

THE CRISIS WAS ALREADY HERE

Mesoamerican WHRDs and COVID-19

Collective authorship¹

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The crisis was already here

By the time the Coronavirus arrived in Mesoamerica, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in the region were already facing the consequences of a structural crisis provoked by a political and economic model inherited from colonial times. This model keeps our region immersed in violence, extractivist looting, and profound inequality that affects our lives, bodies, and territories.

The health emergency has brought to light the collapse of public services resulting from neoliberal policies that are responsible for privatization, looting, and precarious conditions in the institutions: Overflowing and unsanitary hospitals, health personnel – mostly women – without basic rights and victims of attacks, etc. Support to alleviate the lack of basic resources is insufficient and in countries such as El Salvador and Honduras, it is distributed on a discretionary basis.

The Honduran government, denounced internationally for its links with drug trafficking, is taking advantage of increased healthcare spending to perpetrate new acts of corruption. The “solidarity baskets” of food are denied to people who are critical of the government.¹

The confinement has increased poverty. Millions of people who make their living through informal work have lost their livelihoods, or have been forced to continue working at risk of contagion. Many others continue migrating to escape poverty and violence, but have been detained or abandoned on the way. Entire communities live in hunger.

In El Salvador, people who have nothing to eat wave white flags outside their homes. In Honduras, people from different communities are out of the street demanding food from the authorities, some carrying signs stating, “We are hungry.”²

Staying at home has **increased the vulnerability of families who live in overcrowded conditions and without access to water, and has increased women’s burden of care and domestic work.** The confinement exacerbates domestic violence against women and children, and hides the fact that **more women are dying due to femicidal violence than from COVID-19.**

1 National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras

2 National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in El Salvador and National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras

- Complaints relating to violence against women **in El Salvador** have increased by 70%.
- **In Honduras**, 83 feminicides and over 18,000 cases of domestic violence have been documented during the pandemic.
- **In Mexico**, as of 13 April 100 women have died from the Coronavirus while 367 were assassinated in that same time period.³

At the height of the health emergency, **private companies are committing serious abuses against workers** with the permission of governments: massive layoffs, obligation to work in conditions of risk, refusal to comply with health measures, neglecting to disseminate information, among others.

On 12 May in Tijuana, Mexico, two women – mother and daughter – who worked in the Smith Medical maquila [factory] died from COVID-19 after they were denied disability leave. “I don’t want to hear about God,” said the husband and father of the two women.⁴

3 Sources: México. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2020/04/13/mexico-abandona-las-mujeres-violentadas-en-esta-contingencia/> El Salvador. <https://arpas.org.sv/2020/04/alarmando-aumento-de-feminicidios-en-el-salvador-durante-cuarentena-denuncian-organizaciones/>. Honduras. <https://www.latribuna.hn/2020/05/07/durante-pandemia-han-asesinado-a-83-mujeres/>

4 <https://editportal.jornadabc.mx/tijuana/12-05-2020/madre-e-hija-murieron-por-covid-familia-culpa-maquila-donde-laboraban>

The health emergency is being used as an excuse to strengthen authoritarianism

Prior to the Coronavirus, the region was already living in a state of militarization, repression of social protest, and violence against women human rights defenders. Between 2017 and 2018, IM-Defensoras documented 3,305 attacks against WHRDs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. **The pandemic became the perfect excuse to continue weakening democracy and increasing authoritarianism.**

- A few months after the President of **El Salvador** burst into Congress with the military, the government imposed a **“State of Quarantine”** that has led to 2,424 people being detained.⁵
- **Constitutional rights and guarantees were suspended in Honduras** by decree, including freedom of expression and the right to the inviolability of the home.
- A **“total closure”** of the country was imposed in **Guatemala**, leaving thousands of communities locked down and isolated.
- While the Federal Government in **Mexico** has not taken a repressive approach, many local authorities are using **punitive social control measures**.
- **The political persecution and repression of social protest** has not ceased in **Nicaragua** while the authorities threaten anyone who contradicts the official story that denies the pandemic.

