

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Mexico: Repression and violence against the indigenous Hñöhñö (Otomi) community in Santiago Mexquititlán, including sexual violence against woman human rights defender Estela Hernández Jiménez

On 5 June 2025, seven members of the **Hñöhñö (Otomí) people of Santiago Mexquititlán**, Querétaro, were victims of arbitrary detentions, beatings, physical aggression, and body searches carried out violently by agents of the State Police of Querétaro (POES), including acts of sexual violence against woman human rights defender **Estela Hernández Jiménez**.

The [Hñöhñö \(Otomi\) people of Santiago Mexquititlán](#), located in the Mexican state of Querétaro, is an indigenous community committed to the defence of land, water, territory, and collective rights. The Hñöhñö people have a long history of organising around issues of autonomy, ancestral governance, and environmental protection. They actively participate in local, regional, and national institutions such as the Autonomous Council of Santiago Mexquititlán, the Network in Defence of Water and Life (REDAVI), and the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). Its members have been active in denouncing rights violations committed in the context of extractive projects, the lack of rights protection by the state, and the criminalisation of indigenous organisations.

[Estela Hernández Jiménez](#) is a hñöhñö (otomí) defender of indigenous rights, a teacher of native indigenous education, doctor of pedagogy, and one of the most brilliant indigenous intellectuals of contemporary Mexico. She is a member of the Autonomous Council of Santiago Mexquititlán and the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). She fought for the freedom and reparation of her mother Jacinta Francisco Marcial, who was arbitrarily detained on 3 August 2006 and accused of kidnapping six agents of the now defunct Mexican Federal Investigation Agency.

On 5 June 2025, two youths from the Hñöhñö (Otomí) people of Santiago Mexquititlán were arbitrarily detained by agents of the Querétaro State Police (POES) as they were on their way to work. Upon learning of their detention, members of the community organised a peaceful protest to demand their release. During this protest, five other people, including woman human rights defender Estela Hernández Jiménez and her husband, were violently detained when they attempted to enter in a dialogue with the agents and document the abuses. The community was surrounded by state and municipal police forces, and the seven detainees were held incommunicado for several hours, without access to official information or legal assistance. Although they were subsequently released, they suffer from serious physical and psychological effects resulting from the violence exerted by the POES agents.

In addition to excessive use of force during the detentions, there have been reports of physical and sexual violence against woman human rights defender Estela Hernández Jiménez by POES agents. While documenting the arbitrary detention of two youths from her community, the woman human rights defender was intercepted by at least ten agents, who repeatedly beat her, shouted insults with racist and misogynist connotations, and forcibly took her to the facilities of the local National System for the Integral Development of Families (DIF).

According to testimonies gathered by the Hñöhñö people, Estela Hernández Jiménez was subjected to physical aggression directed at sensitive areas of her body during the detention. This is also evident from a recording by Sara Hernández Jiménez, woman human rights defender and sister of Estela Hernández Jiménez, who witnessed the attack. One of the police officers ripped off a button of her blouse, partially exposing her chest, and violently subdued her. As a result, she has persistent physical injuries, including severe pain and loss of sensation in parts of her body.

Following the detentions, people from the community also reported the presence of two individuals resembling police officers near the home of Estela Hernández Jiménez, asking suspicious questions. People from the community presume that they are agents of the POES, which increases their concern about possible acts of surveillance and intimidation. Criminalisation, harassment, and surveillance create an increasingly hostile and dangerous environment for human rights defenders in Santiago Mexquititlán. Furthermore, these events took place in a context of systematic repression against those defending the territory, water, and collective rights of the indigenous people.

Front Line Defenders considers these acts a grave human rights violations against human rights defenders, particularly the use of sexual violence as a tool of repression.

Front Line Defenders urges the Mexican authorities to:

1. Immediately conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the violent incidents, including the acts of sexual violence against Estela Hernández Jiménez, and hold those responsible accountable;
2. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Estela Hernández Jiménez, Sara Hernández Jiménez, and all human rights defenders in Santiago Mexquititlán;
3. End all acts of harassment, surveillance, and criminalisation against members of the Hñöhñö (Otomi) community of Santiago Mexquititlán;
4. Guarantee under all circumstances that human rights defenders in Mexico can carry out their work free from fear of reprisals and without undue restrictions.

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