



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Human Rights Challenges in Mexico

Thursday, June 23, 2022

3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Virtual via Cisco WebEx

Co-Chair Chris Smith

Excerpt of Remarks

Thank you, Co-Chair McGovern, for your opening remarks and for today's timely hearing on human rights challenges in Mexico, which follows the disappointing ninth *Summit of Americas* some two weeks ago in Los Angeles.

Roughly one-third of the Heads of States from Latin America and the Caribbean – including Mexico – failed to

attend the Summit, which reflects poorly on the leadership of the United States in the Western Hemisphere.

While responsibility for this failure lays at the feet of the Biden Administration, I do note that this absence of leadership within our own hemisphere has extended now through several Administrations, both Democrat and Republican.

What preceded the Summit also I think was disturbing, and relates to the topic of this hearing, human rights challenges in Mexico, which have been exacerbated under the rule of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, commonly known as AMLO, given his strongman tendencies.

It has been reported that before the Summit, which he eventually decided to boycott, [AMLO lobbied](#) the Biden Administration for invitations on behalf of some of the

hemisphere's most ruthless abusers of human rights – Maduro of Venezuela, Ortega of Nicaragua and Díaz-Canel of Cuba.

Tellingly, AMLO's absence contrasts with his participation in and promotion of the [CELAC-China Forum](#) last December, which Mexico hosted. Among other things, Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard discussed greater collaboration with Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, issuing a Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Key Areas between China and CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

I note that CELAC is emerging as a shadow alternative to the Organization of American States and excludes the United States.

It is also important that we recognize that AMLO is a man of the Left, and the human rights situation in Mexico needs to be understood in a particular historical context and in a broader regional context where we are witnessing the rise of new Leftism, or *castrochavismo*, in the Western Hemisphere.

In Mexico's case, corruption and disregard for human rights is rooted in the history of this past century, beginning in the 1920's, when President Plutarco Eliás Calles – another strongman of the Left – implemented [rigorous restrictions on the Catholic Church](#) which outlawed Catholic-led education below the secondary level and nationalized property that was used for religious worship.

Freedom of religion, freedom of speech and other core fundamental freedoms were undermined under Calles and

Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which insinuated itself into governmental, educational and social institutions at all levels, fostering a culture of corruption as it ruled Mexico for over seventy years.

PRI, incidentally, is where AMLO got his start, though he has migrated to political parties further to the Left, including now MORENA, which he founded, and from which he was elected President.

When AMLO was inaugurated on December 1, 2018, for a single six-year term, he promised “a change in the political regime,” one that is “[profound and radical](#),” but at the same time, one in which “the corruption and impunity that has impeded the rebirth of Mexico will end.”

So far halfway through his tenure as President, AMLO has followed through on his threat of “profound and radical” change, but failed to keep his promise of fighting “corruption and impunity.”

While Mexico’s President hurls insults at the press, it is one of the [deadliest times for the press in Mexican history](#), as physical attacks on journalists increased 85% since the President took office, amounting to 1,924 attacks – including 33 murders – between 2019 to 2021, according to *Reporters without Borders*.

President López Obrador has attacked the [National Electoral Institute](#) and recommended citizens elect electoral authorities instead, which many worry could be easily corrupted. He has also sought to abolish the [National Institute](#)

[for Access to Information](#), allegedly to cover up his [family's personal use](#) of taxpayer money.

President López Obrador has refused to counter the influence of local and transnational criminal groups, as well as drug cartels, in Mexico's political branches, especially in the judicial branch.

According to the Mexican think tank *Mexico Evalua*, impunity for federal crimes reached new highs in 2020, while institutions responsible for investigating these crimes had funding slashed when AMLO took office.

This is not without precedent in the Western Hemisphere.

After Hugo Chávez took office in Venezuela in 1998, he immediately began to undermine the other branches of government and erode checks and balances. For example, he

attacked judges who disagreed with him, and expanded the Supreme Court from 20 to 32 Magistrates, while taking other actions not recognized in the 1961 Bolivarian Constitution.

Venezuela today has transitioned from the richest country in Latin America to one of extreme poverty.

In Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega has won sham elections, persecuted political opponents, and extended term limits by altering the Constitution.

All of this follows the model of Cuba, where the repression that was so much a part of the Castro brothers' rule continues under Miguel Díaz-Canel.

We will wait to see what happens in Colombia, where former left-wing guerilla Gustavo Petro has just been elected, following coordinated agitation that was catalogued at a

hearing last year on Colombia by one of our witnesses today, José Cárdenas.

So today's hearing is important. Popular revulsion at PRI's corruption led to a political earthquake in the year 2000, when Vincente Fox was elected president from the National Action Party, breaking PRI's stranglehold on power at the national level.

Competitive elections were held since then, and hopefully enough institutional checks will remain once AMLO has left office.

Finally, I want to note the presence here today of a representative from the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Center for Human Rights. Our original witness could not be here today, because just this week, [two Jesuit priests and a tour guide](#) were

slain in northern Mexico in Chihuahua state while inside a local church at the hands of armed gunmen, and he is addressing that.

We should remember Blessed Miguel Pro, who stood against the injustice of the Calles regime nearly a century ago, holding out his arms in the form of a Cross while shouting “¡Viva Cristo Rey!” – “Long live Christ the King” – at the moment of his execution.

Bravery like that is what is necessary to confront evil – be it human rights abuses and corruption committed by government officials, or murder by organized criminals, who act often with impunity because of the corruption of government officials.

With that, I look forward to hearing your testimony.