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PUBLIC STATEMENT

MEXICO

RELEASE OF PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE MANUEL MANRÍQUEZ -- A POSITIVE STEP

The release of long standing prisoner of conscience Manuel Manríquez San Agustín is a welcome step for human rights in Mexico, Amnesty International said today commenting the news of his release on 29 March 1999, after nearly nine years' detention.

In a historic ruling, the *Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal* (TSJDF), High Court of the Federal District in Mexico City, absolved him of all the charges of murder for which he had been convicted after confessing under torture.

This ruling -- apparently based on information contained in a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) -- has potentially far-reaching implications for human rights legislation in the country. For the first time the Mexican authorities have complied with a recommendation from the ICHR, and this comes at a time when the Mexican government is being called to accede to a number of further recommendations from the ICHR and other inter-governmental organizations.

Amnesty International believes that the release of Manuel Manríquez sets an important precedent, and will stand as a benchmark for any future dealings between the Mexican government and such organizations.

Moreover, the High Court decision reinforces the calls of many international human rights bodies -- including the United Nations Committee against Torture, the ICHR and Amnesty International -- to ban the use of confessions obtained under torture as evidence during trials.

Amnesty International considers the release of Manuel Manríquez a success for the long and determined campaign carried out on his behalf by members of the Mexican and international community working alongside his lawyers and supporters.

The organization believes that this result shows the importance of the work of campaigners worldwide and hopes it will be followed by more successes in future campaigns.

Background

Manuel Manríquez, an Otomí Indian and a musician by trade, was detained in June 1990 on charges of murder. He was sentenced to 27 years in prison on the basis of a confession extracted under torture.

The history of his case has been a catalogue of abuses and official cover-ups dating back to his arrest. His original interrogation took place without the help of an interpreter, and the

police tortured him with beatings, burnings and electric shock treatment. His case was eventually brought to court despite a total lack of evidence, other than his forced confession.

During his imprisonment Manuel Manríquez was even deemed to be a high security risk prisoner and accused of being a member of armed opposition group *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (EPR), Popular Revolutionary Army. As a result, he was transferred to a maximum security prison in Guadalajara.

Manuel Manríquez made use of his time in prison becoming an active human rights campaigner on behalf of other prisoners in Mexico. He organized many protests to mark the plight of these prisoners and even went so far as to stitch up his mouth as part of a hunger strike calling for the release of others held under circumstances similar to his own.

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