Misinformation and fear lead society to accept or support authoritarian measures, increasing risks for WHRDs and weakening public support for our work. With presidents turned into “saviors of the people”, governments that are the main culprits in attacks against WHRDs⁶ now enjoy more impunity and social tolerance to silence those of us who denounce human rights violations.

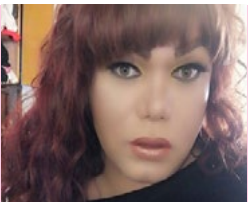
⁵ Based on official data: <https://covid19.gob.sv/>

⁶ Based on IM-Defensoras' Registry of Attacks

From 8 March to date, **IM-Defensoras has issued 44 alerts**, 25 of which are directly related to attacks in the context of the COVID-19 measures.

They are killing us

Confinement has not prevented WHRDs from being assassinated in this period. This is clear evidence of the permissiveness and impunity with which the aggressors act.



Karla Camarena, also known as Valentina Ferrey, was a well-known LGBTI rights defender. She was assassinated on Sunday 29 March in San Felipe municipality, in the state of Guanajuato.⁷



Paulina Gómez Palacios Escudero, a peasant farmer from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, was found dead on 22 March. The defender of territories worked with the Wixarika Regional Council, which had been fighting since 2009 to block mining activities in their territory.⁸



The Mexican journalist **María Elena Ferral** died in the hospital as a result of injuries received when she was attacked with a firearm on 30 March in Papantla, state of Veracruz. She was threatened and attacked through social media because of her work denouncing corruption and political crimes.⁹



Iris Argentina Álvarez, a member of the peasant collective Cerro Escondido, was assassinated in Honduras on 2 April during an illegal violent eviction carried out by private security agents from the sugar company La Grecia. Police agents were in the area when the attackers opened fire against several families, and they did nothing to stop the violence.¹⁰

7 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/whrdalert-trans-community-rights-defender-karla-camarena-killed-in-guanajuato-mexico/>
 8 <https://www.rompeviento.tv/justicia-para-paulina-gomez-palacios-defensora-de-territorio-wirikuta/>
 9 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/whrdalert-mexico-journalist-maria-elena-ferral-hernandez-killed-in-papantla-veracruz/>
 10 <https://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/whrdalert-honduras-defender-killed-by-security-agents-in-violent-illegal-eviction/>

They detain us and put us at risk

In every country in the region, WHRDs and our communities are facing police abuse with the excuse of complying with the confinement measures. In many situations, police forces have used COVID-19 as an excuse to continue criminalizing and restricting our work. The risks faced by WHRDs who are detained in El Salvador and Nicaragua are especially serious.

*In Nicaragua, on 24 March, **María Esperanza Sánchez**, jailed in the women's prison for her participation in the 2018 demonstrations, had bronchitis, an asthma attack, and an episode of high-blood pressure while she was in custody. She was denied medical attention, medicines, and protection against the Coronavirus. Another four women are deprived of their freedom for political motives, one of them is transgender. They all have respiratory illnesses associated with the risk of COVID-19 contagion.¹¹*

*In El Salvador, **Ana Cristina Barahona** of the Network of Mesoamerican Women in Resistance was detained by the national civil police when she was on her way to get medicine for her 3-year-old son who was in the hospital, even though she had a justification for being on the street. She was taken to a detention center with unsanitary conditions where there were other women detained. They did not provide her with a facemask, disinfectant gel, nor access to medicine for her diabetes. She remained detained for more than 30 days.¹²*

*In Honduras, on 24 March, **Evelyn Johana Castillo** of the Women's Network of Ojojona Municipality was detained at 3:30 pm when she was going to find food. The detention lasted until 6 in the morning the next day. At the time of her detention, an agent said to her: "This one is known to be arrogant, better take her to the dungeon..."¹³*

*In México, on 24 April, municipal police officers from Merida, state of Yucatan, arrived at the clinic run by WHRD **Sandra Peniche Quintal** and threatened to arrest three people who work there. The WHRD has protection from the National Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, due to an assassination attempt in 2018.¹⁴*

