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MEXICO CSW calls on government to protect religious minorities in Puebla State

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the Mexican government to protect religious minorities in the state of Puebla, where over the last few months, non-Catholics have come under attack by traditionalist authorities and church leaders have expressed fear for their lives.

CSW was informed last week that traditionalist Catholics had threatened to “lynch and crucify” around 70 evangelical Protestants if they did not leave the village of San Rafael Tlanalapan in the municipality of San Martín Texmelucan. According to the La Jornada de Oriente newspaper, many of the Protestants sought refuge in a church in Alto Aposento after the government failed to intervene.

Tensions have also escalated in another town in the state where local authorities cut off water supplies to members of the Baptist church in the community after the Baptists refused to contribute monetarily to a Catholic religious festival. The authorities in the town of San Jose de Axuxco in the municipality of Miahuatlán began by cutting off the Baptists’ access to water for their crops in May. In the absence of any government intervention the situation deteriorated, and this month local authorities cut off the supply of drinking water as well.

According to Mexican law, resolution to religious conflicts should be sought through dialogue. However, lawyers for the San Jose de Axuxco Baptists are concerned that in this case dialogue has not been actively pursued or facilitated by state religious affairs officials, and the situation has deteriorated to the point that the health of their clients is at risk.

Conflict between traditionalists and non-Catholics is common in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Hidalgo and Puebla where there are large indigenous populations. According to Mexican legal experts, ambiguity as to the relationship between the rights laid out in the Mexican Constitution and the Law of Uses and Customs, which gives indigenous communities a degree of autonomy to exercise traditional law, have allowed local authorities to violate the rights of members of the local communities with impunity. In addition, the Mexican government’s aversion to involving itself in religious issues has allowed such situations to escalate.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is imperative that the Mexican government take concrete steps to protect the fundamental rights of these families in Puebla as a matter of urgency. We take the threats to their lives very seriously and are deeply concerned for those who have had their drinking water cut off, putting the health of children at risk. While we agree that the Mexican government should remain neutral in religious matters, this does not mean that it can stand by while the most basic rights of its people are violated. The Mexican government must uphold religious freedom for all.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The full article in Spanish on the violence in San Rafael de Tlanalapan can be found [here](#).
2. The lawyers of the San Jose de Axuxco community are available for interviews (English or Spanish) and can be contacted via CSW.