

Mexican Authorities Must End Intimidation and Harassment of Migrant Rights Defenders

August 14, 2019

We, the undersigned organizations, are deeply concerned about recent harassment and intimidation by Mexican authorities of personnel working at the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo. We fully support the work of the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo, which has been providing assistance to migrants since 2002 in Saltillo, the capital of Coahuila, an area of Mexico that has experienced significant levels of violence in the past decade. Assistance provided by the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo includes medical and psychological attention for those who need it, as well as legal advice regarding migratory and deportation procedures. In addition, the shelter documents and denounces human rights violations suffered by migrants during their journey.

On July 20, at around 1:00 PM, five Federal Police officers arrived at the shelter in official vans and tried to forcibly enter the shelter to conduct an immigration check. Under Mexican law, even immigration authorities cannot enter migrant shelters, much less security forces. A human rights defender who works at the shelter, José Luis Manzo, refused to allow Federal Police to enter. In turn, the police threatened him, telling him he was “getting into a problem.”

On July 23, National Guard and municipal police of Saltillo approached the gates of the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo and tried to carry out an immigration check. Staff of the shelter reiterated that such a check was illegal. In response, National Guard and police officers photographed and videoed the Saltillo Migrant House staff members.

Since 2010, those working at the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo have had precautionary orders from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. They also have protection measures from the Mexican government’s protection mechanism. In light of the recent incidents, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission issued further precautionary measures on July 25 to the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo and to one other shelter, Exodus Migrant Assistance Center, in Agua Prieta, Sonora, recognizing the important work of these shelters and denouncing the harassment and threats against shelter personnel by the Federal Police.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico called for compliance with the Migration Law, which in its Article 76, establishes that the competent authority “will not be able to make migratory verification visits in places where migrants are housed by civil society organizations or people who carry out humanitarian acts, assistance or protection to migrants.” The Citizen’s Council of Mexico’s National Migration Institute (INM) further noted that according to the law, the INM is the only authority able to carry out the verification of someone’s migration status.

The multiple aggressions and acts of harassment faced by the Casa del Migrante de Saltillo are not isolated events but reflect an increasingly adverse climate in Mexico for the defense of the human rights of migrants, refugees, and others subject to international protection. In the past two months, other shelters in throughout the country have reported concerning efforts by police and military forces to enter their facilities.

We urge the Mexican government to respect the rights of migrants and their defenders; to fully investigate and sanction the officials involved in intimidating, threatening, and harassing the staff at Casa del Migrante de Saltillo and staff at other shelters; and to fully and effectively carry out all protection measures granted to staff of Casa del Migrante de Saltillo and staff of other shelters with protection measures in the country.

Signed,

Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)-France
Alianza Americas
Alliance of Baptists
Americans for Indigenous Opportunity
Center for International Policy Americas Program
Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)
Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) DC
Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF)
Franciscan Action Network
Friendship Office of the Americas
Global Exchange
Honduras Forum Switzerland
Iniciativa para México de Colonia y Bonn
Initiative Mexiko (INI-Mex)
Institute for Policy Studies – Global Economy Project
JASS (Just Associates)
Justicia Ontario
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
México vía Berlín
Misereor
Oficina Ecuménica para la Paz y Justicia
Open Society Justice Initiative
Pacta Servanda
Quixote Center
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)