

# URGENT ACTION

## INDIGENOUS DEFENDER KILLED, OTHERS AT RISK

**Indigenous environmental rights defender Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez was found dead on 14 May in Cuetzalan, Puebla state. He was one of a number of defenders facing criminal investigation for their opposition to the construction of a high-voltage power line. These defenders are at grave risk and have recently been subject to attacks and intimidation.**

**Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez** was found dead with deep stab wounds to the heart and shoulder area in a local motel on the outskirts of Cuetzalan, Puebla state, on the morning of 14 May. He was a member of the Antonio Esteban Human Rights Centre and part of a coalition of social movements who have been opposing energy projects, mining concessions, and the construction of a high-voltage power line in the northern mountain region of Puebla state.

Colleagues from another coalition that Manuel Rodríguez was part of, the **Independent Popular Rural and Urban movement of farmer and workers (MIOCUP)**, last reported seeing him on 13 May. Two MIOCUP members told Amnesty International they were with him in MIOCUP's offices late that night and that around 12:30am one of them saw Manuel Rodríguez washing dishes, before they went to bed in the office dorms. The autopsy places Manuel Rodríguez's death at between 1 and 2am on 14 May, provoked by massive blood loss from three deep stab wounds. On his left shoulder there were also wounds provoked by a sharp and hot object, as well as marks on his face, suggesting other possible forms of violence. The perpetrators remain unknown. The State Attorney General's Office of Puebla has opened an investigation into his death, yet they have been irregularly withholding his lawyers' access to the casefile, and it is not yet clear whether lines of inquiry include his work as a human rights defender.

The Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) had recently opened a criminal investigation against Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez and seven other defenders and activists from MIOCUP and the **Tosepan Union of Cooperatives** for their participation in a peaceful sit-in near the proposed power line outside of Cuetzalan in late 2016 and 2017. The State Electricity Commission responsible for the power line presented a criminal complaint against the defenders in January 2017. They are accused of "obstructing a public work", punishable by up to one year in prison.

### Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the State Attorney General to ensure a prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the death of Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez, ensuring that his work as a human rights defender is part of the lines of inquiry and allowing his lawyers full access to the casefile;
- Calling on authorities to ensure the safety of members of the MIOCUP and the Tosepan collective and investigate any attacks against them;
- Calling on the Mayor of Cuetzalan to urgently and publicly recognize the legitimate role of environmental human rights defenders in the region and refrain from undermining their work publicly or privately.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 JUNE 2018 TO:

State Attorney General  
Lic. Víctor Antonio Carrancá Bourget  
Fiscal General del Estado de Puebla  
Boulevard Héroes del 5 de Mayo 31  
Oriente, Ladrillera de Benítez,  
C.P. 72530, Puebla, Puebla, México  
Tel: +52 222 211 7900 ext. 4019  
Email: particular.fgep.puebla@hotmail.com  
Twitter: @FiscaliaPuebla  
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/  
Estimado Fiscal General**

Mayor of Cuetzalan  
Lic. Oscar Paula Cruz  
Presidente Municipal de Cuetzalan  
Plaza Celestino Gasca s/n, C.P. 73560  
Cuetzalan de Progreso, Puebla, México  
Fax: +52 233 331 0527  
Email: isabel\_pc1@hotmail.com  
**Salutation: Dear Mayor/ Estimado  
Alcalde**

Minister of the Interior  
Alfonso Navarrete Prida  
Secretaría de Gobernación  
Río Amazonas 91  
Col. Renacimiento, Del. Cuauhtémoc  
C.P. 06500, Ciudad de México, México  
Email: secretario@segob.gob.mx  
**Salutation: Dear Minister/ Estimado  
Secretario**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation  
Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The northern mountain region of Puebla has seen an increase in violence in recent years and environmental rights defenders and activists have been registering an increase in attacks and intimidation against them. In addition, violence and criminal activity in the region surrounding Cuetzalan have been on the rise.

This is the second member of MIOCUP that has been killed in recent years. On 4 June, 2014, environmental activist and member of MIOCUP Antonio Esteban was also killed in Cuetzalan. More recently, in April 2018, state investigative police arrested another member of MIOCUP and one of the accused in the criminal suit of the State Electricity Commission (CFE) on the outskirts of Puebla's capital, accusing him of illegally altering his vehicle registration. He was held in state custody for a matter of hours and then released once it was verified that all his details were in order.

The Tosepan Union of Cooperatives includes over 34,000 members throughout the region that work together for the sustainable production of coffee and honey, environmental rights, fair trade and pricing for crops, as well as basic services such as potable water and drainage. On 20 January unknown assailants partially set the Tosepan Union's office on fire, according to information given to Amnesty International. Tosepan members told Amnesty International that unknown attackers shot at one of their members on 4 March as they travelled in their car. On 7 March, another Tosepan member was followed by a strange car when travelling home. The criminal suit presented by the CFE was originally against four members of the Tosepan, but on 20 May the Federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) included a fifth member of Tosepan into its criminal investigation.

Both members of MIOCUP and Tosepan have continued with their work and public protests despite the grave risks they face. On 12 May, two days before his death, Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez participated in a public forum in Chignautla, Puebla, in which he publicly spoke out against the Autlán mine, in Teziutlán municipality, a project currently in operation with plans for expansion and further exploration. MIOCUP members had also recently been active and successful in the closure of a local rubbish dump. Tosepan members have remained active in press conferences and public protests in recent months, despite the attacks and criminal charges that they face.

Many of the human rights defenders and activists from Tosepan and MIOCUP pertain to Indigenous Peoples. Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez pertained to the Nahuatl Indigenous Peoples. Two of the members of the criminal suit from Tosepan pertain to the Masehual Indigenous people.

Name: Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez (m) and other members of the Independent Popular Rural and Urban movement of farmer and workers (MIOCUP) and the Tosepan Union of Cooperatives

Gender m/f: all

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