NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Police detain Mexican priest, two migrants

David Agren Catholic News Service | Sep. 19, 2011

MEXICO CITY -- A Catholic priest in southeastern Mexico -- known for his outspoken defense of undocumented Central Americans arriving from neighboring Guatemala -- was detained for several hours and threatened by soldiers and state police.

Father Tomas Gonzalez, pastor of the Crucified Christ Parish in Tenosique, near the lawless Peten region of Guatemala, told Catholic News Service that soldiers pulled over his vehicle -- also carrying two migrants and an Amnesty International activist -- and "surrounded us for three-and-a-half hours," after he refused to allow them to search his vehicle Sept. 17.

The soldiers called in Tabasco state police, whom Father Gonzalez said found nothing in his vehicle.

Father Gonzalez was traveling at the time with two migrants and Ruben Figueroa, an activist with Amnesty International.

A state police officer struck Figueroa and told him, "We're going to teach you to respect," Amnesty International said in statement.

Another official arriving at the scene in an unmarked vehicle and wearing military clothing called Father Gonzalez "Devious Indian," and said, "There are no witnesses here and I'm going to bust this guy's head," the statement said.

Father Gonzalez confirmed the details of the statement.

"This happens all the time with the Mexican authorities, above all, with the army and state police officers," he said.

The arrest marked the latest hostility directed toward migrant shelters and priests, whose ministries focus on serving undocumented Central Americans transiting Mexico.

Previously, incidents this year have occurred in locations stretching across Mexico, including Tenosique and Oaxaca in the South and Piedras Negras and Saltillo in the North.

Father Gonzalez received a threatening call at his parish Sept. 9, warning "something is going to happen to you," local media reported.

The call came from a local prison, and the caller identified himself as the relative of a National Immigration Institute employee. Father Gonzalez has denounced migration officials through the Usumacinta Human Rights Center, which he directs.

The priest said he is currently helping with more than 90 Guatemalan families, who fled across the border to escape violence in northern Guatemala.

Father Gonzalez previously has received threats at his migrant shelter, "La 72," named for the 72 undocumented migrants massacred last year by Los Zetas on a ranch in Tamaulipas state.

Organized criminal groups such as Los Zetas -- sometimes working with corrupt police and government officials -- kidnap migrants and demand ransoms of up to $7,000 from relatives already living in the United States.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/05/2016 - 12:13*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/police-detain-mexican-priest-two-migrants