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## **Indigenous Mexican women framed over kidnapping are prisoners of conscience**

Amnesty International today accused the Mexican government of unfairly imprisoning two indigenous women for the kidnapping of six police officers in 2006 and demanded their immediate release.

The two women, who were sentenced to 21 years in prison, are awaiting the outcome of their retrial. Amnesty International has adopted them as “prisoners of conscience”.

Alberta Alcántara and Teresa González Cornelio have been held in the Centro de Readaptación de San José El Alto prison since August 2006. In January 2009 they were convicted of kidnapping six agents of the Mexican Federal Investigation Agency (AFI).

The agents claim they were held hostage by the women and other market stall holders during a raid on pirate DVD vendors on Santiago Mexquititlán square in March 2006. The only evidence against them is a photograph published in a newspaper in which Alberta and Teresa are standing next to the AFI agents.

“There is absolutely no credible evidence against Alberta and Teresa,” said Rupert Knox, Mexico Researcher at Amnesty International. “We believe they have been framed as a convenient target because of their marginal status in society as poor indigenous women.”

Alberta and Teresa were originally detained and charged together with market stall holder Jacinta Francisco Marcial, who was released in September 2009. In her case, Mexico’s Federal Attorney General’s Office decided to drop the case during the retrial because of lack of evidence.

However, despite a similar lack of evidence, the same office decided to continue to press charges against Teresa and Alberta and seek their reconviction. The final hearing of the women’s retrial was held on 3 February 2010. The judge now has 30 days to issue a new sentence.

“The case is emblematic of the discrimination and unfair trials that many indigenous people face in Mexico’s criminal justice system,” said Rupert Knox. “The Mexican government must release them both immediately and without conditions. Reparations must also be awarded.”

Alberta is from Santiago Mexquititlán, Municipio de Amealco de Bonfil, Querétaro. She is 31 years old. Before her detention she worked in a clothes factory and on a small plot of land owned by her family. She also made rag dolls to supplement the family income. She left school aged 13 to start work.

Teresa was born in San Francisco Shaxni, Municipio de Acambay, Mexico state. She is 25 years old. Before her detention she worked on the family land and made rag dolls. She is married to Alberta’s brother Gabriel.

She gave birth to Jasmin, now 11 months old, while she was in prison.

#### Background Information

On 26 March 2006, six police officers filed a complaint with the Attorney Federal alleging they had been kidnapped by locals during a market raid earlier in the day in Santiago Mexquititlán.

Four months later, the Attorney Federal ordered the arrest of three indigenous women whose faces appeared next to the police officers in a photo in a local paper. The women did not have access to an interpreter during judicial proceedings and their state appointed public defender never explained their rights or defence.

During the cross examination, the police officers contradicted each other and their main witness failed to ever appear before the court.