

MEXICO | displacement of indigenous groups and destruction of livelihoods Abuse of Eminent Domain and State Abuse of Expropriation | an OSF Cross-Cutting Topic

Violent evictions led by soldiers and police removed communities from their land in the Lacandon rainforest near Chiapas, Mexico. The raiding state forces burned down homes, destroyed villagers' belongings, and prevented families from taking any of their possessions. Indigenous communities in the Lacandon jungle continue to face threats of eviction by the government, which claims that its actions are driven by a need for environmental protection. In response, the communities have used mapping, and visual documentation to demonstrate their claim to their land.

THE CASE

Residents of El Suspiro and Laguna San Pedro, two indigenous Tselales communities in the Lacandon rainforest near Chiapas, Mexico, were forcibly evicted from their villages in a raid led by armed police and soldiers in 2010. The raid was a surprise, and the security forces used violence and threats to force families out of the village. Helicopters were used to “relocate” residents to Palenque, a town over 60 miles away. Some residents avoided relocation by fleeing into the jungle, and were thought to be living there without food or shelter. No displaced residents were compensated for the loss of their homes, means of livelihood, or property. Those that were relocated to Palenque were not offered housing, or access to livelihoods.

In 2012, three communities – San Gregorio, Ranchería Corozal and Nuevo Salvador Allende – were notified that their requests to stay in the area were “categorically” denied, and that they would be removed from their lands. This decision was based on the grounds that the towns were “irregular settlements,” despite that the oldest of the three, San Gregorio, had been there for over thirty years. While this process marks an improvement over the violent evictions that took place in 2010, residents are still not offered housing, compensation, or access to livelihoods upon relocation.

RIGHTS AND EVICTIONS

The forcible displacement of the residents of Tselales villages in 2010, and the three villages in 2012, is

suspected to be part of a large-scale plan to clear minority ethnic groups from the Lacandon area to make way for palm oil plantations. The government, however, claims that the area, which makes up part of the Biosphere Reserve of Motes Azules, will be used to develop eco-tourism. It also claims that the indigenous groups are using the land in an environmentally unsustainable way, directly contradicting the indigenous groups' claims that they work the land in a sustainable manner, with special care to preserve it for future generations.

The raiding soldiers and police destroyed the villager's means of livelihood – work tools, grains, fruit trees, and a community store. This act, combined with the transfer of traditional lands from the indigenous community to the government, demonstrate the paralyzing effect land expropriations have on communities' economic health. It also highlights the fragility of indigenous communities such as these, already marginalized by a pattern of government deprivation of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

The manner in which the evictions were carried out also highlights the disproportionality of force employed by the Mexican government, and the state's willingness to employ excessive violence and intimidation against civilians.

TOOLS AND TACTICS

Community mapping | Because of the complexity of land rights in the cases of the indigenous communities of Mexico, Digital Democracy has collaborated with

civil society actors to develop a community mapping program in Chiapas. This collaborative mapping process is intended to give residents in the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve the ability to dialogue, negotiate, and advocate for their right to the land.

Video and photographic documentation | Residents facing the looming threat of eviction also collaborated with Digital Democracy in order to document their homes, sustainable farming practices, and communities.

RELATED READING

[Friends of the Earth, 2010, "Alto al Desalojo de Familias en Selva Lacandona"](#)

[Friends of the Earth, 2010, "Stop the Eviction of the Native Communities of Lacandon Jungle, Chiapas, Mexico"](#)

[International Land Coalition, 2010, "Multinationals enter Chiapas' Rainforest – Indigenous Communities Violently Evicted"](#)

[La Jornada, 2012, "Amenazan con Desalojar Tres Poblados Indígenas Ubicados en la Selva Lacandona"](#)

[Digital Democracy "Reporting back from Chiapas, Mexico"](#)