

EXTERNAL -- FOR RESPONSE

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Mexico: Amnesty International calls on the authorities to respect the rights of UNAM students

The Mexican authorities must not forget for one moment their obligation to guarantee the physical integrity and legal rights of all the university students still in detention, Amnesty International said today.

The organization has received unconfirmed reports that some of the detained students from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)*, National Autonomous University of Mexico, have been refused the right to receive visits from relatives and lawyers of their choice before being questioned, requiring them to accept the services of court-appointed counsel.

“The Mexican authorities are obliged to guarantee all detainees the right to receive visits from relatives as well as medical attention and the services of a lawyer of their own choosing,” Amnesty International stated.

Article 20 IX of the Mexican Constitution guarantees detainees the right to receive advice from a lawyer of their choosing as soon as judicial proceedings are initiated. In addition, the right to receive all necessary medical attention, the right to family visits, and others, are protected under international law.

International instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment (UN) clearly spell out international obligations in this regard.

“The Mexican authorities are obliged to guarantee these rights in practice,” said Amnesty International.

Some 1,000 people were detained on UNAM premises in two operations carried out by the Federal Preventive Police on 1 and 6 February. In the first operation, 250 people were arrested and 37 were injured.

In the second police operation, during which there were no violent incidents, 745 people were detained. Over 50 were minors.

Reports received by Amnesty International indicate that in the past few days the authorities have released over 500 of the detainees without charge. The number of people still in detention is not clear at present.

“Initial reports received by the organization stated that at least 85 of the detainees had been brought before a judge and accused of ‘terrorism, sabotage and criminal association’,” Amnesty International said. “But more recent reports indicate that the authorities have changed the charges to common law offences such as robbery, theft and causing injury.”

Normally, those accused of these types of offences have the right to be released on bail. However, the authorities have cited security grounds for refusing to release several of the detainees.

Amnesty International would like to remind the Mexican authorities that detaining an individual beyond the period of time permitted by law would constitute arbitrary detention and would be in violation of international law.

“We will be watching these legal proceedings very closely to ensure that they conform to international fair trial standards,” the organization stated.

Background

Students from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* have been on strike since 22 April 1999 in protest at proposed reforms to the university system.

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