

AI Index: PRE01/008/2010
21 January 2010

Human Rights Defenders in Mexico under attack

The Mexican authorities are failing in their duty to protect human rights defenders from killings and life-threatening harassment and attacks, Amnesty International warned today in a new report.

The report “Standing up for justice and dignity: Human Rights defenders in Mexico” describes more than 15 cases of defenders who have suffered killings, attacks, harassment, threats and imprisonment on fabricated charges between 2007 and 2009 to prevent them from doing their work.

“Defending human rights in Mexico is life-threatening and the government is not doing enough to tackle the problem,” said Nancy Tapias-Torrado, researcher on human rights defenders at Amnesty International. “When one human rights defender is attacked, threatened or killed, it sends a dangerous message to many others and denies hope to all those on whose behalf the defender is working”.

Amnesty International believes there are dozens of such cases, very few of which are effectively investigated and even fewer brought to justice. In none of the cases included in the report has a full investigation been carried out and in only two of them suspects are in detention.

Human rights defenders take action to protect and promote human rights. States have a responsibility to protect these people and ensure they can carry out their work.

Activists working to protect the rights of communities living in poverty, those who defend the rights of Indigenous peoples or work to protect the environment are at particular risk of attack. Their work is seen as interfering with powerful political or economic interests. Too often they are treated as trouble-makers not as human rights defenders working for a better society where respect for human rights can be a reality.

Obtilia Eugenio Manuel, founder and president of the Organization of the Me’ phaa Indigenous People (OPIM) in Guerrero, southern Mexico, has been the victim of numerous death threats and acts of intimidation since 1998.

The campaign of intimidation against her got so serious in recent years, Obtilia and her family were forced to flee their community out of fear. For example, in January 2009, a man who had been following her on several occasions shouted at her: “Do you think you’re so brave? Are you a real woman? Let’s hope you also go to prison... If you don’t go to prison, we’ll kill you.” None of the threats or acts of intimidation against her has been investigated.

In another case, Ricardo Murillo Monge, a spokesperson and founder member of the Sinaloa Civic Front (FCS), was found dead in his car in the city of Culiacán, Sinaloa State, on 6 September 2007. Only two years later, on 31 August 2009, Salomón Monárrez, another spokesperson for the FCS, narrowly survived an

assassination attempt.

“The Mexican government must urgently develop an effective and comprehensive programme of protection for human rights defenders”, said Nancy Tapias-Torrado.