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Mexico: Justice and safety for the women of Ciudad Juárez

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The over 200 women killed since 1993 in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state, deserve justice, and all the women living and working in and around the same city deserve protection from violence, Amnesty International said today.

The statement came as women from all over the world gather in Guadalajara, Mexico, for the International Forum of the Association for Women's Rights and Development, from 3 to 6 October.

In 1998 the National Commission of Human Rights (*Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, CNDH) issued a recommendation to the authorities requiring thorough and effective investigations to clarify the circumstances of the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, asking for all those responsible to be brought to justice, and for public officials who had failed in their duty to investigate these cases to also be investigated and punished.

"Despite the years that have passed since the CNDH recommendation, further murders, and the endorsement of the recommendation by Inter-american and UN mechanisms, the authorities have failed to comply fully, leaving the victims and their families without redress and the population of Ciudad Juárez in fear," Amnesty International said.

The detentions heralded by the authorities as the solution to the cases, have failed to stop the killings and have been marred by irregularities and reports of abuses, undermining the confidence of the relatives of the victims and the community.

"The Mexican authorities -- both at state and federal level -- have an obligation to carry out thorough, impartial and prompt investigations into these patterns of violence against women, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to take appropriate measures to prevent similar cases from happening again," Amnesty International said.

"These measures must be transparent and effective if confidence in the judicial system is to be built and the pattern of murders ended," the organization added.

"It is not enough for the different agencies and authorities involved in the investigations to wash

their hands of responsibility and deny their jurisdiction. A pattern of such terrible murders demands a fully integrated response from all relevant state and federal institutions to demonstrate that such crimes cannot and will not be tolerated," Amnesty International stressed.

In January of this year, Amnesty International wrote to the Mexican authorities to request information on the progress of investigations into the cases, and to insist on the need for immediate, thorough and impartial investigations and on the responsibility on the part of the institutions to take measures to ensure the safety of the vulnerable. The responses received to date have been far from satisfactory, and cast doubt on the avowed commitment of the authorities to end the tragedy of the last 9 years and restore dignity to the victims and their relatives.

A large proportion of the women killed or "disappeared" in Ciudad Juárez were migrants, lived in marginalised communities, often with no family support structure, and worked in the *industria maquiladora*- factories set up by US and other foreign companies to exploit cheap labour and favourable tariffs in the region near the US border.

"These cases highlight the link between economic globalization and violence against women. While globalization has created economic opportunities for women in some areas, increased poverty and casualization of labour have led thousands of women to migrate in search of work, often in situations where they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence, and are denied access to effective protection from the criminal justice system," Amnesty International said.

"The message must be clear: violence against women must be tackled at its roots. All instances of it must be thoroughly investigated, those responsible brought to justice, and steps must be taken to address the causes of women's vulnerability to violence," the organization added.

In the light of the increasingly important role played by economic actors, especially multinational companies investing in Mexico, Amnesty International calls upon companies operating in Mexico to show human rights leadership and social responsibility towards the communities they work and provide appropriate measures and adequate protection to ensure the safety of their workers.

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