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Mexico: sentence against indigenous nahua leader Saúl Rosales Meléndez of the community of San Pedro Tlalcuapan

On 1 March 2024, the Court of the Judicial District of Guridi and Alcocer declared human rights defender and indigenous leader **Saúl Rosales Meléndez** guilty of a murder that happened on 15 April 2022. The defender has been facing criminal procedures and detained since 14 July 2022. The sentence is expected to be issued on Friday 8 March 2024, with the General Attorney of Tlaxcala asking for a prison sentence of 50 years.

[Saúl Rosales Meléndez](#) is a human rights defender and President of the nahua community of San Pedro Tlalcuapan, state of Tlaxcala. He is known locally for leading the community assemblies and for his continuous work in defence of the Matlalcueytl mountain's forest -also known as La Malinche-, in face of the environmental damage caused by extractive activities in the area, including illegal logging. Saúl Rosales Meléndez was elected as nahua authority by the community to lead the defence of the forest due to his previous work protecting the forest while challenging personal interests of local State agents regarding the nahua territory, as it has been facing exploitation without proper consultation with the community. The community denounces that officials have entered the territory without the needed previous authorization, with the purpose of enabling access to extractive activities that have caused considerable damage to the ecosystem of La Malinche.

On 01 March 2024 the human rights defender has been declared guilty of aggravated homicide linked to a lynching that resulted in the death of one person on 15 April 2022. The sentence came after one year and seven months of detention. The incident took place in the nahua community of San Pedro Tlalcuapan, and Saúl Rosales tried safeguard the victim by calling the community to calm down but without success. It was reported that while the incident took place, the police arrived to the community but did not intervene. The human rights defender did not participate nor encourage the aggression.

Part of the unmerited reasoning presented by the accusation was that Saúl Rosales failed with his obligation to defend the victim in his role as the President of the community, deriving the decision in a situation of criminalization against the indigenous leader. The human rights defender has been detained since 14 July 2022 in the Center of Social Reintegration of the State of Tlaxcala, away from his family and community. A new hearing that will decide the conviction will take place this Friday 8 March. The General Attorney is looking for a imprisonment sentence of 50 years.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern regarding the acts of criminalisation against the human rights defender Saúl Rosales Meléndez, as it believes to be motivated by his legitimate and peaceful activity in defence of human rights, specially for the defence of the environment and the indigenous nahua territory. Front Line Defenders also reiterates its concern regarding the climate of impunity and lack of protection for land, territory and environmental rights defenders in Mexico.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Drop the charges against human rights defender Saúl Rosales Meléndez and guarantee his right to due process;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the security, physical and psychological integrity of human rights defender Saúl Rosales and of all human rights defenders who are defending their rights to land and territory in Tlaxcala;

3. Take measures to guarantee that all human rights defenders, in the carrying out of their legitimate activities in defence of human rights, can operate freely without fear of restrictions or reprisals in Mexico, including judicial harassment.