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Mexico: Torture and injustice brought to light in Chihuahua

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Amnesty International believes that the legal ruling in the case of David Meza, who was arrested and accused of the murder of Neyra Azucena Cervantes in 2003 despite serious indications that his confession had been obtained under torture, is an important step forward.

On 29 June, almost three years after his arrest, David Meza was released when a judge found that there was no evidence to link him to the crime and ruled that he should be released unconditionally. The judge reportedly found the version of events put forward by the prosecution to be unlikely and dismissed the charges against him.

From the moment of David Meza's arrest, Amnesty International questioned the absence of due process guarantees in the case, in particular the use of torture to obtain self-incriminating statements. It is now essential that an impartial and independent investigation into the killing of the young woman be carried out so that the true culprits can be brought to justice and the killings and disappearances of women and girls in Chihuahua State do not go unpunished.

Amnesty International believes that, now that David Meza has been released, the Mexican authorities must urgently meet their international human rights obligations and carry out an impartial and independent investigation into the torture he suffered while in detention as well as the breaches of due process that occurred in this case so that those responsible can be punished.

The string of irregularities committed in the case of David Meza, who has spent three years in prison with no solid evidence against him, once again calls into question the operation of the justice system in Chihuahua State. Structural reform of the system must be effectively implemented by the authorities in order to ensure that access to justice is available to both victims and defendants.

Background information

On 14 July 2003 David Meza was arrested by the State Judicial Police and accused of kidnapping and murdering his cousin, 19-year-old Neyra Azucena Cervantes, whose body had been found that day in the Cerro Prieto district of Chihuahua. On 16 July, the State Attorney-General's Office presented David Meza to the media, saying that he had confessed to the murder. David Meza retracted his confession the next day, claiming that he had been forced to sign it under torture. During the trial, his defence lawyer submitted evidence of the torture.

The stepfather of Neyra Azucena Cervantes was arrested with David Meza but released without charge the next day. Following his release he said that he had been put under psychological pressure to make him confess to the murder and that his interrogators had threatened to kill him if he disclosed the treatment he had received in custody.

The Public Prosecutor's Office has appealed against the judge's decision to acquit David Meza.

Public Document

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