

Introduction

1. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and Impulso 18 are human rights organisations specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Both monitor the situation of FoRB in Mexico, raise awareness of human rights concerns and advocate for the full protection of human rights. This submission seeks to draw attention to particular concerns regarding the right to FoRB.

International legal framework and UPR commitments

2. Mexico is a member of the Organization of American States and among other relevant human rights treaties and agreements, the following treaties have entered into force in Mexico: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR). The government of Mexico has committed to protecting FoRB in Article 24 of its constitution.
3. During the previous cycle, Mexico received 277 recommendations.¹ Of these the state accepted 275 and noted two (a call to ratify the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute by Liechtenstein and a call to respect and defend life from conception to natural death by the Holy See). Among the accepted recommendations, a number focused on the importance of tackling impunity, including by guaranteeing the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, as well as on the rights of human rights defenders (HRDs), minority rights including indigenous rights, the rights of women and girls, children, and recommendations relating to enforced disappearances.
4. Mexico received just three recommendations pertaining to the right to FoRB during the last review, including a recommendation from Poland to ‘take the necessary measures to effectively combat impunity for attacks against religious leaders, journalists or members of religious minorities’ and from Canada to ‘adopt comprehensive policies for the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and religious leaders, and ensure that existing mechanisms are adequately funded and staffed with trained personnel.’² Third, CSW was encouraged to see a recommendation pertaining to the right to FoRB among indigenous communities, which called on Mexico ‘to ensure freedom of religion for all, especially indigenous populations, so that they are not forcibly displaced and compelled to convert’.³ Regrettably, there has been limited implementation of these recommendations.

5. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should fully guarantee rights associated with the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes ensuring that these rights, as set out in Mexico’s constitution, as well as in the American Convention on Human Rights (San José Pact), the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), are upheld for all inhabitants and citizens of Mexico.**

Constitutional and legislative framework

6. Human rights, including the right to FoRB, are guaranteed in the constitution. However, in practice, cultural protections often take precedence over human rights.
7. The following articles in the Mexican constitution guarantee freedom of religion or belief:
 - a) Article 1: “Any form of discrimination, based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disabilities, social status, medical conditions, religion, opinions, sexual orientation, marital status, or any other form, which violates the human dignity or seeks to annul or diminish the rights and freedoms of the people, is prohibited.”
 - b) Article 2 of the Mexican constitution affirms that Mexico is a pluri-ethnic nation and affords a number of rights to its indigenous peoples, including the right to implement their own social, economic, political and cultural organization, and the right to maintain and enrich their language and culture. The Law of Uses and Customs includes the caveat that this must be practiced in accordance with Mexican constitutional law, and that human rights and gender equality must be respected.
 - c) Article 24: “Everyone is free to embrace the religion of his choice and to practice all ceremonies, devotions, or observances of his respective faith, either in places of public worship or at home, provided they do not constitute an offense punishable by law. Every religious act of public worship must be performed strictly inside places of public worship, which shall at all times be under governmental supervision.”
8. The “Religious Associations and Public Worship Law” regulates Article 24 and establishes Article 2, the Mexican State guarantees in favour of the individual, the following rights, and freedoms in religious matters:
 - a) Have or adopt the religious belief that he likes the most and practice, individually or collectively, the acts of worship or rites of his preference.
 - b) Not profess religious beliefs, refrain from practicing

1 UPR-Info, ‘Database of Recommendations on Mexico’, accessed 15 May 2023, [\(https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=\(allAggregations:lt,filters:\(cycle:\(values:\(%27567eec7b-d5ab-4c36-a712-57c38fae9124%27\)\),issues:\(values:\(b28bd913-9a5b-4d71-a0b9-8ff2eef7fe5c\)\),state_under_review:\(values:\(%275pd3g0abkz6%27\)\)\),from:0,includeUnpublished:if,limit:30,order:desc,searchTerm:%27mexico%27,sort:creationDate,treatAs:number,unpublished:if\)](https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=(allAggregations:lt,filters:(cycle:(values:(%27567eec7b-d5ab-4c36-a712-57c38fae9124%27)),issues:(values:(b28bd913-9a5b-4d71-a0b9-8ff2eef7fe5c)),state_under_review:(values:(%275pd3g0abkz6%27))),from:0,includeUnpublished:if,limit:30,order:desc,searchTerm:%27mexico%27,sort:creationDate,treatAs:number,unpublished:if))

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

religious acts and rites and not belong to a religious association.

c) Not be subject to discrimination, coercion or hostility because of his religious beliefs, nor be forced to testify about them.

