

Human Rights Delegation to Mexico and Guatemala

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A mission of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) visited Mexico and Guatemala on 9-12 February 2016. In Mexico meetings on the first day were jointly with the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee. The DROI mission was led by DROI Vice-Chair Cristian Preda (EPP, RO) and was further composed of DROI Vice-Chair Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea (ALDE, ES) and Hans-Olaf Henkel (ECR, DE).

In Mexico, the mission addressed a large number of human rights issues, focusing in particular in the following three areas: the situation of human rights defenders and of journalists; violence against women and women's political participation, and the disappearance of the 43 teaching students from Iguala.

Mexico is a strategic partner of the European Union and as such there is a close cooperation between the EU and Mexico, not only concerning bilateral matters but also on multilateral fora when addressing international challenges and threats.

Members welcomed the opportunity to exchange views with Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos de Icaza and Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Ruiz Cabañas on a number of issues, including the imminent modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement. A significant part of the discussion looked at the numerous human rights initiatives Mexico has been undertaking in recent years, from the very comprehensive legal reform improving the human rights framework, to the new mechanisms put in place for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, and to the challenges related to the implementation of these new measures.

Discussions with a large number (some 50+) representatives of the very vibrant and committed Mexican civil society revealed the fact that, although there are legal and administrative tools now in place for the protection of human rights and their defenders, actual implementation remains problematic. Most frequently mentioned challenges related to near complete impunity for most types of crimes, and widespread organised crime related to drug trafficking. Another recurrent topic was the significant gap existing between measures taken at federal level and their results at state and local level.

Violence against women and girls was seen as a matter of particular concern, as well as the issue of enforced disappearances. Human rights defenders and journalists, and the work they carry out in this context was seen as crucial, albeit challenging and at times dangerous. While the DROI delegation was in Mexico, one woman journalist Anabel Flores from Veracruz was abducted and killed. Members welcomed the EU's support to pilot projects related to the Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists.

Regarding the disappearance of the 43 teaching students from Ayotzinapa, DROI Members welcomed the meeting with Claudia Paz y Paz (former Attorney-General of Guatemala), one of the five members of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) investigating the students' disappearance.

They expressed strong support to the work carried out by GIEI and expressed hope that their investigation would bring clarity about the disappearances and would bring about due judicial proceedings. Ms Paz y Paz presented the results of the first report of the investigation and explained the difficulties in accessing evidence and information crucial for the completion of the investigation. Members also met with two fathers of two of the 43 students. Members acknowledged the need for further independent investigation, including

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after the delivery of GIEI's report which is foreseen in April.

In Guatemala, all counterparts highlighted the turning point the country is at, as well as the significant potential for positive change if the country continues the reforms it has embarked upon.

Members met President Morales on his 27th day in office. The President presented his programme which focuses on corruption, health, education, malnutrition, economic development, security, and justice and impunity. Members expressed support to the country's endeavours to curb corruption, fight impunity and reform the justice system. In this regard the delegation stated the EU's wish to closely collaborate with Guatemala as a partner on the domestic challenges it faces as well as with shared global challenges. Members furthermore highlighted and expressed support for the important work of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). President Morales stated that his office will fully support the work of CICIG.

Justice and impunity has been a central topic of discussion of the delegation, with Members meetings national authorities, CICIG, judges, lawyers and NGOs working in this field. The recurrent message was that dealing with impunity and reforming in depth the justice system is crucial for the country to continue making use of the momentum and drive change forward.

In meetings with more than 50 organisations representing civil society, several key themes were discussed: the difficult working environment for NGOs and human rights defenders, as well as the lawyers defending them; gender equality and widespread violence against women; impunity and access to justice. The delegation also had an interesting exchange of views with their counterpart of the Congress' working commission on human rights.

The delegation also visited the prison "Centro Preventivo Zona 18", where they met with five imprisoned community leaders from Santa Cruz Barillas and Santa Eulalia. The community leaders have informed Members that they have been in preventive detention exceeding the legal maximum period, in relation to protests against activities of transnational corporations carrying out hydroelectric and mining projects. The delegation raised this case with several interlocutors, including the President himself.

The delegation appreciates the possibility to have visited two key countries in the Americas with which the European Union has Partnership and Association Agreements; two countries facing enormous human rights challenges that are at the same time important partners for the EU. Members express hope that Mexico and Guatemala will forcefully implement the necessary reforms and urge the EU and its Member States to continue their support in this regard.

Further information

- Subcommittee on Human Rights: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/droi/home.html>

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