

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

22 September 2017

MEX105980.E

Mexico: Treatment of Tzeltal people in Chiapas by society and authorities, including displacement of members or supporters of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN); situation in Tenejapa in 2011 and presently (2015-September 2017).

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Tzeltal People

According to an entry on the Tzeltal people published in *Native Peoples of the World: An Encyclopedia of Groups, Cultures and Contemporary Issues* and prepared by Gloria E. Chacon, Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, specializing in indigenous studies (UCSC 2 June 2015), the Tzeltal are a group of "Maya Indians that live primarily in the eastern highlands of Chiapas in southeastern Mexico" (Chacon 2013, 166). According to sources, the Tzeltal people account for approximately one third of the indigenous population of Chiapas (Rodríguez and Fortier 2007, 91; Houston Institute for Culture 2004).

A BBC report notes that "the levels of poverty and marginalisation in Chiapas are among the highest in Mexico, particularly for indigenous peoples, who make up roughly 65% of the local population" (BBC 1 Jan. 2014). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Professor of social anthropology at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, specializing in the study of indigenous groups in Chiapas, noted that the Tzeltal population in Chiapas receives [translation] "unequal treatment" from mestizo [mixed race] society, while indicating that the human rights situation varies for Tzeltal groups depending on political and religious affiliation, as well as economic status (Professor 7 Sept. 2017).

1.1 Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas

According to the encyclopedia entry, the Tzeltal participated in the 1994 Zapatista uprising which asserted indigenous rights (Chacon 2013, 166).

For further information on the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), see Response to Information Request MEX103776 of June 2011.

A 2014 report by Al Jazeera notes that "the Zapatistas remain popular at the local level" in Chiapas (Al Jazeera 1 Jan. 2014). Associated Press (AP) reports that the 20 years following the Zapatista rebellion have featured periods of tense relations between the government and the Zapatista movement (AP 1 Jan. 2014).

In 2011, *La Jornada*, a Mexico City-based newspaper, reports that Tzeltal communities are being persecuted by government groups in an attempt to deprive the Zapatistas of their land (*La Jornada* 7 Oct. 2011). According to the Professor, indigenous EZLN supporters are [translation] "victims of systematic repression and harassment" by members of governmental institutions, paramilitary groups, non-zapatista

armed groups and members of the civilian population (Professor 7 Sept. 2017). The Professor also noted that being an EZLN supporter in Chiapas, including in Tenejapa, poses a high risk (ibid.).

1.2 Displacement of members and supporters of the EZLN

According to a 2014 report by the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which monitors internal displacement around the world under the aegis of the Norwegian Refugee Council (IDMC May 2015, 3), "30,000 IDPs [internally displaced people] have been living in protracted displacement in Chiapas since the 1994 to 1995 Zapatista conflict, with no durable solutions in sight" (ibid., 19). A 2012 report by the same source highlighted that "99 per cent of those affected [were] members of indigenous groups with an acknowledged special attachment to their land" (IDMC Apr. 2013, 39). The same source further adds that because many indigenous IDPs in Chiapas "have lost access to their land and livelihoods, they have reportedly become poorer as a result of their displacement" (ibid.). According to the professor, in the past two years, the indigenous population has experienced a lot of displacement due to the political situation in the region, caused by the arrival of new political parties which created social conflict resulting in the appearance of armed fronts and divisions in the indigenous communities (Professor 7 Sept. 2017).

SinEmbargo, a digital Mexican newspaper, reports that in cases of dispossession in Chiapas, operators of the state government, with the support of police, force indigenous groups and Zapatista supporters to leave their land, with impunity (4 Feb. 2015).

El Universal, a national Mexican newspaper, reports that in 2016 indigenous Zapatistas staged a protest in San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, to demand an end to "harassment and threats" to a group of 47 displaced supporters of the EZLN, 36 of which were living in "inhumane conditions, without employment or medical attention" (*El Universal* 3 Feb. 2016). According to another report by the same source, in July 2017, members of four indigenous communities, displaced by political conflict, staged a protest outside the state palace of the government in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, in order to claim a safe return and reparations for losses and financial damages (ibid. 10 July 2017).

