

## **Joint Statement**

December 8, 2015

### ***HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS EXPRESS SUPPORT TO ADVANCE INVESTIGATION INTO 43 DISAPPEARED STUDENTS IN MEXICO***

On the night of September 26, 2014, students in Mexico's southern state of Guerrero were violently attacked by local police; 43 students were detained and disappeared. The case of the forcibly disappeared students of Ayotzinapa is a painful example of the human rights crisis facing Mexico and has prompted international and country-wide indignation.

At the request of the Mexican government, the families of the disappeared students, and the victims' legal representatives, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) agreed to establish a group of internationally recognized experts to provide technical assistance in the investigation and search for the disappeared students. In September 2015, after six months of working on the investigation, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts issued an [extensive report](#) detailing its initial conclusions. The Experts' findings highlighted serious shortcomings in the government's original investigation and disproved the government's theory that the students' bodies were burned at a local trash dump. The report also called for new lines of investigation to be opened and for the search for the disappeared students to continue.

The undersigned organizations reiterate our full support for the important work of the Group of Experts. The Group of Experts is composed of five [internationally recognized](#), independent experts in the areas of criminal investigations, human rights, and attention to victims: Carlos Martín Beristain, Angela Buitrago, Francisco Cox Vial, Claudia Paz y Paz, and Alejandro Valencia Villa. They have conducted a highly professional investigation and produced a detailed and authoritative report.

We welcome the news that the Mexican government has transferred the case under the authority of the Prosecutor for Human Rights within the federal Attorney General's Office and that a new team of government investigators is being formed to work alongside the Group of Experts—requests the Experts made in order to be able to continue with their important work.

While we laud the Mexican government for these positive developments, we are concerned that some currents within the Mexican government continue to resist opening new lines of investigation and insist on the validity of the government's original findings. Additionally, we are deeply troubled by the recent efforts of some groups to defame the Group of Experts and the human rights organizations that represent the students and their families and to criminalize the victims of the attack and their classmates. These efforts add unnecessary pain to an already shameful case, draw attention away from the investigation itself, and seek to call in to question the Group of Experts' work and the legitimacy of the families' search for justice.

We also reiterate the importance of the Mexican government's full cooperation in the investigation of the case, including the cooperation of the Mexican army. We continue to be concerned that, in spite of multiple requests, the Group of Experts has been unable to interview soldiers of the local battalion, who were aware of the attack on the students and present at some scenes of the crime.

As the investigation moves forward, the Mexican government has a renewed opportunity to demonstrate leadership and support for the case of the 43 disappeared students by cooperating with the Group of Experts and ensuring that the new prosecutorial team is equipped with the necessary human and financial resources to effectively carry out its work. A strong showing of support for the investigation and the Group of Experts will demonstrate the Mexican government's level of commitment to achieving truth and justice in this emblematic case and advancing the protection of human rights in the country.

#### **Background:**

As established in its [mandate](#), the Group of Experts is charged with three principal objectives: developing search plans to find the disappeared students; analyzing the lines of investigation to determine those responsible for the attack on the students; and monitoring and assisting in the Mexican government's plans to provide attention and reparations to the victims of the attack and their families. Additionally, with over 26,000 cases of disappearances documented in Mexico, the Group of Experts has provided recommendations for how to strengthen the Mexico's institutional capacity to address this broader issue in the country.

The Group of Experts began working in March 2015 with an initial mandate of six months. On October 28, 2015, the Mexican government, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the students' legal

representatives [agreed to renew the Group of Experts' mandate](#) for an additional six months. During the discussions regarding this renewal, the Mexican government and the Group of Experts came to an [agreement on the terms](#) of the mandate and the conditions that must be met in order for the Experts to be able to carry out their work without obstacles.

**Amnesty International**

**Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)**

**Conectas Human Rights**

**Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF)**

**JASS (Just Associates)**

**Latin America Working Group (LAWGEF)**

**Peace Brigades International (PBI)**

**Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights**

**Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)**