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Mexico: Digna Ochoa – Two years since her death on 19 October 2001

To mark the second anniversary, this weekend, of the death of the human rights defender, Digna Ochoa, Amnesty International would like to recall her valuable contribution to the defence of human rights in Mexico.

At the same time, the organisation expresses its grave concern at the decision taken by the Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal (PGJDF) Office of the Attorney General for the Federal District to close the case, bringing a verdict of suicide. Shortcomings in the investigation are identified in the report which the Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights delivered to the authorities in June. The anomalies listed include a lack of rigour in the first post mortem examination, irregularities in gathering, handling and storing evidence and the unusual appearance, 18 months later, of new and conclusive evidence. In addition, the report mentioned the failure to follow meticulously all available lines of investigation. In spite of these criticisms, the case has been closed, apparently without addressing these inadequacies.

Another cause for concern in this case has been the apparent attempt to restrict the involvement of Digna Ochoa's family and her lawyers, and their right to contribute to the investigation. During the course of the investigation, information was published with the intention of calling into question the family's legitimate efforts to seek justice and discrediting the work undertaken by Digna Ochoa during her life in the defence and promotion of human rights.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the use of this now-familiar practice of discrediting the victims of human rights violations and their families, as well as human rights defenders. In common with so many human rights defenders, Digna Ochoa played a central role in protecting human rights in Mexico and it is essential that the authorities recognise and support this work. The practice of harassing and bringing human rights defenders into disrepute is common in Mexico. The murder in August of Griselda Tirado Evangelio, an activist from Puebla, highlights the risks run by human rights defenders as they go about their legitimate work.

The organisation hopes that the hearing on the death of Digna Ochoa which is due to take place tomorrow at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington will address the shortcomings identified by the special delegates who drew up the report. It is essential that all the inconsistencies in the investigation be cleared up, so that the death of Digna Ochoa does not become just one more case in which justice continues to be called into question.

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