



Thursday, April 3, 2008

Chiapas: Interview with Diego Cadenas Gordillo (Frayba) about the hunger-striking detainees.

On April 1, 2008, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, SIPAZ interviewed Diego Cadenas Gordillo, lawyer and Director of Defense in the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center (Frayba) and designated legal representative of the detainees on hunger strike.

DCG: The current situation for the hunger-striking and fasting political prisoners is the following: so far 30 prisoners have been freed out of a total of 45. Eleven prisoners still remain behind bars. Of these, four are on hunger strike in the prison El Amate and two in CERESO #5 [in San Cristóbal de las Casas]. The former have maintained a hunger strike for 36 days, and those in CERESO #5 for 26 days. Their health has already deteriorated. Those who have been freed have been released on different legal grounds. Among these is the “law of suspended sentence,” and we also know that “termination of legal action” and “partial sentence reduction” have been applied. We’ll soon see the terms which the judge will dictate for each prisoner, which will have to be complied with so that they may remain free and will not run the risk of being detained yet again. In general, the prisoners have not been granted unconditional freedom, as they’ll have to fulfill these terms such as returning to the courthouse to sign a list of obligations at a time indicated by the judges.

Interviewer: Why do you think the government decided to free some of the detainees, and do you think that the remaining detainees will be freed in the coming days? How do you see the situation?

DCG: I think that the mobilization that was launched when the prisoners initiated the hunger strike, followed by the actions of their relatives and other organizations such as the Pueblo Creyente [Believing People, Catholic social justice group], The Other Campaign, has exercised sufficient pressure to force the Chiapas government to seek a solution to this situation. It is troubling that the underlying issues are not being dealt with, such as a necessary legal reform which will ensure that this situation is not repeated. I also think that the mobilization of the hunger-striking and fasting prisoners has benefited the other 346 or 347 prisoners who were freed [this figure is actually the number of prisoners whose case files were reviewed following the initiation of the hunger strike].

Interviewer: Has the government made the commitment to enact structural reforms that would prevent future cases of unfair or arbitrary detention?

DCG: Officially, the government hasn't made that commitment. During the press conference yesterday, while handing over the orders to release the prisoners, they referred to weaknesses within the system. In order to maintain consistency, we understand that they should be proposing reforms to eliminate these systemic weaknesses. So far, there has been no specific information with regard to that. We've been insisting that these steps be taken, and we don't believe that it would be that difficult for the Chiapas government as there are several sets of recommendations that have been issued by international