

30 June 2017

### **Mexico: Ongoing criminalization of environmental defenders from Colonia Maya, Chiapas**

On 29 June 2017, members of the Board of Directors of Colonia Maya, San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, were called for questioning before Prosecution officers related to charges of criminal association and committing a crime as part of a gang.

[Mesa Directiva de la Colonia Maya \(Board of Directors of Colonia Maya\)](#) is a group acting for the defence of the environment and the protection of environmental rights, especially water, in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. Members carry out actions to promote a healthy environment, and protect springs, forests and other natural resources in their region.

On 29 June 2017, members of the Mesa Directiva were summoned by the Prosecution Office. Human rights defenders **Elizabeth del Carmen Suárez Díaz, Miguel Ángel López Martín, Lucero Aguilar Pérez, Eustacio Hernández Vázquez, Martín López López** and **Ramón Nicolas Díaz** all face indictments issued by the Prosecution on charges of criminal association and committing a crime as part of a gang, a judicial process initiated by a La Moraleja businessman. They have previously been subjected to smear campaigns and judicial harassment.

Inhabitants of Colonia Maya, in the south of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, decided to organise themselves over a year ago to defend the environment in the wake of damages caused in a territory called La Moraleja, located within the Maya colony. The logging of trees in the forest in the south of the city, near La Moraleja, caused on 5 June 2016 a mud avalanche that affected the schools and houses of the Maya colony. Since then, the Mesa Directiva has denounced the municipal and environmental authorities for not fulfilling their duty to promote and guarantee a healthy environment. Due to their activities in defence of human rights, they have also been threatened by local authorities.

On 14 March 2017, human rights defender **Pedro Alvarez Moshan**, member of the community, reported being threatened by the Mayor of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

*Mesa Directiva* has also denounced the possible collusion between the Mayor and other members of the municipal council, with the businessman responsible for the construction of La Moraleja urbanization project. The *Mesa Directiva* has also opposed the construction of a new storm drain that would benefit only La Moraleja project, further destroying the forest.

Private and public companies often file complaints and initiate unfounded criminal proceedings against defenders. After a recent visit to the country, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders [stated](#) that “*the situation of human rights defenders in Mexico is conditioned by the criminalization of their activities through the deliberate misuse of criminal law and the manipulation of the state’s punitive power by both State and non-State actors, to hinder and even prevent the legitimate activities of defenders to promote and protect human rights*”.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the threats, acts of harassment and ongoing

criminalization of environmental defenders from *Mesa Directiva de la Colonia Maya* as they appear to be linked to their legitimate work in defence of environmental rights.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:**

1. Immediately drop all charges, end the investigation, and cease all further judiciary harassment against human rights defenders **Elizabeth del Carmen Suárez Díaz, Miguel Ángel López Martín, Lucero Aguilar Pérez, Eustacio Hernández Vázquez, Martín López López** and **Ramón Nicolas Díaz** and all other members of the *Mesa Directiva de la Colonia Maya*, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being criminalized solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of environmental rights;
2. Investigate the threats against **Pedro Alvarez Moshan**, 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 *Mesa Directiva de la Colonia Maya*;
4. Publicly recognize the valuable work of human rights defenders, and particularly the *Mesa Directiva de la Colonia Maya* for the defence of environmental rights in Chiapas;
5. 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.