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Mexico's strategy to protect migrants fails to have impact

The Mexican government's strategy on migrants has so far failed to tackle the alarming numbers of Central American migrants being kidnapped regularly in the country, Amnesty International said a year after the plan was first launched.

The strategy, announced in August 2010, promised a radical overhaul of the government's approach to the epidemic of kidnappings and killings of irregular migrants in Mexico.

It included commitments to ensure effective coordination between federal, state and municipal authorities to prevent further kidnappings, investigate and punish those responsible, and guarantee assistance to migrants who have suffered abuses.

"Despite the government's claims to be addressing the issue, there is no evidence that the implementation of the widely publicised policy has had any impact," said Rupert Knox, Mexico researcher at Amnesty International.

"The Mexican government should provide a detailed report on the impact of the strategy and information on the prosecution and conviction of all those responsible for abuses against migrants."

Amnesty International has documented dozens of cases where Central American migrants travelling through Mexico have been kidnapped, tortured, raped, killed and disappeared.

According to figures issued by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, 11,000 irregular migrants were kidnapped over a six month period in 2010.

On 23 August 2010, 72 Central and South American migrants were killed by a criminal gang in the municipality of San Fernando, in the northern state of Tamaulipas. This year, 193 bodies, some believed to be migrants, were discovered in mass graves in the same municipality.

On the anniversary of the San Fernando massacre, Mexico's Federal Attorney General's Office announced that 82 suspects, including municipal police, have been detained and charged in connection with the string of crimes in Tamaulipas.

"It's positive to see that the authorities have made public some information about the abduction and murder of 193 people in Tamaulipas," said Rupert Knox.

"However, we are concerned about the absolute lack of clear information about advances in investigations into the human rights abuses against migrants throughout 2010 and 2011."

"The continuing failure to hold the vast majority of those responsible to account or provide adequate support and protection to victims and their relatives is a major concern."

In July 2011, Amnesty International delegates visited migrant shelters and spoke with kidnapping victims and migrant rights defenders, who frequently face threats because of their work.

On 24 June, dozens of migrants were reportedly kidnapped while travelling on the roof of a freight train in southern Mexico en route to the northern border.

According to eyewitnesses, the driver stopped the train just outside the town of Aguas Medias in Veracruz state and at least 10 armed men got out of several vehicles and began to force migrants off the train, shouting “get off the train sons of bitches, hurry up and get inside the pickups”.

Some migrants managed to escape and fled for their lives, but an unknown number, including women and children, were taken.

Investigations by state and federal authorities have not established the whereabouts and fate of those abducted or the identity of their kidnapers.