

17 January 2020

## **Mexico: Police aggression against members of indigenous community councils in Nahuatzen**

On 15 January 2020, members of the Nahuatzen, Comachuen, Arantepacua and Sevina indigenous community councils were physically attacked by the Nahuatzen municipal police and the National Guard. The attacks were carried out at the end of a round table dialogue during which the councils demanded that the town hall complied with previously established agreements.

The [Consejo Ciudadano Indígena de Nahuatzen](#) (the Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen) and the councils of Comuachen, Arantepacua, and Sevina are indigenous community governments which have functioned as local governments in the state of Michoacán since 2015, when a process of gaining an autonomous status as indigenous peoples began. Since then, they 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 15 January 2020, the Councils mobilised peacefully in front of the office of the municipal government of Nahuatzen to demand adequate budget allocation to them as representatives of their communities. The councils also protested against the non-compliance of the municipal presidency with an agreement on the non-utilisation of the Town Hall, until a competent authority defines who is entitled to use the facilities. Tensions have intensified in recent weeks and the municipal presidency has unilaterally decided to occupy the Town Hall, while using the state police to intimidate the indigenous human rights defenders. [Front Line Defenders denounced](#) this situation in October 2019, when three human rights defenders were arrested and imprisoned in the context of the eviction of the offices of the National Development System (DIF) by the municipality.

After three hours of peaceful mobilisation, the councils managed to set up a round table dialogue with the authorities. During the discussions, in the absence of an agreement, the municipal president left the premises escorted by municipal and national guards, violently dispersing the crowd and driving into the protest.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the apparent abuse of power by the authorities in Nahuatzen, Michoacán, as well as the use of police and National Guard to intimidate peaceful protesters. Front Line Defenders believes that the aggressions against the defenders of the communities of Nahuatzen, Comuachen, Sevina and Arantepacua are acts of retaliation for their work defending the right to self-determination and autonomy.

## **Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:**

1. Cease all harassment against members of the Consejo Ciudadano Indígena de Nahuatzen, the councils of Comuachen, Arantepacua, and Sevina, as well as other organisations defending the right to self-determination in Mexico;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the police aggressions against the indigenous protesters, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Respect the agreement concerning the non-utilisation of the Town Hall until a competent authority determines who can use the facilities;
4. Engage in a meaningful dialogue with the indigenous authorities of the communities of Nahuatzen, Comuachen, Sevina and Arantepacua in order to guarantee and respect their rights to self-determination and autonomy as an indigenous people;
5. Guarantee that human rights defenders in Mexico can continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and without restrictions, including police harassment.

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