# Protection on Paper: The Situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Mexico

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## Executive Summary

Severe violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in are common in many parts of Mexico. They fall into two general categories which sometimes overlap – those perpetrated by organised criminal groups and those which occur in villages governed under the system of uses and customs, which allows for the exercise of traditional law and authority structures in indigenous communities. A failure by the government to ensure that a balance is found between upholding fundamental human rights guaranteed by the constitution and the right to self-determination and cultural integrity can be compounded by social instability stemming from violence associated with organised criminal groups

Types of violations are varied but, in many cases, take place in tandem. They can include the prohibition of holding or participating in religious services, receiving visitors from the same faith community, and publicly expressing one's beliefs; as well as coerced participation in activities associated with the majority religion and the payment of onerous fines. Civil rights are routinely violated, with the removal of the right to vote and work, refusals to register births, and the denial of the right to burial affecting members of religious minorities. These situations are frequently compounded by the blocking of access to basic services including water and electricity, threats, damage or destruction to property, arbitrary detention, violence and forced displacement.

FoRB violations in Mexico are deeply interconnected with other human rights, particularly in contexts characterised by the marginalisation of indigenous peoples, limited availability of and access to basic services, deficiencies in access to justice, insecurity, agrarian conflicts, conditions of poverty, low understanding of human rights, weak rule of law and high levels of impunity. The types of violations listed above, for example, create obstacles to both paid and unpaid work, giving rise to conditions of vulnerability and social marginalisation that place members of religious minorities at risk.

CSW has documented more than 130 cases of serious FoRB violations in recent years in several states. In Oaxaca State alone over the past three years the state government has recognised more than 60 cases of FoRB violations. In 2022 the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) released a report based on the National Survey on Discrimination (ENADIS) recognising that three out of 10 people who are not Roman Catholic or atheist and who profess other religions face prejudice, discriminatory practices and barriers of exclusion in various areas of the exercise of their rights.[1] This means that more than three million people belonging to a religious minority in Mexico suffer discrimination to some extent. Despite these high statistics, there are no federal programmes to raise awareness and improve understanding of FoRB.

FoRB violations are frequently inadequately addressed or ignored by both state and federal authorities. Contributing factors include high levels of impunity more widely in Mexico alongside a failure by the authorities at every level to prioritise the protection of FoRB as a fundamental right, and, in many parts of the country, a low understanding among government officials of the right to FoRB and associated rights. The government frequently fails to investigate or follow-up on cases, or to take effective action to protect victims.

Victims and witnesses, in turn, are not incentivised to report violations because not only are the unlikely to receive support from the government, the act of reporting an incident could raise tensions even further potentially leading to even more severe actions targeting the victims. Low levels of reporting feed into the cycle as the visibility of this issue and institutional interest in addressing it are both reduced. In this context, and in the absence of a culture that aims proactively to prevent FoRB violations, government intervention tends to be triggered only when the radicalisation of community leadership results in episodes of violence and forced displacement. Even in such extreme cases, the government response is often lacking, and victims find it difficult or impossible to seek legal redress.

Despite a government discourse that, at least in the public sphere, claims to promote respect for human rights, including FoRB, in practice the authorities at every level remain unwilling or unable to ensure the effective protection of individuals at risk of being affected by these violations.

## Recommendations

***To the government of Mexico:***

- Uphold legal guarantees for FoRB for all; and in communities governed under Uses and Customs, ensure that these are practiced these in accordance with Mexico's constitution and its international human rights obligations.
- Publicly recognise the important social role that religious leaders play, that their ministries often also involve a social aspect, and that as such they should be treated as human rights defenders and afforded protection, including from illegal armed groups, under the National Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.
- Carry out thorough investigations into assassinations, kidnappings of and threats against religious leaders, to establish motive and to hold those responsible to account.
- Proactively widen efforts to address intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including by providing training for the judiciary and federal, state, municipal and local authorities, aiming to inform and also to raise awareness regarding fundamental principles

1 National Institute of Statistics and Geography, National Survey on Discrimination 2017: Results on people of religious diversity, 2022 https://sindis.conapred.gob.mx/investigaciones/encuesta-nacional-sobre-discriminacion-2017-resultados-sobre-personas-de-la-diversidad-religiosa/

including laicity, underscoring the independence of the state from any religious organisation or confession, and ensuring that all individuals can peacefully practice their religion or belief freely without hindrance.

- Provide adequate logistical and financial support is provided to forcibly displaced communities and facilitate educational enrolment for affected children.
- Ensure that that water and sanitation services are unconditionally restored in cases where such rights have been denied.
- Develop and implement programmes to promote tolerance and respect for the ideas, beliefs, and practices of others within a culture of peace embodying a set of values, attitudes, and behaviours that reflect respect for life, the dignity of the individual, and human rights, and with an emphasis on dialogue, understanding, and non-violent conflict resolution as essential components of a harmonious society.
- To effectively address and improve the conditions surrounding FoRB, it is essential that collaboration occurs across federal, state, and local government entities. Additionally, international organisations can play a crucial role in supporting these efforts. Their involvement can facilitate the establishment of frameworks that ensure accountability and provide resources for the protection of minority groups facing religious discrimination.
- Establish effective mechanisms at municipal, state and federal levels designed to monitor and document FoRB violations, especially those that occur within a longer running pattern of religious intolerance, ensuring that there is a systematic and coordinated approach to addressing incidents and conflict.

***To the United Nations and Member States:***

- Urge all relevant UN mechanisms, including the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies, to include the right to FoRB in their reporting on Mexico, addressing the vulnerabilities and violations faced by religion or belief minorities.
- Encourage UN Special Procedures to request country visits to Mexico, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to FoRB, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights and other relevant mandate holders, and ensure that members of civil society can freely meet with them without reprisal.
- Call on the government of Mexico to work with the UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) to ensure 'no-one is left behind' in the realisation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Mexico, including SDGs on education, gender equality, water and sanitation, and reducing inequalities.
- Ensure that the right to FoRB and other intersecting rights are consistently raised with the government of Mexico, including during high-level visits and other bilateral exchanges.
- Urge the government of Mexico, at every level and appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Mexico'.