9. A 2020 study carried out by the National Commission against Discrimination at the time of the last country-wide census,⁴ found that: 21.8% of the population who identify as religious but not with the majority religion feel little or not at all free to express their beliefs, worship or rituals in their community. Of the indigenous population between 12 and 29 years of age and who also identify with minority religious groups, 34.3% said they had experienced discrimination. Of the indigenous population 60 years and above who identify as members of religious minorities, the prevalence of discrimination is 38.7%. For indigenous religious minority women, this percentage increases to 41.1.
10. Despite legal safeguards, violations of fundamental human rights, including FoRB and cases of gender discrimination, occur frequently in areas where the Law of Uses and Customs is applied. There is often little or no response from state or federal governments to violations of FoRB.
11. **Recommendation: Ensure that both state and federal government publicly acknowledge and denounce all violations of freedom of religion or belief. Government bodies must strengthen rule of law and promote good governance to combat impunity.**

Religious leaders as Human Rights Defenders

12. During the 2018 UPR, Mexico accepted 26 recommendations to ensure the safety of human rights defenders (HRDs).⁵ In Mexico, religious leaders sometimes take on the role of HRDs, engaging with various human rights initiatives in order to bring the issues of their respective communities to the attention of those who can provide legal, practical or advocacy assistance. Additionally, religious leaders often fulfil the role of community leaders.
13. A culture of impunity and a lack of protection for religious leaders continues to have a negative impact on the right to FoRB in Mexico. Between November 2013 and May 2023, more than 50 religious leaders were killed.
14. In April 2019, Ambrosio Arellano Espinoza, a 78-year-old priest was admitted to hospital with second degree burns to his hands and feet after being beaten and tortured on 11 April in the city of Puebla, Puebla State. While the authorities stated that they believed that the attack to have been part of an attempted robbery, the CCM pointed out that although some items were taken,

giving the appearance that theft was the motive ‘torture is a recurring element in cases of violence against priests.’

15. On 23 July 2019 Father Juvenal Candía Mosso was shot at while riding in a taxi to attend a prison ministry meeting in the city of Cuernavaca. The priest was taken to the hospital according to a statement from the archdiocese and the driver was also injured in the attack, and later died from his wounds.
16. On 3 August 2019 Seventh Day Adventist Pastor Aarón Méndez Ruiz and his assistant, Alfredo Castillo de Luna, were abducted from the migrant shelter where they worked in Juarez, Chihuahua State. Both men appear to have been targeted because of their work with migrants and asylum seekers and their refusal to cooperate with criminal groups. There has been no news of their whereabouts since their abduction. On 4 October 2019, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) issued a call to the Mexican government to detail what measures it has taken “to determine the whereabouts or destination” of Méndez Ruiz and Castillo de Luna, to protect the families of the victims and report the progress of the investigations of the facts. According to the CIDH report, a warning attributed to the Northeast Cartel circulated on social media in the weeks following the two men’s disappearance: “Operation CATAS, sending priests to hell! Every immigrant will pay us here!!! It doesn’t matter if they come from or hide in a church. Priests, pastors. [non-Catholic] Priests. Bishops. You are warned.”
17. On 18 August 2019, Pastor Alfrery Lictor Cruz Canseco was sitting in his car after leading a church service at the Fraternidad Cristiana Church in Tlalixtac de Cabrera Municipality, Oaxaca when he was shot and killed. His attacker attempted to escape but was prevented from doing so by members of the congregation, and subsequently handed over to the authorities.
18. Tamaulipas State authorities confirmed the murder of the priest José Martín Guzmán Vega, committed on the night of Thursday 22 August 2019, in the Ejido Santa Adelaida, Matamoros Municipality. Father Guzmán Vega received several stab wounds inside the Cristo Rey de la Paz parish church.
19. On 4 January 2020 Father Roly Candelario Piña Camacho was kidnapped in Puebla State. Local media reports said his family members paid the unspecified ransom request to his captors. He was found on the side of the México-Puebla federal highway on two days later. He had been shot four times wounds and was transported to a local hospital,
20. On 6 April 2020, at approximately 12:30pm, Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, an indigenous priest and human

