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## **Mexican Military, Police Accused of Torture, Other Rights Violations**

*by LADB Staff*

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According to reports compiled by Mexican human rights organizations and the UN Committee against Torture, members of the Mexican military and the state and federal judicial police continue to use torture to suppress dissent in several southern states in Mexico. Publication of the reports coincided with an early-August visit to Mexico by UN human rights specialist Nigel Rodley. During his visit, Rodley met with government officials and representatives of four Mexican human rights groups to discuss the allegations of torture in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, and Mexico City.

Speaking to reporters, Rodley said he found evidence that torture and grave human rights abuses remain a problem, particularly in Guerrero and Oaxaca. "It is still too early for me to form conclusions on my visit," said Rodley, who is scheduled to travel to Geneva in mid-August to present a report on human rights in Mexico. "I still have to meet with many people. However, I can say that I listened to very moving testimony that gives me a strong feeling of very serious problems."

Several reports produced by Mexican and international nongovernmental organizations said that, as long as crimes by officials are carried out with impunity, torture will remain a significant problem in Mexico. One report, published by the UN-sanctioned International Human Rights Federation, suggested the presence of Mexican armed forces in 23 states and the continued and widespread economic crisis in Mexico have also helped created a climate for torture to exist. The report said a significant number of violations were reported in 1996, including 150 cases of forced disappearances, 674 illegal arrests, and 164 politically motivated assassinations.

### *Government human rights commission considered ineffective*

The federation and other groups coincided in their criticism of the government-sanctioned Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH) as a relatively ineffective agency that tends to ignore or cover up reports of violations. For example, the Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos, an umbrella organization for Mexican human rights groups, said the CNDH received more than 1,400 complaints about human rights violations between January 1990 and May 1997.

But the CNDH only issued recommendations on about 140 of those cases. Furthermore, the group said the CNDH has taken as long as 12 months to issue recommendations, which have created difficulties in taking legal action. Emma Maza, a spokesperson for the human rights group Todos los Derechos para Todos, said the CNDH frequently downgrades complaints of torture to lesser violations, such as abuse of authority. According to Maza, citizens have brought accusations of torture against 608 officials since 1990, but only 13 of these cases have been tried under applicable laws.

Several reports said many of the acts of torture and rights abuses have been carried out against members and sympathizers of the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas and the Ejercito Popular Revolucionario (EPR) in Guerrero and Oaxaca states. Human rights group also reports high number of disappearances. Meanwhile, members of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vitoria (CDHFV) accused the CNDH of failing to take adequate action regarding "forced disappearances." According to the CDHFV, disappearances have increased notably since 1994, after the EZLN and the EPR emerged in southern Mexico.

According to a CDHFV report, the CNDH received reports of 38 forced disappearances between January 1995 and December 1996, but it failed to act on any of those complaints. "In many cases we suspect the victims were physically eliminated because they have not reappeared and it is now years afterward," said CDHFV spokesperson Miguel Blandino.

For her part, CDHFV secretary general Marisol Lopez Menendez noted the CNDH at one time provided occasional updates on complaints about forced disappearances, but has not published such data in recent years. "The last time the CNDH offered an update on its efforts to end forced disappearances was in 1993 and the report contained contradictory information," said Lopez. "The CNDH mentions 13 cases of forced disappearances from May 1992 to May 1993, but one of the addendums to the report includes a list which suggests that 56 complaints of this nature were received and 46 of these were classified by the CNDH as human rights abuses." (Sources: Associated Press, 07/30/97; El Universal, 07/28/97, 08/05/97; La Jornada, 08/05-07/97; Novedades, 08/11/97; Excelsior, 07/29/97, 08/06/97, 08/11/97, 08/13/97; The News, 07/30/97, 08/05/97, 08/06/97, 08/11/97, 08/13/97)

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