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One Hundred and Twelfth Congress

## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern**

#### **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

#### **“Human Rights in Mexico”**

**2226 Rayburn HOB – Thursday, May 10, 2012 – 12:00-1:30 PM**

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Good Morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today for this important hearing on human rights in Mexico.

In particular, I want to thank the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing this hearing, and our witnesses for their leadership in working to improve human rights conditions in Mexico.

Let me begin by saying that the U.S. relationship, partnership and friendship with Mexico is a very important one. We are neighbors. We have strong family and community ties with Mexico and its people. And as neighbors and family, we must work together to ensure each other's prosperity and security. It is not an exaggeration to say that many of the most difficult and violent problems confronting Mexico today have roots in the United States and how we deal – or fail to deal – with our own domestic and political priorities.

Just six short years ago, after taking office in December 2006, Mexican President Felipe Calderón deployed Mexican military forces in an effort to combat extensive drug trafficking and related organized crime in Mexico. But the hope that this would make Mexico more secure was not realized. And to its credit, the Calderón Administration has now concluded that this military-led strategy not only did not contain the expansion of organized crime in Mexico, but contributed to a sharp escalation of violence and human rights violations.

Over the past five years, more than 50,000 people are estimated to have been killed in drug-related violence in Mexico, resulting in deep pain and traumatized communities in many regions of Mexico. Organized crime networks are responsible for a large portion of these killings, and the counterdrug strategy has seemed to spur even more violent behavior by these criminal groups.

In addition, Mexican security forces have committed widespread and major human rights violations. These abuses include the systematic use of torture and involvement in extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. Some of these abuses are fueled by corruption and links between law enforcement personnel and criminal groups.

At the same time, it is important to underscore that the drug war is not the only source of human rights violations in Mexico. Mexico has long struggled with abuses by security forces and a weak system of justice. Mexican police have too often employed arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture, and forced confessions as tools of their trade. Many migrants, journalists, and human rights defenders have been killed and subjected to other forms of abusive treatment by both criminal groups and government security personnel. Just last Thursday, authorities found the dismembered bodies of three photojournalists in a canal in the city of Boca del Rio.

These problems are compounded by widespread impunity in Mexico for criminal behavior. The vast majority of crimes in Mexico are not reported due to citizens' lack of trust in law enforcement authorities. Of those crimes that are reported, only 2 percent result in a sentence. And impunity is even more pervasive for abuses committed by military and police officials.

Both the U.S. and the Mexican governments have taken steps to try to address these serious problems. Over the past several years, the U.S. Congress and the Obama administration have shifted much of the focus of U.S. assistance to Mexico under the Merida Initiative from security assistance to support for strengthening the rule of law and judicial institutions in Mexico. The Government of Mexico has also taken some significant positive steps, including mandating ethics training for all federal

police, changing regulations on the use of force by the police, and passing laws that strengthen the authority of Mexico's human rights commission, provide for compensation of victims of human rights abuses, and require protection of "at risk" journalists and human rights defenders.

These are encouraging steps, but much more needs to be done to ensure that these reforms are fully implemented, to establish a more effective and transparent Mexican judicial system, and to address the pervasive problems of corruption and impunity. Accountability for abuses is particularly important so that the Mexican people believe that the era of impunity is starting to come to an end. For its part, the United States should continue to provide Mexico with assistance to strengthen the rule of law in Mexico and advance respect for human rights.

I would now like to turn to our witnesses for this morning. Along with their oral testimony, I would like to submit into the Record any written testimony provided by our witnesses today.