***To the European Union and Member States:***

- In line with the EU Guidelines on FoRB, engage regularly with the Mexican federal and state authorities on cases and issues related to violations of FoRB. Special focus should be given to collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, and state commissions for human rights on issues related to FoRB. This should include awareness raising and capacity building within government institutions, for example through exchanges of best practice.
- Raise FoRB violations and apply appropriate leverage within the processes embedded in the updated EU-Mexico Global Agreement.
- Urge the Mexican government to officially recognise religious leaders as human rights defenders under the National Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.
- As part of the EU Delegation and Member State Embassy strategic plans on human rights, undertake a coordinated effort to monitor FoRB issues closely. This should involve input from civil society groups, with whom wider awareness raising and capacity building activities on FoRB as a human right should also be undertaken.
- Urge the government of Mexico, at every level and appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Mexico'.

***To the government of the United Kingdom:***

- Ensure FoRB violations linked to Uses and Customs, including loss of civil status, denial of services, and forced displacement, are consistently raised in all UK-Mexico dialogues, urging federal enforcement of constitutional protections in high-impunity states.
- Urge Mexico to formally include religious leaders and FoRB defenders in the National Protection Mechanism, and to properly investigate assassinations, disappearances and attacks - rejecting the routine misclassification of these crimes as 'common crimes'.
- Use diplomatic influence and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) programming to help restore documentation, civil status, education access and essential services including water and electricity to those denied rights or displaced on religious grounds, prioritising indigenous and rural communities.
- Provide targeted UK-backed training for judges, prosecutors and local officials on constitutional FoRB obligations, limitations of Uses and Customs, and the intersection of FoRB with organised crime, including protection of worship and assembly.

- Ensure the UK Embassy maintains regular consultations with FoRB-focused organisations and affected communities, using this evidence to inform UK country strategy and guide UK interventions at the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS).
- Urge the government of Mexico, at every level and appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Mexico'.

***To the government of the United States:***

- The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, once confirmed, should visit Mexico, following up on and reinforcing similar visits to look at the FoRB situation carried out by previous ambassadors in the same post.
- Given Mexico's failure to address the ongoing and severe FoRB violations, including forced displacement, that take place regularly, especially affecting indigenous communities, and to ensure that the right is upheld, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the State Department should consider adding Mexico to their watchlists for violators of religious freedom.
- USCIRF should work with the government of Mexico to visit the country, paying particular attention to the states with the highest incidence of serious FoRB violations.
- The US Embassy should continue to regularly engage with FoRB defenders and religious leaders, especially those representing communities disproportionately affected by FoRB violations.
- Urge the government of Mexico, at every level and appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Mexico'.

## Legal Framework and Impediments to FoRB

Mexico's constitution protects freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). For much of the country's history, this fundamental human right has had legal protection, beginning with the 1854 and 1857 adoption of the Reform Laws when the separation between Church and State was legally established. This began the path towards the Political Constitution of 1917 which adopted principles in favour of freedom of ethical convictions, conscience, and religion, and enshrined FoRB in Articles 24 and 129 (now 130).

In 1992 changes were made to Articles 24 and 130 of the constitution. Article 24 establishes religious expression but forbids its use for political purposes, political campaigns or political propaganda. It states that congress cannot enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion but limits 'ordinary religious acts' to 'temples'.[2] Any religious activity taking place outdoors is subject to regulatory laws. Article 130 maintains the separation between Church and State and establishes the Religious Affairs and Public Worship Regulatory Act and its regulations laying out the principles for the registration of religious associations.

Article 1 of the constitution affirms that the human rights protected by the constitution and the international treaties to which Mexico is party are equally protected, including freedom of conscience. Mexico is a member of the OAS and has ratified several international treaties that include provisions for FoRB, including the American Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Respect for human rights is contemplated in Article 2, Section A of the Mexican constitution, in which it establishes that decision-making within indigenous communities governed under traditional structures and mechanisms must always be respectful of human rights and the dignity of women.

Article 46 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples establishes in its second and third paragraphs that:

> *In the exercise of the rights set forth in this Declaration, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all shall be respected. The exercise of the rights set forth in this Declaration shall be subject exclusively to such limitations as may be determined by law and in accordance with international human rights obligations. Such limitations shall be non-discriminatory and shall be only those strictly necessary to ensure the recognition and respect due to the rights and freedoms of others and to meet the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples no. 129 and the most pressing needs of a democratic society.*
>
> *The provisions of this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good public administration and good faith.*

While regulatory laws such as the law on religious associations agree on the principle of respect for FoRB, this principle can come into conflict with the institutional empowerment of indigenous communities when human rights guarantees are not upheld. The right to self-governance has been granted to some communities, for example in the Wixárika region, where in May 2025 an autonomous government regime based on traditional customs and practices was approved and granted without the provision of any kind of human rights training and awareness-raising. Similarly, on 21 May 2022, the municipality of Ñu Savi was created in the Mixteca region of Guerrero State, where cases of forced displacement and violations of FoRB have been documented. This new form of government incorporates greater powers, more resources, and greater independence in decision-making, but has no consideration for respect for human rights, including FoRB. When already self-governing

2 Temples refers to buildings legally recognised for religious use.

regions are granted even more autonomy without taking into consideration or attempting to address existing social tensions, and without any systematic implementation of human rights protection, it creates an environment with an increased likelihood for both quantity and severity of human rights violations, including FoRB.

The significant amount of autonomy granted to local leaders under the system of uses and customs, with little to no oversight or accountability can leave not just religious minorities but even institutions associated with the religious majority vulnerable. In 2024 community leaders in Tixtlancingo, Coyuca de Benitez Municipality, Guerrero State, taking note of the amount of funds managed by the Roman Catholic Chapel of San Martín Obispo from offerings and for patron saint festivities, announced a 'community agreement' and appointed an individual to take control of the parish, including its funds and other resources. In this case, the Roman Catholic Church, through the Diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, filed an ultimately successful legal complaint against the municipal authorities in charge of the community.



