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Mexico: New visa requirements jeopardise work of human rights defenders

The new visa requirements for foreign human rights defenders will make it more difficult for international NGOs and individuals to protect human rights in Mexico and so could greatly increase the risks already being faced by local human rights defenders, warned Amnesty International today.

The new measures, unprecedented in the Americas, require those wishing to carry out human rights research to provide details of their work plans and the groups and individuals they intend to interview while in Mexico. This would in practice severely restrict the ability of international human rights defenders to follow up information concerning alleged violations.

“The sensitive nature of human rights work necessitates levels of confidentiality for those such as victims, witnesses and relatives who provide testimonies to human rights workers,” Amnesty International said. “But perhaps even more serious the requirement to give 30 days notice prior to travel clearly prevents a timely reaction by human rights defenders and NGOs to emergency situations.”

While Amnesty International recognises the right of the Mexican government to regulate immigration, the organisation is concerned that these regulations will delay and compromise the work of foreigners committed to the defence of human rights.

These new measures are being introduced in the context of a significant increase in the number of expulsions of foreign human rights activists over recent months. The denial of the right to a hearing for those expelled is contrary to principles of due process, and leaves the expulsions open to the charge of being arbitrary.

The measures also appear to contradict the spirit and intent of international agreements which Mexico had previously supported. In 1993 for example, along with 120 other governments, the Government of Mexico adopted the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action which emerged from the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Human Rights. This recognises, inter alia, the important role which NGOs play in the defence of human rights.

In the spirit of the Vienna declaration, and respecting Mexican national law, Amnesty International urges the Government of Mexico not to introduce measures which could be interpreted as an attempt to hinder the defence of human rights.

Amnesty International urges that these regulations be reviewed and modified in order not to create unreasonable obstacles to the work of Human Rights defenders. Such a move would be consonant with the draft declaration on human rights defenders approved by the UN working group, in which Mexico participates, in March of this year.

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