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**Mexico City  
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There is a human rights crisis in Mexico today, and only the political will of the government and the concerted efforts of all institutions, including Congress and the judiciary, will help the country out of the present situation, and to live up to the standards demanded by its people and expected by the international community.

Today the citizens of Mexico have no effective recourse before the law to seek redress and compensation when their rights are violated. The pattern of grave impunity for egregious crimes has progressively eroded the institutions responsible for protecting citizens' rights and security. Amnesty International has been monitoring the human rights situation in Mexico for more than two decades, and is deeply concerned about the serious deterioration that has taken place over the last three years.

In 1997 alone, Amnesty International has documented hundreds of cases of arbitrary detention which, together with the continuing and widespread practice of torture of detainees as well as some significant cases of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, illustrate the fact that most of the existing legal and administrative measures have been ineffective in preventing, stopping or punishing violations by government officials. This is particularly dramatic when we compare figures. For instance, while in the early 90s Amnesty International documented no more than five prisoners of conscience, now there are more than 150 who should be immediately and unconditionally released. While new cases of disappearances were rarely reported in the early 90s, now there's a growing pattern which has included more than 30 in 1997 alone. And torture is more prevalent than ever in Mexico today.

Dramatically, the threats, attacks and other human rights violations against human rights defenders -- as well as journalists -- have rocketed to unprecedented proportions. Our organization is in no doubt as to the root cause of this: it is the lack of real political will to make the existing measures effective, particularly in cases of human rights violations by members of the armed forces.

This situation is all the more inexcusable if we take into account Mexico's international obligations on the matter. This is why we hope that, in the present climate of reform, the authorities will make effective Mexico's duties to protect human rights. It is in this context that our delegation has been conducting the first high level visit by a Secretary General to Mexico, with the aim of contributing towards the improvement of human rights protection in the country.

During the past three days, our delegation has met with non-governmental organizations, the Mexican Episcopal Conference, the future Head of Government of Mexico City, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, the President of the Supreme Court, and some government officials to discuss the current human rights situation in Mexico and how to improve it. The eagerness of civil society, including the Catholic Church as well as some institutions such as a Congress, to resolve the situation contrasted sharply with the attitude of the government: one of denial.

Amnesty International has presented to the relevant authorities, a series of recommendations which -- if properly implemented -- will significantly help improve the present human rights situation. For instance, scores of prisoners of conscience are being held in Mexican prisons under false charges brought against them -- often based solely on confessions extracted under torture. They should be released immediately and unconditionally. Public security would be improved if impunity ended. Also "disappearances" may become systematic unless swift action, as recommended by Amnesty International, is implemented. Mexico should sign and ratify the Inter-American Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons.

Recommendations also include urgent reforms to the administrative of justice, in particular the role of the public ministry and the need for the creation of an effective and independent body for the investigation and punishment of human rights violations. Most importantly, to help prevent an irreversible situation of massive gross human rights violations in Mexico -- such as that witnessed by Amnesty International in some other countries in the region -- the armed forces should be relieved from their public security and criminal investigations duties, a role which is fuelling the human rights crisis.

Amnesty International joins the Mexican people's hope that, in the present climate of reform, the corresponding authorities will undertake the challenge and responsibility to implement all necessary steps towards the full protection and respect of human rights. To this effect, we call on them to implement the recommended measure without delay. Mexican society, including the Catholic Church -- which is increasingly concerned and committed to this end -- can now play a pivotal role to ensure that Mexico lives up to the standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights before the end of the century.

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