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Mexico: Intimidation and harassment of human rights defender Alejandro Torres Chocolatl

On 2 June 2023, alleged members of the Ministerial Police of the State of Puebla went to the town of Santa María Zacatepec, dressed in civilian clothing and in unmarked cars, asking for the location and address of the human rights defender **Alejandro Torres Chocolatl**. They also went looking for him at his place of work, the Radio Comunitaria Zacatepec.

[Alejandro Torres Chocolatl](#) is a human rights defender who is a broadcaster with the community Radio Zacatepec and a member of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). He is also a member of the Frente Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca and of the People's Front in Defence of Land and Water of Puebla, Morelos and Tlaxcala (FPDTA-PMT). FPDTA-PMT works together with Nahua communities in the states of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala to protect the rights of the twenty-two communities affected by several mega-development projects in the area. Alejandro Torres Chocolatl has worked to protect the Metlapanapa River which is at risk of contamination by wastewater discharge from the Huejotzingo Textile City industrial park. He also advocates for the right to self-determination of indigenous communities.

On 2 June 2023, alleged members of the Ministerial Police of the State of Puebla, in four unmarked vehicles without registration plates and dressed in civilian clothing, went to the town of Santa María Zacatepec. They asked around the town for the location and personal address of the human rights defender Alejandro Torres Chocolatl and then went to his place of work at the Radio Zacatepec premises looking for him. The Ministerial Police has the role of supporting the Office of the General Prosecutor by obtaining the required evidence for their prosecutions.

These events have occurred in the midst of an ongoing judicial process against Alejandro Torres Chocolatl and the human rights defender [Miguel Lopéz Vega](#), initiated by the State Water and Sanitation Commission (CEAS). This process began following demonstrations by the community of Santa María Zacatepec in 2019 against the industrial and rainwater drainage works of the Ciudad Textil Industrial Park. In December 2019, Alejandro Torres Chocolatl was charged with the offences of “obstructing communication roads and attacks on general communication routes and safety in modes of transport.” In 2020, a constitutional action was filed before a District Criminal Judge in Puebla, on the basis that the arrest warrant issued against the human rights defender was done so in an illegal manner, but this action was denied. Thus, an appeal filed against this decision was also denied.

Due to this arrest warrant against Alejandro Torres Chocolatl and Miguel Lopéz Vega, the latter remained in jail from his arrest in December 2019 until 29 January 2020, while Alejandro Torres Chocolatl remained at liberty while the charges against him continued to stand. The proceedings against both human rights defenders were recently [reactivated](#) on 16 March 2023 when they were notified by the Criminal Oral Hearing and Enforcement Court of San Andrés Cholula, Puebla, that the order of 29 January 2020 that had released Miguel Lopez Vega from prison had been revoked.

After a new hearing on 29 March 2023, the CEAS filed a request to grant a pardon solely to Miguel Lopez Vega and not to Alejandro Torres Chocolatl for two of the three charges on which he had been indicted. The Public Prosecutor's Office ruled the request for a pardon inadmissible, and therefore proceeded to schedule a hearing for 27 April 2023. At this hearing, Miguel Lopéz Vega was only acquitted of two of the three charges due to a lack of sufficient evidence, but the same

did not happen in the case of Alejandro Torres Chocolatl, who continues to be charged with the three initial crimes.

The hard work by civil society, which has withstood a long and outdrawn judicial process against Miguel López Vega and Alejandro Torres Chocolatl has resulted in the positive outcome in the case of human rights defender Miguel López Vega, however the same result has not occurred in the case of Alejandro Torres Chocolatl, who, despite the support of civil society, is still at risk of being criminalised and arbitrarily convicted.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the acts of intimidation and harassment by the alleged Ministerial Police of the State of Puebla, and the criminalisation of Alejandro Torres Chocolatl as it believes that these are solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. The organisation express its particular concern with the apparent lack of protection of the human rights defender and guarantees of due process.

Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:

1. Drop the charges against Alejandro Torres Chocolatl and guarantee his right to due process;
2. Initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the harassment against human rights defender Alejandro Torres Chocolatl, in order to guarantee his protection, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the members of the FPDTA-PMT, CNI and the defenders of Santa María Zacatepec, guaranteeing their security and physical and psychological integrity;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders, in carrying out their legitimate human rights activities, can operate freely without fear of restrictions or reprisals in Puebla and throughout Mexico.