

Solidarity Statement from the Freedom for Nestora-Seattle Committee to the January 17, 2014 demonstration demanding freedom for all political prisoners in Mexico

The following solidarity statement was forwarded by the Freedom for Nestora-Seattle-Committee to a January 17, 2014 demonstration in Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero. Several community and political groups organized the event to demand freedom for political prisoners in the state of Guerrero and throughout Mexico. The statement was carried in the two main Guerrero newspapers and reported in many blogs and on-line publications. It reads as follows:

The Freedom for Nestora-Seattle Committee salutes those who are fighting to free political prisoners in Mexico. We stand in solidarity with your efforts to pressure your government to end the criminalization of dissent. Governments can jail and torture people, but they cannot lock up ideas. And they cannot stop the global movements for justice in your country, here in the United States or around the world.

The Freedom for Nestora-Seattle Committee is a community coalition in Washington State. We are part of an international campaign to free political prisoner and indigenous leader Nestora Salgado. Salgado is a U.S. citizen who was arrested in Mexico for her role in coordinating a legal community police force in her hometown of Olinalá, Guerrero. She was locked up after speaking out against collusion between local public officials and the drug cartels. The fact that she was taken to a maximum security prison hundreds of miles away, on a kidnapping charge that normally would be handled locally, is evidence of that she is a political prisoner.

Salgado is being held virtually incommunicado in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the spread of her ideas—that indigenous people and poor people, particularly women, have a right to control their own lives, and to exercise democratic community control over the police (a demand that resonates in many communities of color in the U.S.). Salgado is not alone. Forty-six out of eighty-one cities in Guerrero have community police forces. And she is just one of many indigenous leaders the government has arrested.

The Peña Nieto regime fears the spread of community police forces and growing indigenous and public opposition to privatizing oil production, electrical power, and education, and to granting extensive mining concessions. The government tries to justify the forceful suppression of organizations of self-defense by calling legal community police “vigilantes.” We call people like Nestora—who risk their liberty and their lives standing up for themselves, their families, their communities, their schools, and their environment—heroes and we honor them for their courage and sacrifice.

Putting people in jail because of their political ideas is a violation of freedom of speech and association. It is prohibited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Mexico signed decades ago. It is undemocratic, dictatorial, unjust, inhumane and widespread—which makes what you are doing all that more important.

Our experience is that people want to fight back against political repression. Over 115 organizations and individuals have endorsed the campaign to free Nestora and over 6200 people signed a petition calling for her release.

The Freedom for Nestora–Seattle Committee expresses its deep gratitude for all those who joined protests in the streets to demand freedom for Nestora and all the other political prisoners in Mexico. We stand in solidarity with you.

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