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## **MEXICO | Action Called for in Expulsions**

CSW is calling on state officials in Guerrero, Mexico to intervene on behalf of a group of religious minority families who are under threat of forced displacement at the hands of community leaders belonging to the religious majority.

In addition to threats of expulsion from their community, 10 Protestant families from the El Mesón Zapote community in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, have seen their rights as community members restricted, including access to social benefit programs and the right to vote. The threats and restrictions targeting the Protestant families, who belong to the Land of Revival Church, violate a written agreement signed May 23, 2019 in which community leaders from El Mesón Zapote committed to respect the religious beliefs of every resident after interventions from state officials. It was initiated after Protestant families in the village experienced a sustained campaign of harassment aimed at forcing them to accept positions in service of the local Catholic church.

On Nov. 11, community leaders directed every resident in El Mesón Zapote to make a financial contribution each month toward the construction of a new Catholic church until it is completed.

Armed community police then threatened the Protestant families with expulsion if they did not comply with the order. The families refused to do so, explaining that they hold different religious beliefs. In response, community leaders have restricted their rights and removed them from other positions they held in the village in order to accuse them of not wanting to help in the community.

A few days later on Nov. 14, community leaders, accompanied by armed community police, destroyed Land of Revival Church furniture and threatened the families with “consequences” if they did not contribute to the construction of the Catholic church.

The case of El Mesón Zapote bears the hallmarks of several similar cases CSW has documented in Guerrero and other states in Mexico in 2020. Mexican law gives indigenous communities the right to protect their culture and maintain traditional

governing structures as long as fundamental human rights protected by the Mexican constitution, including freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), are respected. However, a widespread lack of understanding of these legal protections at the local level and a consistent failure of state officials to intervene in cases involving FoRB violations leads to a high incidence of human rights violations and a culture of impunity.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is concerned that community leaders in El Mesón Zapote have denied these families their rights for a month now, and are now threatening them with forced displacement. If the leaders of El Mesón Zapote are unwilling to abide by the agreement that they signed in 2019 then it is incumbent on the state government of Guerrero and the federal government of Mexico to intervene in the case to guarantee a just resolution for these families that protects and restores their rights. We call on the leaders of El Mesón Zapote to cease their harassment of these families and to allow them to practice their religion without hindrance or illegal conditions."