

30 June 2017

Mexico: Killing of labour rights defender Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna, from UPVA 28 de Octubre

On 29 June 2017, human rights defender **Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna** was killed inside the office of her organisation in Puebla, Mexico. The defender was shot twice during an armed attack to the offices of UPVA.

[Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna](#) was a labour rights defender, member of the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre* – UPVA (Popular Union of Street Vendors October 28) and daughter of human rights defender **Ruben Sarabia “Simitrio”**, leader and co-founder of the same organization. UPVA is an organisation based in Puebla defending the rights of street merchants and labour rights, and organises social protests on the issues. The organisation has [faced repression since its founding](#) and its members have been subject to constant attacks, death threats, stigmatization and judicial harassment.

On 29 June 2017, at around 11am, a group of armed men stormed the offices of UPVA, while its members were holding a rally for the release of an imprisoned colleague, **Xihuel Sarabia** (also Simitrio's son), and attacked three people. Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna was first shot in the stomach and then in the head. According to reports, one of the assailants asked the defender about her relation with "Simitrio" and warned that he had a message for him (“*esto es para que Simitrio ya no se pase de verga*” - “*this is so that Simitrio stops f***ing around*”). Two other members of the UPVA were beaten and one of them was wounded before the gunmen escaped. UPVA 28 de Octubre had previously denounced attempts of criminalization, attacks and death threats against Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna and other members of the organisation.

Meztli’s father, Ruben Sarabia “[Simitrio](#)” and her two brothers **Atl Rubén** and Xihuel Sarabia Reyna are detained and facing judicial processes which have been marked by irregularities, including violence during detention and fabricated charges of drug trafficking (*narcomenudeo*). The defenders reported receiving threats from public officials since 2014, warning them that [if they didn’t stop their activism they would end up in jail](#). On the week of 18 June 2017, Rubén Sarabia “Simitrio”, and his son Ruben Sarabia Reyna won two appeals which recognised that due to deficiencies and irregularities in the processes the First Criminal Judge must issue a new ruling.

In April 2016, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders [highlighted](#) the criminalization, constant attacks and death threats faced by UPVA’s members. Particular concern was expressed about the risks faced by human rights defenders Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna and **Rita Amador**. On 05 April 2016, Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna was threatened with a gun and beaten by two men who introduced themselves as police officers. Rita Amador, leader of the organization and wife of Ruben Sarabia "Simitrio", has faced increased risks since the detention of Simitrio, such as criminalization, defamation, smear campaigns, and [several death threats](#) in 2016.

The killing of Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna is the latest in a wave of repression against social

leaders and human rights defenders in Mexico. The government has not only failed to protect human rights defenders, but in many cases its agents are directly responsible for the violence. This year has been a particularly violent one and until May at least 30 human rights defenders and journalists had already been killed in the country, according to Mexican organization *Comité Cerezo México*.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of **Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna** and the attacks against the other members of **UPVA 28 de Octubre**. Front Line Defenders also expresses its deep concern at the death threats and the judicial harassment carried out against **UPVA** members, as they appear to be linked to their legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Publicly and immediately condemn the killing of **Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna**;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of **Meztli Omixochitl Sarabia Reyna**, and the attacks against the other members of **UPVA**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all the members of **Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre**;
4. Immediately release, and drop all charges against, **Ruben Sarabia “Simitrio”, Atl Rubén** and **Xihuel Sarabia**, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being criminalized solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
5. Refrain from misusing the justice system to intimidate, harass and discredit human rights defenders;
6. Publicly recognize the valuable work of human rights defenders, and particularly the **Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre** for the defense of labour rights in the city of Puebla;
7. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mexico are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.