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MEXICO: WIDESPREAD TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT CONTINUES DESPITE GOVERNMENT'S PROFESSED COMMITMENT TO END THIS ATROCIOUS CRIME

Torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officers in Mexico continue on a wide scale despite the government's purported commitment to eradicating these practices, Amnesty International said in a report released today, as the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture prepares to examine the Mexican Government's report.

"Impunity for perpetrators is the rule," Amnesty International said. "No one has been sentenced for the crime of torture in Mexico, despite thousands of complaints filed before the authorities."

Mexico is obliged to investigate complaints of torture or ill-treatment, bring perpetrators to justice and provide compensation to the victims under the UN Convention against Torture, which it ratified in 1987.

"These obligations have little meaning in Mexico," Amnesty International said. "Victims of torture and ill-treatment receive no compensation for their suffering and those responsible for these crimes walk free."

The methods of torture in Mexico most frequently reported to the organization include electric shocks, semi-asphyxiation with plastic bags or by submersion under water, mock executions and death threats, beatings using sharp objects, sticks or rifle butts, rape and sexual abuse, forcing carbonated water up the detainee's nose (a method known as *tehuacanazo*) and slapping both ears at once (the "telephone").

The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) is today examining a report submitted by the Mexican authorities in June 1996, concerning the country's implementation of and compliance with the UN Convention against Torture. This is Mexico's third periodic report presented before the CAT.

"Despite some important legal reforms and administrative measures enacted in the last few years, the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment against political and common law detainees continues to be reported," said Amnesty International.

In a report submitted to the Committee, the human rights organization has detailed its concerns regarding allegations of torture and ill-treatment in Mexico. Today, Amnesty International is calling on the CAT to take these concerns into account while examining the Mexican Government's own report.

In its report, Amnesty International cites numerous instances of torture and ill-treatment by members of the security forces, including the Mexican armed forces, committed up to March 1997. In some cases, detainees have died as a consequence of torture and medical examiners have also often failed to certify injuries or recommend medical care for imprisoned victims of torture and ill-treatment.

Reports of torture and ill-treatment have often been supported by medical and other forensic evidence, yet only in a handful of cases have allegations been investigated. Judges often allow “confessions”, allegedly extracted under torture, to be used as evidence against detainees.

Amnesty International believes that Mexico has shown a continuous and substantial lack of political will to implement the relevant legal and administrative measures it has adopted since ratifying the UN Convention against Torture by allowing the perpetuation of these practices.

The human rights organization takes the opportunity of the 18th session of the UN Committee against Torture to urge the Mexican authorities again to make effective their purported commitments to prevent and punish torture and ill-treatment in Mexico.

Amnesty International submits its concerns about torture and ill-treatment in a number of the countries being examined by the CAT at each session. At this session, in addition to the document on Mexico, the organization has provided material on Ukraine, Denmark, Paraguay, Sweden and Israel.

BACKGROUND

The UN Committee against Torture (the CAT) is a body of 10 experts elected by the States Parties to the Convention against Torture to monitor the way these states implement their obligations set out in the Convention. The experts act in their personal capacity and are not meant to represent any government. At their twice yearly meetings in Geneva the experts review written reports from states on how the Convention has been implemented, by questioning government representatives and issuing written conclusions. The CAT also decides on any complaints from individuals that their government has violated the Convention and carries out other investigations.

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Amnesty International's report, *Amnesty International's concerns regarding torture and ill-treatment in Mexico* (AI Index: AMR 41/17/97) is available in English, Spanish and French. For further information, please contact the International Secretariat Press Office in London on the following number: (+44 171) 413 5566.