

<p>Sr. Gobernador Rutilio Escandón Cadenas Governor of the State of Chiapas secparticular@chiapas.gob.mx</p>	<p>Lic. Adán Augusto López Hernández Minister of the Interior of Mexico (SEGOB) secretario@segob.gob.mx</p>
<p>Sr. Juan José Zepeda Bermúdez President of the State Commission for Human Rights of Chiapas presidencia@cedh-chiapas.org</p>	<p>Sr. Alejandro Encinas Rodríguez Undersecretary of Human Rights and Population (SEGOB) ajencinas@segob.gob.mx</p>

June 16, 2022

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to express our concern about the criminalization of Tzeltal human rights defender **Manuel Santiz Cruz**, president of the Human Rights Committee of San Juan Evangelista Catholic parish in San Juan Cancuc, Chiapas.

After being arrested on the morning of May 29, Manuel Santiz Cruz was transferred to the Office of the Prosecutor for Indigenous Justice in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. On May 30, authorities filed false charges of "drug possession" against the human rights defender. On May 31, he was released but immediately re-arrested by the Indigenous Justice Prosecutor's Office for the crime of "aggravated homicide."


On June 1, relatives and colleagues of Manuel Santiz Cruz went to the Control Court (*Juzgado de Control*), where two more people were arrested without arrest warrants. **Agustín Pérez Velasco** and **Martín Pérez Domínguez**, who testified on Manuel's behalf against the false drug charge, have also been charged with "aggravated homicide." In the courtroom, state police threatened members of the legal team of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas and international human rights observers of the organization SweFOR. By June 4, a total of eight persons had been arrested Manuel Santiz Cruz, Agustín Pérez Velasco, Martín Pérez Domínguez, **Juan Velasco Aguilar**, **Agustín Pérez Domínguez**, and three more persons (names withheld for their personal security).

The fabrication of crimes is used as a repressive method of the judicial system in Chiapas. These arbitrary detentions take place in a context in which inhabitants of San Juan Cancuc have opposed the military presence in their territory and the construction of a highway project that would connect San Cristóbal de las Casas with the region of Palenque. The highway is part of the development of mega-tourism projects in the region that have been promoted by the government without free, prior informed and culturally appropriate consultation with impacted Indigenous communities.

We are deeply concerned about the ability of Indigenous communities and leaders to carry out their legitimate activities in defense of their peoples' territories and waterways. Last year we wrote to you about the about the assassination of Tzeltal human rights defender Simón Pedro Pérez López, age 35, in the *Los Bosques de Chiapas* region of Chiapas State (cf our letter July 6, 2021). We strongly urge that you:

- drop the fabricated charges against human rights defender Manuel Santiz Cruz and the other people detained and allow their immediate and unconditional release
- conduct an impartial investigation into the criminalization of Manuel Santiz Cruz and bring those responsible to justice
- adopt all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of Manuel Santiz Cruz and his legal representatives, in strict accordance with his wishes

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine L. Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Ismael Brito Mazariegos, Secretary General of the Government in Chiapas ~ via email
 María del Rosario Piedra Ibarra, President of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) ~ via email
 Esteban Moctezuma Barragán, Ambassador of Mexico to the US ~ via email
 OAS: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights: Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Mexico and on Rights of Indigenous Peoples ~ via email and US mail
 OAS: Luz Elena Baños Rivera, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the Organization of American States ~ via email
 El Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas ~ via email
 US Embassy in Mexico City: Ambassador Ken Salazar ~ via email and US mail
 US State Department, Office of Mexican Affairs ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
 US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: