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Mexico: Amnesty International's Open Letter challenges political parties

(Mexico City) -- In an Open Letter to all Mexican political parties, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan challenged the leaders to make human rights the cornerstone of Mexican life and a fundamental central pillar of their electoral manifesto.

"Mexico is at a cross roads. The democratic transition is about to move to a new phase in the 2006 elections, but respect for human rights – which is central to the democratic aspirations of all Mexicans - is largely absent from the political agenda, or only present in empty words. Political leaders must move from rhetoric to concrete action if Mexico is to experience a new era of human rights."

Last night, Irene Khan led a panel discussion with political parties -- including the PRD, PRI, PAN and Alternativa Democrática -- and representatives of civil society on the human rights challenges facing Mexico as it prepares for 2006 elections.

Earlier in the day, Ms Khan met Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez, Interior Minister, Carlos Abascal, and Minister of Defense General Clemente Vega Garcia.

Assessing the human rights record of the Fox Administration, Ms. Khan praised the Mexican government for its progressive stand on human rights internationally, but expressed her disappointment at its failure to show equal determination to address serious human rights problems in its own country.

"At the Federal level, the Administration has not been determined enough, Congress has dragged its feet for party political gains, and the judiciary has failed to recognize international human rights standards in its decisions."

"Both at Federal and State level, legal and constitutional arguments have been used to justify and maintain impunity and inaction rather than to ensure accountability."

"From the killings of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez, to impunity for rape of indigenous women in Guerrero, the harassment of journalists in Oaxaca and the imprisonment of Felipe Arreaga, environmentalist, in Guerrero, serious human rights violations persist at the state level. At the heart of these problems lie serious deficiencies in the security and justice sector which continue to encourage torture, arbitrary detention, malicious prosecution, corruption and impunity."

"Violence against women is endemic in Mexico. Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua are high profile

examples of deep deficiencies in the justice and security apparatus, which combined with discrimination and socio-economic inequities, make fertile ground for gender based violence.”

“Impunity for all crimes is high, for human rights violations higher still and for the human rights abuses committed in Mexico’s ‘dirty war’ the highest of all.”

In the open letter, Amnesty International called on the future Presidential candidates and their political parties to indicate their clear commitment to a common human agenda based on the following:

- o **International human rights agenda** – Mexico’s positive contribution to human rights on the international stage should be consolidated and strengthened by the next Administration and supported by all political parties.
- o **Constitutional Reforms** – Constitutional reform should be undertaken to ensure that Mexico’s ratification of international treaties are not only a paper promise but are incorporated and upheld in national law.
- o **Security and Judicial Reform** - Mexico’s policing and criminal justice systems should be fundamentally reformed to ensure both security for citizens and respect for human rights. The reform should extend to limiting military jurisdiction so that military personnel accused of human rights violations are subject to independent and impartial investigation and trial by civilian authorities.
- o **Violence against Women** – Effective policies and practical measures should be adopted to guarantee the right of all women in Mexico to live free from violence and discrimination.
- o **Human Rights Defenders** – The legitimate role of human rights defenders must be fully recognized by the authorities and they must be protected from threats, harassment and fabricated criminal charges. Officials who instigate malicious prosecution must be held to account.
- o **Impunity** – All parts of the Mexican state, including the judiciary and the military, must play their part to address impunity for human rights violations committed during the “dirty war”. Legal and institutional barriers protecting those responsible for human rights violations from prosecution must be removed.
- o **Indigenous rights** - Existing legislation must be reformed bring it in line with international human rights treaties to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.
- o **Economic, Social and Cultural rights** – All aspects of public policy should embrace an integrated approach to human rights recognizing the interdependence and indivisibility of Civil and Political rights and Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Denial of Economic, Social and Cultural rights, such as extreme poverty is inextricably linked to Civil and Political rights abuses, such as unequal access to justice.

“Political parties must now rise to the challenge of putting proposals into practice.”

“Promises of the future will be tested by the commitment to address the failings of the past and the problems of the present. Even before the elections, there will opportunities, for instance on constitutional and judicial reform, to show that politicians are ready to turn a new page.

“Human rights have no political boundaries. It is vital that all parties from across the political spectrum commit themselves to a common human right agenda.”

Background Information

Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s Secretary General led a High Level Mission to Mexico from 8 to 10 August 2005. The delegation visited the city of Chihuahua and Mexico City and meet with State and Federal authorities, representatives of civil society and relatives of victims of human rights violations.

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