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Mexico: Truth and justice for the murdered and abducted women of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua

At a meeting with Governor Reyes Baeza and the Prosecutor Patrizia Gonzalez, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan welcomed the willingness of the State government to address the cases of killings of women. However Ms Khan expressed disappointment at the lack of concrete action and the limited advances in many cases making it difficult for families to have confidence in the process.

"Challenges remain high for both state and federal authorities, particularly in addressing the cases of killings of women and girls in Chihuahua," said Irene Khan in her first follow up meeting since 2003.

"Despite the initiatives taken by the federal government and the positive change in attitude of the state's authorities more than 20 women were killed in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua in the last six months. The authorities must rethink their strategy if there is to be real security and justice for women here."

"Before meeting the governor, dozens of mothers and relatives shared the story of their fight for justice with me. One mother said that they are seeking justice for their daughters who are no longer with them and security for the ones still here."

The intervention of the Special Federal Prosecutor for Ciudad Juarez is a clear step in the right direction but has had very limited impact. The lack of progress in the 24 cases taken under federal jurisdiction and the lack of attention to the abductions and killings of women in Chihuahua City are deeply worrying.

The Special Federal Commission working under the direction of Guadalupe Morfin has carried out positive work with the families and coordinated federal and local initiatives to address the social environment of deprived areas of Ciudad Juarez. However, the restrictions in the Commission's mandate has prevented it from playing a substantial role in establishing truth and justice. It is also crucial that the Commission fully integrates the City of Chihuahua into its work.

At the local level, the change of leadership in the government and the project being undertaken by the Argentina Forensic Anthropology Team to clarify the identity of unidentified bodies, seems to have brought new hope for the relatives of the murdered women.

"The treatment of families by the new authorities is in marked contrast with the past, but this must be accompanied by concrete advances if their work is to be meaningful. The government must rebuild the confidence of the families, take measures to end all harassment and ensure that the cases where confessions were obtained under torture are seriously reviewed."

The partial review of cases continues, but the process is only a paper review of case files and not a wide ranging enquiry and has not fully considered the gender aspects of these crimes. The resulting identification of 130 local officials as possibly responsible for criminal or administrative acts of negligence has led to no prosecutions and impunity for officials.

“The key challenge for both federal and state authorities is to set up a comprehensive strategy and to improve coordination between federal and state authorities to deal with the hundreds of cases reported to date. Until these challenges are met the lives of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua will continue to be under threat.”

“Chihuahua and Ciudad Juarez are symptoms of an epidemic of violence against women around the world.”

“Both state and federal authorities have a duty towards the women of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua. Until serious measures are taken and justice delivered, Amnesty International will continue its work.”

After the meeting with the governor, Amnesty International's delegation joined the mothers of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua to pay tribute to Minerva Torres, whose body was hidden for more than two years in the forensic facilities of the Prosecutor's Office in Chihuahua, despite clear evidence of her identity.

Irene Khan was joined by representatives of Amnesty International sections in the Netherlands, the US, Switzerland and Mexico. “Violence has no boundaries but neither does solidarity. Amnesty International will stand with the mothers until justice and truth become a reality.”

Background Information

Amnesty International's delegation will meet representatives from the federal government on Tuesday 8 August.

In the evening (7 PM), Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan will lead a panel discussion with representatives of the main political parties. Amnesty International firmly believes that human rights must be place at the top of the electoral agenda.

Photos of the day are available on www.amnistia.org.mx/prensa or news.amnesty.org

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