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## **Mexico urged to protect human rights defenders and journalists**

Mexico's federal senate must move swiftly to pass a proposed law to protect human rights defenders and journalists amid shocking levels of intimidation and killings, Amnesty International said on Friday.

The country has seen an alarming pattern of journalists being attacked, assassinated and abducted for their work, with at least 60 reportedly killed in the last decade, including at least nine in 2011.

Numerous human rights defenders have also been attacked, abducted, and killed and have faced ongoing threats and violence.

Tabled this week, the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists aims to set up a mechanism to ensure effective protection for all those who face threats and violence whilst carrying out their journalistic or human rights work.

"This crucial bill has come about through collaboration between Mexican lawmakers, civil society, and those under attack in the course of their work to inform the world about the human rights impact of the violence in Mexico," said Javier Zúñiga, Special Adviser at Amnesty International.

"Mexico's senators must pass it into law as swiftly as possible to uphold freedom of expression and safeguard the vital work carried out by the country's journalists and human rights defenders."

The bill currently under consideration joins another recent measure aimed at stopping the surge in attacks against media outlets and journalists amid Mexico's deteriorating security situation in recent years.

On Tuesday, the Mexican senate unanimously passed a constitutional reform allowing federal authorities – including the Attorney General of the Republic – to investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists and others which affect or limit the right to information or freedom of expression.

In the past, Mexican federal authorities have not stepped in to investigate violence against journalists, saying that such cases fell outside their jurisdiction and were the responsibility of Mexico's 31 states which have routinely failed to hold perpetrators to account. The constitutional reform gives federal authorities the power to investigate and prosecute such crimes.

Federal and state government inaction has added to the impunity, while ongoing intimidation and insecurity has driven some media outlets to self-censor their work, particularly local media in Mexican regions most affected by the violence between armed criminal groups.

"There's no longer any excuse for letting these attacks on journalists and human rights defenders go unpunished. A majority of Mexico's 31 state congresses must now ratify the reform for it to become law and federal government must act on these new powers to fully investigate attacks on journalists and human rights defenders," said Javier Zúñiga.

“Mexico’s authorities must take advantage of this reform to guarantee impartial and efficient investigations into cases of harassment of human rights defenders, which have largely gone unpunished in the past. The constitutional reform and the proposed bill on a protection mechanism provide crucial means of improving the safety of journalists and human rights defenders, provided they are fully implemented.”