



## **Mexican Attorney General (PGR) detains human rights advocate Lucila Bettina Cruz Velázquez in Santa María Xadani, Oaxaca**

**Mexico City** – The Office of the Mexican Attorney General (PGR) detained human rights advocate Lucila Bettina Cruz Velázquez in Santa María Xadani, Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, at 3:30 pm on February 22, 2012. At the time of this press release her whereabouts and the legal charges against her remain unknown. The State of Oaxaca's Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman granted Ms. Cruz Velázquez precautionary measures on November 14, 2011.

At the time of her detention Ms. Cruz Velázquez was accompanied by attorney Maribel González Pedro. The PGR did allow either of them to read the arrest warrant and the reasons for the arrest are unknown. To date it has been impossible to confirm whether Ms. Cruz Velázquez has been presented before the relevant federal authorities. Hence there are grounds for concern regarding her security and physical integrity.

Ms. Cruz Velázquez is a well-known indigenous land rights advocate and a founding member of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of Land Rights. The Assembly has accompanied several campaigns to defend the collective rights of indigenous peoples, including an organizing campaign with members of the Zapotec and Ikoote communities resisting wind projects in the region and a campaign with the Zapotec community against inflated electricity bills imposed by the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE). Ms. González Pedro is also a member of the Assembly.

This is not the first time that the PGR has detained a member of the Assembly. On April 12, 2011, Mr. Filiberto Vicente Aquino, leader of the movement against inflated electricity costs, was detained in Xadani and taken to the headquarters of the Mexican Attorney General in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca. Mr. Vicente Aquino was falsely accused of stealing electricity.

The detention of Ms. Cruz Velázquez is emblematic of the insecurity facing women human rights advocates and the criminalization of their activities.

### **Context:**

Since last year the Assembly has accompanied the Unión Hidalgo Wind Project Resistance Committee, which consists of small landowners from Unión Hidalgo who oppose the Piedra Larga wind project. In order to address land rights violations and the absence of free, prior and informed consent for indigenous landowners, in May 2011 the Committee requested a dialogue with Desarrollos Eólicos de México, S.A. de C.V. (DEMEX), a subsidiary of the Spanish renewable energy company Renovalia Energy, and the state government of Oaxaca as mediator.

On October 28, 2011, local henchmen and municipal police attacked Ms. Cruz Velázquez and members of the Committee. These violent acts prompted the precautionary measures issued by the

Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Oaxaca, which aim to protect and guarantee the physical integrity of Ms. Cruz Velázquez and other members of the Committee.

The dialogue to negotiate the early termination of the land lease agreements signed with DEMEX took place on February 8, 2012. That day both parties agreed to convene a second negotiation for Saturday, February 25, with the purpose of hearing the company's official response to the demand for early termination of the lease agreements.

**Demands:**

The signatories to this press release make the following demands of the federal Interior Ministry, the Office of the Mexican Attorney General, and the National Human Rights Commission:

- The unconditional and immediate release of human rights advocate Lucila Bettina Cruz Velázquez;
- That measures are taken immediately to guarantee the security and physical integrity of Lucila Bettina Cruz Velázquez, Maribel González Pedro, and the remaining members of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of Land Rights.

**Signatories:**

- Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of Land Rights (in Spanish: Asamblea de los Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo de Tehuantepec en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio)
- Unión Hidalgo Wind Project Resistance Committee (in Spanish: Comité de Resistencia al Proyecto Eólico de Unión Hidalgo)
- ProDESC (in Spanish: Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales)
- PODER (Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research)

**Press contact:**

- Valeria Scorza / ProDESC, (52-55) 5212-2230, [valeriaprodesc@gmail.com](mailto:valeriaprodesc@gmail.com)

#####