*The Church of San Martín Obispo in Tixtlancingo.*

***Uses and Customs***

Article 2 of the constitution recognises indigenous peoples and details their unique legal status, including their right to 'decide their internal forms of coexistence' and to 'apply their own legal system to regulate and resolve their internal conflicts', on the condition that this practice does not violate the constitution and must respect human rights. However, in many indigenous communities, community cohesion and participation constitute fundamental aspects of daily life, including religious practice.

In Mexico, 'Uses and Customs' is a general term that refers to the right of indigenous communities to govern themselves according to their traditions. In international law it is referred to as 'the self-determination of indigenous peoples', established as such in 1989 in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.[3] This right must be exercised with respect at all times for the fundamental human rights defined in the constitution and international law.

In many communities governed by uses and customs, however, leaders believe that it is their right to enforce religious belief and practice, including forced financial contributions to and compulsory participation in religious events. These are usually associated with the majority religion at the local level, which is typically but not always Roman Catholicism. Obligations may include taking part in the local Roman Catholic patron saint festival, the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (the patron saint of Mexico) or the Day of the Dead, as well as assuming roles in ceremonies and rituals, ensuring the upkeep of religious buildings including churches, preparing decorations, and making financial contributions. A failure to comply with these duties is often deemed unacceptable by members of the majority religion, who typically occupy leadership positions within the community.

The absence of full participation is commonly interpreted as promoting division within the community and can be associated with potentially adverse consequences, such as a negative impact on agricultural productivity or other hardship. Local authorities rarely recognise the individual's right to FoRB and do not usually consider adherence to a religion or belief different to that of the majority a valid reason not to participate in and contribute to activities associated with the religious majority. Uses and customs, claiming the preservation of cultural practices—typically centred on Roman Catholicism—is seen as a legitimate rationale to restrict FoRB.

In most communities organised under a system of uses and customs, no distinction is made between civil and religious leadership positions. Community leaders arbitrarily assign both types of communal positions to individuals in their communities, compelling all the members of the community to participate in and contribute financially to activities associated with the religious majority.

The problems that arise by the mixing of civil and political roles are illustrated in the case of a Protestant Christian, Mariano Velásquez Martínez, who was forcibly displaced from his community of Santiago Malacatepec, San Juan Mazatlán Mixe Municipality, along with his wife and infant daughter in January 2026. Pastor Velásquez Martínez, who belongs to the Mixe ethnolinguistic group, had been assigned a leadership role in a Roman Catholic festival celebrated in the community and had agreed only on the condition that he not be made to participate in religious acts. Despite financial hardship, he also agreed to contribute financially. At the time of the celebration, however, he was ordered to perform Roman Catholic religious rituals, including kneeling before and praying to a religious image. When he refused, he was arbitrarily detained and held for 48 hours. Following

3 Available at: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/30118/Convenio169.pdf

his release, he was brought before the community general assembly, which ordered his expulsion.




*Pastor Mariano Velásquez Martínez.*

Despite the existence of a legal framework to protect FoRB, the lack of institutional follow-up and the limited culture of reporting have perpetuated the vulnerability of these populations, forcing many individuals to abandon their homes and lands temporarily or permanently. In a 2024 summary of the conflicts between uses and customs, the general criterion of Mexico's Supreme Court of Justice grouped together a compendium to recognise the following:

> *The Mexican Nation is unique and indivisible and it is not possible for another nation to be formed within it; decision-making and election of representatives or authorities of indigenous communities must be made within a framework that respects the federal framework and the sovereignty of the States; and that the procedures of decisions in the communities should be understood as complementary and not exclusive of those applicable; from which it is feasible to note that the fundamental norm is clear that indigenous uses and customs and the principle of self-determination cannot circumvent the applicable regulatory framework.*[4]

Despite this understanding and the resolutions that recognise the jurisdictional limitations of uses and customs, FoRB violations are a common and long running occurrence across the country. In the southern state of Chiapas, for example, forced internal displacement based on religion dates back to the 1970s. This has historically occurred when members of the majority religious group in indigenous communities seek to impose specific religious practices across the community, including on those of other religions or beliefs, and initially mostly involved a Roman Catholic majority and a Protestant Christian minority. As demographics changed, however, this dynamic was reversed in some cases as local leaders, even from former religious minorities, perpetuated the same cycle. In the 1980s and 1990s, Protestant Christians who were now in a majority in some communities in the Chenalhó region destroyed homes and blocked access to communal lands, resulting in the forced displacement of Roman Catholic families and those who adhered to other religious beliefs. More recently, in municipalities such as Aldama and Tenejapa, forced displacements arising from conflicts between communities adhering to different religions, where victims face threats, physical assaults, and restricted access to basic services, have been documented.

Another example of how FoRB violations can become entrenched in areas governed under uses and customs can be seen in the state of Jalisco, in the ethnolinguistic community of the Wixárikas. Documented cases of discrimination, harassment and forced displacement date back to 2003 when religious minority families were expelled under the uses and customs system by communal 'agreements' from their community because they no longer practiced the majority religion. This resulted in the establishment of the Emanuel Wixárika Christian Community in La Cofradia, Huejuquilla el Alto Municipality, which is composed of Protestant Christian Wixárika indigenous families who, over the past 20 years, have been forbidden from returning to their community due to their religious beliefs. In other parts of the region, those who do not practice their majority religion are forced to keep their beliefs a secret or face the loss of civil rights, the confiscation of their property, and forced displacement.



*Wixárika Christian families gathering in Mezquitic, Jalisco.*

Even when the legal system works as it should and rules in favour of the victims of FoRB violations, the government rarely takes action to ensure that judicial orders are implemented or enforced. An example can be seen in Nayarit State in the case of a group of Jehovah's Witness families who in 2019 were expelled from a Wixárika indigenous community in the town of Tuxpan de Bolaños, Bolaños Municipality. Despite a favourable Supreme Court ruling in the case, which recognised the victims' right to FoRB and to belong to an indigenous community and their right to freedom of residence, and ordered community leaders to allow them to return and to respect their right to live within the community,[5] seven years later the families

4 Supreme Court of Justice, Intercultural justice: Right to self-determination, 13 December 2024 https://www.sitios.scjn.gob.mx/cec/editorial/justicia-intercultural-derecho-libre-determinacion

5 Supreme Court of Justice, Second Chamber, Amparo in Revision 1041/2019, 8 July 2020

remain displaced, having been prevented by local leaders, ignoring the Supreme Court ruling, from reintegration into their community.

