



10.2.15

## **MEXICO | Government Urged to Take Action in Case of Displaced Protestants**

Representatives of a community of Protestants displaced for over five years travelled to Mexico City on Oct. 1, accompanied by church leaders and religious freedom organizations, to meet with federal government officials and to plead for a just resolution to their case.

In 2014, state government officials in Chiapas signed an agreement to relocate the community, who were expelled from the village of Los Llanos in early 2010 but have since taken no action to fulfill their promises.

The community of 31 men, women and children has held a permanent sit-in in the San Cristobal city plaza in Chiapas for 118 days in an effort to draw attention to their plight. Church leaders from the Alas de Águilas Church, which has given the group shelter since their displacement, told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that no one from the state government has responded or made any effort to communicate with the group during this period.

Leaders from Impulso 18, a Mexican religious freedom organization, and the Coordination of Christian Organizations, a Chiapas-based organization which supports persecuted religious minorities, accompanied the Los Llanos delegation to a meeting with the director of the Federal Religious Affairs Directorate.

The group initially hoped to return to their homes following their expulsion in January 2010, which involved the destruction of their church and a physical assault on the pastor. They later accepted the state government's offer to relocate them after an attempt to return to their homes in June 2013 ended in violence and a second expulsion. Numerous self-imposed deadlines by state government officials to resolve the case and relocate the group have passed without any action.

The Los Llanos group filed a complaint with the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), which found in 2011 that the fundamental rights of the Protestants had been violated by the local and state authorities in Chiapas and recommended that they be allowed to return to their homes, be afforded protection by the government, and that their right to religious freedom be upheld. Unfortunately, neither the federal nor state governments have taken any action to implement these recommendations. Similarly, none of those responsible for the violent attacks and destruction of property have been charged with any crime.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The failure of the Mexican government to address the Los Llanos case, despite numerous promises over the past four and a half years, is deplorable. Four years ago, the National Commission for Human Rights found that the religious

freedom and other basic human rights of the Los Llanos community had been grossly violated but their recommendations have been wholly ignored by both the federal and state governments. The Los Llanos community has demonstrated its willingness to compromise, even accepting relocation when it became clear they could not expect the government to protect them if they returned to their homes; and yet even this has been met with disregard. We hope that the meetings in Mexico City yesterday with high-level government officials will result in long overdue action to uphold their constitutional rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, and that they will be relocated to new homes without delay.”