



**HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
CONCLUDES VISIT TO MEXICO**

High Commissioner Louise Arbour issued the following statement at the end of her mission to Mexico on 8 February 2008

Mexico City, 8 February 2008-- I am very grateful to President Calderón and the Government of Mexico for inviting me to visit. I was pleased to meet with the President, many Government ministers, Justices of the Supreme Court, the Presidents of the Chamber of Representatives and of the Senate, as well as other members of those bodies, and representatives of the diplomatic community. In Guerrero, I met the Governor, the local coordination committee developing a human rights diagnosis in that state and representatives of indigenous peoples. I also met with the National Commission for Human Rights, as well as a wide range of human rights defenders and civil society activists.

The primary purpose of my visit was to sign a new agreement with the Government of Mexico to further define the activities of my Office here through to 2012. Across the spectrum of Government and civil society, my interlocutors have welcomed the work that OHCHR has done in contributing to building a culture of human rights, and I am very pleased that with the signature of the new Agreement on Wednesday, that very good work can continue and indeed expand at the state level.

I also wish to stress that, on the international scene, Mexico is a force for good in the human rights agenda. Its very wide ratification of the international human rights treaties, with ratification of the latest treaty against disappearances imminent, places the country in the forefront of the campaign I am leading in this 60th year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to push for universal adherence to these treaties. Under Mexico's leadership, the first year of the United Nations Human Rights Council also laid a strong foundation for the Council's future work. Mexico's international advocacy for the rights of migrant workers, for persons with disabilities and against the death penalty shows Mexico's commitment to issues of global concern.

However, during my visit, I have seen and heard that the situation of human rights at the national level raises persistent concerns in a number of areas. Foremost amongst the issues brought to my attention has been the question of the use of the military to engage in law enforcement activities. I emphasize that it is the primary obligation of the State to protect and defend life and physical security. In a situation of serious challenges to the State's authority from heavily-armed organized criminals and severe deficiencies in law enforcement agencies, including widespread corruption, I acknowledge the dilemma faced by the authorities in discharging their responsibility to protect. However, recourse to the military remains problematic, as it is fundamentally unsuited – in training, philosophy, equipment and outlook - to perform civilian law enforcement functions. The focus must be on devoting urgently the necessary resources for reinforcing civilian agencies that work with integrity and professionalism. In the meantime, civilian courts should have jurisdiction over the acts of military personnel performing law enforcement functions, and effective remedies must be available for human rights violations perpetrated by military personnel.

A second major issue for the country at this time is the process of reform of the Constitution and the criminal justice system. I call on the Government and legislators to ensure that international human rights norms adopted and affirmed by Mexico in the treaties it has ratified are given constitutional rank and are applicable as supreme law in proceedings before the courts. Courts must also have the power, the means and the will to provide effective redress for violations of human rights. As became very clear to me during my visit to Guerrero, part of this reform must also be to devise appropriate means in a federal system to ensure that human rights receive equal protection throughout the country, including at state levels. The local diagnoses my Office is undertaking in some states with local actors are an important step in that direction.

Other issues that have been raised during my visit concern increasing limits on freedom of expression and assembly. The concentration of media power into few hands strongly suggests the need for greater pluralism and greater protection of the diversity of views necessary in a healthy, democratic society. Unsolved killings and abuses of journalists contribute to a climate of impunity that chills free speech. Similarly, there needs to be genuine space for expression of social protest and dissent by civil society. Finally, as throughout Latin America, the very high levels of poverty call urgently for greater use of the country's impressive economic resources to ensure full enjoyment of rights to health, education, housing, work and social security for all.

Thank you. I'll be happy to take your questions.