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No solution for Protestant families after fifty days of displacement

Fifty days after the forced displacement on 26 April of more than 150 Baptist Protestants in Hidalgo State, Mexico, the government has failed to take any action to ensure that those responsible for the displacement are held to account and the rights of the religious minority group are protected.

[CSW](#) (14.06.2024)-The forced displacement of the members of the Great Commission Fundamental Baptist Church, the [culmination of a decade of violations of freedom or religion or belief \(FoRB\)](#) in the neighbouring villages of Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, in the municipality of Huejutla de Reyes, took place after village leaders, all Roman Catholics, cut off the electricity to the homes of the religious minority families, vandalised their church, and blocked access to some of their homes. The displaced group, which includes over 70 children and infants, was first housed in a municipal building before being moved to a sports complex.

Sources told CSW that the municipal government, which holds primary responsibility to resolve the situation, has 'washed its hands of the matter' and has communicated to the religious minority group that if they wish to return to their homes, they should comply with the [demands](#) of the community leaders, which include penalties for declining to participate in Roman Catholic religious activities and would force the religious minority families to pay large fines, based on the date of their conversion to Protestantism – which have been increased to a cumulative total of 750,000 MXN (approximately 40,000 USD).

The newly appointed Hidalgo State Director of Religious Affairs, Margarita Cabrera Román, has reportedly returned to the state capital of Pachuca, claiming that she has done all she can. *'They refuse to admit that there is a religious element and are claiming it is an internal conflict between neighbours. [The government officials] have told [the members of the community] to sort it out themselves,'* the source told CSW.

Another source told CSW that, following [country-wide elections](#) in early June, the outgoing municipal government had no political interest in resolving the case and addressing the associated human rights violations. 'It might be necessary to wait until the next government takes office in October, but it will be the third term for the incoming municipal president,' they said, highlighting that in the last two decades, no municipal government in Huejutla de Reyes has ever taken action to address violations of FoRB, despite regular occurrences, many severe, in communities in the municipality, all affecting Protestant Christians.

CSW's Head of Advocacy Anna Lee Stangl said: ***'The refusal of government officials at the municipal and state levels in Hidalgo to take action to address a mass***

forced displacement of these men, women and children on account of their religious beliefs clearly shows how deeply entrenched the culture of impunity around violations of freedom of religion or belief has become. CSW calls on the federal government to take urgent measures, where the state and municipal government refuse to do so, to intervene in the case of those displaced from Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, and to hold those responsible for these egregious human rights violations to account via the justice system. In the longer term, we call on the incoming presidency of Claudia Sheinbaum to prioritise and implement policies that will ensure that the rights of all are protected in Mexico and that no one is deprived of their fundamental rights based on their religion or belief.'

Notes to Editors:

1. Rancho Nuevo and Coamila are indigenous Nahuatl-speaking communities that are governed under Uses and Customs. The Mexican constitution guarantees FoRB and other human rights to all citizens. However, in practice FoRB violations are common among indigenous communities governed under the Law of Uses and Customs. This law protects the right of indigenous communities to maintain their cultural and traditional methods of local governance with the caveat that it must be applied in line with human rights guarantees in the Mexican constitution and in the international conventions to which Mexico is party. However, the Mexican government on both the federal and state levels does little to ensure that these protections are upheld. As a result, in many communities a religious majority attempts to enforce religious uniformity with consequences ranging in severity for members of minorities who wish to practice a religion or belief of their choosing.
2. Human rights violations linked to FoRB have been ongoing and severe in the neighbouring villages of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo since 2015. Local authorities have repeatedly attempted to force members of the religious minority to participate in Roman Catholic religious festivals, including through financial donations, lighting candles and actively participating in acts of worship. Despite detailed documentation of the case dating back to 2015, the municipal government continues to deny that the incidents in Rancho Nuevo and Coamila are linked to FoRB.
3. Women from Rancho Nuevo participated in CSW research that was used for [Let Her Be Heard](#), a groundbreaking report on how indigenous women in Mexico experience FoRB violations, published in April 2022.
4. Hidalgo State government [officials have repeatedly and publicly denied the existence of any cases of religious intolerance](#) in the state. CSW's research has shown that it has one of the highest numbers of such cases in the country.