

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
on
Human Rights Challenges in Mexico
June 23, 2022- 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. EDT
Virtual, via Cisco WebEx**

**Statement of José R. Cárdenas
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the human rights situation in Mexico.

In view of my fellow panelists' presentations on specific cases of human rights concerns in Mexico, I thought I could best contribute an analysis of who exactly President Andres Manuel López Obrador is and why the issues we are discussing today are not aberrations — or constitute circumstances beyond his control — but result directly from his personality and simplistic political views.

The first thing to understand about him is that AMLO is an unreconstructed Latin American leftist from the 1970s. That is to say, his instincts are statist, authoritarian, and highly ideological.

The Cuban Revolution remains his life's Lode Star, in all its romantic glory — and in the intervening six decades he has been impervious to any reconsideration, reflection, and recognition of how that event has ultimately turned out.

Before being elected President in 2018 AMLO spent his career on the margins of Mexican politics, occupying what may be called the Angry Left station in the country's political spectrum.

His worldview is basic, and some might say facile, dominated by his identification with the common man and woman of Mexico, who he believes — not without justification — are victimized by a system controlled by elites, by them and for them.

It's a black-and-white, Us-versus-Them prism through which all issues flow.

As such, he has a visceral distrust of Mexico's prevailing institutions, political norms, and most other political, economic, and social arrangements, which he sees as inherently biased against the Mexican poor and working poor.

And while his diagnosis may be defensible, his prescriptions are narrow, inherently polarizing, and are simply meant to do to elites what he believes have been to the poor for decades.

In terms of human rights, I would suggest that AMLO has a similar pinched, binary view: once again, us-versus-them. If he decides you are on his side, he will defend you; if he perceives you are “against” him, then you had it coming because you represent an unfair — in his eyes, discredited — system.

Again, we are not talking a very sophisticated, nuanced worldview.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that current U.S. policy is helping matters.

My contention is that AMLO has decided that as long as he assists the U.S. in controlling migration at the border and doesn’t overly complicate counter-narcotics cooperation between the two countries, then he has earned a free pass to act as he pleases and ignore broader U.S. concerns.

I don’t think that was any more evident than during the recent spectacle surrounding his behavior in the run-up to the Summit of the Americas.

His insistence that authoritarian regimes from Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua be invited to this conclave of democracies, not only succeeded in, frankly, sabotaging that important event, but also set back by decades the cause of democracy and human rights in the Western Hemisphere.

But just as conspicuous was the absence of any strong push-back from the current administration. As I noted, I suspect they have their reasons. But what is indisputable is that the lack of a robust U.S. response is only going to encourage more provocative and unhelpful behavior from the Mexican president.

There is an opportunity to rectify the situation next month when President López Obrador travels to Washington for meetings at the White House. It is imperative that President Biden disabuses AMLO of the notion that he can have it both ways

— that he can cooperate on some aspects of our full and comprehensive bilateral relationship but not on others equally important to both our peoples’ interests.

It is a message that is long overdue.