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Human rights must be at the heart of the electoral agenda

Amnesty International's human rights priorities for the candidates.

Mexico is preparing for elections that will set its path for the next six years. However, the need to strengthen the protection and effective exercise of human rights has not been at the heart of the debate or the proposals and commitments being made by the presidential candidates. Respect for human rights is a key issue for Mexican society, which is undergoing a public security crisis of historic proportions.

As the annual report published by Amnesty International today shows, many individuals and populations in Mexico are still being subjected to gross human rights violations without having access to an effective remedy. The current government and its recent predecessors promised to respect, protect and guarantee human rights. Amnesty International is well aware that there have been some important positive initiatives, such as the 2011 constitutional reforms relating to human rights. However, the evidence shows that these initiatives, whilst they may look good on paper, have not been translated into action.

For many sectors of the population, communities and individuals suffering injustice, the reality is that human rights still do not exist and impunity is the norm. The past few years have shown that speeches or partial measures in support of human rights are not enough to change reality. If the promises are not backed up with the necessary political will, the participation of society and a programme of specific and comprehensive actions that are taken up at all three levels of government, very little will be achieved. It is therefore crucial that the President of the Republic shows leadership and commitment.

It is essential to combat discrimination, inequality and social exclusion and to ensure that both economic, social and cultural, and civil and political rights are enforced. However, if the specific actions to be taken are not spelled out, what do these vague promises from the candidates' platforms mean? That is why it is imperative that the candidates go much further than just making generic statements in favour of human rights.

In recent years several human rights bodies from the United Nations and the Organization of American States have issued recommendations and judgments with which the Mexican State is obligated to comply. The vast majority have yet to be implemented.

The current situation leads us to highlight a series of human rights priorities that should be addressed as a matter of urgency. We believe that it is crucial for the candidates, both those seeking the presidency and those standing for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, to reflect on these issues, and to make commitments to complying specifically with the recommendations made below.

Public security with justice

The public security and justice systems are in crisis. It is imperative that the candidates make commitments to putting into practice a public security policy that provides greater protection for individuals in the face of crime and violence and ensures human rights protection for everyone.

Those seeking public office should assume responsibility for putting a stop to human rights violations committed by members of the military and other public officials, including torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions and the excessive use of force. For this to happen, the candidates must recognise the scale of the human rights violations being committed in the context of combating crime and those responsible must be brought to justice. This includes ensuring truth and justice for the relatives of all those who have disappeared in recent years in the context of the violence.

It is also vital that they commit to ending military jurisdiction in the case of all investigations and legal proceedings related to human rights violations committed by members of the armed forces, and to reforming the justice system so that human rights are guaranteed in practice, including by abolishing “*arraigo*” (pre-charge detention).

The protection of women, Indigenous People and migrants

Some groups suffer disproportionately from a justice system that is incapable of ending impunity.

The candidates should assume responsibility for implementing policies that guarantee protection and effective access to justice for women who have suffered violence. It is also crucial that they commit themselves to ensuring safe access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health services.

They should also commit to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are able to fully exercise their rights, including the right to a fair trial and the right to have access to health care, education, housing and other basic services, as well as the right to consultation and full, prior and informed consent with regard to any projects that affect their ancestral lands.

The candidates must also commit to implementing a plan of action to protect migrants, ensuring that they have access to justice and establishing a database to gather data on the abuses committed against them.

The protection of human rights defenders and journalists

In a context of impunity and misuse of the justice system, the role of human rights defenders becomes increasingly valuable. However, Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders and journalists.

Amnesty International hopes that the candidates will speak out publicly about the need to ensure that the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists is fully implemented. It is also imperative to ensure that any attacks, killings, threats, arrests and unfounded legal proceedings of which they are victims are effectively investigated so that those responsible can be brought to justice.

International human rights obligations

The candidates must commit to a policy that fosters respect for human rights and includes the widespread involvement of civil society. This requires sustained cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms, implementation of their recommendations and ratification of the international human rights instruments to which Mexico is not yet a party. In particular, Amnesty International hopes that the candidates will undertake to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Foreign policy

Amnesty International urges the candidates to pledge to use Mexico's position and speaking and voting rights in international bodies to further international human rights promotion. A clear example would be to firmly support the adoption and effective implementation of an international arms trade treaty that establishes the effective protection of human rights where arms transfers are concerned. Impunity should not only be combated at home; Mexico's foreign policy should push for all governments who violate human rights to be held accountable.