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The undersigned international organizations express our deep concern over the targeting, delegitimization and stigmatization of the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas), which significantly restricts their space for action in the defense of human rights, exposing the organization and its members to serious risks in the development of their work.

In his daily press conference of 22 April 2024, the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, accused the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center (Frayba) of “attempting to create an environment of violence that does not have the dimension reported [by Frayba]”. Additionally, he criticized the organization for “magnifying the situation”,¹ in reference to the recent reports by Frayba about the situation of violence in Chiapas since mid-2021, when the conflict

¹ Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 22 April 2024. “Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador”. Available in: <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2024/04/22/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-1165>.

between organized criminal groups over control of the zone started.² The same messages were reiterated in the daily press conference of 23 April,³ and a few weeks prior, on 3 April 2024, the President accused Frayba of lying⁴ due to a divergence in the data of deceased people in the context of a confrontation between members of the National Guard and an organized criminal group in the town of La Concordia (Chiapas) on 31 March 2024.⁵

Both statements demonstrate a trend of targeting by which the Executive delegitimizes the work of human rights defence developed by human rights centres, civil society organizations, collectives of families of disappeared people, and journalists who document and report the violence and the human rights violations in the region, revealing the negligence of the authorities at all three levels of the Mexican State.⁶ This trend is not exclusive to the current government but reflects a historic problem in Mexico and other Latin American countries, contributing to the region's status as one of the most dangerous in the world for human rights defence and journalism.⁷

As the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) stated, the States must ensure the freedom of expression "of those who agree with the government, but also those who have differing opinions," emphasizing that "stigmatization can create a permissive environment that allows attacks against human rights defenders and journalists."⁸

Publicly pointing out human rights defenders and journalists who, as part of their work, monitor and scrutinize the State's handling of human rights violations increases their exposure to potential aggression and violent attacks, limiting the space for democracy and the defence of human rights.

In this context, international human rights standards not only mandate respect for the work of defending human rights, but also urge "States to acknowledge, through public statements, policies, programs, or laws, the important and legitimate role of human rights defenders in promoting all human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as essential components of ensuring their protection, including by respecting the independence of their organizations and avoiding the stigmatization of their work."⁹

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center has been working for 35 years in the defence and promotion of human rights in the State of Chiapas, supporting victims of serious human rights violations in their fight for justice, as well as communities and peoples that defend their autonomy and self-determination. Thanks to their ethics, thoroughness, and commitment to human rights, they have established themselves as one of the most well-known civil society organizations, contributing daily to raising awareness about the injustice and violence suffered by the most vulnerable people in the state. Frayba, among other Mexican civil society actors, has documented and reported the increase in violence in Chiapas over the last three years and its impact on its population.

² El País, 14 April 2024. "Chiapas, territorio tomado. Available in: <https://elpais.com/mexico/2024-04-14/chiapas-territorio-tomado.html>.

³ Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 23 April 2024. "Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador". Available in: <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2024/04/23/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-1166>.

⁴ Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 3 April 2024. "Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador". Available in: <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2024/04/03/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-1153/>

⁵ Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, 2 April 2024. "Frente a la Masacre en Niños Héroe, exigimos al Estado mexicano investigar responsabilidades". Available in: <https://frayba.org.mx/boletin-09-masacre-concordia>

⁶ IACHR. Annual Report 2023. Chapter V. Follow-up of recommendations issued by the IACHR in its Country or Thematics reports. Mexico. OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 386 rev.1. 31 December de 2023. Par. 35

⁷ International Amnesty, 2024. "The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024". Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/>

⁸ Proceso, 22 April 2021. "Relator de la CIDH pide a México reconsiderar el "Quién es quién en las mentiras de la semana". Available in: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2021/7/1/relator-de-la-cidh-pide-mexico-reconsiderar-el-quien-es-quien-en-las-mentiras-de-la-semana-267018.html> – See also: Annual Report of the IACHR 2023. Chapter V. Follow-up of recommendations issued by the IACHR in its Country or Thematics reports. Mexico. Op.Cit. Par. 438.4

⁹ General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/146, 18 December 2019

The current context exposes to high risk those who, like Frayba, support the victims of human rights violations in their search for justice and reparations, emphasizing the need for their work to be acknowledged and protected by public institutions at all levels of government.

Given the above, the undersigned international organizations call for an end to the targeting of organizations and human rights defenders in Mexico and a public acknowledgment of the fundamental work they do in favour of justice, the protection and promotion of human rights, and peace-building. Finally, we request the strengthening of the legal framework and mechanisms developed to protect human rights defenders and journalists in Mexico.

International Amnesty | CEJIL (Center for Justice and International Law) | FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders | Front Line Defenders | IM-Defensoras (Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos) | World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders | Protection International | SIPAZ (International Service for Peace) | SweFOR (Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation) | Taula per Mèxic