



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**

### *Briefing Series on Accountability*

## **The Case of Mexico's 43 Disappeared Students: The Group of Experts Report**

**Wednesday, May 25, 2016**

**4:30 – 6:00 PM**

**2200 Rayburn House Office Building**

### **Opening Remarks**

Good afternoon. I am pleased to join Reps. Lowenthal, Sires and Torres, all members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, in welcoming you to our briefing this afternoon in which the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts will present its report on the case of the enforced disappearance of 43 students in Mexico.

I want to thank all the members of the Group of Experts for their excellent work on this case, and just note for the record that the scurrilous defamation campaign to which they have been subjected can only be interpreted as evidence that they made progress in uncovering the truth. I congratulate them for their persistence and urge them to continue to speak out about their findings.

I am a parent of two teens, including my son, who is 17 years old. That's the age of the youngest of the 43 students who were forcibly disappeared in Guerrero, Mexico, on the night of September 26, 2014. Please just take a moment to think about that: 43 young men between the ages of 17 and 33 vanished that night, and 20 months later, we do not know, and their parents and families and friends and loved ones do not know, where they are or what happened to them. It is unbearable for a parent to imagine such a terrible event; how much worse it must be to have to live through it.

Were such a thing to happen here in the U.S., we would turn to the authorities and expect them – demand of them – to find those who are missing, and to investigate and prosecute those responsible. I mean, really – when 43 people disappear together, how hard can it be to find them?

But all too often in Mexico, citizens can't count on the authorities to do their job. And in this case, it's worse: there is solid evidence that members of the Mexican security forces were involved in the disappearances. Some Mexican authorities know what happened to those young men, and they know why.

The Mexican government made a good decision when it decided to invite the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the Group of Experts to assist in the investigation of the disappearances. To the extent that Mexican authorities subsequently collaborated with the investigation of the Group of Experts, that should also be recognized and appreciated.

But in the end, the experts were unable to finalize their investigation, because the Mexican government stopped collaborating. When? When the Experts scientifically proved that the government's original hypothesis about what happened to the students wasn't true and proposed new lines of investigation. Instead of allowing the investigators to follow the evidence where it led, suddenly the environment became hostile; instead of collaboration, the Group of Experts met with cowardly efforts to defame them as individuals and delegitimize them as investigators. As a result, we are left with good leads, hypotheses, and recommendations, but today there are still no clear answers as what happened to those 43 young men.

Let me close with the following idea: these days, states around the world seem to think that they can trample on their people's rights without cost or consequence. Unfortunately, it's often true that in the short-run, repression seems effective. But in the long run, it undermines faith in government, nurtures unrest and feeds radicalization – as we've seen over and over again in Latin America.

The failure to find those 43 men and sanction those responsible for their disappearance totally undermines the Mexico's credibility internally and internationally. There is just no excuse. I say this as a parent, as a defender of human rights, and as a member of the U.S. Congress. Mexico needs to fix this. The first step is to follow each and every recommendation provided by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts.

Thank you.