The implementation of traditional governance under uses and customs is highly localised, resulting in very different authority structures and bodies from village to village. This can complicate the government's ability to intervene and enter into dialogue with community leaders to address FoRB issues. In the community of Tehuetlán, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State, a group of community leaders called 'Los Pasados', who are neither a municipal authority nor elected by the community, are responsible for administering the public cemetery and overseeing Roman Catholic patron saint festivals.[6] In addition to managing all funds raised through the patron saint festivals, which often draw a wide attendance from surrounding areas, and Xantolo,[7] they also decide how much each member of the community must contribute financially to these annual celebrations. Los Pasados regularly make discriminatory decisions regarding the operation of the cemetery and apply sanctions to those who do disobey their decisions. Members of the Protestant Christian religious minority, for example, are restricted from using the cemetery until they pay the annual contributions or face fines as punishment for declining to make financial contributions or take part in the festivals associated with Roman Catholicism and Xantolo.

## Barriers to Reporting FoRB Violations and Associated Crimes

CSW's research over the past decade indicates that serious FoRB violations are common but are significantly underreported and go undocumented. In many cases there is a reluctance to report incidents of religious intolerance due to the closeness between the victims and the perpetrators who are often close relatives. In the long running case of Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo, religious minority families have experienced various human rights violations, many severe, including discrimination, physical violence, theft, attacks on property, and dispossession since 2015. However, when the opportunity to initiate formal complaints to the municipal and state authorities presented itself, the victims often decided not to proceed. This was largely due to fear of what the impact on the community and on their families would be. In this case, like many others, those responsible for the violations were the direct relatives of the victims - often siblings or uncles.

Even when victims are prepared to report FoRB violations, weak rule of law and high levels of impunity mean that doing so can carry serious risk. In one example in 2023, a Chinanteca man, Tito Mariano Méndez, filed a formal complaint with the Oaxaca State Ombudsman office in San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec Municipality regarding serious FoRB violations to which he and his family had been subjected



*Tito Mariano Méndez*

because of their religious beliefs in their village of Montenegro, San Juan Bautista Valle Nacional Municipality. The complaint detailed a series of threats he had received from community leaders before his house was destroyed in an arson attack in 2020 and explained the decision taken by Mr Mariano Méndez to remove their children from the local school due to severe mistreatment and discrimination because of their religious beliefs.

Following procedure, in July 2024, the Ombudsman requested a report from the Montenegro community leaders in response to the complaint. Rather than providing a report, community leaders arbitrarily detained Mr Mariano Méndez and his wife for three days. The couple was made to pay a fine of MXP 50,000 and agreed to drop and not to pursue any legal remedy. Montenegro leaders conditioned the religious minority couple's continued presence in the community on their removal of any mention of what happened that had been published on social media.

This case illustrates the limited access to justice through state-operated mechanisms for the protection from and reporting of human rights violations, the absence of accountability among community authorities, and the inability of judicial institutions to implement or enforce resolutions or ensure effective follow-up within communities governed by custom laws and traditions.

## Loss of Civil and Political Rights

Members of religious minorities are removed from the membership rolls of their village as a punishment or tactic to pressure them to participate in activities associated with the majority religion. This effectively erases their legal existence and strips them of their civil and political rights and can negatively affect every facet of their lives. They are no longer allowed to participate in local assemblies where decisions are made, or to vote in elections, and they can face obstacles in obtaining official documents, including birth certificates or identification cards. One example can be seen in a case in Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo State where leaders of the community of Contepec have mandated that all members of the community must contribute financially to Roman Catholic festivals and other activities, regardless of their religion or belief. Three Protestant Christian families who refused to do so were removed from the community rolls in February 2025. Although they still live in and are part of the community, their unrecognised status means that they are unable to access government programs and have lost all of the rights associated with community membership.

6 The administration of the cemetery is, technically, legally regulated by the Hidalgo State Coordination of Municipal Cemeteries.

7 Xantolo is the traditional Day of the Dead celebration in the Huasteca region of Mexico (Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz states), celebrated primarily from 31 October to 2 November. It comes from the Latin word Sanctorum ('of the saints'), meaning 'Feast of the Souls', where the deceased are honoured with dances, huapango music, colourful altars, and traditional dishes such as tamales and zacahuil.

The loss of legal recognition also blocks those affected from accessing government benefits available only to members of indigenous communities, including community education, healthcare, and other social programs. This can have a negative impact not only on the targeted individual but on entire families. In 2018, religious minority women in the communities of Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo were barred from accessing a government program aimed at supporting single mothers with school age children after community leaders removed their status as members of the community.[8]

## The Right to Education

As mentioned in the previous section, community leaders attempting to enforce religious uniformity often target entire families. Within this context, the right to an education of children in religious minority families who live in communities governed under uses and customs is routinely violated. Cases of religious minority children being blocked from attending school have been documented by CSW over the past decade in multiple states including Chiapas, Hidalgo, Jalisco and Oaxaca. In one such case, the children and nephew of Darío Manzano Márquez have been denied access to primary and preschool education in San Luis Morelia, Santiago Tamazola Municipality, Oaxaca since September 2025 after Mr Manzano Márquez, a Protestant Christian, refused to contribute financially to and participate in a traditional dance held annually in observance of the Roman Catholic patron saint. He was arbitrarily detained for 36 hours at the time and the punishment for his attempt to exercise his right to FoRB has been expanded to the children in his extended family and is ongoing.

Similarly, Tzotzil children affiliated the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the community of Pinal Salinas and Tzajalnabin, Zinacantán Municipality, Chiapas State are barred from attending the local primary school. This forms part of a larger pattern of discrimination that has been ongoing for over four years. The religious minority families have seen their water and electricity cut off and access to their homes obstructed. In January 2026, eleven members of the religious minority were assaulted and arbitrarily detained by local leaders after they refused to accept assigned roles and to contribute financially to traditional Roman Catholic festivities. Initially, the local authorities demanded payment of MXP 100,000 before releasing them but ultimately backed down and freed the detained individuals after state officials intervened.

