

## Communities at risk from Mexican dam project

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Several thousand people, primarily peasant farmers and others from poor Indigenous communities, are at risk of being displaced by plans to build a dam in Mexico.

The project to build La Parota hydroelectric dam in Guerrero State, Mexico, is a massive undertaking. The proposed dam would produce 1,527 gigawatt hours of electricity a year, flood an area of around 17,000 hectares of land and lead to the displacement of several thousand people.

Local human rights defenders and environmental activists have expressed serious concerns about the impact of the project and the manner in which the government is preparing for its implementation. Amnesty International (AI) has documented a series of threats to those who have campaigned against the building of the dam.

The construction will affect three municipalities in Guerrero State, a state with one of the highest levels of marginalization and some of the lowest indicators of human development in Mexico.

The government claims that 2,981 people will be displaced. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) put the figure far higher at 25,000, with an indirect impact on the lives of 75,000 people. Twenty-one agrarian settlements inhabited by *campesino* (rural small-scale farmers) and Indigenous communities may be directly affected by the construction of the dam.

Local NGOs have won several court cases demonstrating irregularities in the process of consultation and a lack of accessible and reliable information relating to the project. Tensions around the project have led to violence in the affected communities.

Since 2003, three people have been killed, three leaders of groups opposed to the dam have been temporarily detained, and several people have been injured in incidents reportedly related to the conflict arising from the dam project.

Most recently, Rodolfo Chávez Galindo, a human rights defender and a leading member of the Council of Communal Land-owners and Communities Opposed to the La Parota dam (*Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositoras a la Presa la Parota*, CECOP), was arbitrarily arrested by the police on 21 April 2007. He was arrested by police on the basis of an arrest warrant that had been cancelled in 2004.

Local human rights organizations secured his release later that day, highlighting the fact that his illegal detention may have been politically motivated. In a recent response to AI, the Federal Commission of Electricity (CFE), which is responsible for the project, stated that it did not have any role in his arrest as it is a police and judicial issue.

However, in the same letter, the CFE was highly critical of Rodolfo Chávez's campaigning against La Parota. AI is not aware of any progress in official investigations into his illegal arrest.

The project is presently on hold after a successful challenge of the legal basis for the approval of the project by Mexican NGOs, including CECOP. However, the federal government's electricity commission responsible for the project and the Guerrero state authorities appear committed to overcome legal obstacles and ensuring that the dam is constructed.

AI is concerned that human rights are at risk in the preparation and implementation of La Parota hydroelectric dam. In particular, the lack of full, accurate, accessible and impartial information; the lack of opportunities for genuine participation in developing plans for the dam and for mitigating the social impact of the dam; the exclusion of women and other community members from the decision-making process; and the risk that impending displacements may

amount to mass forced evictions. All this raises numerous concerns that Mexico should address without delay.

AI neither opposes nor supports the construction of La Parota dam and the organisation will continue to investigate human rights concerns arising from the project. Nevertheless, AI believes that the manner in which the project has been implemented so far has not guaranteed the rights of those affected and has contributed to social tensions and conflict. It is time for the federal and state authorities to incorporate these international human rights standards into the process of consultation and avoid serious human rights violations.

**Read more:**

Mexico: Human Rights at Risk in La Parota Dam Project (Report, 05 August 2007)  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR410292007>

Mexican authorities fail to investigate Oaxaca abuses (Web Feature, 31 July 2007)  
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/mex-2310707-feature-eng>

Mexico: Challenging a history of human rights violations (Web Feature, 31 July 2007)  
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/mex-310707-feature-eng>