

URGENT ACTION

AUTHORITIES INTIMIDATING RELATIVES OF DISAPPEARED

Public officials in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua have intimidated relatives of disappeared people and are pressuring them to allow government-chosen forensic experts to examine human remains found in the area. If carried out, these tests will make subsequent independent testing impossible. The authorities must guarantee the safety of victims and adequate protection of all forensic evidence.

Fernando Romo is looking for eight relatives who disappeared in 2011 after they were arrested by local police near Cuauhtémoc City in Chihuahua state. On 25 March he met with two state officials at a relative's home. They asked him to sign papers which would authorize the government to proceed with forensic tests of human remains found in three places near Cuauhtémoc City. These tests would be carried out by government-chosen forensic experts, despite a previous agreement between relatives and officials on the appointment of a mutually agreed team of experts. If the government goes ahead, the evidence will be extinguished and relatives will be unable to request further corroboration.

On 13 March one of Fernando Romo's relatives, **Albino Cruz**, met once again with a prosecutor to enquire about progress in their case. When he insisted that local police officers seem to be involved in the disappearance of his relatives, the prosecutor told him "we'll put you in front of all those cops, so that you tell us who did it" (*te vamos a parar enfrente de todos los policías para que digas quién fue*).

Amnesty International has just been informed of these acts of intimidation and undue pressure on the victims' relatives. They appear to be part of a campaign to smear dozens of families who are campaigning for effective search and prompt investigations into the enforced disappearances and abductions of their relatives in and around Cuauhtémoc City in the last few years.

Please write immediately in Spanish, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to safeguard all human remains which were found near Cuauhtémoc City between 2011 and 2014, and refrain from processing the evidence until a mutually agreed, independent group of experts is appointed;
- Urging the authorities to stop local officials from intimidating or pressuring relatives of disappeared or abducted people in Cuauhtémoc City;
- Calling for a full, prompt and thorough investigation into the hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances and abductions in the area in the last few years;
- Reminding the authorities of their obligation to respect the rights of all victims and the legitimate work of their human rights defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 MAY 2016 TO:

Chihuahua State Governor

Lic. César Horacio Duarte Jáquez
Palacio de Gobierno de Chihuahua
Calle Venustiano Carranza Nro. 911,
Colonia Centro, C.P. 31000, Chihuahua,
Chih., México

Email: despachodelejecutivo@hotmail.com

Twitter: @GoberDuarte

Facebook: César Duarte Jáquez

Salutation: Dear Governor / Estimado Gobernador

Minister of the Interior

Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong
Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucareli 99, Col. Juárez, Del.
Cuauhtémoc, C.P. 06600, Ciudad de
México, México

Email: secretario@segob.gob.mx

Twitter: @osoriochong

Facebook: Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong

Salutation: Dear Minister / Estimado Sr. Secretario

And copies to:

Centro de Derechos Humanos de las
Mujeres (CEDEHM)
Email: comunicacion@cedehm.org.mx
Facebook: Centro de Derechos
Humanos de las Mujeres

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to current official figures, more than 27,000 people have disappeared or gone missing in Mexico since 2006. Most of these cases seem to have taken place under the current administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto. Many of these abductions have been carried out by criminal gangs and it is unclear whether any public officials could have played a role. In other cases, there is direct or indirect involvement of public officials, amounting to enforced disappearances. The spike in disappearances has coincided with the “war on crime” on the part of the authorities. Impunity is the norm for these crimes. In 2015 the government told the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances that it had achieved six convictions in cases of enforced disappearances.

The situation of disappearances and abductions has been particularly serious in Cuauhtémoc City. According to official records, 374 people are missing there, but it is possible that many families have not reported their cases out of fear. The city is near dangerous drug-trafficking routes which connect Mexico and the USA. Amnesty International highlighted these cases in its latest report on disappearances in Mexico, *Treated with indolence* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/3150/2016/en/>), which it presented in Chihuahua state in February. The Chihuahua state government rejected Amnesty International’s concerns. Soon afterwards, some local media outlets began smearing the families and the human rights defenders which accompany them at the Women’s Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres, CEDEHM).

Human remains were found near Cuauhtémoc City in three separate locations between 2011 and 2014. Victims and their human rights defenders are demanding that the Chihuahua government honours a 2014 agreement by which it would appoint a team of internationally renowned forensic experts to examine those remains. The government has acknowledged that it does not have in-house expertise to carry out those tests. In the last few weeks, however, officials have pressured relatives of disappeared people to consent to hand over all human remains to a government-chosen forensic team in order to carry out these tests. This would extinguish evidence and prevent any further tests that relatives may want to request from forensic experts of their choice.

The Mexican Senate is currently discussing a bill on disappearances and abductions. The “general law on enforced disappearances and abductions” (*ley general sobre desapariciones forzadas y desapariciones por particulares*), as it would be called, could be a step forward to prevent and punish these crimes. However, the bill needs to be strengthened in order to be effective. For example, the definitions of both crimes should comply with international standards, it should lay out responsibilities for those in the chain of command, and it should establish the obligation to provide emergency support to relatives of disappeared people. Senate sources have communicated that the bill could come to a vote soon.

Name: Albino Cruz (m), Fernando Romo (m) and other relatives of disappeared people in Cuauhtémoc City, Chihuahua state
Gender m/f: both