

La Parota Dam is an example of the global trend to assassinate land and environmental defenders reported by Global Witness

The annual Global Witness report entitled “At What Cost?: Irresponsible business and the murder of land and environmental defenders in 2017” was launched worldwide on Tuesday 24th of July. It has once more put the murders, violence and criminalization of defenders of the territory in Mexico back on the map. Countries such as Brazil, Philippines, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo stand out in the report data for the number of murders against environmental and land defenders; in some of those cases, numbers in these countries reach up to one murder per week.

Mexico occupies the 4th position in this ranking with 15 murders during 2017, which makes it the second country worldwide in which the situation for land and environmental defenders has worsened. The statistics went up from 3 to 15 murders per year, that is an increase of 500% just within the span of one year. What is more, the Global Witness report details that 13 of the 15 murdered defenders were indigenous who fought for their ancestral territories. On the other hand, the Cerezo Committee report “Mexico 2017: 48 human rights defenders extrajudicially executed” indicates that there were 12 defenders of indigenous territory killed within the same year [1]. In the state of Guerrero, 8 killings of human rights defenders were registered in 2017[2]. Moreover, Global Witness recorded a trend on the industries that are most involved in cases of assassinations of land and environmental defenders -in which stood out water projects and hydroelectric dams.

These data lead us to the gross human rights violations that took place in the rural community of La Concepción in Acapulco, Guerrero on January 7, 2018 [3]. Global Witness reports a global trend of security forces, in which the army and police feature as the most involved in this type of killings. This global phenomenon is manifested yet again in the 38 arbitrary detentions, 3 extrajudicial executions and at least 8 cases of torture perpetrated against land defenders of the Council of *Ejidors* and Communities Opposed to La Parota Dam (CECOP by its Spanish acronym) and the Coordinator of Regional Community Authorities - Community Police (CRAC-PC by its Spanish acronym).

The operation conducted by more than 200 elements of public security- including state, investigative and federal police, as well as the armed forces- in the community of La Concepción, was executed on blatant arbitrariness and a tremendous level of violence. This intervention is yet another example of the generalized culture of impunity that encourages human rights violations by public security bodies. In fact, according to testimonies documented by the “Tlachinollan” Human Rights Centre, inhabitants of La Concepción that witnessed more than 25 illegal house searches performed during the operation, have informed that members of security forces openly acknowledged that the Interior Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Interior) allowed them to carry out this type of actions without judicial oversight or authorisation [4]. This tallies with the sum of factors that, according to Global Witness, enhance and perpetuate the risks faced by human rights defenders.

The defense of the territory against La Parota hydroelectric dam is a struggle of the indigenous communities that would potentially be affected by this megaproject. After many decades, CECOP members have received intimidations, threats and criminalization from state and non-state actors, who have also pushed for community conflict as a strategy to dismantle this anti-dam movement. Global Witness asserts that the causes of threats against human rights defenders are closely related to the impunity of the attacks and blackmailing; the corruption of public officers and businessmen, who seek to secure the imposition of the projects; the disregard towards the right of a free, prior and informed consent; and the exclusion of indigenous communities from the decisions concerning the use of their territory. All of these causes are clearly present in the attempts of government and other non-state agents to harm the CECOP’s defense of the territory by promoting fear in the affected communities and imposing the project through corruption networks made up of businessmen, organized crime and public officers at the state and federal levels, as well as by pressuring for the non-compliance of the judicial

resolution issued on July 11th, 2010 by the 41st District Unitary Agrarian Court which ordered the suspension of the dam project.

Among the specific recommendations issued by Global Witness to Mexico is ensuring accountability and that all investigations into crimes against defenders adequately consider potential motives linked to the defender's human rights activism. In Mexico, we are being witnesses of impunity levels that soar around 99%; and crimes against human rights defenders, like the ones committed against CECOP members, are not exempt from this phenomenon. The investigations into the torture suffered by at least 8 of them, as well as the 3 arbitrary killings have not shown any progress. By contrast, these seem to be intentionally delayed by public authorities. At the same time, there is a clear practice on fabricating and manipulating evidence to incriminate the 25 members of CECOP and Community Police in a criminal process opened given their defense of the territory.

Global Witness' report should draw the attention of the Federal Government to address the serious situation of land and environmental defenders in the country, and particularly, the situation of the defenders against the La Parota hydroelectric dam project.

[1] Comité Cerezo, *Report Mexico 2017: Human Rights Defenders Extrajudicially Killed*, January 2018 (Informe México 2017: 48 defensores de DH ejecutados extrajudicialmente), p. 4. Available at:

<https://www.comitecerezo.org/spip.php?article2936>

[2] *Idem*, p. 5

[3] "Tlachinollan" Human Rights Centre, *Informative Material: Serious Human Rights Violations in La Concepción, Guerrero*, January 11, 2018 ("Ficha informativa: Violaciones graves a los derechos humanos en La Concepción, Guerrero"). Available at: <http://www.tlachinollan.org/ficha-informativa-violaciones-graves-los-derechos-humanos-la-concepcion-guerrero/>

[4] Global Witness, *At What Cost?: Irresponsible business and the murder of land and environmental defenders in 2017*, July 2018, p. 13. Available at:

<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/a-qu%C3%A9-precio/>