

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on
Human Rights Challenges in Mexico

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STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

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Thank you for hosting this timely hearing on human rights conditions in Mexico. As previously noted, Mexico faces many human rights challenges. Today, my remarks will focus on the following two: Mexico's disappearance crisis and the killing and violence against journalists.

First, we can no longer continue to ignore that Mexico is facing a disappearance crisis. This past May, Mexico reached a grim milestone, more than one-hundred thousand disappearances in the country with women, children, and adolescents rising among the number of victims disappeared and countless others not included in official figures. We cannot stand by as innocent women and children continue to face systemic violence and impunity.

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) released a report in April documenting that disappearances in Mexico are accompanied by "near-total impunity and re-victimization." Outrage from the families of those disappeared is granted when rates of prosecution for human rights abuses and corruption remain low. When public servants are complicit with organized criminal gangs. When a quarter of the disappeared are women and girls. When approximately 16,000 of the disappeared are minors.

We must work together to end the human rights abuse against the most vulnerable. Enforced disappearances in Mexico is a humanitarian crisis and thus makes it everybody's problem. We have a moral obligation to strengthen our efforts with Mexico to support both justice for these crimes and the search for those still missing.

Which is why I, along with Representative Garcia and Representative Castro, sent a joint letter to Secretary of State Blinken, Attorney General Garland, and Administrator Power urging them to take immediate action regarding the human rights abuses facing our direct neighbors to the south. We asked for the following from our administration:

- To promote full and correct implementation of Mexico's Uniform Search Protocol for disappearance cases.
- To increase support for the Extraordinary Mechanism for Forensic Identification to tackle Mexico's backlog of unidentified bodies and remains.
- To help strengthen Mexico's landmark General Law against Disappearances.

Secondly, the killing and violence against journalists is an attack against democracy and should be condemned in the strongest terms. This upcoming July marks the 10th anniversary of the Mexican government's Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. However, despite these federal protections, there is an increase in violence and killings against journalists. Unfortunately, the majority of these crimes aren't properly investigated, and without adequate investigations, impunity permits crimes to surge.

Regrettably, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's administration has failed to address the violence against journalists or prioritize the protection of free media. Instead of supporting journalists, he has frequently attacked at-risk journalists and independent news outlets. There have been 11 journalist killings to date in 2022 alone and 145 since 2000.

For these reasons, I joined my fellow lawmakers in expressing our concerns to the Biden Administration and urging the State Department to prioritize these topics in our diplomatic engagements with the López Obrador administration. The State Department and USAID must prioritize the protection of free media and the investigation of homicides against journalists in our development assistance to the Mexican government and we must evaluate any deficiencies that can be corrected.

Disappearances and journalists' killings are two serious and important issues that require a partnership between our two countries to address.

Thank you for this timely hearing and to the witnesses present today that will provide their testimony and give us a better understanding of the current situation of human rights in Mexico.