
Mexico: The ongoing fight of indigenous communities against illegal logging

The struggle for environmental defenders in Mexico continues. Activists who seek to protect their local ecosystems continue to be under threat from illegal loggers and the inaction of local government authorities.

As part of this struggle comes the case of environmentalist Ildefonso Zamora, his family and his community of San Juan Atzingo, Ocuilán municipality in the State of Mexico. Since 1998, Ildefonso Zamora has worked to bring public attention to the problem of illegal logging in his community, which borders the Zempoala Lagoons National Park, a zone identified as one of the 15 “critical regions” affected by illegal logging in the country. The park is located within what Greenpeace calls ‘the great water forest’ which houses two percent of the world’s biodiversity and supplies three quarters of the water consumed in Mexico City, besides helping to mitigate climate change and its impacts in the region.

For the last number of years, Ildefonso, his family members and fellow commissioners of their indigenous communal landholding have been subject to a series of threats by illegal loggers. Various incidents have included gunshots outside family residences, death threats, confrontations in vehicles on the highway and even threats directed at the local mayor.

The most shocking incident against these defenders of the forest was the murder of Ildefonso’s 21-year-old son Aldo in a highway shooting at the hands of a group of illegal loggers in May 2007. The arrest of two men involved in the murder was delayed by a staggering 79 days after the shooting. At 9 months since the death of Aldo, two of the four murderers still remain at large, despite being clearly identified and having outstanding arrest warrants. Mexican President Felipe Calderón made public statements in July 2007 that he would commit to carrying out justice in the case, yet such an outcome has yet to be delivered.

These incidents occur within an environment of harassment and systematic discrediting of defenders of environmental rights in Mexico. The murder of Aldo Zamora can be placed among the similar cases of Rodolfo Montiel, Teodoro Cabrera, Felipe Arreaga and Albertano Peñaloza in the mountains of the state of Guerrero and the cases of the indigenous Tarahumaras environmentalists Isidro Baldenegro and Hermenegildo Rivas in the state of Chihuahua.

The Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center in Mexico City (Center Prodh) has been working with Ildefonso and the community of San Juan Atzingo with legal defence, awareness raising and educational workshops. In June of 2007 Center Prodh and Greenpeace Mexico made a joint request to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights for precautionary measures which would protect the life and physical integrity of victims that are under threat within the community. In January 2008 Center Prodh also highlighted the plight of the community of San Juan Atzingo in a report to the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders.

That campaigning for environmental protection in Mexico should mean putting one’s life in danger

illustrates the need for stronger accountability of local authorities and their involvement in these violations. Ildefonso Zamora and his community continue to live in mourning for the death of Aldo Zamora and are still waiting for justice and personal safety.

For more details of the case and addresses of authorities to whom letters can be directed, visit: <http://centroprodh.org.mx/english/> and also at Greenpeace Mexico's website: <http://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/press/releases/caso-aldo-zamora-seis-meses-d> or email internacional3@centroprodh.org.mx.