

03 March 2025

Joint Statement – Mexico: Next sentencing hearing of human rights defender Pablo López Alavéz

In a joint declaration, seven human rights organisations, including the Observatory (OMCT- FIDH), are calling for the immediate release of human rights activist Pablo López Alavéz, on the eve of the sentencing hearing scheduled for 6 March.

On 06 March 2025, the First Court for the Conclusion of Traditional Criminal Cases of the State of Oaxaca will carry out the sentencing hearing for the emblematic case of human rights defender **Pablo López Alavéz**. The indigenous Zapoteco defender has remained unjustly deprived of his liberty in the Villa de ETLA Regional Prison in Oaxaca for more than fourteen years while awaiting a decision.

Prior to his detainment, Pablo López Alavéz held various community leadership roles, reported illegal logging and raised awareness about environmental protection and sustainability in his indigenous community of San Isidro Aloápam in Oaxaca. In retaliation for his efforts, he made powerful enemies among the illegal loggers operating in the area and subsequently faced numerous criminal charges.

On 15 August 2010, Pablo López Alavéz was arbitrarily detained by a group of unidentified individuals who covered their faces and carried long weapons. The defender was forced into the vehicle which they arrived in without being given any explanation. The following day, the defender was accused of participating in the murder of an individual in June 2007, despite not being at the crime scene. Since then, the defender has faced criminal proceedings against him, which have been characterised by irregularities, affecting his right to due process and liberty, which have been denounced nationally and internationally.

On 2 October 2015, the Defensoría de los Derechos Humanos del Pueblo de Oaxaca (Oaxaca Human Rights Ombudsman's Office) issued recommendation n° 11/2015, in which it analysed the legal case of the defender and concluded that there have been significant violations of due process during the trial against López Alavéz.

On 25 April 2017, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued opinion n° 23/2017, describing the deprivation of liberty of Pablo López Alavéz as arbitrary, and recognising that his detention was as a result of his legitimate activity in the defence of land rights, natural resources and indigenous peoples' rights, as well as his 20 years of leadership in the defence of the forests of San Miguel and San Isidro Aloapam, Oaxaca, against deforestation. The WGAD recommended his immediate release.

The Observatory, along with other human rights organisations, has repeatedly expressed its concern over the criminalisation, arbitrary detention, prolonged pre-trial detention and imposition of excessive sentences based on fabricated and unfounded charges against human rights defenders belonging to indigenous peoples in Mexico. This has become an alarming trend, demonstrating a pattern of racism and disproportionate violence by the Mexican State.

Additionally, the organisation has reiterated its call for their release, emphasising that long-term arbitrary detention generates particularly serious impacts, damaging the social fabric and affecting not only the criminalised defender but also their family, community and the broader process of defending human rights. On 18 September 2024, the organisation

Consortio Oaxaca shared the presentation of the “International Report: Analysis of Due Process in the Criminalisation of Indigenous Defender Pablo López Alavéz”, which concludes that the process has been “an extreme example of the use of criminalisation against human rights defenders in Mexico, particularly against indigenous and environmental activists”.

On 8 November 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders expressed her concern over the arbitrary detention of indigenous defenders in Mexico, including Pablo López Alavéz, and the imposition of harsh sentences against them. The Special Rapporteur shared that she is in contact with the Mexican government regarding these concerns.

The signing organisations urgently call on national and state authorities in Mexico, especially the First Court for the Conclusion of Traditional Criminal Cases of the State of Oaxaca, to adopt recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms and to immediately release human rights defender Pablo López Alavéz, as well as to refrain from further criminalising him. Both organisations call the international community to make a statement on the situation of defenders of indigenous rights in Mexico.

Signing organisations:

- Consorcio Para el Diálogo Parlamentario y Equidad, Oaxaca
- Centro de derechos humanos “Zeferino Ladrillero”
- Colectivo de Saneamiento y Restauración de La Malintzi, Tlalcuapan
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Front Line Defenders
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos Todos los derechos para todas, todos y todes (Red TDT)
- Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz A.C. (SERAPAZ)