

Indigenous activist set free in Mexico

A prisoner of conscience and mother-of-five has been released from jail in Mexico after spending more than 18 months in custody.

Magdalena García Durán, a Mazahua indigenous activist and street vendor, was set free on 22 November after courts said there was no evidence justifying her detention and trial on charges of kidnapping and attacks on public roads.

After her release, she thanked Amnesty International, which has campaigned extensively on her behalf.

Magdalena García had been in prison since 4 May 2006, when she was arbitrarily arrested in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico State, during demonstrations. Several police officers pulled her out of a van and beat and kicked her repeatedly. She was then handcuffed, covered and forced to lie on top of other detainees in a waiting vehicle. Officers repeatedly threatened to kill her "like a dog".

After six days in detention she was informed of the charges against her and committed for trial. She has consistently denied the charges and her defence lawyer has presented evidence to show that she was not involved in the violent offences she was accused of.

Magdalena García's release follows a series of injunctions recommending that she be set free. On 11 August 2006, a federal review court granted the defence an injunction but this was sidestepped. On 7 November 2006, a second federal injunction was granted on the basis of insufficient evidence, but still the state judge did not order her release. In January 2007, a higher federal court confirmed the original injunction, but this was once again sidestepped.

Amnesty International believes Magdalena García's prolonged detention was politically motivated and totally unjustified. The authorities failed to provide evidence of her alleged crimes and there are indications that the little evidence available was probably fabricated.

Amnesty International remains concerned for the fate of more than 150 people who still face charges following demonstrations in San Salvador Atenco, and for 20 people who continue to be detained on the same charges and evidence as Magdalena García Durán.