

Mexican Baptists move when authorities fail to honor rights

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Members of a Baptist church in Mexico's Hidalgo State who were displaced in April have moved to neighboring Veracruz State after local officials failed to honor their religious freedom rights, an international human rights group reported.

About 150 Christians associated with the Great Commission Fundamental Baptist Church relocated to Chalma, Veracruz, where they were offered the opportunity to rent land they can purchase later, [Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported](#) on Nov. 21.

The Baptists initially were [forced from their homes](#) in the villages of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo—indigenous Nahuati-speaking communities in Hidalgo—in April.

They sought refuge in Huejutla de los Reyes, where they asked the government to intercede for them and where local evangelicals provided them food and water.

In September, the displaced families were allowed to return home after municipal officials worked with Hidalgo State Secretary Guillermo Olivares and Religious Affairs Director Margarita Cabrera Roman to [broker an agreement](#), assuring the Baptists their religious freedom rights would be protected.

Village leaders reneged on agreement

However, village leaders “quickly reneged on key provisions of the

agreement,” Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported.

“Contrary to the stipulations of the agreement, those who returned to the villages were informed that they would be obliged to make financial contributions to the local Roman Catholic church, and while they would not be forced to participate in Roman Catholic events, they would be expected to pay associated fees,” CSW stated.

“The village authorities also communicated that they would not be permitted to speak about their religious beliefs and placed a ban on any conversions.”

The Baptists also learned their movements would be strictly monitored to prevent contact with associates and relatives in Veracruz.

They also were informed they would be barred from access to health, education and other government benefits for a year to ensure they complied with the restrictions.

“We are deeply disappointed that, yet again, the Mexican government at every level—municipal, state and federal—has neglected its responsibility to uphold constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion or belief and has placed the responsibility to resolve the egregious violation of their fundamental rights on the victims,” said Anna Lee Stangl, co-director of advocacy for CSW.

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo have a [history of violating the religious freedom of minority faith groups](#) dating back at least to 2015. The villages are governed under Mexico’s Law of Uses and Customs, which recognizes the right of indigenous communities to maintain their cultural and traditional local governance.

Action by government officials to broker an agreement “means little in the absence of enforcement and accountability measures for village leaders

who continue to openly break Mexican law,” Stangl continued.

“We call on the Mexican government, once again, to take steps to ensure that freedom of religion or belief is protected for all, including indigenous people, and to combat a culture of impunity around freedom of religion or belief violations by holding individuals responsible for these crimes to account in a court of law,” she said.