



12.9.13

MEXICO | Report Finds Increase in Religious Freedom Violations

Christian Solidarity Worldwide is marking Human Rights Day on Dec. 10 with the release of its latest report on freedom of religion or belief in Mexico, which finds a “significant” increase in religious freedom violations in the country in recent years.

The report launch will take place in Mexico, coordinated by CSW’s partner organization, Impulso18. The report, which will be presented to federal and state government officials by Impulso18, highlights government inaction as a factor exacerbating the pervasive religious discrimination across the country, “Although root causes vary, many violations occur with impunity because of reluctance on the part of the state to involve itself in ‘religious affairs’ or to prosecute those responsible for criminal acts linked to religious freedom violations.”

The effects of government inaction are often compounded by the Law of Uses and Customs, which gives significant autonomy to indigenous communities. “Local leaders try to enforce community uniformity in terms of religious practice and belief, compelling members of the community to participate in the religious activities of the majority or face punishment. Violations range in severity, but in the absence of government intervention, and because of a failure to hold the perpetrators to account, they all too often escalate to the point of destruction of property, arbitrary detention, forced displacement and violence,” the report states.

The report recommends “legal guarantees for freedom of religion and belief are upheld for all, and that where other laws apply, for example in communities governed by the Law of Uses and Customs, these be practiced in accordance with the Mexican Constitution and its international human rights obligations.”

Increased violence in Mexico stemming from organized crime results in religious groups facing violence from illegal cartels involved in drugs, arms and human trafficking, who “see churches as an attractive target for extortion and fronts for money laundering, and their leaders as threats to their influence and aims. Over the past few years the number of religious leaders under threat, including Catholic priests and Protestant pastors, has skyrocketed. Sadly, a significant number have been killed or kidnapped, though precise figures are difficult to obtain because of witnesses’ fear of retaliation by those responsible.” At least one Catholic parish has been effectively shut down after criminal groups threatened to kill any priest assigned to the church in the state of Michoacan.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The rise in religious freedom violations in Mexico is deeply worrying. As our report shows, the Mexican government has an important role to play, both in promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief. We urge the Mexican government

to end the culture of impunity for crimes relating to religious freedom violations. Violations of religious freedom are not and should not be a special category of crime that is exempt from prosecution. Action must also be taken to combat the threat of illegal armed groups, whose targeting of church leaders who refuse to cooperate with them on moral grounds has a chilling effect on religious freedom.”