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Mexico: Despite promises on Juarez, doubts remain about government's true commitment to human rights

(Mexico D.F.) Upon concluding Amnesty International's official visit to Mexico, Secretary General Irene Khan welcomed the federal authorities' commitment to take action on the murders and abductions of women in Ciudad Juarez. However, doubts remain about the government's commitment to resolving long-standing human rights problems throughout the country, particularly in relation to the administration of justice.

Amnesty International underlined that, in light of ten years of inaction, the real test of the government's commitment will depend on visible, concrete and immediate results in Ciudad Juarez as well as Chihuahua. Amnesty International noted the commitment by the Attorney General to pursue investigations until the cases are fully resolved. The organization also welcomed the undertaking by the Interior Minister to provide Amnesty International and other human rights NGOs with monthly reports on the progress made by relevant federal and state authorities.

Amnesty International stressed during its meetings with federal and state authorities the urgent need to overcome the lack of confidence of families of victims. A first step in this direction is to ensure their participation in the investigations and other actions in relation to the cases and ending intimidation and harassment against them.

At the same time Amnesty International is concerned by the continued refusal of the Chihuahua State authorities to acknowledge mistakes and irregularities in past investigations and to end impunity. Killings and abductions continue, as do allegations of torture of suspects held in connection with the cases. The organization is disappointed that the Chihuahua State Governor, who publicly refuted Amnesty International's findings, refused to meet with the delegation.

While acknowledging the undertakings on Ciudad Juarez, Amnesty International remains disturbed by the failure of the Mexican government to tackle the serious deficiencies endemic in the criminal justice system throughout Mexico that facilitate arbitrary detention, torture and unfair trials. The government has also failed to provide sufficient political support toward efforts to end impunity for past human rights violations.

Following his meeting with Irene Khan on 11 August, President Fox reiterated publicly that human rights were one of his administration's top priorities and that he was committed to "drawing up an integrated human rights policy". The abolition of the Foreign Ministry's Human Rights Secretariat, announced that same day, casts serious doubts on his professed commitment to human rights reform.

The office has played a critical role in the cooperation program agreed with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights aimed at producing a national human rights agenda.

Midway through President Fox' term in office, these mixed signals undermine the credibility of the pledges he made on taking office. Amnesty International urges President Fox to prove his unequivocal commitment to see through the process of human rights reform. The ability to match words with action is the benchmark by which the international community and domestic civil society will judge this administration's record on human rights.

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