

URGENT ACTION

INDIGENOUS DEFENDER KILLED, OTHERS AT RISK

Indigenous environmental rights defender Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez was found dead on 14 May in Cuetzalan, Puebla state. He was one of a number of defenders facing criminal investigation for their opposition to the construction of a high-voltage power line. These defenders are at grave risk and have recently been subject to attacks and intimidation.

Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez was found dead with deep stab wounds to the heart and shoulder area in a local motel on the outskirts of Cuetzalan, Puebla state, on the morning of 14 May. He was a member of the Antonio Esteban Human Rights Centre and part of a coalition of social movements who have been opposing energy projects, mining concessions, and the construction of a high-voltage power line in the northern mountain region of Puebla state.

Colleagues from another coalition that Manuel Rodríguez was part of, the **Independent Popular Rural and Urban movement of farmer and workers (MIOCUP)**, last reported seeing him on 13 May. Two MIOCUP members told Amnesty International they were with him in MIOCUP's offices late that night and that around 12:30am one of them saw Manuel Rodríguez washing dishes, before they went to bed in the office dorms. The autopsy places Manuel Rodríguez's death at between 1 and 2am on 14 May, provoked by massive blood loss from three deep stab wounds. On his left shoulder there were also wounds provoked by a sharp and hot object, as well as marks on his face, suggesting other possible forms of violence. The perpetrators remain unknown. The State Attorney General's Office of Puebla has opened an investigation into his death, yet they have been irregularly withholding his lawyers' access to the casefile, and it is not yet clear whether lines of inquiry include his work as a human rights defender.

The Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) had recently opened a criminal investigation against Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez and seven other defenders and activists from MIOCUP and the **Tosepan Union of Cooperatives** for their participation in a peaceful sit-in near the proposed power line outside of Cuetzalan in late 2016 and 2017. The State Electricity Commission responsible for the power line presented a criminal complaint against the defenders in January 2017. They are accused of "obstructing a public work", punishable by up to one year in prison.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Calling on the State Attorney General to ensure a prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the death of Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez, ensuring that his work as a human rights defender is part of the lines of inquiry and allowing his lawyers full access to the casefile;
- Calling on authorities to ensure the safety of members of the MIOCUP and the Tosepan collective and investigate any attacks against them;
- Calling on the Mayor of Cuetzalan to urgently and publicly recognize the legitimate role of environmental human rights defenders in the region and refrain from undermining their work publicly or privately.

Contact these two officials by 29 June 2018:

State Attorney General

Lic. Víctor Antonio Barranca Bourget
Fiscal General del Estado de Puebla
Boulevard Héroes del 5 de Mayo 31 Oriente,
Ladrillera de Benítez,
C.P. 72530, Puebla, Puebla, México
Phone: +52 222 211 7900 ext. 4019
Email: particular.fgep.puebla@hotmail.com
Twitter: [@FiscaliaPuebla](https://twitter.com/FiscaliaPuebla)
Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Ambassador Geronimo Gutierrez Fernandez, Embassy of Mexico

1911 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington DC 20006
Phone: 1 202 728 1600 | Fax: 202 728 1698
Email: mexembusa@sre.gob.mx
Twitter: [@GERONIMO_GF](https://twitter.com/GERONIMO_GF)
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

[Click here](#) to let us know if you took action on this case! *This is Urgent Action 103.18*

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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The northern mountain region of Puebla has seen an increase in violence in recent years and environmental rights defenders and activists have been registering an increase in attacks and intimidation against them. In addition, violence and criminal activity in the region surrounding Cuetzalan have been on the rise.

This is the second member of MIOCUP that has been killed in recent years. On 4 June, 2014, environmental activist and member of MIOCUP Antonio Esteban was also killed in Cuetzalan. More recently, in April 2018, state investigative police arrested another member of MIOCUP and one of the accused in the criminal suit of the State Electricity Commission (CFE) on the outskirts of Puebla's capital, accusing him of illegally altering his vehicle registration. He was held in state custody for a matter of hours and then released once it was verified that all his details were in order.

The Tosepan Union of Cooperatives includes over 34,000 members throughout the region that work together for the sustainable production of coffee and honey, environmental rights, fair trade and pricing for crops, as well as basic services such as potable water and drainage. On 20 January unknown assailants partially set the Tosepan Union's office on fire, according to information given to Amnesty International. Tosepan members told Amnesty International that unknown attackers shot at one of their members on 4 March as they travelled in their car. On 7 March, another Tosepan member was followed by a strange car when travelling home. The criminal suit presented by the CFE was originally against four members of the Tosepan, but on 20 May the Federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) included a fifth member of Tosepan into its criminal investigation.

Both members of MIOCUP and Tosepan have continued with their work and public protests despite the grave risks they face. On 12 May, two days before his death, Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez participated in a public forum in Chignautla, Puebla, in which he publicly spoke out against the Autlán mine, in Teziutlán municipality, a project currently in operation with plans for expansion and further exploration. MIOCUP members had also recently been active and successful in the closure of a local rubbish dump. Tosepan members have remained active in press conferences and public protests in recent months, despite the attacks and criminal charges that they face.

Many of the human rights defenders and activists from Tosepan and MIOCUP pertain to Indigenous Peoples. Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez pertained to the Nahuatl Indigenous Peoples. Two of the members of the criminal suit from Tosepan pertain to the Masehual Indigenous people.

Name: Manuel Gaspar Rodríguez (m) and other members of the Independent Popular Rural and Urban movement of farmer and workers (MIOCUP) and the Tosepan Union of Cooperatives
Gender m/f: all

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