4 ENADIS 2017 Resultados sobre personas de la diversidad religiosa. Accesible (conapred.org.mx)

5 UPR-Info, ‘Database of Recommendations on Mexico’, accessed 15 May 2023 [\(https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=\(allAggregations:lt, filters:\(cycle:\(values:!\(%27567e6c7b-d5ab-4c36-a712-57c38fae9124%27\)\), issues:\(values:!\(b28bd913-9a5b-4d71-a0b9-8ff2eef7fe5c\)\), state_under_review:\(values:!\(%275pd3g0abkz6%27\)\)\), from:0, includeUnpublished:if, limit:30, order:desc, searchTerm:%27mexico%27, sort:creationDate, treatAs:number, unpublished:if\)](https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=(allAggregations:lt, filters:(cycle:(values:!(%27567e6c7b-d5ab-4c36-a712-57c38fae9124%27)), issues:(values:!(b28bd913-9a5b-4d71-a0b9-8ff2eef7fe5c)), state_under_review:(values:!(%275pd3g0abkz6%27))), from:0, includeUnpublished:if, limit:30, order:desc, searchTerm:%27mexico%27, sort:creationDate, treatAs:number, unpublished:if))

rights defender received a threatening phone call from an unknown individual, identifying themselves as 'The Colonel', and threatening his life and the lives of his parishioners in Simojovel Municipality, Chiapas State. The caller said '...it is up to you to ensure that your parishioners do not experience a massacre'. This threat was part of a series of threats and incidents of harassment against Father Pérez Pérez, his pastoral team, and the parishioners of Simojovel. Days before, on 2 April, a close collaborator of Marcelo Pérez Pérez received a phone call warning him to be careful as unidentified men were asking for details of people working in the parish of San Antonio de Padua. On 5 April Marcelo Pérez Pérez received information that a man in Simojovel was reported to have said: 'Father Marcelo gets into everything, someone needs to shoot him...' Similar threats were also made repeatedly on social networks.

