



NATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MEXICO

January 26, 2017

PRESS STATEMENT

“The outstanding groups of women human rights defenders that I’ve met here in Mexico remind us that women are frequently in the forefront of the battles for human rights even though their work may still be invisible.”

Rapporteur Michel Forstⁱ

Michel Forst, Special UN Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders **met twice with 33 members of the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Mexico (RNDDHM)ⁱⁱ** on his recent visit to our country.

In specifically designated spaces, defenders from 11 statesⁱⁱⁱ spoke of the need to highlight gender differences and inequalities as a priority in achieving equality, enjoyment and protection of the human rights of defenders, especially in a global context in which a patriarchal vision is enforced. This perspective discredits the voices of women; invisibilizes our struggles and contributions; and violates our rights, bodies, freedom, aspirations and needs.

In view of the above, we shared both our endeavor and our diagnosis with the Rapporteur regarding the attacks we’re experiencing and their impact, as well as the strengths and challenges that we’ve identified for the creation and strengthening of citizen protection networks.

Our meetings with the expert were an opportunity to call his attention to the Registry of attacks against women defenders and journalists, administered by the RNDDHM and the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders. According to the Registry, **from 2010 to 2016, 41 women human rights defenders (11 of whom were journalists) were killed due to their defense work^{iv}**. This data was included in the Mission Closure Report submitted by the UN representative.

In the same vein, we told the Rapporteur that there are four attacks on women defenders in Mexico every week, and that their frequency is increasing. We also noted that our main aggressors are public officials, among them police officers, and that the most recurrent attacks we face are intimidation and smear campaigns using macho, sexist language. Furthermore, we reported cases of torture, sexual and workplace harassment, threats against our children, and femicides.

In his report, the Rapporteur echoed some of our basic concerns as follows: *“Most women defenders are at risk not only due to their work but to their gender”*; *“they are likely to suffer sexual violence, threats on social networks, or smear campaigns based on gender stereotypes”*; *“due to the fact that they challenge the patriarchy and misogyny, women defenders may also face violence and discrimination in their own families and communities, given that their defense work is often seen as less important or at variance with the role assigned to them socially and culturally.”* With regards to this last point, Michel Forst calls on the civil society to *“deal with discrimination against women and LGBTI defenders in their own movements.”*

The UN representative also stressed the fact that in social networks, women defenders are the target of specific attacks including messages that incite violence against us or urge *“rape as punishment.”* Moreover, he points out that we face smear campaigns with a heavy gender component, including insults or references to us as prostitutes or women without values or morality.

We who make up the RNDDHM appreciate the Rapporteur’s visit, his sensitivity and interest in incorporating a gender perspective in his work, and his willingness to meet with women defenders and journalists in spaces specifically designated for the analysis of our situation.

And finally, we are grateful for the emphasis he has placed on our efforts in defender networks, pointing out that *“they are a key factor in protection”*, and for his acknowledgement of our work: *“I want to publicly acknowledge and support the work led by networks, such as the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders, which has been crucial in helping women break the cycle of violence and stigmatization and has offered many opportunities for self-protection and capacity building.”*

We urge the Mexican government to comply with the package of recommendations that the Rapporteur made in his Mission Closure Report, particularly the following:

- 1. Broad dissemination of the 2013 UN General Assembly Resolution on Human Rights Defenders.
- 2. Integration of a gender perspective into all policies related to the protection and empowerment of defenders.
- 3. Strengthening and integration of a gender approach in the National Mechanism, which implies, among other things, a comprehensive review of the different stereotypes and types of violence.
- 4. A guarantee in the Mechanism of the existence of female personnel with appropriate training who are available for risk analysis,.
- 5. Assurance by the Mechanism of the possibility for defenders’ family members, particularly boys and girls, to be considered in a risk analysis.
- 6. Public recognition, at both the federal and state levels, of the fundamental role played by defenders and journalists in democratic societies.
- 7. Condemnation of any public expression that discredits defenders or validates the violations committed against them.

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i Mission Closure Statement, January 25, 2017. Source: http://hchr.org.mx/images/doc_pub/SRHRD-END-OF-MISSION-STATEMENT-FINAL_ESP.pdf

ii Made up of 222 women defenders in the 23 states of Mexico

iii Mexico City, Monterrey, Puebla, Morelos, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacan, Queretaro, Tamaulipas, Baja California Sur and Sonora. It is important to note that in meetings with the civil society in Chihuahua and Oaxaca, RNDDHM members also participated.

iv Bety Cariño (Oaxaca), Josefina Reyes (Chihuahua), Marisela Escobedo (Chihuahua), María Isabella Cordero Martínez (Chihuahua, journalist), María Elvira Hernández Galeana (Guerrero, journalist), Selene Hernández León (State of Mexico, journalist), María Magdalena Reyes Salazar (Chihuahua), Luisa Ornelas (Chihuahua), Susana Chávez Castillo (Chihuahua), Isabel Ayala Nava (Guerrero), Reyna Ayala Nava (Guerrero), Carmela Elisarraraz Méndez (Michoacan), Bárbara Lezama (Puebla), Julia Marichal Martínez (Mexico City), Ana María Marcela Yarce Viveros (Mexico City, journalist), Rocío González Trápaga (Mexico City, journalist), Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz (Veracruz, journalist), María Elizabeth Macías Castro (Tamaulipas, journalist), Agnes Torres Hernández (Puebla), Regina Martínez (Veracruz), Durvin Ramírez Díaz (Tabasco), Manuela Martha Solís Contreras (Chihuahua), Juventina Villa Mojica (Guerrero), Fabiola Osorio Bernáldez (Guerrero), Renata-René Espinoza Reyes (State of Mexico), Irma Ascencio Arenas (Hidalgo), María Concepción Martínez Medina (Mexico City), Gari Gómez Bastida (Hidalgo), Rocío Mesino (Guerrero), Ana Lilia Gatica (Guerrero), Sandra Luz Hernández (Sinaloa), Marlén Valdez García (Nuevo Leon, journalist), María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio (Tamaulipas), Norma Angélica Bruno Roman (Guerrero), Nelva Edilia Sánchez López (Guerrero), Nadia Dominique Vera Pérez (Veracruz), Cornelia San Juan Guevara Guerrero (State of Mexico), Anabel Flores Salazar (Veracruz, journalist), Zamira Esther Bautista Luna (Tamaulipas, journalist), Tania Nadshiely Verónica Luna (Puebla), Alessa Flores (Mexico City)