

## **Justice Mexico Now: Trustees Annual Report 1st April 2021 to March 31st 2022**

Justice Mexico Now is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (number 1177740) set up with the following charitable purposes:

TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS (AS SET OUT IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT UNITED NATIONS CONVENTIONS AND DECLARATIONS) THROUGHOUT THE WORLD BY ALL OR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS: ·

- MONITORING ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS; ·
- OBTAINING REDRESS FOR THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE; ·
- RELIEVING NEED AMONG THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE; ·
- RESEARCH INTO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES;
- RAISING AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES;
- PROMOTING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS;
- PROMOTING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG INDIVIDUALS AND CORPORATIONS
- INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY OF HUMAN RIGHTS
- ELIMINATING INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

IN FURTHERANCE OF THAT OBJECT BUT NOT OTHERWISE, THE TRUSTEES SHALL HAVE POWER TO ENGAGE IN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITY PROVIDED THAT THE TRUSTEES ARE SATISFIED THAT THE PROPOSED ACTIVITIES WILL FURTHER THE PURPOSES OF THE CHARITY TO AN EXTENT JUSTIFIED BY THE RESOURCES COMMITTED AND THE ACTIVITY IS NOT THE DOMINANT MEANS BY WHICH THE CHARITY CARRIES OUT ITS OBJECTS.

The case of the disappearance of many students of the Pedagogy University in **Ayotzinapa**, the Escuela Normal Raul Isidoro Burgos, has always been at the heart of our campaigning and work. For this reason, during this year, a member of Justice Mexico Now (JMN) travelled to Mexico to accompany the family of the victims to demand a better procurement of justice at the National Public Prosecutor's office in Mexico City as well as meet local activist supporting the campaign, such as several Pedagogy University students and the Otomí community in Resistance currently working from the Casa de los Pueblos Samir Flores Soberanes in Coyoacán, Mexico City.

Another important activity of JMN took place when one of our members attended the launching of the first **Truth Commission on the 'Dirty War'** in Mexico, a period of intense violence, disappearances and extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the government against dissident and opposition groups during the 70s and 80s. The current viceminister of Human Rights, the lawyer Alejandro Encinas, launched this Commission in the hopes of legitimizing the narrative of the abuse of power from the then government and the military and to find a path to memory, justice, truth and reparations to the families of the victims. However, during the visit we realized that it's important to work closely with the families as they demand the opening of a special prosecutor office for the cases from the Dirty War, something much more concrete and not yet proposed by the current administration. We also noted a deep reluctance from the military to open their archives or to readily collaborate with the requests of this Truth Commission. Hence, international campaigns to support and accompany this process will indeed be relevant in the coming years.

Violence in Mexico prevails at alarming levels; however, each region has a very specific geopolitical context which influences the situation at any particular period. During 2021 and 2022 we detected increased **attacks against environmental**

**activists**, specially from indigenous communities. For this reason, we decided to follow and support cases on these matters.

The first case was the murder of **Samir Flores**, an indigenous environmental activist (Nahuatl) from Amilcingo, Morelos who campaigned, along with his community and the People's Front in Defense of Land and Water (FPDTA) against two thermoelectric plants in their communal land and against the much larger scale infrastructure plan called Proyecto Integral Morelos (PIM). PIM also includes large-scale aqueducts and gasoeducts as well as a heavy voltage electrical network in their territory and is one of the current government flagship *development* strategies. According to the residents as well as several independent studies<sup>1</sup>, this project will seriously jeopardize their community's access to water and their livelihood activities, as well as their safety because of its environmental and social impacts. Samir Flores, father of four, was also a delegate of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), the largest pacific organization for the defense of the territory in the country, whose members have consistently suffered threats, attacks, disappearances and damage to their lives in these past years. Four years have passed and there's still no justice whilst the government continues to push forward the project, even after a referendum in which the communities voted against it. From JMN we have consistently joined the international community in demanding justice for Samir and a halt to the violence this project entails. We joined an international public demonstration in February 2022 as well as organized a talk about what happened to Samir and about the overall impacts of the PIM. We also attended the Casa de los Pueblos Samir Flores Soberanes in Mexico City to pay respects and to contribute a bit on keeping alive the memory and work of Samir.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021 the Human Rights activist, catechist and former president of the Abejas de Acteal, **Simón Pedro Perez Lopez** was shot in the head by a man whilst he was in the main market of Simojovel, Chiapas, where he had gone with his son. Simón was 35 years old. The Abejas de Acteal is a Mayan-Tsotsil, Christian and pacifist civil society whose objective is to promote peace and social justice in Mexico, including the protection of land, and they also have delegates in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). Las Abejas attracted international attention when on December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group murdered 45 members of the community while they were praying in the Acteal Church. Since then, neither the perpetrators nor the masterminds have been brought to justice. On the case of the murder of Human Right activist Simon Pedro, JMN has firmly called for the Public Prosecutor's Office in Chiapas to progress in the investigations and to investigate this murder on the framework of the increased violence to activists in the region. We've also denounced how the Prosecutor Office has used a strategy of burning out the family of Simón Pedro and The Abejas by summoning them to hearings early in the morning and 4 hours away from their towns, and cancelling them on the spot. Furthermore, we've presented in several venues a documentary about the current work of the Abejas and how the whole community was and is still affected by the 1997 massacre. The documentary is called "Lupita. Que retiemble la tierra." (Lupita. Let the earth tremble) by Monica Wise Robles who very kindly allowed us to present her documentary for free and even provided subtitles. Currently, a member of JMN is visiting Acteal to meet with The Abejas, which, hopefully, will give way to several activities to share their story in other parts of the world and to donate and present a new documentary they are filming titled "The Path of Resistance" which is made by several of the Abejas who worked and learned from director Monica.

