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Former Senator Arely Gómez González Becomes Second Woman to Head Attorney General's Office

by Carlos Navarro

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In early March, the Mexican Senate overwhelmingly confirmed Arely Gómez González as the next attorney general, replacing the embattled Jesus Murillo Karam, who was reassigned to another position in President Enrique Peña Nieto's Cabinet. Gómez González, who left her post in the Senate, becomes the second woman to rise to the top post in the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR). The first woman to serve as attorney general in Mexico was Marisela Morales, appointed to the post by ex-President Felipe Calderón ([SourceMex, April 6, 2011](#)).

Gómez González, who had served in the Senate since 2012, was easily confirmed by her former colleagues who voted 106-5, with three abstentions, to ratify her nomination, submitted by President Peña Nieto shortly after Murillo Karam was reassigned to the Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario Territorial y Urbano (SEDATU).

Still, administration officials made it a point to underscore Gómez González's qualifications for the job. "This is a woman who is very committed and well-prepared, one who has the overwhelming support of the Senate," said Interior Secretary Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong.

Gómez González comes to the job with extensive legal education and experience. She received law degrees from Universidad Anáhuac and Universidad Panamericana and taught at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), Mexico campus. The new attorney general also spent time on the staff of the Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, SCJN), the PGR's electoral investigations bureau (Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de Delitos Electorales, FEPADE), and the elections tribunal (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF).

Observers said the significance of the appointment should be underscored. "Naming Arely Gómez to head the Procuraduría General de la República is a very important step," Clara Scherer, an expert on gender issues, wrote in a guest column in *Excélsior*. "She has a very difficult challenge, not only because of the complex insecurity problem in our country but because she could be an important catalyst in promoting the vision of gender in the procuration of justice."

First major Cabinet change for Peña Nieto

Murillo Karam is the first member of Peña Nieto's original Cabinet to leave his post since the president took office on Dec. 1, 2012. Analysts said the change was necessary, as the ex-attorney general had become identified with many missteps committed by the PGR, including the slow investigation of the disappearance of students from the teachers college (Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa Raúl Isidro Burgos) in Guerrero state in September 2014 ([SourceMex, Oct. 15, 2014](#), [Nov. 19, 2014](#), and [Dec. 3, 2014](#)).

Under Murillo Karam's leadership, the PGR was also slow to investigate an Army massacre of 22 suspected drug traffickers in Tlatlaya, México state, on June 30, 2014 ([SourceMex, Oct. 1, 2014](#)).

Administration officials downplayed Murillo Karam's departure and confirmed that little would change at the PGR with Gómez González at the helm. "The goals will be the same, there will be no variation," said Osorio Chong. "In making this decision, the president did not think about political parties or the interests of any individual or groups."

Despite the administration's public stance, Murillo Karam was becoming more of a liability for the Peña Nieto government. For one, the ex-attorney general was seen as cold and uncaring, with this perception reinforced at a press conference where he abruptly cut off a reporter who was asking about the progress of investigations on the Ayotzinapa incident. The then attorney general simply told the reporter that he was tired of answering questions. The response, in which Murillo Karam had said, "Ya me cansé (I am tired of this)," went viral on Twitter with the hashtag #yamecansé.

Skepticism and hope in Guerrero

The appointment of Gómez González as head of the PGR elicited mixed reactions from the families of the students killed in Guerrero. At least one parent said she was hopeful that the new attorney general would show more concern about the situation. Murillo Karam did not officially acknowledge the deaths of the Isidro Burgos students until January, and the assessment came only because of confessions from leaders of the drug cartels accused of carrying out the murders. Because the bodies were burned beyond recognition, experts were only able to positively identify one of the victims ([SourceMex, January 28, 2015](#), and [April 13, 2011](#)).

"The former prosecutor did not care about my son," Afrodita Mondragón, mother of slain student Julio César Mondragón, said in an interview with the daily newspaper *La Jornada*. "If the new attorney general is a mother, with the sensibilities of a woman, she will show more concern than Mr. Murillo Karam. I ask her to guarantee that she will conduct a serious investigation."

Others were more skeptical that there would be much of a change in the policies of the PGR, even with a woman at the helm. "We are quite aware that there is a set political position in the institution that is the PGR," said Vidulfo Rosales Sierra, an attorney for the families of the 43 students. "I don't believe that the arrival of a person [to the federal prosecutor's office] will change the situation."

Nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International (AI) also expressed hope that Gómez González would be more honest and open with the families of the Isidro Burgos students than her predecessor. "She has to guarantee that the victims attain access to medical exams and reports from the forensic experts who examined the remains," said AI. "This is exactly what the UN requested."

AI also appealed to the new attorney general to accept independent reports from independent investigators on such issues as torture. The PGR has in the past tended to sweep such reports under the rug. "Reports from entities like the Stockholm Protocol are routinely ignored, and victims have to frequently wait months or years to be examined," said Erika Guevara Rosas, AI's Americas director. "The documentation of torture should be the first step to break the wall of impunity."

Despite the pressure from the public, Gómez González appeared to give Murillo Karam a pass during her confirmation hearing, suggesting that her predecessor was "far-reaching, serious, and exhaustive."

Gómez González also reassured senators that her "only interest" as head of the PGR was to "serve as a defender for Mexican society." She said her goal was to strengthen the mechanisms to address crime, expedite investigations, and protect individual rights.

While the confirmation hearings moved smoothly in committee and before the full Senate, one issue raised flags for some senators. The nominee was asked whether there would be a conflict of interest if she had to prosecute any cases involving the broadcast giant Grupo Televisa, where her brother Leopoldo Gómez is a high-level executive. Gómez González assured senators there would be no problems whatsoever. "My brother has worked in many places, in the private and public sector, and we both have made every effort to remain autonomous from each other," she said.

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