



The Council of Cherán (2011)

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CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

My name is Devin, and I am very excited to be your Chair! I'm from Chesterfield, Missouri, but I am now a third-year at UChicago studying political anthropology, quantitative social analysis, and playwriting.

Outside of classes, I work as a research assistant for a novelist. I've spent my summers working for EducationUSA Mexico City, Indus Action, and a St.-Louis-based pizza law firm. Beyond work and academics, I enjoy such totally-normal hobbies as growing hundreds of carnivorous plants and orchids, watching foreign films, and seeing just how inexpensively I can backpack other countries without getting myself killed.

I genuinely love Model United Nations as an activity, and I am a believer in its ability to inspire substantive interests and effect communicative skills. I went to MUNUC as a delegate three times while in high school, and I can genuinely say it changed my life. Before I went my first time, I had never heard of the University of Chicago and thought I wanted to be a botanist. At MUNUC, though, I fell in love with international politics, and I now dream of working in embassies rather than greenhouses. It is also largely responsible for my interest in UChicago, and I couldn't be happier that I'm here now. Going to MUNUC each year was one of the highlights of my high school years; I looked forward to next year's MUNUC as soon as closing ceremony ended, and it was the prospect of going the coming year that kept me going through the summer jobs I worked to pay my way. I want to make MUNUC as meaningful for you as it was for me.

I have had the privileges of working as an AC on the MUNUC XXXI Cabinet of Chile, chair of the MUNUC XXXII Cabinet of Armenia, and now as the Under-Secretary-General of Continuous Crisis. Model UN often encourages a top-down view of the world, but grassroots organizing has never been more important. With this committee, I hope to challenge the primacy of national governments often implicit in Model UN.

I care deeply about making this committee an enjoyable and inclusive environment for all delegates, and I will not tolerate any racism, sexism, colorism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or other forms of bigotry. Genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity will not be permitted in any of the committee's actions. This committee will deal with mature themes often avoided in high school conferences, but I trust that you will treat this topic with the respect, dignity, and empathy that it deserves. If you have any concerns or committee questions, feel free to shoot me an email at usg.cc@munuc.org.

All the best,

Devin A. Haas

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PURÉPECHA AND MEXICO

Indigenous groups have inhabited Mexico for thousands of years. Before the arrival of the Spanish, numerous civilizations rose and fell in this territory. The Aztec were the largest empire existing at the time of Hernan Cortez's 1519 landing at Veracruz. Less known outside of Mexico, the Tarascans—also known as Purépecha for the language they speak—were the second largest and controlled an empire of over 75,000 square kilometers from their capital of Tzintzúntzan in modern-day Michoacán. The Tarascan empire included people of multiple ethnic groups; they were permitted to maintain their local languages and identities as long as they paid tribute to Tzintzúntzan and provided soldiers in times of war.¹

By 1522 CE, Tzintzúntzan had grown into a city of at least 35,000. The capital city was the seat of the king or Kasonsí, and it was also the commercial and religious center of the Tarascan empire. Terraces were constructed and irrigation projects were carried out to ensure that local agriculture was enough to feed the large population. Fruits, vegetables, flowers, tobacco, craft goods, obsidian, copper, bronze, silver, and gold were all important commodities. Indeed, the Tarascans were renowned metallurgists and were Mesoamerica's most important producers of tin-bronze, copper, and copper-alloy bells for religious ceremonies. Localities paid tribute and provided cotton, cacao, salt, and feathers. A network of local markets and the tribute system ensured there was usually enough goods to meet demands, but it was still necessary to import some commodities like turquoise, rock crystal, and green stones. While trade and commerce were important, it is worth noting that it was the Tarascan state that controlled land allocation, forests, copper and obsidian mines, craft workshops, and fishing rather than private industry.²

Tarascan society had considerable social stratification; there were multiple levels of nobility and clergy. The Tarascan religion held that the Pátzcuaro basin was the center of the cosmos and that the universe had three parts: the sky, the earth, and the underworld. The most important deity, the sun god Kurikaweri, ruled the sky, and his wife, Kwerawáperi, was the earth-mother goddess.

1. Cartwright, Mark. "Tarascan Civilization." Ancient History Encyclopedia, published 11 December 2013, https://www.ancient.eu/Tarascan_Civilization/.

