

OCTOBER 2007
NEWS ON IRTF RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK
HUMAN RIGHTS CASES

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MEXICO

**Mexican Federal Commission for Electricity responds to RRN letters;
says that hydroelectric dam protesters “destroy information to confuse people of good faith”**

UA 103/07

RRN letter May 11 2007

On May 11, RRN members wrote to officials in Mexico, including the Director of the Federal Commission for Electricity, to express concern for the the safety of members of the **Organization of Community Members Opposing the Parota Dam** (CECOP) in Guerrero state and for the lives of the indigenous communities whose land will be flooded when the dam is built. Affected communities have been left in the dark about the amount of say-so they have with respect to the project approval process and actually handing over their land to state authorities. Some members of CECOP have been harassed, including leader Rodolfo Chavez Galindo, who was arbitrarily arrested by the police.

RRN members have sent at least three previous letters to Guerrero and Mexican officials since 2004 to protest the violence, arbitrary arrests and intimidation surrounding Parota Dam, which is a part of the Plan Puebla Panama infrastructure project. Three people have been killed, several injured, and at least one local activist has received death threats. There has been no progress in official investigations into these incidents.

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The fact the Mexican government felt the need to respond to almost 200 IRTF RRN members with personalized letters shows the pressure they are feeling and the scrutiny they are under. This is the power of the RRN!!

In a letter dated June 6, 2007, Eugenio Laris Alanís, Director of Projects and Financial Investment for the Federal Commission for Electricity (CFE), wrote to RRN members: I write you today grounded in Article 8 of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico, responding to your communication related to the La Parota Hydroelectric Project. I'd like to make you aware of the following:

The CFE is absolutely respectful of Mexican law and conducts itself within legal boundaries. In this way, it never has exercised any pressure to curtail freedom and individual rights of the inhabitants; it has not intimidated or threatened in any way those who oppose the construction of our projects. On the contrary, CFE has gone so far as to publicize and discuss it projects with communities that see themselves involved in the development of these projects.

In the case of La Parota, CFE has always tried to dialogue with all opposing groups, obtaining a favorable response in some cases, but also intransigent rejection by others.

CFE respects the way in which the Assemblies of Agricultural Nuclei are developed, which conduct themselves according to [federal] Agricultural Law. Whenever there's a demonstration of protest, the competent local security authority [i.e., police] is legally empowered to make sure that the public order is not upset.

CFE has respected judicial rulings of rejections handed down to 4 of the 19 Assemblies that have taken place in the ejidos [collective farming communities] and communities with direct influence on the project and has conducted itself within legal boundaries.

CFE, together with Federal and State governments, is convinced that the construction of La Parota will bring great benefits to the communities of the region, certainly with accentuated poverty levels and marginalization; that's why we have unrolled the Integral Development Plan that will assure real opportunities to better the standard of living of the population, activities contained within the limits of sustainable development and filled with full community participation.

The case of citizen Rodolfo Chavez Galindo is an issue for the Public Ministry and State Judicial Power, in which CFE has no interference.

It's worth mentioning that the opposing group led by persons such as Mr. Rodolfo Chavez Galindo who don't live within the zone and presumably have political interests, make false accusation, distorting information to confuse people of good faith.

Finally, the commitment that CFE has demonstrated to the 2012 people involved in the realization of the project, with respect to the effects of some 14,000 hectares, consists of fairly compensating them for their lands and the resources of their lands, as well as the resettlement of 10 communities, where housing and urban amenities will be proportioned to them, substantially improving their quality of life. It should be underscored that the vast majority of people potentially affected live in conditions of extreme poverty; we shouldn't fail to point out that the productive development projects of the region will represent for them a much better quality of life, as demonstrated by the wide studies conducted by the Autonomous University of Gurrero. In this context, I won't fail to emphasize that if this project is canceled, investment of important sums of money to spur development in this region, with tangible benefits for the whole community of the region, would not happen.

Mexico is a country of laws. The decision to move forward with the project will continue based on absolute respect for freedoms and human rights but always siding with the free will of the majority.

Sincerely, Eugenio Laris Alanís, Director of Projects and Financial Investment