11 <https://im-defensoras.org/2020/03/whrdalert-nicaragua-health-care-and-access-to-medicine-denied-to-activist-and-political-prisoner-esperanza-sanchez/>

12 <http://im-defensoras.org/etiqueta/derechos-de-las-mujeres/>, <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/05/alerta-defensoras-sv-actualizacion-las-defensoras-cristina-barahona-y-sara-benitez-siguen-retenidas-en-centro-de-contencion-de-covid-19/>

13 <https://im-defensoras.org/2020/03/whrdalert-honduras-police-arbitrarily-arrest-defender-evelyn-castillo-on-pretext-of-covid-19-emergency/>

14 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/whrdalert-mexico-yucatan-authorities-and-police-harass-feminist-defender-dr-sandra-peniche-quintal/>

We are attacked for protecting the commons

Extractive activities have not stopped, despite their harmful impacts on people's health and safety. Taking advantage of the limitations of communities to resist, States and corporations are expanding extractive projects and presenting them as the only alternative for addressing the economic emergency.

*The **Canaan, el Hatillo, and Tamara communities** in Honduras were repressed by the National Police with tear gas and armored trucks, because they organized a peaceful occupation demanding food and water in order to live through the quarantine. Many of the demonstrators were women.¹⁵ **COPINH** and **OFRANEH** have denounced that the government has also harassed communities, tolerated violence against them, and blocked the successful health measures that the indigenous communities and organizations have put in place to protect themselves from COVID-19.*

*In the Guatemalan municipality of **El Estor**, the Guatemalan Nickel Company has continued its operations despite the curfew decreed by the government. Municipal authorities and the q'eqchi people are implementing the official measures to prevent and contain the virus. But the refusal of the company to suspend operations increases the risk, and this has created unrest among the women, their families, and the mineworkers.¹⁶*

We are defamed and harassed

Governments have taken advantage of the social permissiveness for their social control measures in the context of the pandemic to defame WHRDs. In countries like El Salvador, online defamation campaigns and violence against WHRDs – often using private information or sexist attacks – have increased alarmingly.

*In **El Salvador**, on 29 March, **President Nayib Bukele** affirmed on Twitter that “sometimes it seems that some ‘human rights’ organizations only work for more human deaths...” Two days later, the **Labor Minister, Rolando Castro**, attacked WHRD **Bertha María Deleón** with slanderous and misogynist insults. These attacks were previously incited by **Walter Araujo**, who is close to the President, when he slandered the WHRD questioning her “sexual morality” and sharing her professional work and her private life.¹⁷*

15 Report to UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders. IM-Defensoras

16 <https://medium.com/@PrensaComunitar/ni-la-covid-19-ni-la-corte-de-constitucionalidad-detienen-las-operaciones-mineras-9f476ba0d8f7>

17 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/whrd-alert-el-salvador-officials-of-bukele-government-foster-smear-campaigns-and-attacks-in-social-networks/>

In México, on 7 April at 10:00 pm, by order of the Municipal President, a group of Oaxacan municipal police officers arrived at the home of WHRD Miriam Pascual with the aim of intimidating her, because – given the lack of governmental and municipal information about COVID-19 from official institutions – she has provided information and guidance to the community.¹⁸

In Guatemala, on 15 April, a radio program by **La Cuerda Feminist Association** transmitted over Zoom was interrupted by pornographic images and insults right at the moment that an interview was being conducted with a worker from the Guatemalan Public Healthcare System.

In Nicaragua, on 15 April, the **Madres de Abril Association** denounced police harassment, siege and attacks on their homes and the violation of their right to freedom of movement in the context of the commemoration of the assassination of their relatives during the repressive acts of 2018.

The impacts of the health crisis on our lives and our struggles

Right at this time, when our work as WHRDs is crucial for denouncing power abuses and human rights violations committed in the context of the health emergency, our living and working conditions have notably deteriorated because of the measures implemented by the States. **For this reason, IM-Defensoras is assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on our lives and our work**, which we will present shortly. Some of the main findings documented up to now are described below.

