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## MEXICO | Protestants Denied Burial Rights

Village authorities in Ranchera Yocnajib in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, blocked the local Protestant community from burying one of their dead in the village cemetery last month in response to their refusal to contribute to a Catholic festival.

The 17 Protestant families in the village, located in the Comitán Municipality, have refused to contribute to the religious festival for many years. In an effort to force their participation, local authorities cut off their access to water and other basic services in 2016, according to Luis Herrera of the Coordination of Christian Organisations in Chiapas.

After being told they could not bury Consuelo Méndez Hernández in the village, the families were forced to bury her in the municipal capital on Sept. 29.

The Protestant community has made complaints to authorities at various levels of government regarding the actions of the local authorities, but nothing has been done to redress these ongoing violations of freedom of religion or belief. Herrera reported that the families have been told to “accept what the Assembly has determined, or continue to suffer the consequences.”

The lack of government interest in the situation is further exemplified by the fact that the authorities did not visit to verify that the families’ access to water had been blocked until over a year after they had been cut off. No action has been taken to restore their water access.

The denial of access to basic services as a method of pressuring religious minorities to participate in the activities of the majority religion is a regular occurrence on the local level in Chiapas. The government rarely intervenes and situations often remain unresolved until members of the minority group pay fines. CSW has also received reports of similar events in the states of Oaxaca and Hidalgo.

The state government of Chiapas recently reported that all the problems derived from religious differences had been adequately addressed, however Herrera stated that “things remain the same, or maybe worse.”

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the continued denial of access to basic services of the Protestant community of Ranchería Yocnajib, and the recent decision to prevent them from burying one of their dead in the village. No one should be forced to participate in ceremonies that contradict their religion, and the failure of the state and federal governments to protect religious minorities indicates that tensions arising from religious differences remain a problem in Chiapas. We call on the Mexican government to ensure that fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, are respected and upheld by the authorities at every level."