2. Ibid.

Xarátenga, the moon and sea goddess, was their most important child. As new peoples were conquered, their local deities were incorporated into the Tarascan pantheon. Pyramids were built to honor the gods, and the burning of incense was used in their worship.³

The arrival of Cortez marked the beginning of Spain's brutal conquest and colonization of the region. The Tarascans had a military perhaps 100,000 strong, but rather than fight the Spanish, they sought to make peace with them. The Tarascan Kasonsí Tangáxuan II and Cortez agreed to co-rule their land so that localities paid tribute to both Tzintzúntzan and Spain, but the Spanish reneged after a few years and had Tangáxuan II horrifically executed. Most of the population was forcibly converted to Catholicism and enslaved; many died of disease or were killed outright. Under Spanish rule, what is now Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and the Southwestern United States, was all united under "Nueva España" or "New Spain."⁴

The Spanish ruled New Spain with an iron fist until Napoleon occupied Spain in 1808. At that point, Spain had been so badly weakened that many of its colonies had begun plotting their independence. Mexico officially declared independence on September 16, 1810. However, it wasn't until 1821 that Spain finally negotiated with the rebels and helped the country draft its own constitution.⁵ Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1835, and due to American support, Mexico lost this region. The United States continued to act in line with its philosophy of Manifest Destiny, which believed that American expansion across North America was inevitable and necessary. This led to the USA declaring war on Mexico in 1846, and after an American victory, Mexico ceded modern-day California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico to the United States.⁶ The constitution in place from independence until the early 1900s lent itself to an authoritarian government. From 1876 to 1909, Porfirio Díaz ruled as an authoritarian leader. The people grew tired of his regime and launched the Mexican Revolution—a ten-year civil war with over two million casualties. The result was a constitutional republic which implemented many of the social reforms supported by the

3. Ibid.

4. "Timeline Mexico 1970-1997." Accessed May 26, 2019, https://timelines.ws/countries/MEXICO_B.HTML.

5. Ibid.

6. Editors, History com. "Mexico Timeline." HISTORY. Accessed May 26, 2019. <https://www.history.com/topics/mexico/mexico-timeline>.

revolutionary groups: land reform and limiting the role of the Catholic Church.⁷ The constitution sought to put property in the hands of the people, avoiding exploitation at the hands of foreigners and the elite class. In addition, the Catholic Church was reduced from a dominating system—which had at times been even more influential than the government—to a heavily regulated social club.

Since the constitution's emergence, the country's economy and population have grown tremendously. Mexico has remained relatively unaligned throughout the Cold War, therefore making it a part of the "Third World." This term does not mean that Mexico is an impoverished nation, but rather that it does not overtly ally with the Western Powers and NATO (the First World) and the Communist Powers and Warsaw Pact (the Second World). The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ruled the country for 71 uninterrupted years from 1929 until 2000. However, in 2000, Vicente Fox of the right-of-center National Action Party (PAN) won the presidency, and PAN candidate Felipe Calderón won the presidency again in 2006.⁸

The Purépecha still live in a region of Michoacán characterized by high volcanic plateaus and lakes and a cool climate. Though many have assimilated into mainstream *mestizo* culture, some remain monolingual Purépecha speakers and culturally conservative. Purépechas are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic; like elsewhere in Middle America, their worship emphasizes patron saints. However, unlike some other parts of Latin America, their strain of Roman Catholicism is not syncretic; they do not believe in pre-Columbian gods and demons. Corn, beans, and squash are still the staple crops, and the rearing of sheep, hogs, and chicken is also important.⁹

7. Agren, David. "Separation of Catholics and State: Mexico's Divisive Religious History." *The Guardian*, February 12, 2016, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/mexico-catholicism-politics-religious-history-pope-francis>.

8. "Political Parties in Mexico." Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. Last updated December 12, 2017. <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/political-parties-mexico/>.

9. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Tarasco." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tarasco>.



Map of Mexico with Michoacán labelled¹⁰

10. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Michoacán." Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Michoacan>.