In many such cases, unfortunately, no action is taken by the government to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed right to an education. In one example, in the long running aforementioned case of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo in 2018, the barring of Protestant Evangelical children from attending the local school made national headlines. Despite this, no intervention was carried out by the government at any level to address this violation. Religious minority children and youth were prevented from attending local schools until the eventual forced displacement of the entire religious minority community in April 2024.

Even when members of religious minorities have been able to create alternative avenues to ensure their children receive an education, some local authorities have sought to create new barriers. From 2021 to 2024 municipal leaders in Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco State barred teachers paid by the government from employment at a school in La Codorníz, a community made up mostly of forcibly displaced Protestant Christians within the municipality. Teachers were freely permitted to work in Roman Catholic majority villages. In 2024 this discriminatory treatment came to an end, following advocacy efforts by CSW and the resulting intervention of the Jalisco State Religious Affairs Office.

Children who have been forcibly displaced along with their families because of their religion or beliefs are also often subsequently deprived of their right to an education. Due to the circumstances of their forced displacement, often involving destruction of property and violence, many are unable to obtain the paperwork necessary to enrol in a school in their new place of residence. School and government officials rarely make the process easy for the parents and, in some cases, turn the children away.

## Forced Displacement

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been investigating the phenomenon of forced displacement in Mexico since 2004.[9] In 2021, the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH) recorded 28,943 internally displaced persons across 42 incidents of mass internal displacement due to violence, representing the highest number of internally displaced individuals—almost equivalent to the total number of internally displaced persons over the previous three years—and nearly double the number of mass displacement events caused by violence compared to 2020. According to a recent Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) report, which incorporates CMDPDH data, approximately 9,200 internally displaced persons were recorded during 2022, bringing the cumulative total of people displaced in mass violence-related events to around 386,000 by the end of 2022.[10]

The findings of these and other studies, including a special report on internal forced displacement carried out in October 2024 by the Oaxaca State Ombudsman's Office, analysing the reasons for this phenomenon, have consistently noted that a frequent driver of internal displacement is religious intolerance and conflicts over religious practices

8 The programme, now called 'del Bienestar', was then known as 'Prospera'.
9 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Internal Displacement in Mexico, July-December 2022 https://www.acnur.org/mx/sites/es-mx/files/2023-05/Boletín.%20Desplazamiento%20Interno%20%28Julio-Diciembre%2022%29.pdf
10 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Country Profile: Mexico, updated 18 May 2022 https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/mexico/

in indigenous communities.[11] As noted earlier in the report, local authorities often resort to different forms of pressure to align or unify religious tradition in communities. This typically begins with harassment, threats and the application of fines and escalates to arbitrary detention and forced displacement if members of religious minorities do not give in to the demands of community leaders to renounce their religious beliefs or participate in religious activities associated with the majority religion. According to the Oaxaca State Ombudsman's report:

> *A particular feature of Oaxaca State is that the imposition of fines or sanctions on community members for failing to fulfil a community role or for practicing a religion different from the majority constitutes a triggering factor for displacement, or, in some cases, for arbitrary detention.*[12]

While some cases of forced displacement happen quickly and with little warning, many escalate slowly over years or even decades with the government failing to take advantage of opportunities to intervene to uphold FoRB. In one such long running case, community leaders in the Chinanteca-speaking community of San Isidro Arenal, San Juan Lalana Municipality in Oaxaca State attempted in November 2023 to enforce a 1993 community agreement mandating Roman Catholicism as the only religion permitted in the community. Subsequently, 13 families belonging to the Interdenominational Protestant Christian Church (ICIAR) were subjected to threats and acts of violence, despite the fact that they were complying with all their assigned community responsibilities, including participation in Roman Catholic activities. In December 2023, three religious minority families were forcibly expelled from San Isidro Arenal. The situation escalated even further in early August 2024 when the remaining religious minority families were forcibly dispossessed of their land and livestock. More than 300 men looted the families' properties, razing their cocoa and mango crops, destroying their homes, and setting the ICIAR's place of worship, located on the Cerro Cajón Ranch, on fire.

Such situations are mirrored in other states, as in the case of the 2024 mass forced displacement of religious minorities in the Huasteca region of Hidalgo State:

## Case Study

**Community: Rancho Nuevo and Coamila**

**Municipality: Huejutla de Reyes**

**State: Hidalgo**

**Ethno-linguistic identify: Nahuatl**

**Religious majority: Roman Catholic**

**Religious minorities: Protestant Christian – Baptist**

Rancho Nuevo and Coamila are neighbouring Nahuatl speaking communities, governed under uses and customs.

***2015***

Village leaders in both villages prohibited members of the religious minority from carrying out their faenas, i.e. required community service. This also removes their rights to be recognised as members of the community. In one example, Brígida Hernández Hernández was forbidden from carrying out her assigned task of cleaning the school that her children attend. Because she was not able to complete her faena, she was not permitted to receive medical attention at the local health clinic and was denied access to government benefit programmes for indigenous women. In addition to this, local leaders ordered that members of the religious minority were forbidden from working their plots of land, which they depend on both for sustenance and income.

***2016***

***January – March*** Members of the religious minority in both villages continued to be forbidden from carrying out their faenas and were repeatedly ordered to attend meetings and community assemblies, where they were threatened with various types of punishment by leaders including Alfredo Zerón Ordiz. In March, the religious minorities were ordered to present themselves before a community assembly where they were held for three hours, from 8pm to 11pm, and were ordered by local leaders to continue participating in Roman Catholic church festivals by making financial contributions, lighting candles and actively participating in acts of worship. In late March the local Roman Catholic catechist, Julio Hernández Hernández, visited the home of Rogelio Hernández Baltazar, the Protestant pastor, and ordered him not to share the Bible with others in the community and threatened him with 'consequences' if he did not obey. The same day, Mr Hernández Baltazar was forced to feed Roman Catholic missionaries who were visiting the community.

