



Four Mexican Human-Rights Defenders



Carlos René Román Salazar, an indigenous Mixtecan from the town of Huajuapam, is a member of CIPO-RFM and the Oaxacan teachers' union who was disappeared on March 14th, 2011. Román Salazar spent more than 25 years working as a school teacher and as an educator in Oaxaca's teachers' training program. He also realized academic studies in the area of educational science.

In the teachers' union he belonged to the Educational Studies and Development Center, which developed proposals for education reform that went counter to the reform proposals pushed forward by the state government at the time. He was also active in the struggle against patronage and political interference in union affairs. Within CIPO-RFM, he was responsible for negotiations with Oaxaca's state government regarding the return to Oaxaca of fellow-CIPO member Raúl Gatica Bautista from Canadian exile. In the period leading up to his disappearance Román Salazar received multiple death threats. On the night of his disappearance his last communication was with his wife, to whom he sent a text message that he was on his way home after attending a meeting. Although his ultimate fate and whereabouts are unknown, he is presumed dead. No report of the police investigation into his disappearance was ever made public.



Pablo López Alavez is a farmer and community leader from San Isidro Aloapam in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte and a member of CIPO-RFM. He is an environmentalist who, as a member of San Isidro Aloapam's town government, played an important part in the community's struggle with a neighboring town – San Miguel Aloapam – over a forested area that San Miguel is exploiting for its wood. In that struggle, authorities in San Miguel have long been allied with Mexico's old ruling party, the PRI, and have resorted both to paramilitary violence and to legal harassment of their adversaries.

In August 2010 López Alavez was kidnapped by armed and hooded men while in the presence of his family. A day later he appeared in a state prison and was charged with homicide. Oaxaca's Human Rights Commission has found grave irregularities in the process against Pablo, which amounted to "violations of the human rights of [Pablo López Alavez]." Judicial officers have repeatedly stalled the process and key witnesses of the prosecution have still not appeared in court. Four years after his kidnapping and arrest, López Alavez still awaits the outcome of his trial. He remains in prison today.

López Alavez was the main breadwinner of a large family that includes three small children, a wife, and a sick father.



Rodrigo Flores Peñaloza is a community activist from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and a leading member of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of the Land and the Territory. Peñaloza has been prominently involved in the struggle against the Mexican company Demex, a branch of the Spanish Renovalia Energy, which has used dishonest and illegal means to alienate land from local communities in order to install wind parks.

The wind-parks project on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is one of the largest of its kind in the Americas and is already causing high levels of environmental damage, including the pollution of valuable farm lands. The project has been supported by politicians of Mexico's old governing party, the PRI, and has also been encouraged by Oaxaca's governor, Gabino Cue Monteagudo, who called the project's opponents "enemies of progress and of Oaxaca." Opposition to the project is widespread and has been the target of paramilitary intimidation and violence.

Flores Peñaloza has received multiple death threats. In a tactic commonly used against community organizers in Oaxaca, he has also been charged with various crimes by a local federal court, but has been refused access to his judicial file. Armed men have repeatedly attempted to track him down, possibly with the intent to kill him, and his wife has been harassed and threatened on various occasions. He now lives in hiding.

Flores Peñaloza has worked as a primary-school teacher in various parts of Mexico for more than twenty years. He is married and has several children.



Raúl Gatica Bautista is an Oaxacan school teacher and writer who has lived in Canadian exile since 2005 and was granted the status of a political refugee in 2006. An indigenous Mixtecan, Gatica Bautista began his activities as a community organizer and human-rights activist in the early 1980s in the

teacher's union and in various indigenous organizations. He also held various communal government posts in his hometown of Tlaxiaco.

As a result of his political work, Gatica has been a victim arbitrary imprisonment, death threats, beatings, and other intimidation tactics. He has survived torture and two assassination attempts, in one of which he was gravely injured, and he continues to suffer from health-problems as a result. Before being granted asylum in Canada he was forced to live in hiding.

In Canada, Gatica has worked for the Agricultural Workers' Union, hosted a radio show, edited and contributed to a cultural magazine, and published various books of poems and stories. He has received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal for his distinguished service to Canadian communities. A founding-member of both CIPO-RFM and CIPO-Vancouver, he has attempted to keep up the struggle for rights and accountability in his homeland from abroad. His family and children live in Mexico.