21. On 27 March 2021, Father Gumersindo Cortes Gonzalez priest of the Cristo Rey Parish in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato State was forcibly disappeared. When his body was found the following day, according to the Guanajuato prosecutor's office, it showed signs of violent attack including multiple bullet wounds.
22. Friar Juan Antonio Orozco Alvarado was killed on 12 June 2021, according to the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor (Ordo Fratrum Minorum) to which he belonged. The monk and parish priest was, together with other lay leaders accompanying him, caught in a confrontation between rival cartels after he led celebrations of Mass in Tepehuana, Pajaritos, Durango Municipality and in Mezquital Municipality, Durango. The events occurred in the highway along the border of the states of Durango and Zacatecas.
23. Father José Guadalupe Popoca Soto, parish priest of San Nicolás de Bari in Galeana, Zacatepec, Morelos State was murdered on the night of 30 August 2021.
24. On 15 May 2022, Roman Catholic priest, José Guadalupe Rivas Saldaña, disappeared from the San Judas Tadeo parish in the El Descanso neighbourhood of Tecate, Baja California. His body, which showed signs of severe violence, was recovered at a ranch near Hacienda Santa Veronica. A second unidentified body, which had been beaten beyond recognition, was found with the priest.
25. Pastor José Humberto Leyva of the Iglesia Global Reformada, located in the west of the city of Tijuana, Baja California, went to Sauce Street in Ejido Francisco Villa to buy wood from an establishment. A subject identified as an employee of the place approached him and murdered him. The murder was committed at approximately 3:09pm on 26 April 2022 according to police reports.
26. On the night of 23 November 2022, 79-year-old Pastor Efrén Martínez Ruiz was murdered by men who allegedly intended to rob the Nazareth Nueva Atzacualco Christian Church in the Nueva Atzacualco neighborhood of Mexico City where the victim also lived.
27. Pastor Mario Daniel Salinas Valentín was abducted on 13 January 2023. The body of the pastor, who led a Presbyterian church in El Ciruelom, Ometepepec Municipality, Guerrero State was found the following day on the border of the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca.
28. On 22 May 2023, the Augustinian priest Javier García Villafañá, who led the San Marcos Parish in Capacho, Huandacareo Municipality was found shot dead inside his car on the Cuitzeo-Huandacareo Highway in Michoacan State.
29. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should recognize the important social role that religious leaders play in society and that their ministries often also involve a social aspect – as such they should be treated as human rights defenders and afforded protection under the National Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.**
30. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should ensure the effective protection of all human rights defenders operating in the country. The government must strengthen rule of law by carrying out thorough and impartial investigations into all attacks, including threats, kidnapping, forced disappearance, assaults and murders targeting human rights defenders, including religious leaders, ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice.**

Strengthening the rule of law

31. CSW welcomes the recommendations Mexico accepted during the last UPR cycle regarding capacity building for federal and local public officers in order to ensure better law enforcement and human rights promotion and protection. However, despite commitments to strengthen the rule of law and good governance, religious minorities continue to face discrimination and regularly experience serious human rights violations because of their religious beliefs in many parts of the country.
32. Human rights violations against religious minorities take place with impunity. Such violations include:
 - illegal fines;
 - violent physical assault;
 - destruction or damage to and arbitrary confiscation of property;
 - sexual assault;
 - arbitrary detention;
 - forced displacement.
33. For over a decade, Protestants from three different denominations in the non-indigenous community of Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality, Chiapas State have experienced hostilities on the part of village authorities, including physical violence, arbitrary detention in an effort to force the families to 're-convert'

to Roman Catholicism, and confiscation of 83 hectares of land. Starting in March 2015, the Protestants were prohibited from buying or selling anything in the community and a fine of 5,000 pesos (approximately \$260) was set for anyone caught defying the ban. Promises from the municipal and state governments to the address the situation have not been fulfilled. Over the past two years, some of the prohibitions imposed on the Protestants have been lifted, however, a wider conflict over land, which includes properties confiscated from the Protestants, has escalated and has led to loss of life on both sides of the conflict.

