

# ***OPENING STATEMENT***



## **Press Conference by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay**

Mexico City, Mexico (Friday 8 July 2011)

Good afternoon,

Thank you all very much for coming. It has been a great pleasure to visit Mexico, and I wish I could have stayed longer, to see more of this beautiful country, meet more people and immerse myself more fully in the complexities of the human rights situation that I have come to observe.

I would like to thank the Federal Government for their kind invitation and their warm hospitality, and for their frank and honest dialogue, which I also enjoyed from the Governments of Oaxaca and the Federal District.

I came to Mexico to gain first-hand understanding of current dynamics in relation to human rights. I also came to examine ways in which my office can provide further support and advice to the country.

In the past six days, I met with President Felipe Calderón, and with Oaxaca's and the DF's authorities. I held a series of fruitful discussions with the Ministers of Interior, Defence and Public Security. I also met with the Attorney General, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Mayor of Mexico City and local authorities, as well as with the federal Ombudsman and his counterparts from 32 federal entities.

But most importantly, both in Oaxaca and here in Mexico City, I met with the wonderful people of this country. I met human rights defenders working on a variety of issues from migrants' rights to torture, from security to women's rights and freedom of expression. I met victims and relatives of victims of human rights abuses, and held discussions with indigenous representatives and authorities. I have also felt the energy of an enthusiastic gathering of young people offering their support to human rights defenders.

I have been deeply touched by how much the people I met keep hope alive despite enormous human rights challenges, and are willing to keep fighting in order to build a country ruled by law, where their fundamental rights are respected. They are Mexico's most valuable resource.

It must be recognised that a number of important advances have been made. The constitutional reform on human rights paves the way for greater promotion and protection of internationally recognized human rights in the country. But it now needs to be implemented and further developed, at national, state and municipal levels. Mexico City shows the way on how a federal entity government makes human rights an integral part of its agenda.

I am deeply concerned by the very high and still escalating levels of violent crime in some parts the country. Organized crime, with its brutal actions and methods, threatens the very core of the State and attacks the basic human rights we are struggling so hard to protect.

Let us not forget that ensuring citizen security means upholding the right of the whole population to live free of threat to their basic rights – such as life, physical integrity and liberty, and justice – and for the State to respond and provide redress when those rights are violated.

And let us not forget also that law enforcement is only one aspect of providing citizen security. Equally important are prevention, investigation and sanction of crimes, and reparation for those who have suffered so much. I cannot emphasize more how much all these aspects must come together as a whole. And in this, dialogue with, participation of and accountability to society is paramount to the success of any citizen security policy. I therefore salute the President's meeting with the victims and relatives of victims of violence, and I am very encouraged by his promise to pay more attention to their situation and to protecting the population.

The magnitude of the challenge is enormous, and some of the root causes of the problem are to be found across Mexico's borders. I call on the United States of America, reported to be the main consumer of drugs and supplier of guns in and out of Mexico, to do more for the people of this country to be safe.

I understand that in extraordinary circumstances difficult decisions have to be taken – like the use of the armed forces in public security functions – while a State builds the capacity to protect its citizens according to the rule of law. But such exceptional measures must remain true to their nature: **extraordinary, and limited in time**. And they must be carried out under civilian control and within the boundaries set by human rights standards and principles.

A State can only be strengthened when it protects the rights of its people. Only by protecting human rights will people trust and support it, and the rule of law prevail for everyone, everywhere. Human rights are the way, not an obstacle to security, however difficult circumstances may be.

I acknowledge that the security forces are trying to provide protection, often at very high risks to their lives. I view with concern, however, the increasing reports of rights violations and excessive use of force by state agents in the course of their actions against organised crime. Torture as a practice must be stopped. I urge the

Government to ensure full investigation and sanction of all such incidents, which should always be dealt with by civilian courts, irrespective of the perpetrator.

Another aspect that I view with concern is the situation of migrants, and of the brave and committed people working on their behalf. They too have rights, and their protection should not be neglected. I urge the Mexican Government to make all possible efforts to protect the life and integrity of migrants, in particular women and children, and to prevent trafficking. I also urge all state officials to fully respect migrants' rights, and to ensure that human rights defenders and police and judicial officials investigating violations against them are effectively protected.

Now I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the female victims of violence and insecurity in Ciudad Juárez and other parts of the country, and urge the authorities to fully accept and implement the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the "Cotton fields case", and to fight impunity in any case of femicide.

I was shocked to hear a young woman tell me how she was stabbed seven times by her fiancé – only to face the indignity of seeing him freed in court, by a woman judge, who thought she was being too harsh on him. My thoughts go to Marisela Escobedo, killed outside Government House seeking justice for her daughter, and to the many women whose killings and attacks remain unpunished.

Women's rights defenders are doing an extraordinary job in promoting and protecting human rights throughout Mexico, often at the expense of their own personal security. I commend their work, and want to assure them that my office will be standing by their side, to consolidate common strategies and activities to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, and to find ways to strengthen their own protection.

The promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples remains a major priority for my office. In particular, we are guided by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – of which Mexico is a signatory – as our framework for action to further the advancement and protection of indigenous peoples' rights. But it is one thing to have signed up to the Declaration, and quite another to ensure it is implemented.

I am aware of a number of important developments, such as the ones I witnessed in Oaxaca, concerning the recognition of indigenous customary law and traditional political structures, based on community assemblies. I congratulate the indigenous peoples of Mexico for the struggle that led to this recognition, and encourage them to continue their brave efforts to win respect of their rights. In particular, I call upon the Federal and state governments to explicitly recognise their right to consultation and to free, prior and informed consent.

I would like to draw special attention to the situation of indigenous women, who suffer a triple form of discrimination – **for being indigenous, women and poor**. Just as non-indigenous societies have a long way to go before they achieve gender equality,

indigenous peoples also need to give women a more prominent role, on an equal footing with men.

The current President of Oaxaca's State Congress is an indigenous woman. An exceptional woman, she told me how she had to fight discrimination and resistance to her running for office, even from within her own community. I salute her strength and her achievement. But others wanting to follow her steps have not been so lucky. I therefore want to encourage the authorities throughout the country to take concrete measures to improve their situation and foster their political participation and leadership.

The State has to do more to safeguard freedom of expression. Not only by allowing a plurality of views and media to disseminate information, but also by ensuring that those who do so, are able to carry out their task without paying a high price – sometimes their lives.

Assaults on journalists are assaults on freedom of expression and on people's rights to information. I am alarmed by the high impunity that prevails on attacks upon journalists, and I urge that this impunity stops. And the mechanism to protect journalists needs to be implemented without delay and with their full participation, both at the national and state levels.

I have similar concerns about the situation of human rights defenders. I have met many of them here, as well as in Geneva, and listened to their plight. I know that far too many of them have been harassed, threatened, wrongfully imprisoned and even murdered. I am pleased to have witnessed this week the signature by the President of a document setting the basis for a national protection mechanism for human rights defenders. I trust that this mechanism will strengthen the existing efforts of authorities to generate safe and free conditions for them to work.

I and my staff here in Mexico will continue to highlight the precarious situation of human rights defenders and journalists, and to underline the need to include them in all stages of the designing and implementation of any strategy which aims to protect them.

I encourage every Mexican to take a stand and to become a defender of human rights defenders. I invite all of you to join a great campaign – “Declare yourself” - launched this week by my office in Mexico to defend those who defend our rights. Without these brave people, all of us risk having our rights eroded.

Finally, I would like to thank again the Government and people of Mexico for their warm welcome. It has been a privilege to visit this country. I hope to be back soon.

Thank you.