

16 February 2021

Mexico: Attacks and threats against members of the Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen

On 11 February 2021, a fire was registered for the second time this month in the garbage dumps of P'urhépecha indigenous municipality of Nahuatzen in Michoacán de Ocampo, allegedly caused by people linked to the Nahuatzen City Council. In the last weeks at least two members of the Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen have received threats.

The [Consejo Ciudadano Indígena de Nahuatzen](#) (the Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen) and the city councils of Arantepacua, and Sevina are indigenous community governments which have been functioning as local governments in the state of Michoacán since the process of gaining an autonomous status as indigenous peoples began in 2015. Since then, the aforementioned indigenous city councils' have worked to defend the rights and interests of their communities. The councils have been recognised by the Electoral Tribunal of the State of Michoacán and the Federal Government of Mexico.

On 3 February 2021, when the first fire was occurred, members of the community reported the incident to the Civil Protection and state authorities, but did not receive any type of support. Both accidents have put homes that are located near the garbage site and the forest protected by the community at serious risk, as well as endangering several members of the Nahuatzen Indigenous Citizens' Council who tried to control the spread of the fire. Community members believe that the fires are being caused by people possibly linked to the Nahuatzen City Council.

Front Line Defenders has denounced the patterns of violence against the Citizens' Council and autonomous communities on various occasions, such as on 15 January 2020, when the Citizens' Councils undertook a peaceful mobilisation in front of the municipal government to demand the allocation of the corresponding budget for their representation. This peaceful protest was met with police [repression](#) and [intimidation](#) against the human rights defenders.

In October 2019 Front Line Defenders denounced the [arrest and imprisonment](#) of three human rights defenders belonging to the Nahuatzen Indigenous Citizens' Council. On 8 November October of that year, after having spending almost a year in preventive detention, **José Antonio Arreola** and **José Luis Jiménez** were found guilty of "sabotage" and sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment by the judge of criminal prosecution of the Uruapan region of the Supreme Court of Justice of the State of Michoacán. A year later, civil organisation that have closely followed the process continue to point out that the sentence is a reprisal for their work as indigenous rights defenders as well as there being a lack of clear evidence of the crimes for which they are accused.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the latest events that have occurred in Nahuatzen, which seem to be linked to the community's work in favor of the rights of indigenous peoples, for self-determination and for autonomy. Front Line Defenders condemns the inaction from the authorities in charge of Civil Protection of the state as well as other authorities involved and offers its support for the indigenous rights defenders of the Nahuatzen, Sevina and Arantepacua communities, including the unjustly imprisoned human rights and indigenous defenders, José Antonio Arreola and José Luis Jiménez, who in the coming days will be given a final opportunity to review their process before the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation.

Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:

1. Carry out a full and impartial investigation into the fires that have endangered the community, the forest, and the members of the Nahuatzen Indigenous Citizens' Council;
2. Bring those responsible for these fires to justice, in compliance with international standards;
3. Guarantee that human rights defenders in Mexico can continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and without restrictions, including judicial harassment. We call for the release of defenders José Antonio Arreola and José Luis Jiménez

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