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MEXICO | Protestant Families Forcibly Displaced

Nine protestant families were forcibly displaced because of their religious beliefs from their village in Chiapas, Mexico on Jan. 4.

Armed village leaders, led by Village Commissar Reynaldo Jiménez Hernández and Municipal Agent Francisco Jiménez Santiz, attempted to force the victims to renounce their religious beliefs. When they refused to do so they burned their homes in Gabriel Leyva Velázquez, Margaritas Municipality, forcing them to flee.

The group, from the Tojolabal indigenous group, is comprised of nine men, 10 women and 14 children. They have been under pressure to renounce their Protestant beliefs since April 2015, according to Luis Herrera of the Coordination of Christian Organizations in Chiapas.

Herrera told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that on Dec. 15, village leaders imprisoned some of them and held an assembly at which they called each Protestant individual to present themselves and sign a document confirming they had renounced their religious beliefs and “given evidence” that they had separated themselves from the Roman Catholic Church. Seven of the Protestants were imprisoned for two days. All of the adults were made to pay a fine of approximately \$145 each and a follow-up village meeting was scheduled for Jan. 4 when the destruction of property and forced displacement took place.

According to Herrera, municipal, state and federal officials all received repeated requests for urgent precautionary measures since November 2015, but they did not respond and no action was taken. The displaced families are currently being housed in the Municipal Hall in Las Margaritas.

“We were deeply disturbed to hear of the forced displacement of these 34 men, women and children on account of their religious beliefs and even more disturbed that despite warnings for months, and a series of documented illegal actions on the part of the village authorities, the Mexican government, at every level, failed to intervene to uphold the law,” CSW’s Chief

Executive Mervyn Thomas said. “The government should be ashamed that because of their inaction the situation escalated to violence and these families are now homeless. We call on the international community to raise this case and others like it with the Mexican government as a matter of urgency. We also call on Governor Velasco Coello and President Peña Nieto to take swift action to resolve this situation, to protect the basic rights of these families and to hold those who have committed criminal acts in the name of religious intolerance to account in the courts.”