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Mexico: Human Rights must be at the centre of the constitutional reforms

The Mexican Congress must take this historic opportunity to place human rights at the heart of the Constitution and the criminal justice system, said Rupert Knox, Amnesty International's Mexico researcher today.

In a memorandum sent to members of Mexico's Federal Congress, Amnesty International recommends wide consultation with civil society and other sectors in order to strengthen the protection of human rights in the executive's proposals presented earlier in the year which Congress should debate during this legislative session.

The memorandum highlights the need to clearly recognise international human rights standards in the Constitution and reform the criminal justice system in order to guarantee that the rights of both victims and suspects are upheld at every stage of the proceedings -- including the rights to equality before the law, presumption of innocence, fair trial, access to legal representation and medical attention.

"For too long laws governing Mexico's criminal justice system have contributed to human rights violations and impunity as well as to inefficiency, with security and judicial agencies widely distrusted," said Rupert Knox, Amnesty International Mexico researcher.

The memorandum also highlights the fact that public security for all citizens can only be guaranteed if reforms ensure that human rights are fully protected and institutions, such as the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office, are professionalized on the basis of human rights principles and made accountable to society.

While the political climate in Congress is difficult, the executive's initial proposals should provide a positive platform on which Senators and Deputies from different political parties should forge a common agenda to strengthen human rights protection. "It is vital that Congress shows its commitment to overcome differences and to legislate on these issues in line with the recommendations of international human rights organization such as the United Nations and the Inter American Commission on Human Rights", said Mr Knox.

Background Information

President Fox's government has recognised the structural flaws in legislation that contribute to human

rights violations. The government has repeatedly promised to carry out major reforms. The proposals that have been put forward are the first attempt to do so. The range of complex proposals may be considered by the various Commissions in the upper and lower chambers during this Congressional session up to December.

**For a copy of: "Mexico: memorandum to the Mexican Federal Congress on reforms to the Constitution and criminal justice system", please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr410322004>**

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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