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MEXICO | Religious Freedom Violations Prompt Forum

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) supports an initiative by the Mexican National Council for Religious Tolerance to host a forum on “Religious Persecution and its Challenges” on March 16.

The event will take place in Chiapas State, where religious freedom violations are common, and will examine the attention accorded to these issues, how violations can be prevented and how to promote a culture of tolerance. Drawing on international experiences, the forum will include perspectives from the government and civil society organizations.

The main open panel event will comprise local and national participants, including the President of the Inter-American Federation of Christian Jurists (FIAJC), representatives from Open Doors International, and a member of the Mexican Congress, Deputy Hugo Eric Flores Cervantes.

The forum follows a series of serious freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) violations in Mexico in 2016, including the destruction of churches and property and the forced displacement of members of religious minorities solely due to their religious beliefs.

One recent and particularly severe case, which took place in Gabriel Leyva Velázquez, Margaritas Municipality in Chiapas State, involved the forced displacement of nine families belonging to the Renovation in Christ denomination and the destruction of their property. These violations took place despite a January 2015 agreement between the Chiapas State government and seven Mexican communities that have experienced long standing and severe FoRB violations. As part of the agreement, the state government promised to resolve the seven cases by April 2015. Only two of the communities, from Buenavista Bahuitz, Margaritas Municipality, and Unión Juárez, Trinitaria Municipality have seen any form of resolution in their situation; and restrictions on FoRB in Buenavista Bahuitz remain in place.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We welcome tomorrow’s forum on religious persecution, organized by our Mexican colleagues, and look forward to the insights of the open panel. We continue to be deeply concerned by both the recent cases of religious freedom

violations in various states, including Chiapas, as well as by the Chiapas State government's failure to fulfil its 2015 promises to resolve long-standing cases. We call on the Mexican government to take the forum's recommendations seriously and to commit urgently to the resolution of all FoRB violations in Chiapas and other States where serious religious freedom violations are common."