



Amnesty International UK México & Central America Newsletter January 2019



MÉXICO

New security bill will harm human rights

Amnesty is concerned about a bill that Congress may soon sign, which would create a new security force called the “National Guard”. It would be made up of the army and navy and replace the Federal Police.

During the last 12 years the use of the armed forces in public security has led to many human rights violations. Armed forces shouldn't be used for policing, because they lack the training to protect civilians. Mexico's Supreme Court recently ruled that permanently using the armed forces for public security would be unconstitutional, but Mexican legislators are trying to change the Constitution. <https://bit.ly/2Tnx59h>

This is a disappointing start to President Lopez Obrador's presidency. He had previously been a strong critic of militarization, a policy that started in 2006 with Felipe Calderon's 'war on drugs.' Attached to the newsletter is a short sample letter to the Mexican legislature opposing this legislation.

Journalists continue to be murdered with impunity

Mexico remains the most dangerous country in Latin America for journalists and the most dangerous worldwide for a country not engaged in armed conflict, according to the International Federation of Journalists. The IFJ registered 11 killings of journalists in Mexico in 2018 and two in Guatemala. The Committee to Protect Journalists puts the number of murdered journalists in Mexico at four and one in Nicaragua. The Inter American Press Association listed 13 killed in Mexico, two in Guatemala and one in Nicaragua. There was no explanation for the discrepancy in the figures.

Some cautiously good news about Ayotzinapa

President López Obrador is creating a commission to investigate the Ayotzinapa case and has ordered the cooperation of federal prosecutors. However, this commission isn't the one ordered by the federal court in May, and does not have the power to direct the criminal investigation or present evidence before a court.

Investigative journalist Anabel Hernandez spoke at a PEN event in London in November and gave details of her theory of what happened on the night the 43 students disappeared. She believes they were murdered because a stash of heroin was hidden in the bus the students had haplessly commandeered.

Guatemala

Two Guatemalan children die in US custody

Felipe Gómez Alonzo, 8, and his father, Agustín Gómez Pérez, left the family's modest home in the mountains to start a new life in the US. They were stopped near the US border just a few miles from El Paso, Texas. Felipe died in a New Mexico hospital on Christmas Eve after he had been moved among at least four crowded facilities at the border over the six days from his apprehension until his death. Earlier in December 7-year-old Jakelin Caal died of dehydration and shock after her group of 163 Guatemalans handed themselves over to US Border Patrol agents. Both children came from remote indigenous communities, where migration has long been seen as a response to hardship, racism and violence.



El Salvador

Salvadoran court frees woman held under abortion laws

Imelda Cortez, 20, has been found not guilty of attempted murder after giving birth in a latrine to a baby fathered by her abusive stepfather and has now been freed after 17 months in prison. The judge concluded that Imelda could not have been expected to act any differently, given the emotional, physical and psychological damage she had suffered as a result of sexual violence since childhood.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International Director at the Americas, said: "It is encouraging to know that Imelda Cortez has finally received justice. The authorities in El Salvador have taken a step in the right direction to protect the human rights of girls and women in what remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for them. Amnesty International welcomes the fact that Imelda will be released after being detained for more than a year, but we must not forget the other girls and women who continue to face injustice in El Salvador just because they are women." <https://bit.ly/2Tn3soq>



Honduras

Judgement in Berta Cáceres case



The trial against the eight individuals accused of the murder of Berta Cáceres has now been concluded: Douglas Bustillo (retired military officer), Henry Hernández (former soldier), Edilson Duarte Meza, Óscar Torres, Sergio Rodríguez Orellana (director for DESA, the company that built the Agua Zarca dam to which the activist was opposed) and Mariano Díaz Chávez (army major) were all found guilty by the court. Emerson Duarte Meza was found not guilty. David Castillo, the general manager of DESA, is still pending trial.

Despite the ruling in this emblematic case, Amnesty believes that the Honduran justice system must still demonstrate its commitment to the truth and identify all those who planned and ordered Berta's murder. Irregularities within the investigation and judicial process, coupled with the fact that those who operated as the masterminds of the crime have not been identified or prosecuted, lead to the conclusion that the right to justice, truth and reparation in this case has not been guaranteed.

Amnesty International observed the following irregularities during the trial: 1) The Public Prosecutor's Office of Honduras didn't guarantee the family of Berta Cáceres or Gustavo Castro full and complete access to the file, nor to the probative material. 2) The family of Berta Cáceres, as well as Gustavo Castro, were excluded from the trial on 19 October and representation by the Public Prosecution was imposed – an institution that had repeatedly been denounced for violating their rights. 3) COPINH and lawyers for Berta Cáceres family suffered stigmatisation attacks that seek to discredit their human rights work. 4) On at least one occasion, the Court staff made it difficult for indigenous people to access the court room.

<https://bit.ly/2E4KDCY>

Amnesty International stands in solidarity with the family of Berta Cáceres, Gustavo Castro and COPINH and will continue to support their fight for justice.

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