34. On 4 December 2017, 42 Jehovah's Witnesses and 24 Protestants (13 of whom were children) were forcibly displaced from Tuxpan de Bolaños in Bolaños Municipality, Jalisco state. Local authorities also destroyed most of their homes, making it unlikely they would be able to return. The expulsion of religious minorities from Tuxpan de Bolaños follows the forcible displacement of 20 Protestant families (approximately 50 individuals including children) in January 2016. A resolution adopted by the village assembly in December 2015 stated that the Protestant members of the community would be expelled if they refused to convert to Roman Catholicism. The Jalisco State Human Rights Commission recommended community dialogue to resolve the issue in December 2015, but government officials took no action to address the first forced displacement in January 2016 and despite warnings did nothing to prevent the second. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court of Justice under review number 1041/2019, and in July 2020, the court recognized the right of the families to return to their community, and requested their reintegration. Almost five years after their forced displacement, and three since the Supreme Court decision in their favour, the affected families have been unable to return to their community. They have reportedly received threats and given the failure of the government to assure their protection, they fear that they will be subjected to continued attacks. The families are staying in rented houses in Tlaltenango, Zacatecas and Ocotlan, Jalisco where they are awaiting relocation by the Jalisco State government.
35. On 21 December 2022 Maria Concepcion Hernández Hernández, a member of the Great Commission Baptist Church in Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de los Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State, was violently attacked after she visited a plot of land that she owns in response to a request from a neighbour who had requested that she remove two trees. Local authorities have prohibited members of the religious minority from accessing or using their land for cultivating crops since 2015. Local leaders in Rancho Nuevo, including Mr Benito Rocha, community leader Fermín Hernández Hernández, delegate Octaviano Gutierrez Hernández, Mr Margarito Gutierrez Hernández, Mr Francisco Wenses, and catechist Juan Hernández Hernández, who all belong to the Roman Catholic religious majority in the village, participated in the attack after being made aware of her presence. When Protestant pastor Rogelio Hernández Baltazar attempted to intervene to ask the authorities to stop the attack he was also physically assaulted and detained for two hours. Local leaders demanded that he hand over the deeds to ten plots of land belonging to members of the Baptist church. When the pastor refused to do so, the authorities threatened to take the documents by force and to confiscate the properties. Mrs. Hernández Hernández filed a complaint at the state Human Rights Commission and state Public Prosecutor's Office before returning home. She was subsequently hospitalized and in intensive care for weeks after an attack of diabetes ketoacidosis triggered by the assault. No action was taken by the government to hold those responsible for the assault to account.
36. This is not the first time members of the religious minority have been subjected to violence in Rancho Nuevo. In March 2018, five religious minority men, all Protestants, were illegally detained and beaten by local authorities in the community of Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla Municipality, Hidalgo State. Four of the men were violently removed from a church service the morning of 3 March, tied up and held until just after noon the following day. A fifth victim was taken out of his home at 2am on 4 March and held along with the others. Diego Hernández Hernández, Juan Nicolás Hernández Solórzano, Rogelio Hernández Baltazar, Ricardo Hernández Baltazar and José Silverio Gutiérrez Bautista, all of the Christ is Coming Protestant Church, were beaten and pressured to each pay a large fine because of their religious beliefs. The government has never taken any action to hold those responsible for criminal acts committed against members of the religious minority to account.
37. In February 2019 Gabriel Lara Antonio and Gilberto Badillo were arbitrarily detained for 24 hours in Cuamontax del Huazalingo, Hidalgo State, in an effort to force them to participate in the traditional festivals associated with the religious majority. The same month, the local authorities prohibited Mr. Lara Antonio from sowing crops on his land until his family renounced their religious beliefs. When they refused to do so, Mr. Lara Antonio was forced to sign an illegal agreement under duress, obliging him to pay a fine of approximately \$25,000 MXN as well as a financial contribution to celebrations observed by the majority religious community in November, including All Saints Day, All Souls Day and the Day of the Dead. The illegal agreement also stipulated that Protestants are prohibited from entering Cuamontax del Huazalingo. On 28 July, Adelina Simón Posos was forcibly displaced from Cuamontax del Huazalingo to Atlaltipa Tecolotitla, Atlapexco Municipality, with her husband, Uriel Badillo Lara, and her parents-in-law, Agustina Lara and Gilberto Badillo. The local authorities in Cuamontax del Huazalingo informed the family that their expulsion was a consequence of their failure to sign the agreement that Mr. Lara Antonio was forced to sign. Up to the present, no agreement has been reached with

the Cuamontax del Huazalingo authorities who refuse to accept that a problem exists and will not permit the two religious minority families' return to the community until the families formally commit to participate in all activities of the community activities, which include religious activities associated with Roman Catholicism. The families are currently living, forcibly displaced, in another community.

