
Mexico: Montiel and Cabrera are finally free!

It is with great pleasure that we received news on Thursday 8 November that a few hours previously, Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera, the environmentalist peasants, unjustly imprisoned in Guerrero since May 1999, had been liberated. President Fox has not recognised their innocence, but under the pressure of the unanimous claim of Mexican and international society, he has pardoned them for humanitarian reasons.

Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera have been carrying out a campaign since 1990 against indiscriminate logging of forests in the State of Guerrero. Following the signature of an abusive agreement for forestry exploitation in 1995 between the then governor of Guerrero and the Mexican branch of the North American company Boise Cascade, the communities, permanently under attack, became even more mobilised. They unsuccessfully demanded that the commitments taken on by the company to support the local communities be honoured and they endeavoured to avoid the ecocide that was being committed with the consent of the authorities.

What they received instead was the visit of 30 soldiers, who entered the village shooting and who arrested Rodolfo and Teodoro, they obliged them to pose with arms and sacks of marihuana, they were tortured for several days and, under the threat to kill them, they were obliged to sign false declarations. They were judged for crimes against health and illegally carrying arms and confined in the prison of Iguala for two and a half years.

During those years in prison they received acknowledgement of their efforts and sacrifice from thousands of people and hundreds of environmental and human rights organisations all over the world, that were demanding their freedom. Last year the Goldman Prize was given to Rodolfo Montiel for his extraordinary commitment to the environment.

However the government continued to ignore demands for justice. The lack of recognition of the serious violations suffered by the communities in the hands of the army and the thugs paid by logging companies, have favoured other regrettable events, such as the recent murder of the lawyer, Digna Ochoa or the murder of three people, a baby, a woman and an old man, recently denounced in Guerrero.

Montiel and Cabrera's commitment with the forests is still in force, as can be seen from their recent statements: "We have always said our struggle had a beginning and the end will be death, because there is no way we will ever retreat. We are going to continue with the new struggle, knocking on doors, promoting reforestation and demanding that the government supports the communities. We will continue our struggle in favour of human rights and of the forests. One day we want our communities to be able to live better, to eat, to be clothed and to have work."

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