

Ambassador Jorge Castro-Valle Kuehne
Embassy of Mexico to Norway
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to share my concern regarding two Christian Protestant families in Hidalgo, Mexico as it has come to my attention that they as religious minorities are experiencing discrimination in their local community.

In January 2019, several families experienced pressure from local authorities to sign an agreement to refrain from religious gatherings according to their Protestant conviction. While eight families succumbed to the pressure, Nemesio Cruz Hernández, Eligio Santiago Hernández, and their wives Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Angelina Martínez Hernández refused to sign. As a consequence, the local authorities cut off the families' access to public goods, such as water, sewer services, government benefit programs and the community mill for a year.

I would like to highlight the fact that this agreement is not in accordance with the Mexican constitution, protecting the rights of every citizen to practice their religion peacefully. After refusing to sign, Cruz Hernández and Santiago Hernández were frequently summoned to meetings with community leaders and threatened with being expelled from the community, should they continue their religious meetings. One year later, on 15 January 2020, the families saw no other solution than to sign the agreement, promising to refrain from their basic human right of gathering in the name of their faith. Their access to public services was then restored, and state authorities generously contributed to paying part of the families' fines of 57,700 Mexican pesos.

The government's financial contribution is greatly appreciated, as is the recent willingness by local authorities to continue with peaceful negotiations with the families, according to a court hearing on 4 October. However, the families are still in a situation of financial debt because of the fines, levied to them on illegal and unjust terms.

Your Excellency, I believe that the unjust treatment of these families is not honoring the Mexican constitution which states the equal treatment of all citizens, including the right for minorities to engage in peaceful religious ceremonies. I therefore humbly petition your intervention to ensure that:

- the fines levied to the Protestant families in Hidalgo be annulled with immediate effect;
- the families are secured full access to public goods on equal ground as their fellow citizens, without having to compromise their freedom of religion;
- Mexican state authorities uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for religious minorities in any agreement or mediation with local community leaders.

Sincerely,