Restrictions and inadequate conditions to conduct our human rights defense work

- The majority of our organizations have had to **limit, restrict, or suspend planned activities**, and there is a strong concern that we cannot **express ourselves, organize and continue to denounce** human rights violations.
- **Impact of virtual work.** Although we have made tremendous efforts to work virtually, not only do we not have adequate conditions and resources (limited internet access and other communications tools, small and inappropriate spaces, high workload in the house), but also the virtual work cannot substitute the close community work that we do accompanying our communities.
- **Prohibiting our ability to mobilize and demonstrate** has left open space for the perpetrators of human rights violations. This is the case for extractive corporations or organized crime groups that – with government complicity or inaction – continue their violence and dispossession against communities.
- Social movements and organizations that can contribute alternatives to the crisis that respect human rights have been **excluded from processes to create and implement responses to the pandemic.**
- As in other moments of crisis, **women's rights are being sidelined**, limiting even more the work of women and feminist organizations in the region.

A deterioration of our living conditions

- **Restrictions in movement to be able to acquire basic products and medicines;** including arbitrary detentions that especially affect women defenders who are heads of households.
- **Loss of economic means to sustain the family.** Many WHRDs who do not have fixed salaries or benefits have been fired, or are prohibited from conducting our economic activity.
- **Lack of access to food and economic assistance.** In El Salvador and Honduras, for example, we have documented the refusal to provide this support to WHRDs in reprisal for their work denouncing human rights violations.
- **Lack of access to health services and restricted access to medicine,** particularly affecting WHRDs and family members in their care who have pre-existing conditions that require permanent care and medicine.
- **Lack of supply and limited access to water,** including drinking water.
- **Overload in care and house work.** Confinement, the lack of income, the care and/or support of dependents, and the school closings have increased our burden of care work.
- Although it is a small percentage, there are defenders who report a higher **risk of male-chauvinist violence in their homes.**

Impacts on our emotional and psychosocial wellbeing

- **Fear, anxiety, and even depression** due to uncertainty and the effects of the current situation on ourselves, our families, communities, and organizational processes.
- **Increased stress and emotional exhaustion because of the working conditions:** virtual work; longer working hours; working in small spaces that are shared and lacking in communications infrastructure; increased workload in the home.
- **Distress and tension caused by confinement itself** and what that means for our lives and political action. Inability to meet, to hug; we feel isolated.
- **Hopelessness and unease** with the current situation.

New limitations for WHRDs who face criminalization processes

- Many **hearings** related to judicial processes **against criminalized WHRDs have been suspended**, resulting in lengthened processes.
- When the hearings are not suspended, **accompanying organizations cannot participate** or conduct their accompaniment work.
- WHRDs who are unable to sign in periodically at the courthouse because of movement restrictions risk being accused of not complying with this obligation.

Despite this extremely adverse context, WHRDs, our organizations and communities, quickly organized ourselves to confront the crisis and support those most vulnerable.

Distributing food and basic necessities, creating of health centers and alternatives, assisting victims of domestic violence, accompanying women defenders at risk, denouncing human rights violations, among other responses. In these months, we have seen the strength and wisdom of indigenous peoples to safeguard the health of their communities, the ability of feminists to create mutual care networks, and the creativity of all to continue to protest despite the confinement.

ANNEX - SITUATION BY COUNTRY

EL SALVADOR¹

“The situation is unsustainable, in just one month we’ve had 15 attacks on WHRDs. In the time it takes us to identify who to support, they are already dying of hunger.”