THE UNITED MEXICAN STATES: ITS GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

According to Mexico's 1917 constitution, the federal government, which oversees the 31 states, is composed of an executive, legislative, and judicial branch, much like that of the United States of America. The branches are also called "The Powers of the Union" (Poderes de la Unión).¹¹

The executive branch of Mexico is led by a president who is also the supreme commander of the armed forces. A presidential term is a six-year period called a sexenio and is a position which can be held only once. The constitution bans reelection to this position. This role is extremely similar to the American presidency because the Mexican constitution was largely based off of the American one. Thus, the Mexican president helps enact the laws passed by Congress, can veto parts of passed laws, and appoints people to certain judiciary and bureaucratic positions.¹²

The legislative branch is called the "Congress of the Union" (Congreso de la Unión). This is a bicameral legislature with two chambers: the Senate of the Republic with 128 senators and the Chamber of Deputies with 500 deputies. The Senators serve a 6-year term, with a variety of electoral processes. The goal of the senatorial elections is to give most seats to the parties with the most votes. However, some seats are reserved for the minority parties in certain districts. Deputies are elected every three years. The election of 300 seats is determined by winning in single-seat constituencies around the country, while the other 200 seats are proportionally divided according to party. This method is rather effective, since there are over seven major parties in Mexico.¹³

The Judicial Branch of government has varying levels, similar to the American justice system. The highest court is the Supreme Court of Justice, whose members serve for 15 years. Unlike the USA, this Supreme Court does not solely focus on the constitutionality of legislation, but does deal with cases of federal jurisdiction and the interpretation of laws.

11. "Ley Orgánica de La Administración Pública Federal," August 26, 2011.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20110826002207/http://www.funcionpublica.gob.mx/leyes/loapf2000.htm>.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

Mexico City is the capital of the country, where all the branches of the federal government are headquartered. Since it is not part of any state, it has its own government so that it can be immune from other political influence of the country. It is governed by a Head of Mexico City and a unicameral legislative branch. While Mexico City has remained relatively autonomous since the 1917 constitution, people are beginning to question these special powers.¹⁴

As of 2011, Mexican politics is dominated by 3 major parties:

- National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN)—a right-of-center party that has held the presidency since 2000.
- Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI)—the dominant party for most of the 20th century. Although part of the Socialist International, it is a centrist party.
- Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD)—a left-of-center party formed in 1988. No PRD politician has yet been elected President.¹⁵

14. Ibid.

15. "Political Parties in Mexico."

CHERÁN



Aerial view of downtown Cherán, Michoacán¹⁶

Cherán is a predominantly Purépecha municipality of roughly 18,000 inhabitants in the central-western Mexican state of Michoacán; more live in the surrounding rural areas and are part of the broader community.¹⁷ For years, it was terrorized by violent organized crime groups and victimized by corrupt politicians and police. Extortion, murders, violence, and disappearances were common.¹⁸ As the crime syndicates looked to diversify their activities, they turned to illegal logging; gunmen oversaw an operation that felled huge swathes of the pine forests that once surrounded the town so they could sell the timber on the black market. The loggers then burned the tree stumps to make way for future avocado orchards. Producing avocados is often lucrative but environmentally detrimental and bloody; they require forests be cleared and then need large amounts of water,

16. Ferri, Pablo. "El pueblo mexicano que expulsó a las mafias." *El País*, September 19, 2016.

https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/09/16/mexico/1474058845_448139.html.

17. "Cherán: Municipality in Mexico." <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/mexico-admin.php?adm2id=16024>.

18. Soloff, Andalusia K. "After long fight for self-government, indigenous town of Cherán, Mexico ushers in new council." *NBC News*, September 4, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/after-long-fight-self-government-indigenous-town-cher-n-mexico-n906171>.

fertilizer, and pesticides to thrive. Avocado orchards are often the object of contention in bloody turf wars between rival crime groups.¹⁹ The clearing of forests led to erosion, less water for livestock, and more widespread environmental degradation. Pine forests are important to the residents of Cherán for cultural reasons; much of Purépecha culture and identity is rooted in the idea of the land's fertility and care for its resources. Many depend on native medicinal plants, fish, and sustainably-harvested wood and cork as well.²⁰

Years of bloodshed finally came to an end on April 15, 2011. The townspeople, mostly led by women, revolted against the crime syndicates and corrupt police and politicians. A blockade was set up to stop illegal loggers' pickup trucks. Young men shot fireworks at armed men and loggers who threatened the women. Ultimately, the police, gangsters, and politicians were all expelled from the town, and armed checkpoints were set up to monitor who entered and protect the residents. Political parties and campaigns were banned, and a new council was formed to manage the community's public resources.²¹ While it has yet to be recognized by the Mexican Supreme Court, it is clear that there's a new government in town.

19. Gonzalez Covarrubias, Jennifer. "A Mexican indigenous town's environmental revolt." PHYS.org, December 21, 2019. <https://phys.org/news/2019-12-mexican-indigenous-town-environmental-revolt.html>.

