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Mexico: Merida initiative can only deliver security with human rights

Amnesty International today urged the US Congress to maintain human rights safeguards in the Merida initiative – legislation to fund a security cooperation package between the US, Mexico and Central America.

Amnesty International's call comes as the US Congress has come under increasing pressure not to include human rights safeguards in the proposed initiative. Mexican government authorities said they would not proceed with the agreement unless human rights safeguards were removed.

“Mexico and the US have a responsibility to protect and promote human rights. Rejecting human rights clauses from the Merida initiative sends the wrong message about the Mexican government's commitment to improving respect for human rights and accountability for perpetrators of abuses,” said Amnesty International.

The human rights safeguards under discussion include those ensuring that:

- confessions extracted by torture or other ill-treatment are not accepted as admissible evidence by Mexican courts;
- allegations of human rights violations committed by military personnel are transferred to civilian prosecutors and courts;
- an independent monitoring mechanism, involving both government and civil society, is established to assess the human rights impact of the security assistance package.

Representatives of Mexican and US civil society have supported these safeguards and also supported the strengthening and evaluation of US measures to prevent cross-border smuggling of arms to Mexico.

“Real security cannot be achieved without human rights. Both the US and Mexican authorities have the duty and power to ensure that international human rights standards such as the right not to be subject to torture, to a fair trial and to justice are protected and promoted. The safeguards under discussion in the US Congress advance these goals,” said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International called on all governments to ensure that military, security and police transfers are rigorously controlled and monitored to ensure that they do not result in human rights violations.