- Many sectors in the country are experiencing hunger, people who have nothing to eat put out white flags to signal for help. The government’s economic support is insufficient, and local governments and parties distribute it at their discretion. In this context, violence increases in homes that have become even more impoverished.
- In a context where the President of the Republic was already strengthening authoritarianism, militarization, and the violation of the State’s laicism, the decreed “State of Quarantine” has meant confinement, restrictions in movement and gatherings, and detention centers where numerous human rights violations have been documented.
- According to official data, there are 2,424² people detained for “violating the quarantine”, among them many women and human rights defenders, trans persons and heads of households who remain detained in crowded and unhealthy conditions, separated from their families, and without receiving information about the tests that have been conducted on them. WHRDs are afraid, and they do not maintain the same level of activity for fear that they will be taken to a containment center.
- **Complaints regarding violence against women have increased 70% in this period.**³
- Dissident voices to the government measures are defamed in digital media, especially from the President’s Office (“they defend criminals”, “they act outside of the law”, are some of the critiques). Attacks have been orchestrated not only against critical voices but also against people and organizations that support them. Social media attacks against WHRDs – with a clear sexist component – have increased alarmingly in this period.
- The Executive power has met with the oligarchy to discuss the reconstruction of the economy, and not with other State powers. Civil society organizations have been completely excluded from the dialogue regarding how to manage the pandemic and the reconstruction of the country.
- **The Salvadorean Network of Women Defenders has documented a considerable increase in attacks, compared with previous years (15 in just one month).** Along with attacks related to the current situation, there are continued attacks against defenders of sexual and reproductive rights.

1 Main source: Salvadorean Network of Women Human Rights Defenders.

2 Based on official data: <https://covid19.gob.sv/>

3 <https://arpas.org.sv/2020/04/alarmante-aumento-de-feminicidios-en-el-salvador-durante-cuarentena-denuncian-organizaciones/>.

EL SALVADOR¹

ALERTS

1. [15/05/2020] [Las defensoras Cristina Barahona y Sara Benítez, siguen retenidas en centro de contención de COVID-19](#)
2. [04/05/2020] [La página web de la Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto El Salvador, tuvo más de 13,000 intentos de sabotaje para dar de baja al sitio.](#)
3. [17/04/2020] [Fueron hackeadas las cuentas de Twitter, Facebook y correo electrónico de la periodista Yaneth Estrada.](#)
4. [16/04/2020] [Agentes de la Policía Nacional Civil, amenazan a periodista de Radio Victoria – Arpas, haciendo uso de fuerza excesivo](#)
5. [15/04/2020] [Defensora es detenida y llevada a centro de contención, por salir a comprar artículos de primera necesidad para sus hijas menores](#)
6. [14/04/2020] [En el marco de Covid-19, policía envía a centro de detención a defensora por salir por medicamentos para su hijo hospitalizado](#)
7. [03/04/2020] [Movimiento ecofeminista de El Salvador es atacado por su posicionamiento ante la crisis generada por COVID-19](#)
8. [02/04/2020] [Ataques, calumnias y hostigamiento en redes sociales contra la defensora Camila Portillo](#)
9. [01/04/2020] [Officials of Bukele government foster smear campaigns and attacks in social networks](#)
10. [17/05/2020] [Defender harassed and insulted in social networks for denouncing unhealthy and overcrowded conditions of persons quarantined due to Covid-19](#)

HONDURAS¹

“Between the never-ending repression and the pandemic that became a tool for repression. Many WHRD sisters are facing hunger.”

- Corruption and the collapse of the healthcare system had already provoked strong protests in 2019 that were forcefully repressed. In the current context, people’s health conditions continue to deteriorate and there are new acts of corruption with the excuse of increased spending on healthcare. At the same time, the priority of caring for COVID-19 leaves other health needs unattended. An example of this is that women are afraid to go to health centers to give birth; the midwives who had been outlawed are now re-organizing themselves to be able to support women.
- The situation of impoverishment and hunger is seen throughout the country. The government’s “solidarity baskets” with basic goods are distributed discretionally, and those who are critical of the government are denied the support. Two groups that are particularly vulnerable are the maquila [factory] workers who were left jobless and unable to return to their communities because they are closed off, and the migrant population in transit.
- **During the pandemic, 83 feminicides and more than 18,000 cases of domestic violence have been documented.**²
- The President, accused of having links with drug traffickers, continues on the authoritarian path initiated with the 2009 Coup. Constitutional rights and guarantees have been suspended in Honduras by decree, including freedom of expression and the right to the inviolability of the home. This decree includes exceptions for some sectors but not for human rights defenders.
- The military has taken over the management of the pandemic, and the opposition has denounced the President’s intention to cancel the elections.³
- The possible entry into force of the new Criminal Code, despite the extension decreed by Congress and the fact that it has been identified by national and international human rights bodies as a human rights violation, would further aggravate violence and abuses of power in the country.⁴