20. Alejandra González Hernández, Alejandro, and Víctor Alfonso Zertuche Cobos. "Cherán. 5 years of self-government in an indigenous community in Mexico." openDemocracy, December 2, 2016. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/cheran-5-years-of-self-government-in-india/>.

21. Pressly, Linda. "Cheran: The town that threw out police, politicians and gangsters." BBC, October 12, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37612083>.

ISSUES FOR COMMITTEE

The Mexican Constitution recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, which allows indigenous communities “to elect a citizens’ council which receives public funding directly and administers it among police, infrastructure, health and other services.”²² 15% of Mexico’s population is indigenous, and the precedent set by recognizing Cherán’s independence could lead to more widespread revolutions and legal challenges. Many neighboring Purépecha communities—including, notably, Nahuatzen—have been inspired by Cherán and are clamoring for their own self-determination. Local authorities and crime groups have taken notice, however, and these villages face an even more difficult path to expelling them than Cherán did.²³ Cherán will have to fight for legal recognition of its self-determination in court and decide what role, if any, it should play in helping its neighbors. Could this be the beginnings of a broader movement towards libertarian communalism or Graeberian democracy? For more on these theories, you may consider reading David Graeber’s *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*, especially “There Never Was a West: Or, Democracy Emerges From the Spaces in Between.”

There are few successful models of direct democracy on which Cherán can model itself, so committee will need to constantly work to innovate the designs and efficacy of local bureaucracy to ensure that essential services can be delivered to residents in a timely manner. The structure of committee will adapt to the actions taken by delegates to restructure the council on which they serve; simulated elections may or may not take place. Even if official recognition is secured from the Mexican Supreme Court, this does not mean that it will be respected by crime groups and state and federal governmental authorities. Now that the town has thrown out the police, it will need to devise a new model for its internal and external security.

Severe environmental degradation from years of illegal logging have devastated the surrounding ecosystems, and the effects of this may now threaten the town’s water and food supply.

22. Lopez, Oscar. “A town torn apart: Mexico’s indigenous communities fight for autonomy.” Reuters, January 2, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-indigenous-cities-feature-trfn/a-town-torn-apart-mexicos-indigenous-communities-fight-for-autonomy-idUSKBN1Z1oM9>.

23. Ibid.

Reforestation is an urgent priority, but these efforts will need to work hand-in-hand with new security forces to ensure that forest remnant and restored areas are protected from illegal loggers. The future cultivation of avocados is also in question: they are a highly lucrative and desirable crop for many farmers but threaten to bring organized crime back to the municipality.

BIOGRAPHIES

Eréndira Cisneros, Civil Rights Attorney

Cisneros grew up in Cherán. She began to notice, at a very young age, that while everybody is theoretically equal under the law, this was far from reality. She always liked social studies in school, and she eventually went to law school. She worked in several corporate law offices in Mexico City before returning to Cherán when her mother got sick. After her mother passed away, she decided to stay in the town to be closer to the rest of her family. She started her own practice and has mostly been working on local civil rights cases, but she maintains connections with her former colleagues and friends in the Federal District.

Sesasi Mendoza, President of XEPUR-AM (The Voice of the Purépechas)

Sesasi Mendoza grew up in the neighboring village of Zacapu, Michoacán. During her childhood, she saw a lot of murder and corruption, and she grew frustrated as she realized that few people outside of the area knew or cared about what was going on there. She won a scholarship to study at la Escuela de Periodismo Carlos Septién García, a journalism school in Mexico City, so she could become a journalist and increase awareness for the plight of her community. After finishing her degree, she moved back to Michoacán and began to work at XEPUR-AM—The Voice of the Purépechas—an indigenous community radio station in Cherán. The station broadcasts in both Spanish and Purépecha, and it is one of the most important sources of news in Cherán and surrounding Purépecha villages. She has worked her way up to become its president, and she is eager to use her position to make a difference.

Irepani Nila, Metal Crafter and Council Member

Nila has followed in the footsteps of his father and his father before him: he has become a metal crafter. He is especially interested in indigenous Purépecha metal-crafting techniques; he takes a more traditional approach to his work to ensure that indigenous practices and methods survive and are passed on. Nila is seen as the leader of and unofficial spokesperson for the town's metal-crafting

community. He cares deeply about maintaining and protecting Purépecha language and culture, and he is a loving father and respected figure in his neighborhood.

