



July 6th, 2022

MEXICO || Urgent call to the Mexican State to guarantee justice and protection for the indigenous peoples and communities of the Sierra Tarahumara.

- Homicide of Jesuit priests and civilian in the Sierra Tarahumara, a result of **the pattern of violence and impunity against indigenous communities and human rights defenders.**
- **At least 30 people with community charges have been murdered in this region** as a result of disputes, operations, and territorial control by drug trafficking cartels.
- The Sierra Tarahumara must be considered a region of **special attention with a sufficient and long-term budget to address the backwardness and violence suffered by the population**, with the **significant participation of Indigenous Peoples.**

On June 20, 2022, the Jesuit priests Joaquín César Mora and Javier Campos, human rights defenders of the Rarámuri, Ódami and mestizo communities, were killed in the community of Cerocahui, municipality of Urique, in the Sierra Tarahumara, Chihuahua.

The homicide occurred in the community's church while they were trying to help Mr. Pedro Palma, a tourist guide in the region. Both priests were widely recognized as defenders of the indigenous peoples of the area for decades.

After depriving them of their lives, the armed group took the three bodies. In a [press release issued on June 21, 2022](#), the Society of Jesus demanded justice and the recovery of the bodies of their brothers. Finally, on June 23, the Society [confirmed that the bodies had been found and identified.](#)

This is not an isolated event. The Sierra Tarahumara faces conditions **of discrimination, land and territory grabbing, marginalization, economic over-exploitation, gender violence**, and deliberate abandonment by the authorities, the way the State has decided to intervene in the territory.

Organized crime has benefited from impunity and collusion with local authorities to increase its level of control and violence. Death or forced displacement has been the rule for the general population, mainly for indigenous communities.



Drug cartels dispute this territory for the cultivation of marijuana and poppy for heroin production, and illegally plunder the forests, violently subjugating the indigenous communities. Hundreds of indigenous families have been forcibly displaced from their land in the region as part of a growing displacement crisis in Mexico due to violent dispossession at the hands of organized crime.

In July 2021, in the report "[Chihuahua: When the talamontes-sicarios force exile](#)," journalist Patricia Mayorga reported the dozens of murders of key actors in the defense of the collective rights of their communities and the hundreds of victims of forced displacement. These have been happening since 2014 in the Sierra Tarahumara due to extortion and arson by criminal groups to control illegal logging and money laundering.

According to [this report](#), at least 30 people with community charges have been killed in the area. This includes the 2017 murder of Isidro Baldenegro, a Rarámuri winner of the 2005 Goldman Environmental Prize, and his brother [José Trinidad](#) in March 2022. [Cruz Sanchez Legarda](#), a former Rarámuri governor displaced from the community of El Manzano, denounced that in his territory the criminal groups have felled pine trees to plant poppy. "The creeks have dried up. The forest is abandoned," he lamented from exile.

Indigenous Peoples Rights International -IPRI condemns the murder of defenders Joaquín César Mora Salazar SJ and Javier Campos Morales SJ; and the violence against the Indigenous Peoples of the region.

We also warn that **the above conditions seriously threaten the physical and cultural existence of the Rarámuri and Ódami peoples**. The protection and guarantee of their individual and collective rights as Indigenous Peoples should not be further delayed.

In line with its international obligations we demand the Mexican State to:



- Guarantee truth, justice and reparation for the murder of Javier Campos SJ, Joaquín Mora SJ, Pedro Palma, and for the deaths and disappearances that occurred in Cerocahui and other communities in the Sierra Tarahumara.
- Allocate sufficient and long-term resources to combat the structures that generate dispossession and violence in the Sierra Tarahumara.
- Address the phenomenon of forced displacement and design a plan for the safe return of victims and the restitution of their lands.
- To the Government of Chihuahua, address recommendation 96/2022 of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in the case of forced displacement of families from El Manzano in the municipality of Uruachi and Monterde, in the municipality of Guazapares.
- To the Federal Government, establish the General Law on Forced Internal Displacement that incorporates international standards for the protection of internally displaced persons in order to address this phenomenon in a comprehensive manner, considering the special impacts of forced displacement in the case of indigenous peoples.
- Implement effective and culturally appropriate protection measures that guarantee the security of human rights defenders and indigenous peoples of Chihuahua, including their effective participation in the design of these measures.
- Dismantle the organized crime groups that have taken territorial control of the indigenous peoples of the Tarahumara.
- Create a federal strategy against the criminal actions of Mexican state institutions such as municipal governments, state governments, local and regional prosecutors' offices. Intervention is needed to break the pact of impunity and the collusion of state institutions with organized crime.