38. On 25 July 2021, Protestant pastor Damián Severiano Vázquez and five other Protestants were arbitrarily detained in Ahuacachahue, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, Guerrero State and held in the community jail, after they refused to participate in activities associated with the Roman Catholic religious majority and to make contributions to religious festivals. Local leaders threatened to force Pastor Severiano Vázquez into a community re-education camp for two years if he continues to refuse to participate in Roman Catholic religious activities. Pastor Severiano Vázquez attempted to seek legal recourse for the injustice he suffered but this further enflamed the situation. Community leaders forced three families to sign an illegal agreement that they would return to the majority religion and in April 2022 four other religious minority families were forcibly displaced.
39. On 21 November 2021 local leaders in San Pedro Chimaltepec, San Juan Mazatlan Municipality, Oaxaca State arbitrarily detained religious minority pastor Ruperto Dominguez Teodoro after he refused an order to organise a festival associated with the Roman Catholic religious majority. The local authorities then attempted to force four other religious minority individuals to organise the festival and when they too refused, they were illegally fined \$5000MXN each and were threatened with violence and forced displacement. The members of the religious minority were unable to pay the fine and community leaders confiscated one of their houses en lieu of payment. The members of the religious minority were threatened with further violence if they remained in the community and on 10 January 2022 the families, a total of 24 people, fled the village, taking refuge in a nearby municipality, Guivea de Humboldt, where they remain on a parcel of loaned land.
40. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should take measures to guarantee the rights of displaced victims to return to their homes. In cases where this is not possible, including because the victims are too fearful to return to their homes, they must receive sufficient compensation and those responsible for their displacement must face justice.**

Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief

41. In the last UPR cycle, Mexico accepted recommendations regarding actions aimed at eliminating discrimination and strengthening the protection of the rights of disadvantaged groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples. Mexico also agreed to develop

programmes for the social protection of citizens suffering discrimination and social inequalities. CSW welcomes steps taken to protect the rights of children. However, CSW is concerned that men, women and children from indigenous and non-indigenous communities continue to be discriminated against because of their religious beliefs.

42. Violations include:

- The denial of basic services such as access to water, electricity and sewerage services;
 - The denial of the right to an education;
 - The loss of civil and political rights;
 - The blocking of access to medical attention;
 - Pressure to convert to another religion;
 - Prohibitions on the right to assembly and of worship;
 - Discrimination in the implementation and distribution of government programmes;
43. Prohibitions on the right to assembly and of worship have been imposed on 42 Protestants in Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, Palenque Municipality, Chiapas State since March 2017. Members of the religious minority are also subjected to discrimination in the implementation and distribution of government programmes and benefits. In 2018 the religious minority families took legal action against the illegal seizure of their land, and despite a favourable ruling, their rights have not yet been restored by the local authorities who have refused to meet with state government representatives. The state is now seeking to relocate the religious minority families, in effect cooperating with their forced displacement from their community of origin.
 44. In an ongoing conflict which began in 2016, religious minority inhabitants of El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas, which belongs to the Tojolab'al ethno-linguistic group, have been prevented from accessing water, sewerage and electricity services because of their refusal to cooperate with activities associated with the majority religion. On 26 November 2016 a group of Protestant families refused to sign an agreement obliging them to participate in religious activities associated with Roman Catholicism and to contribute to the maintenance of the local Roman Catholic church. They were ordered to pay a fine of MXN 5,000, which they refused to do. In response, local authorities disconnected the water supply for the religious minority families. Two years later, in July 2018, when the village drainage network was being built, the local authorities did not allow sewerage facilities to be installed in the families' homes. In July 2020, the local authorities instructed the company responsible for upgrading electricity services in the village not to install electricity in the homes of religious minority families. Because of this pressure, two families made the decision to resume making financial contributions to Roman

Catholic festivals. Each family also paid an illegal fine of MXN 5000 to have their basic services reinstated. The remaining families continue to experience considerable hardship in their daily lives due to their lack of access to electricity, water and sewerage services.