Shanarani López, Teacher and Co-Principal

Shanarani's childhood was rough, but her school teachers always cared about her wellbeing and kept her motivated. She now teaches at the local school, where she is also a co-principal. Like Nila, she cares deeply about preserving Purépecha language and culture, and she teaches Purépecha and Spanish to all of her students. López, in fact, plays a large role in writing the curriculum taught in the town. Though she does not have children of her own, there are always children around her, as she tutors students and looks after young children if their parents need to go away. Shanarani is widely beloved.

Patricia Hernández, Taco Vendor, Revolutionary, and Council Member

Patricia is the loving mother of four and a taco vendor. After her brother was attacked while he was working in the forest by illegal loggers, she decided that—for the sake of her children and grandchildren—drastic change was needed. She was among the group of women that planned the revolution that expelled the loggers, police, and politicians. Patricia is seen as a leader in her community, and her neighbors chose her to be one of the first-ever council members of the new town administration.

Father Salvador Campanur, Roman Catholic Priest

Salvador grew up in Morelia, the capital of Michoacán. In his teenage years, he fell in with the wrong crowd, but after a close encounter with a drug cartel in 1993 almost cost him his life, he had a religious awakening and decided to join the Roman Catholic clergy. Salvador has been Cherán's priest for 6 years and is a respected member of the community. While the town trusts him and are devoutly religious, some are still wary of the institution of the Catholic Church—which has a very complicated history in Mexico and was severely restricted until 1992. He is often a conservative voice in community discussions.

Margarita Elvira Romero, Soil Scientist

Margarita Elvira Romero is a Chilango who grew up in Colonia Roma. She has loved nature ever since the days of her childhood, when her parents would take her on weekend hikes up Ajusco. She earned a PhD from the Department of Ecology and Natural Resources at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and she now works as a soil scientist. Romero is also an environmental activist, and when she heard of Cherán's revolution, she packed her bags to travel there to help with their environmental restoration efforts. When illegal loggers burned the stumps of pine trees to make way for eventual avocado orchards, the soil was left exposed to the elements and the top layer—rich in decomposed organic matter—severely eroded. If Cherán's reforestation efforts are to be successful, they will need to also restore the soil. Romero's broader study of ecology may also be useful in advising on other issues as well.

Heriberto "Diablo" Campos, Founder and Co-ordinator of the Ronda Comunitaria

Campos is a lifelong resident of Cherán who remembers its highs and lows. He is a loving father and has a reputation for his fairness and sense of judgement. The official police had grown corrupt and frequently conspired with the illegal loggers and crime syndicates. Now that they have been expelled, Campos has been asked to organize a new community militia—the Ronda Comunitaria—to protect the town. He is now the founder and coordinator of this community police force, to be comprised entirely of local residents, and wants to ensure that it will work to fairly protect all.

Neyci Fabian, Activist

Neyci's family has always been upper-middle-class by local standards, but she was radicalized as a teenager when she read the works of numerous Latin American leftist theorists. She worked hard in school, became fluent in English, and won a prestigious scholarship to Princeton University. On campus, she double-majored in Sociocultural Anthropology and Public Policy, but she spent the majority of her time organizing with the campus chapter of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Her work with DSA in New Jersey led to her eventually making connections with other anti-racist, anti-imperialist, feminist, grassroots organizers across the US. Upon finishing her BA, she returned

home to Cherán and has done local grassroots work while maintaining her relationships with US activists.

Andamuqua Lozano, Engineer and Council Member

Lozano has always liked to fix things. He loved math and science in school, and he works as an independent electrical engineer in Cherán. While he mostly works in electrical engineering, he has also taught himself a decent deal about plumbing and wells. Lozano is very concerned about the town's electrical and piping infrastructure, but for years, his recommendations fell on the deaf ears of corrupt politicians who never seemed to take action. Andamuqua does not like government or politics, but his neighbors felt strongly that he should serve on the council so he could finally make some of the changes he has promoted for so long.

T'shue Jimenez, Construction Worker and Council Member

Jimenez grew up in Cherán and has always liked building things. They were interested in urban planning but were not able to attend university to pursue that interest further. Instead, they stayed in Cherán and work with Juan Aguilar, husband of María Gertrudis Bocanegra Aguilar, in construction. While they weren't able to become an urban planner, they are very creative and are constantly coming up with new ideas about how to better design construction installations. They are never satisfied and constantly work to improve themselves and everything around them. They are popular with and respected by their fellow construction workers.