1 Main source: National Network of WHRDs in Honduras. For more information, see Network Newsletter: <http://im-defensoras.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Boletin-Honduras.pdf>

2 <https://www.latribuna.hn/2020/05/07/durante-pandemia-han-asesinado-a-83-mujeres/>

3 <https://criterio.hn/oposicion-cierra-filas-ante-utilizacion-politica-de-la-pandemia/>

4 <https://twitter.com/RedDefensoras/status/1258792151401533440>

HONDURAS¹

- Linked to this, the call to decongest prisons has led to a process of selective justice: while people accused of corruption are released, defenders of the territory such as the Guapinol water defenders are left in jail.⁵ In this context, there is a danger that the persons accused of assassinating **Berta Cáceres** could go free.⁶
- **Attacks against defenders of the territory continue.** Of particular concern are the attacks, violence, and harassment against Lenca and Garifuna communities, which have a history of defending their territories against extractive projects and which also implement important community health measures against COVID-19.

ALERTS

1. [26/05/2020] [Con mensajes misóginos y fascistas atacan cibernéticamente a compañeras de la plataforma Somos Muchas](#)
2. [21/05/2020] [Por no entregar la llave de portón de bioseguridad asesinan al compañero de OFRANEH, Edwin Fernández](#)
3. [24/04/2020] [En plena crisis sanitaria, habitantes de varias zonas del país son víctimas de marginamiento gubernamental y represión](#)
4. [09/04/2020] [Autores materiales e intelectuales del asesinato de Berta Cáceres podrían ser liberados](#)
5. [03/04/2020] [Defender killed by security agents in violent, illegal eviction](#)
6. [30/03/2020] [Familias migrantes de origen haitiano y africano echadas en la calle en la ciudad de Choluteca](#)
7. [30/03/2020] [Police arbitrarily arrest defender Evelyn Castillo on pretext of Covid-19 emergency](#)
8. [17/03/2020] [Activist Aleyda Huete arbitrarily arrested and criminalized during Covid-19 curfew](#)

5 <https://cejil.org/es/guapinol-urge-revocar-prision-preventiva-defensores-del-agua-frente-riesgos-covid-19>

6 <https://copinh.org/2020/04/la-justicia-para-berta-esta-en-riesgo/>

MEXICO¹

“Attacks and online smear campaigns against women journalists have increased in COVID times.”

- The management of the pandemic faces strong limitations due to the looting, precariousness, and pre-existing collapse of the health system. Additionally, numerous verbal and physical attacks against health personnel, mostly women, have been documented.
- Homicidal violence continues without pause.² As of 13 April, 100 women have died from the Coronavirus while 367 were assassinated; calls for help due to domestic violence have also increased.³
- While the federal government has not proposed repression to impose the COVID-19 management measures, not all the states have acted in the same way. In places like Jalisco, Puebla, Oaxaca and Yucatan, abuse of power and other attacks against defenders, journalists and the general public by the authorities (patrolling with long weapons as in Yucatan; arbitrary detentions, threats from the authorities or legislative initiatives to restrict rights as in the case of Puebla) have been documented.⁴
- Human rights organizations are concerned about the President’s challenging of the press and his doubting the gravity of the situation of violence against women.
- The use of bots activated by NOTIMEX (the state news agency) to smear journalists – among them Lydia Cacho and Carmen Aristegui – have been denounced.
- The State has tolerated serious health risks created by private corporations. COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths in maquilas [factories] and mines, and the refusal of companies to close operations or follow health measures are some examples. Meanwhile, the commitment to the extractive economy continues.
- During this period, the legal reform process has advanced to allow the presence of the military in public security tasks for another 4 years, without an effective justice system to address the crimes committed in previous administrations and without clear mechanisms to control violations and abuses of power.