***April-July*** Members of the religious minority continued to be prohibited from carrying out their faenas throughout this period. They were threatened with being permanently removed from the community list which would mean they

11 Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, Forced Internal Displacement in Mexico, 15 December 2022 https://cmdpdh.org/2022/12/15/desplazamiento-interno-forzado-en-mexico/

12 Oaxaca State Ombudsman's Office, Forced Internal Displacement in Oaxaca State, p.41, October 2024 https://www.ddhpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Informe-especial-Desplazamiento-Forzado-Interno-en-el-Estado-de-Oaxaca.pdf

would not be recognised as members of the community and lose all associated rights. Despite this, Mr Hernández Baltazar was elected by the community to be president of the Committee of Parents and Family. He received documents from the government notifying the community of the construction of a new pre-school classroom, requiring the signature and stamp of the community delegate. The community delegate refused to recognise Mr Hernández Baltazar because of his association with the religious minority and would not sign or stamp the documents, preventing him from carrying out his community duties. In May, Mr Zerón Ortiz called a community assembly where he threatened Mr Hernández Baltazar with permanent removal from the list of 'faeneros' and to remove him from his position as President of the Committee of Parents and Family. During the meeting, another community leader, Juan Hernández Hernández, grabbed Mr Hernández Baltazar's Bible and attempted to destroy it. Another community member, Jose Luis Hernández Cruz, attempted to physically attack Mr Hernández Baltazar. Religious minority women continued to be prohibited from carrying out their community responsibilities which included cleaning the local primary school, and Paulina Hernández Bautista was removed from her position as secretary of the Women's Committee.

***August-October*** During this period, members of the religious minority in Rancho Nuevo began to build a church on land belonging to them. A neighbour who helped them, Juan Nicolas Solorzano, was threatened and beaten by community leaders. In October Mrs Hernández Bautista, a member of the religious minority community, experienced a late term miscarriage. When her husband, José Silverio Gutiérrez Bautista, approached Mr Zerón Ortiz to arrange the burial of the body, he was refused. Mr. Zerón Ortiz stated, 'I tried to warn you, but you didn't listen to me,' referring to the fact that Mr Gutiérrez Bautista had converted to Protestantism. After Mr Gutiérrez Bautista pointed out that he had continued to carry out his community responsibilities, with the exception of those associated with Roman Catholicism, Mr Zerón Ortiz called a community meeting. Mr Gutiérrez Bautista was ordered to take the baby's body to Coamila, for burial. Religious minority leaders at this point requested the intervention of the state government. Two state government officials, including Jose Antonio Vital Perez, the state government official responsible for religious affairs, arrived and were informed that the community would not allow the baby to be buried there because the couple had 'outstanding matters' to attend to, specifically their failure to participate in religious activities associated with the Roman Catholic church. Mr Vital Perez then asked community leaders in Coamila to allow the burial, but they also refused, pointing out that the couple is not part of their community. Mr Vital Perez then returned to Rancho Nuevo where he spoke with community leaders who agreed to allow the baby to be buried there, two days after the miscarriage. However, Mr Vital Perez refused to sign any documentation formalising the burial and also strongly advised the members of the religious minority to 'obey the community leaders,' implying that they should participate in Roman Catholic activities.

***2017***

The six Protestant families in Coamila were threatened by community leaders with the removal of benefits such as government social programmes as well as the right to attend school. In December, Angélica Hernández Baltazar attended a Bible study at Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission in Coamila. The Bible study was interrupted by an intoxicated man holding a machete. The man entered the church and kicked over the bench upon which Angélica Hernández Baltazar, who was pregnant at the time, and a 70-year-old woman, were sitting, throwing the two women to the ground. Throughout her pregnancy, the local health clinic refused to provide Mrs Hernández Baltazar with folic acid supplements. As a result, she was forced to travel by bus to the city of Huejutla de Reyes, a journey which takes one hour and costs MXN 40-260.

***2018***

***January-March*** During this period, members of the religious minority in both villages were informed that their children were no longer welcome to attend classes at the local primary school. As there was no way for them to prevent them from doing so, the parents continued to send their children to school, however, the teachers then refused to teach their children. In February a man who converted to the minority religion was beaten by the community delegate Félix Hernández Hernández. In March, five men, Diego Hernández Hernández, Juan Nicolas Hernández Solarzano, Rogelio Hernández Baltazar, Ricardo Hernández Baltazar and Jose Silverio Gutierrez Bautista - all members of the religious minority - were illegally detained and beaten by the local authorities. Four of the men were violently removed from a church service on Saturday 3 March; they were tied up and held until just after noon the following day. A fifth man was taken out of his home at 2am on Sunday 4 March and held along with the others. They were not permitted food or water and were later ordered to pay a large fine as punishment for not re-joining the religious majority. Ten days later, Mr Félix Hernández threatened members of the religious minority with the confiscation of their land.

***April-July*** Angélica Hernández Baltazar was blocked from burying her stillborn baby in the local cemetery because the local authorities of Coamila, including Diego Hernández Solórzano, had removed her and other Protestant Christians from the register of inhabitants. The parents were forced to go to the municipal capital in order to be able to bury their baby.

Two men, the adult children of a widow who is a member of the religious minority and who lives with her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren, ordered the family to vacate their home because 'having embraced the Protestant faith, they have lost their right of inheritance.' The widow showed the documents from the Huejutla Agrarian Attorney's Office, proving she owns the property, but the community leaders said they do not recognise any law other than that of Uses and Customs.

***August-October*** Diego Hernandez Solórzano directed the local school to be closed in order to prevent 16 children whose parents are Protestant Christians from attending classes there. When the teacher, who was hired by the government and from outside the community, tried to defend the children's constitutional right to study, the local authorities ordered the local pre-school in Coamila to close for one week in order to expel her. She was warned not to attempt to reenter the community.

Mr Félix Hernández Hernández, who was intoxicated and carrying a machete, attempted to break into the home of Mr Hernández Baltazar. Mr Hernández Baltazar said that this was the fifth time this has happened and that his three younger children and his sister were in the house with him.

***November-December*** Members of the religious minority were cleaning the church grounds when Marcelino Gutierrez, a member of the religious majority, attacked Mr Solorzano, knocking out one of his front teeth.

