

# **Civil Observation Mission (COM) in the framework of attacks against indigenous peoples and defenders of lands and territory in front of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.**

---

## Report Summary

### **Context**

#### **A. Large-scale project of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec**

In the southeast of Mexico there is a 200 km wide area located in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. It is the narrowest land area connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. A large number of Indigenous Peoples live in this territory, considered a biodiversity highspot. A huge economic project called the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec ('CIIT') is being developed in this region.

The CIIT “development” project was launched in December 2018, as part of the Tehuantepec Isthmus Development Plan – also known as the Tehuantepec Isthmus Development Program.<sup>1</sup> The main objective of this Plan is to have a more efficient connection between the ports of Coatzacoalcos, in Veracruz, and Salina Cruz, in Oaxaca This through the modernization of different kinds of infrastructures, mainly rail transport. At the same time, it aims to strengthen energy infrastructures, both oil refining and gas supply, the establishment of industrial parks, modernization and creation of road infrastructures, an airport network and the creation of development poles <sup>2</sup>.

Initially, the project will be developed in around 76 municipalities in Oaxaca and Veracruz, where communities of several Indigenous Peoples are located, such as the Binnizá or Zapoteca, Ayuuk or Mixe, Zoque, Ikoots or Huave, Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixteco, Popoluca and Nahuatl peoples. There is also Afro-Mexican population in the area <sup>3</sup>.

Ongoing and potential impacts range from the environmental to the social. According to reports developed by experts in various disciplines and the experiences shared by the communities, the CIIT in its authorization and development processes has involved, at least <sup>4</sup>:

---

<sup>1</sup>Official Gazette of the Federation, *Program for the Development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec 2020-2024*, August 4, 2020, available at: [https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5597712&fecha=04/08/2020#gsc.tab=0](https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5597712&fecha=04/08/2020#gsc.tab=0)

<sup>2</sup>Government of Mexico, *Logistics Platform of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, December 1, 2023, available at: <https://www.gob.mx/ciit/articulos/folleto-corredor-interoceanico-del-istmo-de-tehuantepec?idiom=es>

<sup>3</sup>National Development Plan (PND), 2019-2024 published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on July 12, 2019.

<sup>4</sup>Ceceña, Ana Esther (Coord.), *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec at risk*, Latin American Geopolitics Observatory, UNAM, February 2012, available at: [https://geopolitica.iiec.unam.mx/sites/geopolitica.iiec.unam.mx/files/2021-04/Istmo%20de%20Tehuantepec%20en%20risk\\_0.pdf](https://geopolitica.iiec.unam.mx/sites/geopolitica.iiec.unam.mx/files/2021-04/Istmo%20de%20Tehuantepec%20en%20risk_0.pdf)

Although there are no official reports on the current status of the various components that make up the CIIT project, indigenous peoples and communities in the region have stressed the following impacts:<sup>5</sup>

- **Impacts to their territories.** There are environmental impacts on their communities due to the construction of the electrical grid, gas pipelines, industrial parks and roads. Building companies generate waste that is left on their lands, and the construction of the different components of the project results in felling of trees and damage to endemic flora and fauna<sup>6</sup>.
- **Militarization.** The presence of the National Guard (GN), Secretariat of the Navy and the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA), as well as the increase in the presence of the state police and Civil Force - in Veracruz - in the communities where the CIIT is being developed<sup>7</sup>.
- **Lack of information about the project.** Residents of the communities visited during the CFM expressed their ignorance on the scope of the project. Through various testimonies, they indicated that they were not informed about the elements related to the CIIT, its impacts or environmental, social or economic consequences. They have only learned about the project when work starts within their lands and territories.<sup>8</sup>
- **Omissions in the protection of their rights to self-determination, autonomy, free, prior and informed consent and free, prior, informed, good-faith and culturally appropriate consultation.** The communities affected by the CIIT project state that they have not had the necessary or sufficient guarantees for the exercise and protection of their rights as indigenous peoples. In addition, they have been denied recognition as subjects of public law by the nonrecognition of the community assemblies as legitimate decision-making bodies. The CIIT is being carried out without the consent of the affected peoples and their communities<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, despite the lack of adequate mechanisms for the effective protection and guarantee of the right to self-determination and free prior informed consent, and the absence of free, prior, , informed, good-faith and culturally appropriate

---

<sup>5</sup>San Juan Guichicovi, Hierba Santa, Boca del Monte, Mogoñe Viejo, Rincón Viejo, just to name a few.

