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# STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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## MEXICO

### Raped with impunity

Inés Fernández Ortega &  
Valentina Rosendo Cantú

**F**ive years on and Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú are still waiting for justice. The two women, who belong to the Tlapaneca Indigenous community, were raped by members of the Mexican army in February and March 2002 respectively in the state of Guerrero, Mexico.

Inés Fernández Ortega, who speaks little Spanish, was reportedly raped on 22 March 2002. Soldiers entered her home to interrogate her about some meat they claimed had been stolen. When she did not answer their questions, they raped her. Valentina Rosendo Cantú, then aged 17, was approached on 16 February 2002 by soldiers near her home, who questioned her about the activities of some "hooded men" (a reference to armed opposition groups). When she replied that she did not know any, she was threatened and two of the soldiers raped her.

The Mexican authorities claim that both women have failed to co-operate with the military investigation. However, the fact that both cases remain under military jurisdiction places the women at serious risk of reprisals. The women are required to go into the barracks to ratify their complaints before the military prosecutor. There, they may face a real risk of intimidation.

The women have shown great courage in speaking out, demanding that their cases be transferred to the civilian authorities. Amnesty International supports their demands as the military justice system lacks the impartiality and independence to properly investigate such cases. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is now investigating the Mexican government's failure to ensure effective access to justice for both women.

#### Dear President

I am writing to raise concerns about the cases of Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú who were raped by members of the armed forces in 2002, which have never been brought to justice. As long as their cases remain within military jurisdiction, they will not be investigated fully or fairly and the women will be denied justice. I therefore call on you to demonstrate your commitment to protecting human rights by:

- ▶ Immediately taking steps to guarantee that the cases are transferred to the appropriate civilian authorities.
- ▶ Ensuring that the perpetrators of these rapes are brought to justice through the civilian justice system and that the victims are given appropriate reparations.

Yours sincerely

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_



## Mexico – Widespread violence against women

**W**omen and girls in Mexico suffer high levels of discrimination and violence in the home and community. Indigenous women suffer both sexual and racial discrimination, often compounded by poverty. According to official 2003 figures, nearly half of all women over the age of 15 living with a partner had suffered some form of violence during the previous year. Efforts by the authorities to prevent and punish such crimes are frequently inadequate, despite increasing public awareness of the problem.

Women who have had the courage to brave the cultural, economic and social barriers to seek redress from the state for sexual violence, committed by state actors or private individuals, have had to contend with poor medical care, substandard forensic examinations and a judicial system that appears reluctant or unable to provide even minimum assurances of a successful outcome.

One obstacle is where perpetrators are military personnel and cases are transferred to military jurisdiction, which has an alarming lack of accountability. This failure to investigate, hold accountable and bring to justice members of the armed forces suspected of serious human rights abuses is almost absolute and has been extensively documented by Amnesty International and other national and international non-governmental organizations.

The new government of President Felipe Calderón has made no commitment to ensure that such cases are handled by the civilian judicial system or to strengthen measures to prevent and punish cases of violence against women which remain endemic in many parts of Mexico.

Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW  
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**Felipe Calderón**  
**Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos**  
**Residencia Oficial de "Los Pinos"**  
**Col. San Miguel Chapultepec**  
**México DF**  
**CP 11850**  
**Mexico**