioning that the latest articles published in February 2015 are similar to those previously published in November and December, as they also make reference to “official documents” or information from the CISEN and link human rights defenders to guerrilla groups and subversive movements. Such allegations would suggest that federal resources are being allocated and used to investigate HRDs in the state of Guerrero.

Acts of Aggression

On 12 January 2015, the Military Police allegedly attacked some of the relatives of the 43 disappeared students while they were protesting in front of the 27 Battalion Military Quarters in Iguala⁵. Similarly, on 14 December 2014, family members and students were allegedly attacked by five drunken federal police officers while preparing the “Light in the Darkness” concert⁶. In February during a speaking tour to Geneva and Brussels, two parents of the disappeared students also described regular surveillance and intimidation by different state security forces during their protests. According to Mexican civil society organizations, these events are part of a broader context of increased restrictions on the right to protest and freedom of expression in Mexico⁷.

Precedents and context

In 2012, Tlachinollan lawyer Vidulfo Rosales Sierra was forced to temporarily leave the country after receiving threats linked to his work with students from the same Ayotzinapa teachers college. Due to his extraordinary risk level, Rosales Sierra was awarded Provisional Protection Measures from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Diverse organizations and international experts have also recognized the adverse conditions in which human rights defenders carry out their work in Guerrero and the obstacles that they face⁸. According to the National Network of Human Rights Organizations “All Rights for Everyone” (Red TDT) between 2011 and 2013, 10 human rights defenders were assassinated in Guerrero and 21 suffered acts of aggression or death threats⁹. Indeed, on 13 February 2015, another activist was

1 El Financiero: see columns dated 18, 19, 20 February 2015 written by Riva Palacio: <http://bit.ly/1Bvz0fB>

2 El Universal: “Padres de Normalistas están siendo manipulados: SEMAR” 10 December 2014: <http://eluni.mx/1z7LG9B>

3 Fundar, November 2014: <http://bit.ly/1wZuupU>

4 Reporte Indigo “Ficha CISEN a abogado de Normalistas “ 8 December 2014: <http://bit.ly/1z2LyIj>. According to the article, CISEN has a file on Tlachinollan’s Director Abel Barrera and the Director of the Judicial Section, Vidulfo Rosales Sierra and considers them “radical and dangerous to the governability” of the country. The same article mentions several other civil society organizations from Guerrero which are allegedly surveilled and have files with CISEN.

5 Tlachinollan, 12 January 2015: <http://bit.ly/1L1UYwV>

6 Tlachinollan, 14 December 2014: <http://bit.ly/1ssDhbZ>

7 For further information see: <http://bit.ly/1nEgV3f>

8 Amnesty International, 2014: <http://bit.ly/1wve5Zm> and Civil Observation Mission., November 2014: <http://bit.ly/1FRZCaj>

9 Red TdT, 2014: <http://bit.ly/1m1sLIR>

murdered¹⁰.

In its concluding observations following a review of the first report submitted by Mexico in February 2015, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances highlighted the numerous cases and reports it has received which described threats and attacks against relatives of disappeared persons and human rights defenders working on this issue¹¹.

More generally and as recognized by the UN, human rights defenders in Mexico work in a persistent climate of violence, hostility and insecurity¹². Local human rights organizations report that cases of aggressions towards human rights defenders have doubled over the past 4 years¹³. Impunity prevails in more than 95 % of these cases¹⁴.

The undersigned organizations believe that the aforementioned examples of defamation, surveillance and acts of aggression place both the family members of the 43 disappeared students, and the HRDs who accompany them at increased risk and serve to obstruct their legitimate work. Moreover, the stigmatisation and criminalisation of HRDs, social leaders and the student community is deeply troublesome as it remains a breeding ground for the perpetration of grave human rights violations in Guerrero and, in particular, against the student community of the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa. In the absence of a thorough and exhaustive investigation of the events of 26 – 27 September in Iguala, and the prosecution of the material and intellectual actors responsible for these incidents, the security and protection of those who continue to fight for justice in this case is likely to remain a matter of deep concern.

We therefore call on the Mexican authorities to:

- Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Vidulfo Rosales Sierra and other members of the Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre, as well as other human rights defenders, and indeed the family members of the 43 disappeared students, permitting them to continue in their fight for justice and against impunity. Furthermore, we urge that the physical and psychological integrity of those who exercise their right to peacefully protest within the context of this case be guaranteed.
- Continue to investigate the events that occurred in Iguala on 26 – 27 September, establishing with conclusive scientific proof, the whereabouts of the disappeared students, as well as establishing the alleged involvement of the authorities at all levels in these incidents and the chain of command of such authorities.
- Facilitate the work of all independent international experts working on the case including the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team and the group of experts appointed by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.
- Guarantee the protection of all human rights defenders, including through statements of recognition of their legitimacy, the sanctioning of all aggressions against them, the implementation of adequate protective measures for victims and the full implementation of the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Yours sincerely,

10 Red Nacional de Defensoras de DDHH de México, 17 February 2015: <http://bit.ly/1ECO4ua>

11 UN CED, February 2015: <http://bit.ly/1J9QldT> (p6)

12 UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, February 2014: <http://bit.ly/1qef766> and ACCUDEH, 2014: <http://bit.ly/ZTsLms>

13 ACCUDEH, 2014: <http://bit.ly/ZTsLms> and

14 OHCHR Mexico, 2013:

Action de Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture – ACAT France

Front Line Defenders

German Network for Human Rights in Mexico (Coordinación Alemana por los Derechos Humanos en México)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in the frame of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Jass – Just Associates

Latin America Working Group Education Fund

Mexico EU international Cooperation Observatory (MEICO)

Mexico Forum Schweiz (Foro México Suiza)

Peace Brigades International (PBI) – Mexico

Protection International

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) in the frame of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders