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## **Mexico: Relatives of the disappeared deserve more than promises**

Disappearances in Mexico have become commonplace because federal and state authorities have tolerated and refused to clamp down on them, Amnesty International said as it launched a new briefing today.

The recent commitments by senior government officials to end disappearances and locate the victims are important, but will mean nothing to the relatives if they do not produce tangible results to end impunity and clarify the whereabouts of victims.

Confronting a nightmare: Disappearances in Mexico highlights the country's ongoing pattern of disappearances amid the government's efforts to rein in organized criminal groups. These often include enforced disappearances – carried out by public officials.

The federal government has recognized that at least 26,000 people were reported disappeared or missing over the last six years. Last week the Interior Minister suggested the real number was much lower, despite the lack of full investigations.

“Even if full investigations establish that not all reported disappearances relate to ongoing abductions by criminals and public officials – a shocking reality can no longer be ignored,” said Rupert Knox, Amnesty International's researcher on Mexico.

“These figures demonstrate one of the key human rights challenges facing the government of Enrique Peña Nieto: ending the crisis of disappearances, locating the victims and holding those responsible to account – regardless of whether they are criminals or public officials.”

The briefing also documents the struggle of relatives for truth, justice and reparation, in the face of state inaction which has allowed a climate of impunity to flourish and continues to put people at risk of further disappearances.

**This impunity has resulted in threats, stigmatization and mistreatment of relatives desperate to find their disappeared loved ones. In the face of official collusion or inertia, they have had to carry out their own investigations, often at great personal risk.**

Their struggle is reflected in stories like Israel Arenas Durán's mother. Israel disappeared at the hands of transit police in the northern state of Nuevo León on 17 June 2011. When his mother went to the office of the investigator in charge of the case to ask about her son's whereabouts, the official sent for a patrol car to remove her from his office “because he didn't want us demanding an investigation”.

Even though the Mexican government has now partly recognized the magnitude of disappearances in the country, it has yet to acknowledge the involvement of federal, state and municipal agents in many of the cases. Official involvement in such cases makes them enforced disappearances, a violation of international law.

The systematic failure to investigate effectively reported disappearances is also a breach of international law and has thwarted opportunities to locate the disappeared. Moreover, the authorities' negligence has conveniently disguised the true number of cases, including those in which the authorities are implicated.

“The steps taken so far by the government – including publishing data on disappearances, meeting some of the relatives and promising to establish a special unit to search for the disappeared – are welcome, but insufficient,” said Knox.

“The isolated actions promised by the federal government do not go far enough to address the systematic failure of federal and state authorities as well as the direct and indirect involvement of public officials in enforced disappearances. The appointment of 12 investigators to the new special search unit set to handle thousands of cases is hardly a convincing sign of the full-scale commitment, resources and political will needed to address the national crisis.

“It is essential that the government confront this nightmare, by involving victims and human rights groups in the development and implementation of public policy, which must be enforced by federal and all state-level authorities to ensure an effective response to this

crisis.”

Amnesty International representatives will participate in a conference organized by relatives of the disappeared in the northern city of Saltillo between 5 and 7 June to identify and promote measures to combat disappearances.