1 National Network of WHRDs in Mexico

2 <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2020/04/dia-mas-violento-mexico-114-homicidios-cuarentena/>

3 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2020/04/13/mexico-abandona-las-mujeres-violentadas-en-esta-contingencia/>

4 Sources: <https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020-04-21/los-gobernadores-mexicanos-endurecen-el-aislamiento-y-se-enfrentan-a-lopez-obrador.html>

<https://www.lajornadadeoriente.com.mx/puebla/red-nacional-de-periodistas-noticias-falsas/>

<https://desinformemonos.org/no-reprimir-al-pueblo-por-covid-19-demandan-organizaciones-en-oaxaca/>

MEXICO¹

- **Attacks against WHRDs in 2020 documented by month: January – 31, February – 59, March – 64, and April – 34. Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz, and Mexico City are the states where the most attacks were registered. In March alone, three women defenders and journalists were assassinated.**

ALERTS

1. [24/05/2020] [Atentan contra la periodista María Fernanda de Luna Ferral en el Estado de Veracruz](#)
2. [24/05/2020] [Amenaza de nuevo ataque armado al Pueblo Ikoots de San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca](#)
3. [04/05/2020] [Violent attack against Ikoots People in San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca](#)
4. [26/04/2020] [Yucatan authorities and police harass feminist defender Dr. Sandra Peniche Quintal](#)
5. [12/04/2020] [Hostigamiento hacia la comunicadora y defensora de Derechos Humanos Miriam Pascual](#)
6. [09/04/2020] [Retiran protección a defensora y víctimas de violencia con medidas cautelares en Yucatán](#)
7. [01/04/2020] [Trans community rights defender Karla Camarena killed in Guanajuato, Mexico](#)
8. [31/03/2020] [Journalist María Elena Ferral Hernández killed in Papantla, Veracruz](#)
9. [26/03/2020] [Asesinan a Paulina Gómez Palacio Escudero, guardiania del territorio sagrado de Wirikuta](#)

NICARAGUA¹

“Fear because of secrecy and the lack of information about COVID-19 adds to the fear of public persecution that is with us since 2018.”

- The political and human rights crisis that began in April 2018 is still ongoing; a climate of violence and harassment of WHRDs and their families persists, while political assassinations remain in impunity.
- When the worldwide health alert began, the government responded by convening massive demonstrations to show that, “the people are not afraid of COVID.” Since then, the government has not decreed a single confinement measure, insisting on a discourse of denial in relation to COVID-19. Faced with international pressure and the fact that citizens and even government bodies began to implement measures unilaterally, the State is putting in place some prevention and sanitary measures, but confusion and contradictory messages reign.
- The right to information is restricted. Medical personnel has been fired for denouncing the lack of conditions to face the pandemic, and authorities threaten media outlets that disseminate information contrary to the official position.
- Jailed WHRDs are at high risk due to the terrible conditions in the prisons (overpopulation and overcrowding), the illnesses that they suffer, and the precarious medical attention.² Four women are currently deprived of their liberty for political motives, one of them is transgender.³ In this period, more than 2,000 people have been freed from prisons (mostly men), but none who were imprisoned for political motives. Women victims of violence whose aggressors were freed, and WHRDs and organizations who accompany them, are at risk.
- For their part, women defenders – particularly political prisoners who were released and the lawyers who accompany their cases – face the risk of being criminalized if they demand rights in the context of the pandemic, and they are being denied access to public health services because of the stigmatization and persecution against them. Harassment by the police and para-police groups continues.
- During this period, prisoners who committed sexual violence and femicide were released.
- **In April alone, 136 attacks against WHRDs were documented.**

¹ Source: Nicaraguan Initiative of WHRDs

² <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/statement-report/nicaraguan-government-continues-put-lives-imprisoned-women-human-rights-defenders>

³ <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/04/alerta-urgente-nicaragua-la-policia-detiene-de-manera-arbitraria-a-la-joven-activista-transgenero-celia-cruz-de-la-isla-de-ometepe/>