1.3 State Protection

Sources indicate that, in 2012, the state of Chiapas adopted the Law for Prevention and Response to Internal Displacement (The Brookings Institution 17 Feb. 2012; *El Universal* 14 Feb. 2012). However, according to some sources, application of the law has been lacking (IDMC May 2015, 19; Frayba Oct. 2014, 12). The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Frayba), a non-profit, independent NGO that was founded in 1989 and promotes human rights in the state of Chiapas (Frayba n.d.), reports that the Mexican government is a [translation] "persistent offender" regarding forced internal displacement and human rights violations (ibid. Oct. 2014, 11).

El Universal reports that the National Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH) have asked the federal government to create a national law regarding displacement and quotes the CNDH as noting that the country's legal system lacks regulation regarding forced internal displacement (*El Universal* 12 May 2016). According to the professor, no official program exists to assist victims of armed conflict and forced displacement (Professor 7 Sept. 2017). The IDMC reports that "[e]fforts to assist IDPs have been piecemeal and fragmented" (IDMC 31 Dec. 2013).

1.4 Civil Society

Sources indicate, without providing further details, that the Indigenous Development Commission (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, CDI) provides some assistance to IDPs, including housing (IDMC 31 Dec. 2013; CDI 12 May 2016).

2. Situation in Tenejapa in 2011

According to sources, on 4 December 2011 four families of Zapatista sympathizers were displaced in Tenejapa after they were assaulted by individuals affiliated to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) (*La Jornada* 7 Mar. 2013; SinEmbargo 4 Feb. 2015).

The following information comes from several reports in *La Jornada*:

The displaced families belong to the Tzeltal community of Banavil, in Tenejapa (17 July 2013). The families stated that they were [translation] "attacked with fire arms, displaced, incarcerated, persecuted like criminals, and mocked by the authorities" due to their being indigenous and EZLN supporters (7 Dec. 2013). Lorenzo López Girón, one of the victims and son of Alonso López Luna, who disappeared following the incident, is quoted as saying that the public prosecutor [translation] "has been an accomplice of the aggressors and has

refused to search for his father's body" (7 Mar. 2013). In a press release on the commemoration of the fifth year of the disappearance of López Luna, Frayba indicated that on 21 February 2013, one of the members of the displaced families, an 11 year old girl, died due to the [translation] "consequences of suffering the vulnerability of forced displacement," as the family remained in a "precarious" situation (5 Dec. 2016).

Sources also indicate the following about the incident of 4 December 2011:

- Pedro Méndez López was killed (*La Jornada* 20 Jan. 2012; Frayba Oct. 2014, 22);
- Lorenzo López Girón was injured and arrested in the incident (ibid.; *La Jornada* 7 Mar. 2013);
- Six others were injured (*La Jornada* 7 Dec. 2013; Frayba Oct. 2014, 22);
- Alonso López Luna was disappeared (ibid.; *La Jornada* 20 Jan. 2012). According to *La Jornada*, he is an indigenous Tzeltal from Banavil, Tenejapa (ibid. 5 Dec. 2016). The same source reports that on 23 December 2011, a severed arm was found in Mercedes, adjacent to Banavil, which, according to the family, belongs to López Luna, based on a scar he had on one of his fingers (ibid. 20 Jan. 2012). *La Jornada* states that evidence suggests that López Luna was killed (ibid. 17 July 2013). According to Frayba, five years after his disappearance, the government has not searched for his body (ibid. 5 Dec. 2016);
- EZLN supporter Francisco Sántiz López was arrested and imprisoned for 14 months (ibid. 7 Mar. 2013). *La Jornada* indicates that although witnesses report that he was not present at the time and place of the incident, he was accused of having initiated the violence (ibid. 20 Jan. 2012). A judge reportedly declared that the charges against him were unfounded (ibid. 8 Oct. 2012).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Associated Press (AP). 1 January 2014. José María Álvarez. "Mexico's Zapatista Rebel Movement Marks 20 Years since 1994 Uprising." (Factiva) [Accessed 29 Aug. 2017]

Al Jazeera. 1 January 2014. Duncan Tucker. "[Are Mexico's Zapatista Rebels Still Relevant?](#)" [Accessed 29 Aug. 2017]

