



Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition

Defending Women Defending Rights

Stop defamation against the women human rights defenders (WHRDs) of CEDEHM in Mexico

April 1, 2015

THE Women Human Rights Defender International Coalition (WHRDIC) has serious concerns about the situation of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) Luz Estela Castro, Director of the Women's Human Rights Center (CEDEHM) and Irma Villanueva, Director of the Legal Department of CEDEHM in Chihuahua, Mexico.

The WHRDIC is aware of a campaign discrediting the work of Ms Castro and Ms Villanueva which has involved defamatory articles in print media, as well as derogatory references to their work defending and promoting human rights. Ms Castro and Ms Villanueva have a national and international reputation for their defense of human rights. The defamation campaign is not only damaging to their reputations and the validity of their work, but also makes them extremely vulnerable to high levels of risk.

According to the information received, the timing of the campaign and harassment corresponds to cases where Ms Castro and Ms Villanueva accompany and support women who are victims of institutional violence by governmental bodies such as the Justice Department, the National System for Family Development, and the Specialized Gender-Based Violence Crime Units in Chihuahua.

The WHRDIC is particularly alarmed that attacks against CEDEHM members have occurred despite of CEDEHM's precautionary measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2008 and in spite of Luz Estela Castro's (Director of CEDEHM) provisional measures from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights since 2013.

In addition, the WHRDIC is disturbed about the claims made by Enrique Serrano Escobar, the Mayor of Ciudad Juarez, who, on February 19, 2015, stated, that femicide is a myth (leyenda negra) in front of the Senate that in Ciudad Juarez in order to give CEDEHM members a bad reputation during a forum about repatriation.

With these kinds of statements, the Mayor is hiding the 20-year reality of violence and risk for women in the State of Chihuahua, which has been documented by diverse civil society and human rights organisations, including CEDEHM. Such statements also contribute to the stigmatisation of WHRDs that fight for the end of violence against women while fostering a climate of defamation and discrediting of pro-women's human rights work.

It is critical to draw attention to and recognise the contribution of WHRDs as they strengthen societies, institutions and democratic processes, as referred to by the United Nation's *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, which dictates that governments and authorities should not be obstacles to such processes but instead represent an important and legitimate force in democratic states.

The WHRDIC demands

- that the precautionary and provisional measures in favor of WHRDs Luz Estela Castro and Irma Villanueva as well as the other members of CEDEHM are immediately implemented.
- the efficient coordination between the State and Federal Governments in order to effectively implement the protective measures granted by international bodies.
- Implementation of a holistic policy in favor of WHRDs in Chihuahua in accordance with international standards including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights case Luna vs. Honduras.
- an end to the stigmatization and attacks against WHRDs and the women's human rights movement in the State of Chihuahua.

The Women Human Rights Defender International Coalition is a resource and advocacy network supporting women human rights defenders worldwide. We have 32 members:

Amnesty International (AI)	Isis International
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)	ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS-WICCE)
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM ASIA)	Just Associates (JASS)
The Association for Progressive Communications (APC WNSP)	The Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM)
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)	MADRE
BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB)	Nazra for Feminist Studies
Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR)	Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI)
Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)	Peace Brigades International
Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)	Society for Appraisal & Women Empowerment in Rural Areas (SAWERA)
Frida the Young Feminist Fund	Rainbow Rights Project (R-Rights)
Front Line Defenders	Urgent Action Fund (UAF)
Human Rights First	Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)
Information Monitor (INFORM)	Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)	Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (WIGJ)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)	Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRRAW-AP)	World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)