NICARAGUA

ALERTS

1. [01/05/2020] [Released political prisoner Karla Escobar subjected to violent arrest and taken to “El Chipote” penitentiary](#)
2. [22/04/2020] [La policía detiene de manera arbitraria a la joven activista transgénero Celia Cruz, de la isla de Ometepe](#)
3. [21/04/2020] [As of April 15, countrywide police harassment of mothers and families of persons killed in 2018 protests](#)
4. [20/04/2020] [Al menos 70 mujeres activistas y defensoras de derechos humanos han sido agredidas por policías y paramilitares desde el 15 de abril, en el marco del 2º aniversario del inicio de la crisis en Nicaragua](#)
5. [18/04/2020] [Intensifican represión y hostigamiento contra activistas, periodistas y defensoras en el marco del segundo aniversario de la crisis política y de derechos humanos en Nicaragua](#)
6. [14/04/2020] [Acuerdo entre patronal, sindicatos oficiales y gobierno por COVID-19 vulnera derechos laborales y agrava precariedad económica de trabajadoras de maquilas](#)
7. [10/04/2020] [Policías allanan ilegalmente la casa de la presa política excarcelada Ruth Matute, detienen a su esposo e incautan materiales de trabajo](#)
8. [06/04/2020] [Government aligned forces attack women journalists through smear campaigns, hate speech and threats of sexual violence](#)
9. [05/04/2020] [Policía asedia y amenaza a las activistas Guisella Ortega, Dolly Mora y Flor Ramírez](#)
10. [27/03/2020] [Police lay siege to home of activist Flor Ramírez and block her exit](#)
11. [24/03/2020] [Health care and access to medicine denied to activist and political prisoner Esperanza Sánchez](#)
12. [23/03/2020] [Social network users post threats, hate speech, and incitements to sexual violence against Kenia Gutiérrez](#)
13. [20/03/2020] [Student leader Dolly Mora threatened, harassed and expelled from university](#)
14. [13/03/2020] [Police arbitrarily detain, beat and threaten defender Irma Centeno](#)

GUATEMALA¹

“Everything implemented so far comes from donations from businessmen and collaborators (primarily from extractive companies and agents linked to drug trafficking) who are mortgaging the political capital of the current government, and this will have devastating medium- and long-term costs for the majority of the population.”

- The “State of Calamity” (which includes a curfew from 5 am to 5 pm, total closure of the country from Friday to Monday, prohibition of assembly, and restriction of inter-departmental movement) was imposed by a State that was already strengthening impunity for abuses of power, corruption and crimes against humanity. The measures have been accompanied by constant threats to the population by the President of the Republic (“if you do not behave, I will declare a state of siege”) and the lock-down of entire communities by poorly implemented sanitary cordons that have blocked the minimum supplies to many at-risk populations.
- The defamation of journalists is constant, and they have been denied all access to public information. Press conferences and access to healthcare centers have been prohibited, and the government’s usual communications channels with mass media have been severely reduced.
- Despite the approval of millions in loans from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration to attend to the emergency in the country, only 1% of funds have been used. The social audit processes are stuck and intentionally blocked; Congress does not prioritize accountability for the healthcare investments.
- There are only three special treatment centers for COVID-19 in the entire country, and they are completely saturated and lack respirators, beds, and protection and biosafety equipment for the healthcare personnel.
- There are no effective measures to ensure basic services for the population: water shortages or absence affects 30% of the country’s population; the right to food is denied and politicized through conditional and partisan concessions; and the inability to control price hikes for basic products has become evident. In this context, the military has been charged with distributing basic aid to the population, in that way reinforcing their presence in communities.

GUATEMALA

ALERTS

1. [23/05/2020] [Sujetos desconocidos allanan el domicilio, agreden físicamente y roban equipo de trabajo de la defensora Tania Palencia](#)
2. [30/04/2020] [Trabajadoras del Hospital Nacional Roosevelt denuncian no tener acceso a equipos médicos de protección ni a pruebas de COVID-19 pese a haber pacientes que han dado positivo](#)
3. [19/04/2020] [Ataque digital durante transmisión en Zoom de programa radial de la organización feminista La Cuerda](#)