

23 August 2000

AI Index AMR 41/043/2000 - News Service Nr. 164

Mexico: " Disappearance" is criminalized for the first time

The criminalization of "disappearance" in Mexico's capital, the Federal District (D.F.), marks an advance in the struggle against this serious violation of human rights. What is needed now is the political will to give substance to this first step, stated Amnesty International today.

In an unprecedented decision, on 19 August the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District unanimously passed an addition to the Penal Code allowing sentences of between 15 and 40 years in prison for public servants from the D.F. responsible for "disappearances".

"It is now imperative that the authorities develop a strategy to prevent further 'disappearances' and bring to justice those responsible for these crimes," added the human rights organisation.

"It is also essential that they proceed, as soon as possible, to codify the crime of 'disappearance' in Federal Law and in the legislation of each and every one of the 31 states of the Mexican Federation."

Amnesty International continues to receive cases of "disappearances" following detention by security forces personnel, most of which take place in the context of counter-insurgency and anti-narcotics operations. In addition, over 400 cases of "disappearances" dating back to the 1970s and 1980s remain unresolved, prolonging untold anguish and injustice for the relatives.

"The cycle of impunity that has characterised and reinforced human rights violations in Mexico must be broken," said Amnesty International.

"The authorities have the obligation to do everything in their power to establish the truth of each " disappearance" , bring all those responsible to justice and fully compensate the victims and their families."

Background

*The bill to criminalize " disappearance" was proposed by Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, whose son Jesds Piedra Ibarra, disappeared in 1975 after being abducted, according to reports, by agents of the State Judicial Police in Monterrey, Nuevo Le\n state. Jesds Piedra is one of more than 400 " disappeared" whose fate has yet to be established by the Mexican authorities. During the last 25 years Rosario Ibarra has campaigned ceaselessly for the authorities to investigate these crimes and bring those responsible to justice. Over the years, both she and the organisation she created, the Committee for the Defense of Prisoners, the Persecuted, the " Disappeared" and Political Exiles (also known as *Comité Eureka*), have suffered threats and intimidation*

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>