45. At present, Protestant families remain without water and electricity services, and although state officials have sought to meet with the local authorities to resolve the situation, the local authorities have not agreed to a date for a meeting nor to any solution other than the signed agreement by the religious minorities that they will participate in all community activities including those of a religious nature, linked to Roman Catholicism.
46. On 23 August 2018, the religious minority parents of 16 children from the Nahuatl communities of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, in Huejutla de los Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State, were prevented from registering their children at the local school because of the parents' decision to decline to make financial contributions to the majority religion's activities. The religious minority parents at first attempted to send their children to the school in defiance of the ban, but the teachers refused to teach the religious minority children. At least 38 children in the communities remain without access to public education provided by the State.
47. In January 2019, the families of Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Angelina Martínez Hernández, who live in La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State, refused to sign an agreement renouncing their religious beliefs. In response, the local authorities removed their access to water, sewerage services, government benefit programmes and the community corn mill, used to process their staple food, for one year. In April 2019, after a few months of carrying jugs of water from the river to her house, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández developed an inguinal hernia and a lump under her right arm, which continued to grow. She underwent two operations to remove the lump and inguinal hernia on 16 December 2019. One week after her operations, her open wound became infected, and worsened due to her continued exposure to the unsanitary conditions of the river water, Angelina Martínez Hernández suffered a uterine prolapse when she attempted to carry a 20-litre container of water from the river to her home. Due to the risk of the same thing happening again, doctors recommended surgery and she underwent a hysterectomy on 22 July 2019. The recoveries of both women took place without access to water services, a functioning bathroom or support from friends or family, as the local authorities threatened to cut off the basic services of anyone who visited or tried to help either of the two women. The local authorities also forbade them from visiting each other during this time.
48. On 11 November 2020, community leaders directed every resident in El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, Guerrero State, to make a financial contribution of \$500 MXN per month towards the

building of a new Roman Catholic church until the construction was completed. Armed community police then threatened six Protestant families with expulsion if they did not comply with the order. The families refused to do so, explaining that they hold different religious beliefs. In response, community leaders restricted their rights, blocking them from access to government programs and removed them from other positions they held in the village. On 14 November, local leaders destroyed furniture belonging to the religious minority church. Since then, they have ostracized them from the community and members of the religious minority say they regularly suffer the theft of their work tools, the destruction of their crops and that their livestock has been killed or stolen.

49. On 11 November 2022, 70 religious minority families in San Lorenzo Papalo, Concepción Papalo Municipality, in the state of Oaxaca, refused to make financial contributions to festivals associated with majority religion. Four religious minority church leaders were arbitrarily detained and the access to water and electricity services and to the health centre was blocked for members of the religious minority. The majority community has been prohibited from any contact or interaction with members of the religious minority.
50. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should ensure that all religious groups are given full equal rights to practice their faith either individually or in community, in public or in private, and to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. The government must ensure that nobody is discriminated against due to their religion or belief.**
51. **Recommendation: The government of Mexico should restore access to basic services for all religious minority communities and ensure that nobody has their access to electricity, water, education and health care restricted because of their religious beliefs.**
52. **Recommendation: Ensure that federal and local governments promote and protect freedom of religion or belief, ensuring that no one is pressured to convert to another religion or set of beliefs against their will.**

Conclusion

53. While in most cases it is the state government's responsibility to address FoRB violations at the local level, CSW remains concerned that the government of Mexico has rarely taken adequate action to intervene or uphold the right to FoRB for all peoples within the country; similarly, the federal government continues to act with negligence in failing to ensure that the constitutional rights of the victims of FoRB violations are upheld. This has allowed a culture of impunity to develop in at least 14 states in the country - especially in Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Oaxaca and Jalisco. In these states, the majority religious group often believes they

have the right to enforce religious beliefs and practices at the local level.

54. Recommendation: CSW strongly recommends that every level of government ensures that all religious and belief groups are given full equal rights to practice their faith either individually or in community, in public or in private, and to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. The government must ensure that nobody is discriminated against due to their religious beliefs. The government must carry out full and thorough investigations into FoRB violations to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

**CSW everyone
free to believe**

T +44 (0)20 8329 0010
✉ @CSW_UK
f /CSWUK
csw.org.uk

PO Box 99
New Malden
Surrey, KT3 3YF
United Kingdom

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