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 1 January 2014. Will Grant. "[Struggling On: Zapatistas 20 Years After the Uprising.](#)" [Accessed 29 Aug. 2017]

The Brookings Institution. 17 February 2012. Elizabeth Ferris. "[Good News from Chiapas - But a Larger Challenge for Mexico.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Frayba). October 2014. [Los derechos humanos a debate: Entre el cinismo oficial y la Dignidad de los Pueblos.](#) [Accessed 25 Aug. 2017]

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Frayba). N.d. "[Sobre nosotros.](#)" [Accessed 6 Sep. 2017]

Chacon, Gloria E. 2013. "Tzeltal and Tzotzil." *Native Peoples of the World: An Encyclopedia of Groups, Cultures and Contemporary Issues*. Edited by Steven Danver. London and New York: Routledge.

Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI). 12 May 2016. "[Visita a Casa del Niño Indígena en Chiapas.](#)" [Accessed 5 Sep. 2017]

El Universal. 10 July 2017. Óscar Gutiérrez. "[Indígenas desplazados realizan plantón en Chiapas.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

El Universal. 12 May 2016. Marcos Muedano. "[CNDH pide crear ley sobre desplazados.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

El Universal. 3 February 2016. Óscar Gutiérrez. "[Indígenas zapatistas exigen retorno de desplazados en Chiapas.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

El Universal. 5 July 2015. Katia Torres. "[Crime, Poverty and Conflicts Trigger Exodus in Mexico.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

El Universal. 14 February 2012. Óscar Gutiérrez. "[Chiapas aprueba iniciativa de Ley para desplazados.](#)" [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

Houston Institute for Culture. 2004. John P. Schmal. "[Chiapas: Forever Indigenous.](#)" [Accessed 11 Sep. 2017]

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). May 2015. [Global Overview 2015: People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence](#). [Accessed 23 Aug. 2017]

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). 31 December 2013. "[Mexico: Internal Displacement in Brief](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). April 2013. [Global Overview 2012: People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence](#). [Accessed 6 Sep. 2017]

La Jornada. 5 December 2016. Elio Henríquez. "[Gobierno, sin acción ante desaparición de Tzeltal hace 5 años: Frayba](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 1 April 2014. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Crean en Chiapas ONG en defensa de desplazados](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 7 December 2013. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Denuncian a fiscal especializado indígena de Chiapas por incumplir aprehensiones](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 17 July 2013. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Tzeltales desplazados de Tenejapa exigen atención del gobierno](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 7 March 2013. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Desplazados de Banavil piden intervenga Peña Nieto](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 13 January 2013. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Libertad inmediata para el indígena Francisco Santiz López, exige el Frayba](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 8 October 2012. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Un juez reconoce su inocencia, pero Santiz sigue en la cárcel](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 20 January 2012. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Demanda el Frayba detener las agresiones de priístas contra indígenas](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

La Jornada. 7 October 2011. Hermann Bellinghausen. "[Se recrudece la persecución contra bases de apoyo zapatistas en los Altos de Chiapas](#)." [Accessed 30 Aug. 2017]

Professor, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City. 7 September 2017. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Rodríguez, Jeanette and Ted Fortier. 2007. *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

SinEmbargo. 4 February 2015. Sandra Rodríguez Nieto. "[Chiapas: Tierra de desplazados ... por su propio gobierno](#)." [Accessed 25 Aug. 2017]

University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). 2 June 2015. [Institute for Humanities Research](#). [Accessed 11 Sep. 2017]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Centro de Derechos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas; Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vitoria; Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos; Congreso Nacional Indígena; Federación Indígena Empresarial y Comunidades Locales de México; Mexico – Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación; UN – Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

Internet sites, including: Agencia Mexicana de Noticias; Amnesty International; eoi.net; *Estudios Políticos*; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; *Human Rights Quarterly*; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; IRIN; Minority Rights Group International; *Mundo de Hoy*; NOTIMEX; Radio France internationale; Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty; ReliefWeb; Reuters; UN – OHCHR, Refworld.

[Tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

[Top of Page](#)

Date modified: 2016-01-05