Cuinierángari Peralta, Council Member

Peralta is a Marxist but a practical one. Getting to live through a revolution that successfully abolishes the police is a once in a lifetime opportunity for most Marxists, and Peralta is now concerned that the revolution will be co-opted, undercut, and un-done. Even before the uprising, Peralta frequently organized demonstrations against U.S. imperialism and workers' strikes. Peralta is especially concerned by some who, reportedly, are opposed to complete reforestation because they want to plant avocados in the cleared lands. Avocados are largely profitable due to the demand of

U.S.-based multinational corporations, and Peralta is determined to deny them a foothold in Cherán at all costs.

Tangaxuan Montoya, Banker and Council Member

Tangaxuan likes microeconomics and finance. He liked math and social studies, and learning about economics in high school convinced him that finance was the perfect synthesis of his interests. Tangaxuan is proud of his Purépecha heritage and loves his community, but he often disagrees about the best way to do so. While many in his community are leftists and very communalist, Montoya is more liberal in disposition. He wants Cherán to be a great place for private enterprise, and he convinced his bank to start a microfinancing program to fund aspiring entrepreneurs. He is more conciliatory than some of his hardline neighbors when it comes to dealing with the political parties that were expelled; as a teenager, he had volunteered for PRI candidates. His neighbors chose him for the council because they hope his contrarian views will help foster richer discussion and better solutions than if only likeminded townspeople were chosen.

Páracume Mata, Farmer and Council Member

Mata lives on the outskirts of Cherán in a rural area and grows corn and beans at the base of a mountain. Loggers cleared the entire mountain, and without trees to hold the soil in place, Mata must now deal with mudslides when it rains. In the drier months, his crops struggle; the water is further below the surface than it used to be. He has been a vocal proponent for the rights of farmers, and the farmers living in the municipality nominated him to the council. While he supports the revolution, he is concerned that the new checkpoints will make it harder for farmers to drive their crops to market in surrounding towns and cities.

Vápeani Herrera, Chicken Farmer and Council Member

Herrera raises chickens and eggs to sell at market. She is a fixture of the town square, and she is known for her warmth and teasing sense of humor. She seems to know everybody and everything in town, so she knows things hours before they happen. Because of this, many accept her as if she were

a member of their extended family. Herrera has especially strong ties with the others in town who raise livestock. She is also the caring single mother of two.

María Gertrudis Bocanegra Aguilar, Revolutionary, Weaver, and Council Member

María is a lifelong resident of Cherán and is the mother of 3 children. Her mother and grandmother were both weavers, and she became a very talented one in her own right at a young age. While her husband works in construction, she weaves traditional Purépecha dresses. María was one of the women that organized the revolution, and because of her leadership, her neighbors elected her to represent them on the council.

Lázaro Cárdenas Bernal, Manager of the Municipal Nursery

Ever since Lázaro was young, he has loved nature. When he was 12, he saw and his family visited the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in eastern Michoacán, where they saw hundreds of thousands of monarch butterflies migrating to the pine forests. That sight was so incredible that he swore on that day to devote his life to protecting and revitalizing Michoacán's pine forests. Since his teenage years, he has worked in the municipal nursery. Sadly, armed illegal loggers devastated the pine forests of the mountains around his home in Cherán. Illegal logging did not only take a toll on the pine trees; it damaged the entire ecosystem and reduced biodiversity. Now that the loggers have been kicked out, Lázaro sees an opportunity to try to restore the ecosystem he loves so much. He hopes to one day produce and plant 2 million trees a year, but the nursery is nowhere near close to that goal now.

Abel García, Council Member

Abel has always been interested in politics. Since he was 14, he has followed Mexican politics in the news, and he reads about international politics whenever he gets the chance. Abel always did well in school and hoped to run for office with the PRD party at a fairly young age; he's wanted to capitalize on his youth and charisma. While he is aware that party politics can be corrupt, he thinks it is usually most effective to reform a system from within. When parties were expelled from Cherán, he was conflicted; he knew well of their problems, but he had also planned to base much of his future on

them. The community thinks he can be a bit big for his *britches, but he is a motivated and studious voice for the town's younger generations.*

Salvadaor Adame, Director of 7TV News Station and Council Member

As a journalist, Adame has covered general news and local politics in Michoacán for over a decade. Sadly, Michoacán is a very dangerous place to be a journalist, and two journalists with whom Adame has been friends have been murdered since he began working. Still, Adame has never been one to censor himself, and he has been a frequent critic of local and state officials. He and his wife co-own a local tv news station, and he is the director of it.

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