<sup>6</sup>Footer, *200 trees will be torn down to build work on the Interoceanic Corridor*, July 23, 2023, available at: <https://piedepagina.mx/derribaran-200-arboles-para-construir-obra-de-corredor-interoceanico/>

<sup>7</sup> See PODER Latam, *Militares SA de CV, Otra via al Militar-Istmo*, February 27, 2024, available at: [https://poderlatam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Militares\\_SAdeCV.pdf](https://poderlatam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Militares_SAdeCV.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Testimonies received at the “Tierra y Libertad” Camp, in Mogoñe Viejo, Oaxaca. And Des-Infórmonos, *Ecocide and lack of transparency in CIIT works, denounce Zapotec defenders*, May 9, 2023, available at: <https://desinformemonos.org/ecocidio-y-falta-de-transparencia-en-obras-del-ciit-denuncian-defensores-zapotecs/>

<sup>9</sup>Aristegui Noticias, *Judge suspends construction of industrial park in Corredor del Istmo*, June 14, 2023, available at: <https://www.aristeginoticias.com/1406/mexico/juez-suspende-construccion-de-parque-industrial-en-isthmus-corridor/>

consultations with the Indigenous Peoples impacted by the project, the imposed project continues developing .

## **B. Attacks on defenders of nature, land and territory in Mexico in front of the CIIT.**

The implementation of the CIIT has caused a profound transformation in the lives of affected persons and communities, who are sustaining processes of resistance and community organization to this day. To respond to the actions communities and defenders are carrying out to protect their properties, territories and ways of life, the Mexican State has undertaken measures that affect their human rights, their physical and emotional integrity, personal freedom and their lands and territories.

The statements that are integrated into the full report are the result of the documentation and observation of twenty-two civil society organizations, who formed a Civil Fact-finding Mission in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CFM) in order to call attention to the attacks carried out against persons and communities defending nature and territories.

The CFM took place from July 22 to 25, 2023. It was constituted by representatives of Indigenous Peoples and of international, national and state human rights organizations. We toured different communities of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. After three years of implementation of the Interoceanic Corridor, the data are alarming:

From May 1, 2021 to May 1, 2024, a total of 72 attacks were documented, in which at least 226 different kind of aggressions were perpetrated against defenders, the most recurrent being: intimidation (30%), harassment (28%), threats (10%) and physical attacks (7%). In addition, 3 homicides were documented against Zapotec defenders Jesús Manuel Martínez (2022), Félix Vicente Cruz (2023) and Noel López Gallegos (2023).

92% of the victims are indigenous. The Mixe (Ayuuk) and Zapotec (Binnizá) peoples were the ones who suffered the highest number of attacks. It is important to highlight the differentiated violence and its impacts against indigenous women, who have faced intimidation, threats and physical attacks based on gender roles and stereotypes and with sexual components.

In the cases documented by the CFM, the Mexican State had direct participation in the violence perpetrated on 94 occasions within the 72 documented attacks. The permanent and prominent presence of the Army, the Navy and the National Guard inside Indigenous territories of the Isthmus, fosters a climate of hostility and intimidation, and has generated a systematic violation of the fundamental rights of the communities and peoples living in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, among them:

- Consultation and consent: the consultations carried out in the Isthmus were not in accordance with relevant international Indigenous Peoples' human rights standards.
- Territory: dispossession of ejidal lands with violence was documented, linked to the dynamics of real estate speculation and destruction of crop lands.
- Forced displacement: defenders were displaced, with the occurrence of violence and several crimes - robbery, physical attacks- in some specific cases, such as the building of development centers, railways and industrial parks.
- Alleged forced disappearances: ten men and six women have been allegedly victims of forced disappearances, since they were deprived of their liberty by state authorities, and information about their whereabouts was denied by the investigative authority of the state of Oaxaca.
- Personal freedom: arbitrary arrests by the National Guard and State Investigation Agency were documented. The authorities broke into homes, with excessive use of force and without stating the reasons for the arrests to carry out detentions. It is unknown whether there was a legal arrest warrant