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<sup>1</sup> Lilián Gonzales Chevez (<http://libros.uaem.mx/archivos/epub/proyecto-integral-morelos/proyecto-integral-morelos.pdf>)  
BUAP (<https://cupreder.buap.mx/territorio/?q=proyecto-integral-morelos-peligro-sismico>)

Another case we've followed closely is the case of environmental activist and anti-mining campaigner **Don Roberto de la Rosa** who has received many death threats and has suffered legal hostility from a Mexican mining company called Ocampo Mining, property of Carlos Slim, the 8<sup>th</sup> richest man in the world according to Forbes. Don Roberto, a goat herder, is widely known as the last inhabitant of Salaverna, Zacatecas, because he refuses to move from his home so that Ocampo Mining could expand its open-pit operation. The strategy of Ocampo to empty the town was to make heavy and unlawful explosions nearby so as to damage the structural integrity of Salaverna. The Church was heavily damaged and the rest of the residents, mostly herders, slowly decided to sell their property at unfair prices. But Don Roberto stood his ground and decided not to sell and managed to organize with different organizations, including the Frente Popular de Lucha en Zacatecas (FPLZ) and Cambiemosla Ya, a non-profit dedicated to lobbying the Mexican parliament to modify Article 6 of the Mining Law. As JMN we've been in close contact with Roberto as we've denounced the hostilities of the mining company Ocampo and helped organize a large international event to share his story with other activists throughout Europe. This event took place in the context of the Caravana por la Vida y el Agua (Long March for Life and Water), a 32-day long march encompassing 6 states in central Mexico (Queretaro, Estado de Mexico, Mexico City, Morelos, Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca). This event was organized by the National Indigenous Congress, and they called for international observation and monitoring for their safety as well as a call for a large conference with international activists protecting the right to life and water. In this conference JMN invited Don Roberto, because even though he is from within Mexico, he was not yet in touch with members of the CNI. Another objective of his participation was to share widely his case and testimony in order for the international community to know about it. We feel it was very successful on this regard as in the event we worked together and shared Don Roberto's story with activists from Germany, France, Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Chile, Spain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, and, of course, England. We hope, in the coming year, to be able to make him beneficiary of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists in Mexico. We speak with him as we write this report and will continue to work on his case and his protection because we feel his activism is vital.

Related also with the Long March for Life and Water was the case of the Nahuatl community in the municipality of Juan C Bonilla in Puebla who, throughout 2021 and 2022 resisted against the scarcity of water due to an allegedly illegal water extraction plant by Bonafont, a subsidiary of Danone, which was extracting more than 1 million 650 thousand of liters of water per day. The company was never able to provide documentation of his permits and the National Commission of Water claimed to not have any register of permits for the plant. The local community decided, then, to stop the water extraction operations and to shut the well for good and to transform the plant into an autonomous space to manage the recovery of the water wells, create cultural, educational and communication projects, and a meeting center for the organization. The place was called **Altepelmealli, Casa de los Pueblos**. As JMN we followed this process closely and constantly joined the international community in demanding the local and national government not to repress or violate the right of this communities to water for their life and livelihood activities. During the conference of the Long March, we established close contact with the community and hope to continue accompanying their process even though their cultural center was shut down by the National Guard in early 2022. The extraction well remains closed and the company still doesn't have any legal extraction permit.