***2019***

In 2019 members of the religious majority community placed two signs outside the religious minority church stating that 'brothers and sisters' (referring to Protestant Christians) were not permitted to enter. During this year, members of the religious minority also reported that local authorities in Rancho Nuevo were refusing to issue birth certificates to babies born to members of the religious minority. Parents also found it difficult to obtain the birth certificates from the civil registry at the municipal seat in Huejutla de los Reyes, where officials questioned why their community had refused to issue them the documentation, implying there had been misconduct on the part of the religious minority parents. In many of these cases, after multiple visits to the municipal civil registry there was a recognition that these were cases of religious discrimination and the parents were eventually referred to the local human rights commission, which could provide documentation allowing the civil registry to issue a birth certificate and register the birth of the child.

In 2019 José Antonio Vital Pérez, Director of Religious Affairs in the Huasteca region, and Iván Huesca Licona, General Coordinator of Religious Affairs for the Hidalgo State government, gave numerous interviews to local press in which they blamed Protestant Christians for rebuffing an agreement that would obligate them to participate in and contribute financially to Roman Catholic religious activities. On 16 December 2019 Simón Vargas Aguilar, Government Secretary of Hidalgo State, denied that there were any cases of religious intolerance in the Huasteca region during an interview with a local media outlet, Criterio Hidalgo.

***2022***

Maria Concepción Hernández Hernández, a member of the Great Commission Baptist Church in Rancho Nuevo, was attacked on the morning of Wednesday 21 December after she visited a plot of land that she owns in response to a request from a neighbour who had asked her to remove two trees. Since 2015, the local authorities have prohibited members of the religious minority from accessing or using their land for cultivating crops. 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 informed of her presence. A source told CSW that unusually, and immediately before the attack on the Mrs Hernández Hernández, the bells of the local Roman Catholic church were ringing. When 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 that belong 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 later hospitalised and continues to experience health challenges related to the incident.



*Maria Concepción Hernández Hernández.*

***2024***

***March*** Pastor Rogelio Hernández Baltazar was arbitrarily detained for 48 hours along with other leaders of the church. After the intervention of government officials, an agreement prohibiting any more families from joining the religious minority church and applying a 15,000 MXP fine was signed to allow for the men's release.

***April*** At the beginning of the month, village leaders, ignoring the March agreement, sanctioned the takeover of five plots of land belonging to members of the religious minority, cutting down trees, removing stones, and destroying their crops. On 27 April over 100 Protestants were forced to flee the villages after village leaders cut off their electricity, vandalised and blocked access to their church and some of their homes, and posted guards at the entry points to the villages. 139 people, including five infants and 70 children under the age of 17, all of whom attend the Great Commission Baptist Church, sought sanctuary in the municipal seat of Huejutla de Reyes,

where they requested government intervention to protect their rights.

Over the following months, the state government attempted to convene meetings with the victims, the local authorities responsible for their expulsion and municipal officials. The local authorities ignored all invitations to attend or attempted to place unreasonable conditions on their participation.



*Families displaced from Rancho Nuevo and Coamila in April 2024.*

***September*** An agreement was brokered by the municipal government allowing for the return of the displaced families with guarantees for FoRB in return for dropping a criminal case filed with the state prosecutor's office against the local authorities. The agreement was not honoured by local authorities in the two villages, however, and with no effective remedy to allow them to return home with guarantees for their safety, the displaced families relocated to the neighbouring state of Veracruz where they established the new community of 'La Paz'.



*The community of 'La Paz' in Chalma Municipality, Veracruz State.*

## A Culture of Impunity and the Impact of Organised Crime

In September 2025 the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) warned that structural impunity and a weakening of the rule of law in Mexico have made the country one of the most dangerous environments in Latin America for the defence of human rights. Enforced disappearances, violence against human rights defenders and the lack of effective investigations do not occur in isolation but are the result of systematic failures of the state apparatus, aggravated by the presence of organised crime and, in some cases, by the complicity or acquiescence of the authorities.[13]

The 2025 National Survey of Victimisation and Public Safety Perception (ENVIPE) estimated that more than 2,480 households were forced to leave their residence in 2024 alone to protect themselves from crime.[14] Examples of the trade that some criminal groups are involved include crop fields and laboratories in Guerrero, the control of drug routes and human trafficking in Chiapas, and the trade and import of avocados and narcotics in Michoacán. These situations generate social destabilisation and insecurity on a day-to-day basis in areas in which criminal groups seek to take absolute control over the population for fear of other opposing groups or the intervention of authorities.

In Michoacán State, communities located within or near indigenous areas, such as the Purépecha region, in the municipalities of Angahuan, Los Reyes, Nurio, Tangamandapio and Uruapan, must contend with the crime and instability of the area generated by the pervasive presence of organised criminal groups. Members of religious communities and religious leaders are harassed, threatened, and subjected to extortion. The establishment of community self-defence groups, meant to resist the encroachment and influence of organised criminal groups, has further complicated the situation, with self-defence groups employed to enforce decisions of community leaders which sometimes include those orders to enforce religious uniformity and violating FoRB.

Restrictions on free movement due to the control of organised crime groups in several regions of Mexico have resulted in significant restrictions on FoRB. These groups establish curfews and define perimeters and zones of permitted movement in the regions where they operate to protect themselves from rival groups or federal security agencies. These restrictions can adversely affect basic rights, including freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, alongside FoRB. Religious activities are restricted, suspended or physically impossible to carry out. In practice, organised criminal groups sometimes prohibit members of religious groups from gathering for worship and other religious activities.

13 United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, A/HRC/60/35, 21 July 2025
14 National Institute of Statistics and Geography, National Survey of Victimization and Public Safety Perception (ENVIPE) 2025, 18 September 2025 https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/envipe/2025/#tabulados

Those who do not obey these restrictions, and religious leaders who publicly condemn violence and illegal activities are often threatened, subjected to violence, and sometimes forcibly displaced, disappeared, or killed.[15] Entire communities have been affected. In one example in the highlands of Chiapas State, more than 3,000 people have been displaced due to violence since 2021. Entire Protestant Christian communities in Aldama Municipality were forced to flee during violent clashes between organised criminal groups have been unable to return due to the lack of adequate security conditions.

