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Mexico: Amnesty International Deplores Arbitrary Expulsion of Central American Human Rights Defenders

Amnesty International today strongly condemned yesterday's arbitrary expulsion from Mexico of Vilma Núñez de Escorcía and Benjamín Cuéllar -- Central American human rights defenders -- following confiscation of their visas by the Ministry of the Interior.

"This latest arbitrary expulsion of two international human rights defenders -- and the continuing threats and attacks suffered by Mexican human rights defenders -- grossly contradicts the Mexican Government's professed commitment to the defence of human rights," Amnesty International said today

Vilma Núñez de Escorcía and Benjamín Cuéllar, members of a delegation of the *Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos* (FIDH), International Federation of Human Rights (based in France), had their visas withdrawn in Acapulco, state of Guerrero, on 16 April.

Vilma Núñez and Benjamín Cuéllar, as well as two other delegates of the FIDH, arrived in Mexico a week earlier, invited by a number of Mexican human rights non-governmental organizations, to carry out investigations into the human rights situation in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas. They had fully complied with visa formalities as indicated by Mexican consular representatives in their respective home countries.

The delegation had visited a prison in Acapulco and gathered testimonies from torture victims on the day that their visas were withdrawn. The other two members of the delegation, lawyer Gilberte Deboisvieux and Fernando Mejía, did not have their visas withdrawn.

Despite last minute appeals by Vilma Núñez and Benjamín Cuéllar, they were ordered to leave Mexico by 12:00 hours (Mexico time) on 20 April. The FIDH cancelled its visit to Mexico and the remaining delegates also left the country.

"The fact that these people were stopped from carrying out their work shows yet again the Mexican Government's failure to keep its promises regarding human rights," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International believes that it is the inescapable responsibility of states to guarantee the free exercise of the right to promote and defend human rights. States are fundamentally obliged to protect and promote this right, to prevent it from being threatened, restricted, or suppressed, and to protect the liberties and security of those who exercise it.

During the official visit of a high-level Amnesty International delegation to Mexico in November 1995, Foreign Affairs Minister José Ángel Gurría stated that Mexico no longer considered international human rights monitoring to be an interference in internal affairs, and had, therefore, adopted an open door policy for any international NGO who wished to investigate the situation of human rights in Mexico.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Vilma Núñez is director of the *Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos* (CENIDH), Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights. Benjamín Cuéllar is director of the *Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana* (IDHUCA), Central American University Human Rights Institute, El Salvador. He participated in an Amnesty International delegation which visited Mexico in November 1996 to launch an international campaign on behalf of human rights defenders in Central America and Mexico.

Amnesty International has condemned the Mexican Government for similarly expelling other human rights defenders in the past. On 23 June 1995, Fathers Rodolfo Izal Erloz (Spanish national), Loren Riebe (USA national) and Jorge Baron Gutlein (Argentine national), were arbitrarily arrested and expelled by the Mexican Government. The three were prominent human rights activists in Chiapas.

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For further information see UA 148/95, AMR 41/12/95, 23 June 1995 and AMR 41/13/95, 26 June 1995. See also Central America and *Human rights violations in Mexico: A challenge for the nineties*, AMR 41/21/95, November 1995.