

**30 April 2020**

**Mexico: Surveillance and death threats against indigenous priest  
Marcelo Pérez Pérez and his pastoral team**

On 6 April 2020, priest and human rights defender Marcelo Pérez Pérez received a threatening phone call from an unknown individual, identifying themselves as “Colonel”, threatening his life and the lives of his parishioners in the Municipality of Simojovel in Chiapas, Mexico. This threat is the most recent in a series of threats and incidents of harassment against Marcelo Pérez Pérez, his pastoral team, and the parishioners of Simojovel.

Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez is an indigenous priest and human rights defender based in Simojovel. He currently coordinates the Social Pastoral of the Province of Chiapas, which integrates the Dioceses of the municipalities of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Tapachula and Tuxtla Gutiérrez. He actively supports and collaborates with organizations and groups of the religious indigenous movement which promotes the collective rights of indigenous peoples and denounces projects that threaten their beliefs and their autonomous living. Within the movement of *Pueblo Creyente por la Defensa de la Madre Tierra* (Believing People for the Defense of Mother Earth), Marcelo Pérez Pérez has led pilgrimages and activities related to issues such as access to healthcare, poverty and violence, targeting the population of the Municipality of Simojovel in Chiapas. Despite the lack of political will and protection, he continues his religious activities in defence of the rights of indigenous peoples.

On 6 April 2020 at approximately 12:30 pm, Marcelo Pérez Pérez received a phone call from a person who identified themselves as “Colonel”. The man threatened his life and the lives of his parishioners, saying “...it is up to you to ensure that a massacre does not break out among your parishioners”. Days before receiving the death threat, Marcelo Pérez Pérez was informed by parishioners and collaborators of surveillance and monitoring incidents that compromised his safety and the safety of parish members.

On 29 March 2020 at approximately 7:00 a.m, a man dressed in civilian clothing took photographs of some members of the Simojovel Parish who were engaged in activities at the entrance of the church of San Antonio de Padua. Photographs of the parish members were also reportedly taken by unknown men from a nearby hotel window with the intention of being noticed.

On 2 April a close collaborator of Marcelo Pérez Pérez received a phone call warning him to be careful as unidentified men were asking for details of people working in the parish of San Antonio de Padua. On 5 April Marcelo Pérez Pérez received information that a man in Simojovel was reported to have said: "Father Marcelo gets into everything, someone needs to shoot him...". It is worth noting that such threats have also been made repeatedly on social networks by unknown sources.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the safety of the defender Marcelo Pérez Pérez, his pastoral team, and the parishioners of Simojovel, as incidents of harassment against his pastoral team and death threats against the life of the indigenous defender continue and have become more frequent since March 2020. Front Line Defenders believes that these threats are due to Marcelo Pérez Pérez legitimate activities in defence of indigenous rights.