In the same light of the increased attacks to environmental defenders, we also noticed a spike in the attacks by paramilitary groups towards unarmed indigenous communities in the SouthEast of Mexico. These human rights violations have historically taken place in impunity and at present it is not different. We, then, decided to follow closely three cases of armed attacks, dissapearances, torture and displacement in rural indigenous communities in Chiapas.

We followed the attacks to the Tsotsil community of **Nuevo San Gregorio**, in the municipality of Huixtán, Chiapas. A territory known for being the first in México during the XX century to have tsotsil major (1938) and in which nowadays converge many political actors, both indigenous and mestizo. There were at least 21 aggressions perpetrated by armed paramilitary groups on the first months of 2022, one in which the autonomous secondary school was burned down, according to reports of the BriCOs (Civil Observation Brigades) which have been living there since March 2021 and which are part of international efforts along with the Chiapas based Human Rights Centre FRAYBA. We joined many international organizations, institutions and collected in condemning this situation, in which both community and BriCOs lives have been in constant risk. These attacks happen in a larger context in which other communities have also been taken hostage by similar paramilitary groups in the region, such as the Ocosingo Regional Organization of Coffee Growers (ORCAO in Spanish), an armed group which in October 2021 attacked the tsotsil community of **Moises y Gandhi**, near Ocosingo, shooting randomly towards its secondary school and several houses as well as remaining surrounding the community for more than 24 hours, instilling terror in resident families. This situation then repeated in November 2021, at which point the ORCAO decided to burn down the school as well. Then, in 2022 the same paramilitary group, attacked again Moises y Gandhi as well as other communities nearby, **Emiliano Zapata and La Resistencia**, also burning down the secondary school in La Resistencia. Because of this 83 people, including children and elderly, have been forcibly displaced ever since.

On the 11th of September members of ORCAO “arbitrarily detained and tortured **José Antonio Sánchez Juárez and Sebastián Núñez Pérez**”, members of Moises y Gandhi indigenous council, keeping them as disappeared until September 19. Their release was possible thanks to the intervention of parish priests from San Cristóbal de las Casas and Oxchuc, human rights organizations and the mobilizations and denunciations that took place in Mexico and, above all, in Europe. JMN participated actively in the demands for their safe return. We attended protests in the Mexican Embassy in Austria.

A deeply concerning situation is that all of these armed attacks are dismissed by local and national governments as internal conflicts amongst peasants. However, we note that when one party is armed men and another are unarmed families, this narrative cannot be sustained as it effectively invisibilizes the human right violations to these communities. The fact that this dangerous narrative is systematically used by authorities gives a hint on the fact that the procurement of security and justice is discriminatory regarding indigenous communities and that, historically, governments have allowed, if not allegedly encouraged, paramilitary groups in rural regions in order to execute counterinsurgency activities outside of the legal framework.

Along with the international support and calls for mediation and government positioning on these attacks, we called for donations for some of the displaced communities. At the time we didn't gather much, around £90 which did not enter our accounts as they were sent directly by the donors to the RedAJMAQ and which

managed to be delivered to the communities Moises and Gandhi in the form of 75kg of beans bought in the San Cristobal de las Casas market and delivered through the 2022 BriCOs by RedAJMAQ in Chiapas. Also, in early 2022 JMN supported the edition and publishing of photography book about rural communities' resistances in Chiapas. The book, named Guardians of the Night, had 150 copies printed and sold during 2022. A second edition is being designed with the collaboration of La Parcería, an editorial group in Madrid. We hope, with the profits of this second edition, to support the work of several communities in Chiapas who are working really hard to protect their rights to land, water, security and dignity.

Finally, during 2022, members of JMN made a donation of 20 art photographs to **Escuelita Agua de Lluvia in Oaxaca** for it to raise funds raffling them and selling printed material with the art, as well as donated and helped to promote their crowdfunding campaign to expand their current building and to buy school material, boards, desks etc. Amount donated was £50. Founded on December in 2021, Rain Water School, is a comunitarian autonomous school in the Mazateca region of Oaxaca which provides a space for what in Latin America is called 'educación popular' for both children and adults in the rural community of Huautla de Jimenez.

## **Income and Spending**

JMN has a small reserve of over £2970 which has been gathered through charitable activities and individual donations. There was no significant expenditure on activities in 2021/22 as all the donations before mentioned were made on our behalf by the donors themselves directly to the beneficiary organizations.

We registered two new trustees to the Board – Andy Gregg and Rupert Knox who have provided a lot of council to the organization with their experience and knowledge on HHRR protection and campaigning.

All of JMN's activities were for the public benefit and we ensured that none of our activities were party political or outside the terms of our charitable objects.