The CFM would like to stress that the work of defenders and the exercise of their right to protest were the triggers for the attacks they have suffered, including lethal attacks, carried out by authorities or individuals. Besides, the security measures granted by the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists to some of those affected have been defective and do not function properly.

### **C. Recommendations**

Within the framework of the situation of systematic violence against persons and communities defending their territories, nature and ways of life in the face of the CIIT project, and in order to address violations of their human rights, we would like to make the following recommendations: to the Mexican State

1. Fully respect the individual and collective human rights of Indigenous peoples and their communities enshrined in international human rights law, particularly UNDRIP, and the Mexican Constitution
2. Guarantee the urgent implementation of effective protection measures in favour of defenders of the environment and the territory. These measures must be agreed upon with defenders themselves and be relevant to the context, considering ethnic, gender and collective perspectives.
3. Stop all forms of threats, criminalization and aggression against Indigenous Peoples and human rights and nature defenders of, as well as take necessary actions to guarantee a safe environment for them within the framework of article 9 of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information,

Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Issues in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement).

4. Comply with due diligence obligations in the investigation and punishment of crimes and human rights violations committed against defenders and communities, as well as their families, in accordance with the constitutional parameters on the rights of human rights and environmental defenders, particularly taking into account the criteria enunciated in the ruling in the *Case of Digna Ochoa and Familiares vs. Mexico*, issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights<sup>10</sup>.
5. Recognize the quality of victims of the affected defenders and communities, as well as their families, through their entry into the National Registry of Victims and the effective attention of the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims, within the framework of the state obligations, among other actions.
6. Adopt the necessary and sufficient measures for the comprehensive reparation for the human rights violations suffered by persons and communities defending the territory and nature.
7. Adopt the necessary and sufficient measures to guarantee the non-repetition of human rights violations committed against the victimized peoples and communities defending nature and territory.
8. Recognize and respect the individual and collective human rights of the Zapoteca, Mixe and Zoque and other Indigenous Peoples and their communities, in the region, to self-determination, autonomy and self-government, to territory, to free, prior and informed consent, through their effective recognition as subjects of public law and of the indigenous jurisdiction of the Community Assemblies as the highest decision-making body and under the highest standard of protection.
9. Urgently and effectively stop the process of *militarization* in the indigenous territories of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in order to respect Indigenous Peoples' r collective rights over their territory, to self-determination and free, prior informed consent. The above, taking into account community considerations and agreements regarding the presence of military elements.

Participating organizations:

Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (UCIZONI),  
Corriente del Pueblo Sol Rojo, ARTICLE 19 - Oficina para México y Centroamérica,

---

<sup>10</sup>Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of Digna Ochoa and Relatives vs. Mexico*, Preliminary objections, merits, reparations and costs, Judgment of November 25, 2021, Series C, No. 447, pp. 28- 47, available at: [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_447\\_esp.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_447_esp.pdf)

Brigada Humanitaria de Paz Marabunta, Brigada Humanitaria de Paz Marabunta Oaxaca, Brigadas Internacionales de Paz (PBI), Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, A.C., Centro de Información sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos, Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental A.C., Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca, A.C., Espacio OSC, Grupo de Trabajo «Fronteras, regionalización y globalización» del Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), Indigenous Peoples Rights International IPRI-México, Prevención, Capacitación y Defensa del Migrante, A.C. (PRECADEM), Proceso de Articulación de la Sierra Santa Marta, Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos Todos los derechos para todas, todes y todos (Red TDT), Servicios para una Educación Alternativa A.C. EDUCA, Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz A.C. (SERAPAZ), Territorios Diversos para la Vida A.C., Tribunal Internacional de Conciencia de los Pueblos en Movimiento (TICPM)