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Mexico: Abduction of the brother of environmental human rights defender Rolando Silva Andrade

On 15 July 2026, the brother of human rights defender and environmentalist **Rolando Silva Andrade** went missing. Rolando Silva Andrade and his family have been the target of frequent threats in recent months, which has forced the defender to leave his community indefinitely. Rolando's brother, José Luis Silva Andrade, is also a member of the Agua Fría community and has not been contacted ever since.

The [Comunidad de Agua Fría](#) (Agua Fría Community) is located in Los Azufres, a region of the state of Michoacán. It was formed in the 1940s and currently has around 180 residents. The community's territory is of great environmental importance, including forest ecosystems and several water sources. The Community has collectively taken responsibility for protecting the territory, organising community life, and caring for the local forest and water sources.

[Rolando Silva Andrade](#) is a human rights defender and environmentalist from the Agua Fría Community. He is known for his longstanding role in defending the forest, water, and territory from illegal logging and land grabbing by local sawmill groups colluding with organised crime, state officials, and other actors with economic interests in the area. In the Community, Rolando Silva Andrade plays a key role as a healer and moral authority, as well as an environmental defender of the local sulphur springs, an activity that is central to the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual life of the Agua Fría Community.

On Monday, 15 July 2026, José Luis Silva Andrade left his home at 8:00 am to investigate a tree-logging incident in the Agua Fría community, as chainsaws could be heard nearby. He told his sisters he would be back for lunch, but his family have been unable to contact him ever since. The following day, at around 8:00 am, a man allegedly associated with a local organised crime group arrived at the sisters' home to inform them that José Luis Silva Andrade was being held captive and that they had to go and 'negotiate with the boss'. The threats escalated until the sisters were told they would need to act as witnesses while José Luis Silva Andrade signed documents transferring the land to them. Otherwise, he would be beaten up and disappear.

Threats and attacks against human rights defender Rolando Silva Andrade, his family and the community have been on the rise in recent months. Front Line Defenders [previously reported](#) on similar incidents. Between February and March 2026, the community made public at least 4 serious threats targetting Rolando Silva Andrade and several of his family members.

On 25 February 2026, a group of four heavily armed men reportedly linked to a criminal group operating in Los Azufres went to the home of Rolando Silva Andrade's relatives in the Agua Fría community. They made direct threats against them: 'Tell Rolando to hand over the land because we are going to take it. If he doesn't, we will come for him.' On 3 March 2026, shortly afterwards, four armed men returned to the Agua Fría Community, questioning why the human rights defender had not reported to them. They left a phone number and instructions for him to call immediately and stated that 'now we are not just going to take him away; the offence is now more serious'.

On 16 March 2026, the woman human rights defender and partner of Rolando, Reyna Coello Castro, received several calls from a relative. They told her that three armed men had visited them, threatening the community and demanding that they hand over the land, or else 'they would round up the people of the community'. Two days later, on 18 March, three heavily armed men entered Agua Fría, intimidating community members in an attempt to force them to sign documents transferring ownership of the community's land to the men.

To date, the community has managed to resist the incursion of organised crime groups and their attempts to seize control of its territory. However, this resistance has come at a severe cost, compromising the safety and physical integrity of several community members and exposing them to life-threatening risks; the latest being the ongoing abduction of José Luis Silva Andrade. The community has already lodged several formal complaints with the Specialised Public Prosecutor's Office for Human Rights (FEMDH) and the Prosecutor's Office Specialised in Organised Crime Matters (FEMDO) regarding the threats received in February and March, as well as requesting that human rights defender Rolando Silva Andrade, his family and the community of Agua Fría be included in the National Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. However, to date they have received no response regarding the incidents reported, nor any updated information on the progress of the investigation.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned for the life and physical safety of José Luis Silva Andrade, the brother of human rights defender Rolando Silva Andrade. Front Line Defenders is also appalled that this abduction occurred following an escalation of threats which had already been reported to several state agencies. Front Line Defenders believes that the Agua Fría community is at imminent risk of forced displacement and further physical violence. José Luis' ongoing abduction is clearly an act of retaliation for the Agua Fría community defending its land and territory. It is also a stark illustration of the seriousness of the situation and the urgent need for effective protection.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Launch an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the whereabouts of José Luis Silva Andrade. This investigation should aim to ensure his protection and timely release, and the findings should be published. Those responsible should be brought to justice in accordance with international standards.
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the comprehensive protection of the Silva Andrade family and all members of the Agua Fría community, guaranteeing their safety, physical integrity and psychological well-being.
3. Prioritise and expedite the assessment of Agua Fría community human rights defenders for inclusion in the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, with a view to ensuring the immediate safeguarding of their lives, physical integrity and safety.
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders and their communities in Mexico, including the Agua Fría community, can continue their advocacy work without fear of reprisals or other restrictions.

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