

Mexico: 1,000 Wixarika Indigenous People Reclaim Ancestral Land



The hallucinogenic cactus peyote is central to the spirituality of the Wixarika as a channel to connect with their ancestors. | Photo: EFE

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The Wixarika people in Mexico's Western Madre Sierra mountain range have fought for decades to reclaim some 10,000 hectares of ancestral land.

With court ruling in a century-old conflict on their side, at least 1,000 Indigenous Wixarika people, also known as Huicholes, are determined to reclaim Thursday a swath of their ancestral land from ranchers in the western state of Nayarit in a mass action that some fear could spark violence.

OPINION:

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The Wixarika community from San Sebastian Teponahuaxtla—known as Wuaut+a by the local Indigenous population—in the state of Jalisco, bordering Nayarit to the south, announced plans to accompany federal authorities at 10:00 a.m. local time to enforce a court decision upholding Wixarika rights to the land dating back to colonial agreements with the Spanish grown in the early 1700s.

The enforcement targets a 184-hectare plot in the Nayarit community of Huajimic, a relatively small tract of the Wixarika's total land claim of some 10,000 hectares of territory that the group argues is under "irregular possession." Ranchers obtained titles to the land in the early 1990s, but courts have ruled in the Wixarika's favor on 13 out of a total of 47 land claims, the remainder of which remain pending.

"After 40 years of conflict and 10 years of litigation, this is the first enforcement to be implemented in the countryside ... for the return of several properties in Huajimic," said the community of San Sebastian Teponahuaxtlan and its supporting Indigenous organizations in a statement ahead of the action. "It is important that this first enforcement is implemented efficiently and that the Mexican state demonstrates that the rule of law prevails over any act of intimidation."

But many observers fear that hostile confrontations may erupt. Gamboa Suarez, a member of a property owners' association in Huajimic, told the news outlet NNC that local residents don't plan to surrender the land, which they've had a stake on since 1906.

OPINION:

[Tribal Dakota Pipeline Resistance the Start of Something Bigger](#)

“None of the people of Huajimic are willing to give up their land,” Suarez said, calling the dispute a “delicate issue” and warning of possible violence.

Wixarika leaders called on authorities in Jalisco and Nayarit to respect the court decision and take steps to ensure peace and public order in the course of the enforcement. They also called on President Enrique Peña Nieto and Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong to fulfill their duty to guarantee Indigenous territorial rights, specifically for the community of San Sebastian Teponahuaxtlan.

The Wixarika urged federal authorities for years to solve the dispute by offering compensation to the ranchers currently in possession of the land, Intercontinental Cry reported. But earlier this year, officials revealed that payment would not be possible, forcing the land claims to take the route of a direct takeover of the territories indicated in the court rulings. With ranchers set on staying on the land, the atmosphere is ripe for violent conflict.

The Wixarika people's traditional territory spans across the major Western Sierra Madre mountain range in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Zacatecas, and Durango. The traditional culture, shamanic spirituality, and the present-day struggles of the Wixarika were showcased in the 2014 documentary film “Huicholes: The Last Peyote Guardians.” The film details the group's ceremonial use of the hallucinogenic cactus peyote, which they “hunt” in one of their sacred mountains, which they call Wirikuta.

The Wixarika, the sacred Wirikuta, and ancient cultural traditions like the peyote hunt are under threat from foreign mining activities, including an open-pit, cyanide leaching silver mine operated by the Canadian company First Majestic Silver Corp. The Wixarika continue to hold on to a custom of completing an annual pilgrimage to Wirikuta to honor the four sacred cardinal directions and pass their traditions on to the next generation.

Source: <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Mexico-1000-Wixarika-Indigenous-People-Reclaim-Ancestral-Land-20160922-0017.html>