

Christian Persecution Watchdog Calls Mexico on the Carpet

The United States has questioned Mexico regarding reports of widespread discrimination, violence and displacement of Protestant Christian communities in Chiapas and several other states.

In a private email International Christian Concern (ICC) received by last week, Congressional staff members revealed that Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobson confirmed the questioning of the Mexican government by State Department officials had taken place during the first week of June.

The news comes as several human rights groups, including International Christian Concern and Christian Solidarity Worldwide-U.K. (CSW-U.K.), have launched campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the plight of religious minorities in rural areas of Mexico. Extensive research and investigations conducted by CSW-UK and an April field visit by ICC have uncovered large numbers of cases of religious persecution among rural indigenous communities in Mexico that are often directed towards the Protestant minority.

“It is time that the Mexican government provides justice and protection for victims of religious persecution while dealing with local and state officials that are part of the problem,” said Jeff King, ICC’s President. “A slow wave of religious persecution has been sweeping across Mexico and the culture of corruption and lack of accountability that surrounds religious freedom cases needs to end.”

ICC conservatively estimates that more than 70 open cases of religious persecution against minority Christian communities, each involving between 20-100 victims, currently exist in just

Chiapas, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero. In most cases, local authorities appear unwilling to thoroughly address the issue and are occasionally directly complicit in cases of religiously based discrimination.

These types of cases, which include cutting off access for minority communities to utilities, public schools, and public cemeteries, land seizures, destruction of property, and physical and sexual assault, have been ongoing for an estimated four decades but have largely gone unnoticed by the international community.

“A free society cannot flourish when religious persecution exists, and this issue has gone on for far too long while the world has looked the other way,” King said. “Every citizen of Mexico has a right to practice their faith without the fear of being driven from their homes simply because of what they believe.”

Last week, ICC received reports of five Protestant Christians, including three children, being detained by local authorities in the village of Tzetelton, Chiapas, for converting to Protestantism. The children were released after a brief detention on July 7 but two adults, Andres Lopez and Virginia Lopez, were jailed for two nights before signing an agreement to pay a fine of 9,500 pesos (approximately \$600 USD) and to remove their children from local schools. The agreement was mediated with officials from the state government present and observed by local human rights groups.

On June 1st, ICC launched a campaign aimed at raising awareness about the issue and called on supporters to contact the Mexican government to voice their concerns. Included in the campaign is a petition “calling for the immediate end to violence against and displacement of religious minorities in Mexico.”