

# **Baptists assaulted in indigenous community in Mexico**

January 9, 2023

A Baptist woman in Mexico remains hospitalized in serious condition after being tied to a tree and beaten before Christmas.

Her pastor at Great Commission Baptist Church in Rancho Nuevo also was assaulted when he tried to intervene and was detained two hours by local authorities.

No arrests were made, even though complaints were filed with the Hidalgo State Human Rights Commission and the Hidalgo State Prosecutor's Office.

## **'Not an isolated incident'**

Officials with [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), a United Kingdom-based human rights organization, noted Rancho Nuevo—an indigenous Nahuatl-speaking community in Hidalgo State—has a documented history of violating the religious freedom of minority faith groups.

"This was not an isolated incident," said Anna-Lee Stangl, joint head of advocacy for CSW. "The situation in her village, Rancho Nuevo, has been ongoing since 2015. Religious minority children in Rancho Nuevo have been blocked from attending school since 2018.

"CSW has documented 20 other similar cases in the state of Hidalgo and about 100 in different states across the country."

Maria Concepcion Hernández Hernández was attacked Dec. 21 after she

visited a plot of land she owns because a neighbor asked her to remove two trees. Since 2015, local authorities in Rancho Nuevo have prohibited Baptists from accessing or using their own land to cultivate crops.

A half dozen Roman Catholic men allegedly participated in the assault. CSW reported the local Catholic church rang its bells immediately prior to the attack—at a time when they typically are silent.

When Pastor Regelio Hernández Baltazar tried to stop the attack, he was assaulted and detained by local leaders who demanded he hand over the deeds to plots of land owned by his church members. When he refused, the authorities threatened to take the deeds by force and seize the property.

## **Governed under Law of Uses and Customs**

Rancho Nuevo is governed under Mexico's Law of Uses and Customs, which recognizes the right of indigenous communities to maintain their cultural and traditional local governance.

The law stipulates local authorities must govern in line with rights guaranteed in the Mexican constitution and international conventions. In practice, however, the state and federal government does little to protect minority rights in those areas, Stangl said.

“In Hidalgo, over the past six years and [under the previous governor](#), the state government insisted that there were no cases of religious intolerance in the state, and we have documented cases where government officials responsible for protecting freedom of religion or belief pressured members of religious minorities to comply with the demands of the religious majority,” she said.



Elijah Brown

Elijah Brown, general secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance, called for prayer.

“As we enter into this new year, we are reminded again that many around the world, including Baptists, face daily challenges as they live out their faith,” Brown said.

“Even as the BWA stands together with the Mexican Baptist Convention in providing support for this church and family, let us pray for the full recovery of Sister Maria, and renew our commitment to live in all circumstances with bold humility our faith in Jesus Christ.”

Maria Concepcion was listed in critical condition for two weeks, but her condition improved this past weekend.

“She was moved out of ICU and is able to receive visitors. She has also stopped vomiting blood and has been able to ingest some soft food. Her family and church community attribute this to all the prayer on her behalf and have asked people to continue to pray for her,” Stangl said.

“Aside from the improvement in Maria Concepcion’s condition, there have been no new developments in the case, and the Baptists in Rancho Nuevo remain in a very precarious situation, with ongoing threats of mass forced displacement.”

# Report documents plight of women



(CSW Report)

Last March, CSW published [a report](#), “[Let her be heard: The untold stories of indigenous minority women in Mexico](#).” It focused on interviews and focus group discussions with indigenous women from religious minorities in the states of Hidalgo, Chiapas, Guerrero, Jalisco and Oaxaca.

“Many local authorities of communities functioning under the Law of Uses and Customs mandate community uniformity in terms of religious practice and belief, compelling all members to participate in the religious activities of the majority or face punishment,” the report states.

Interviewed women reported religiously motivated attacks on property, gender-based violence and denial of access to basic services, including prenatal healthcare services.

CSW holds responsible authorities in the Hidalgo State, as well as local individuals directly involved in the assault on Maria Concepcion.

“We call on Governor Julio Ramón Menchaca Salazar to ensure that his administration takes swift action to bring to justice those responsible for

this brutal attack and the ongoing threats against members of the religious minority in Rancho Nuevo,” Stangl said.

“We urge Governor Menchaca Salazar to work closely with the state human rights commission and federal religious affairs officials to put in place policies that recognize the existence of serious [freedom of religion or belief] violations in Hidalgo and develop effective and timely ways to address them in accordance with Mexico’s legal protections for human rights.”