***Religious Leaders***

Organised criminal groups target religious leaders, who often have significant influence in their community, as a way to destabilise a community and establish a culture of silence and terror. Criminal groups extort churches, attempting to coerce religious leaders into paying protection money or allowing their churches to be used for laundering. Those who resist these efforts become targets. Religious leaders involved in social work and community work are especially vulnerable.

Threats and attacks against religious leaders often go unreported, especially when it comes to Protestant Christian leaders, whose experiences have not been systematically documented, for various reasons. Human rights defenders point out that authorities are quick to label attacks on and murders of religious leaders as 'common crimes' (often robberies gone wrong), rather than investigating the cases thoroughly, further distorting the statistics.

According to the Catholic Multimedia Centre (CCM), a cardinal, 62 priests, a deacon, four church employees, 23 lay leaders, and a Roman Catholic journalist were killed between 1990 and 2025. Two priests were forcibly disappeared during the same period.[16] These statistics include Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, 51, an indigenous Roman Catholic priest and human rights defender, who was shot and killed in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, after officiating Mass on 20 October 2024; Father Bertoldo Pantaléon Estrada, 59, parish priest Mezcala Municipality, Guerrero State, whose body was discovered with multiple gunshot wounds inside his vehicle on a highway on 6 October 2025;[17] and Father Ernesto Baltazar Hernández Vilchis of the Diocese of Cuautitlán in Mexico State, who had been reported missing at the end of October 2025 and whose death was confirmed on 13 November after his remains were found in the polluted waters of the river in the Nextlalpan Municipality.

Forced disappearance is rampant in Mexico and also affects religious leaders. A report from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) highlights that




*Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez (right). Credit: Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.*

disappearances in Mexico have increased by over 200% in the last ten years. The IACHR found that state actors are often involved, either directly or indirectly by allowing organised criminal groups to operate with impunity.

In one such case, Benito Guevara Arcos, a 79-year-old Protestant Christian missionary disappeared in Guerrero State on 31 March 2026 in the town of San Vicente, Chilpancingo de los Bravos Municipality, where he had travelled from the town of Ocotito to preach and give out Bibles. The missionary had been staying with a friend, who went to look for him when he did not return at nightfall. Witnesses told the friend that armed men had forced Mr Guevara Arcos into a car after taking exception to his preaching and taken him away. The friend was later able to confirm that the missionary was being held by an organised criminal group which claimed that it was investigating his identity, even though he had his official identification documents with him.



*Benito Guevara Arcos.*

15 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Resolution No. 1/26 Organized Crime and Human Rights in the Americas, I, 28 February 2026 https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2026/res-1-26.pdf

16 Special Investigations Unit of the Catholic Multimedia Centre, Annual Report 2025: Violence against priests, religious and institutions of the Catholic Church in Mexico https://ccm.org.mx/ https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/51bf5868-d2d1-45a7-b5a6-964a26884784/Reporte%20Anula%202025%20OK%20B.pdf

17 Another parish priest in Mezcala Municipality, Father Germain Muñiz García, was shot dead in 2018 along with another priest, Father Iván Añorve Jaimes, also in an ambush on the road.

A few days after the forced disappearance of Mr Guevara Arcos, the criminal group reportedly claimed that they had released him in the town of Amojileca, a 30km drive from San Vicente, on 4 April, and requested that a family member pick him up. Protestant Christians in the area sent two men in a pickup truck along the only road to Amojileca to search for the missionary but were unable to locate him. Mr Guevara Arcos' family told CSW that he did not have his phone with him, but that he was carrying sufficient money to have covered the cost of returning home. On 13 April they filed a missing person report with the National Search Commission for Missing Persons in Guerrero State and were provided with police protection as they posted flyers throughout the municipality.

The case has received extensive local media coverage, and Mr Guevara Arcos is well-known in the area, however no-one has come forward with information regarding his wellbeing or whereabouts. The family has not filed a report with the Guerrero prosecutor's office for fear of reprisals from criminal groups.

## Conclusion

The empowerment of customary practices without clearly defined limits to protect human rights within indigenous communities creates a situation of vulnerability for individuals who adhere to religions that differ from those of the majority. This dynamic often compels these individuals to conform to a singular belief system or face exile in their quest for what is perceived as protection of their traditions.

An effective response that institutionalises respect for FoRB necessitates the participation of all levels of government as well as organisations outside of Mexico, contributing to the enhancement of FoRB in a practical and tangible manner for those of all religions or beliefs. This can be achieved through national and international human rights mechanisms that assist in monitoring cases of violations of FoRB and promote respect for this fundamental right.

To effectively address and improve the conditions surrounding FoRB, it is essential that collaboration occurs across federal, state, and local government entities. Additionally, international organisations can play a crucial role in supporting these efforts. Their involvement can facilitate the establishment of frameworks that ensure accountability and provide resources for the protection of minority groups facing religious discrimination.

Furthermore, mechanisms should be designed to monitor and document instances of violations, ensuring that there is a systematic approach to addressing grievances. By fostering an environment of cooperation and shared responsibility among various stakeholders, it becomes possible to create lasting change that upholds and respects the rights of all individuals, regardless of their religion or belief. This collaborative approach not only reinforces national commitments to human rights but also aligns with international standards aimed at protecting the dignity and freedoms of all people.

In light of this, it is imperative to recognise that the government of Mexico is responsible for providing education on the issue of FoRB at all levels—federal, state, and municipal. This education aims not only to inform but also to raise awareness regarding fundamental principles including laicity, underscoring the independence of the state from any religious organisation or confession, ensuring that all individuals can practice their beliefs freely without governmental bias. Tolerance and respect for the ideas, beliefs, and practices of others, particularly when they differ from or are contrary to one's own, must be promoted. This respect is crucial in promoting coexistence and reducing societal tensions. Finally, a culture of peace embodying a set of values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect respect for life, the dignity of the individual, and human rights must be cultivated. An emphasis should be placed on dialogue, understanding and non-violent conflict resolution as essential components of a harmonious society. By fostering these principles, the Mexican government can contribute to a more inclusive environment where diverse religious beliefs are respected and protected, thereby safeguarding the rights of all individuals within indigenous communities and beyond.

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T +44 (0)20 8329 0010
/CSWUK
csw.org.uk

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

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