



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS VISIT THE UNITED STATES OF MEXICO

18 to 20 May 2011

PRESS STATEMENT

The importance of human rights at the heart of the European Union's cooperation with Mexico, the EU's commitments to help the country implement important reforms of the justice system and discussions on moving quickly towards the setting up of a special protection mechanism for human rights defenders were the key themes of this week's three-day visit by a delegation of the European Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Committee to Mexico.

The delegation, led by Richard Howitt (UK, S&D), also comprised Heidi Hautala, chair of the Human Rights' sub-committee (FI, V), Laima Andrikiene (LT, EPP), Maria Eleni Koppa (EL, S&D) and Marian-Jean Marinescu (RO, EPP).

The delegation undertook an intensive programme of meetings with Government, legislators, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, human rights organizations and journalists, as well as conducting a field visit to study human rights challenges in Oaxaca State.

Speaking at a press conference at the conclusion of the visit today (Friday 20 May), Richard Howitt MEP says:

“Human Rights are fundamental to Europe and the European citizens we represent, and we have been grateful to have the opportunity this week to restate the central role respect for human rights plays in the strategic partnership between the European Union and Mexico, to welcome the cooperation between us in international human rights resolutions and to acknowledge the efforts being made within the country for reforms to ensure respect for international standards of human rights.

“Of course we share and express our own grave concerns about violations of human rights in Mexico – as we do in all countries around the world where human rights abuses take place including on our own European continent.

“We join with all those who have told us that there must be an end to impunity in the country, to ensure those responsible for violence against women, migrants, indigenous communities, people with different sexual orientations and all human rights defenders are brought to justice. This is absolutely necessary to prevent continuing violations in the future.

“In that respect we would like to pay tribute to the work of the European Union delegation and of EU Member States in supporting human rights defenders at risk in states across the country, and call for this work to continue. Above all, we express our deep admiration for the courageous work of Mexican human rights defenders, whose work is in the common interest of us all.

“We express our deep sadness for all who have died or been victims of violence, and used our visit to Oaxaca to call for all continuing efforts to be made to bring to justice those responsible for the killings of Bety Cariño and Jyri Jaakkola and all other killings in such circumstances. We support calls from victims to hold to account all those responsible for gross violations of human rights in the state in the period after 2006.

“We welcome the work of the Special Prosecutor on crimes against freedom of expression and also we welcome Europe’s role in supporting the Mexican Government in the establishment of a special mechanism for the protection of journalists at risk. This week we have emphasised that the EU stands ready to assist our Mexican partners in carrying out their commitment to establish quickly a similar protection mechanism for human rights defenders at risk, with the full participation of civil society organisations whose trust and support such a mechanism is intended to secure.

“We welcome Mexico’s reform processes including the Constitutional reforms on human rights agreed this week.

“But we also hope our presence in Mexico will help to bolster efforts towards the full implementation of reforms to the criminal justice system, the protection of the independence of the judiciary, to secure convictions in practice, introduce a comprehensive system for witness protection and demonstrate that the fight against crime can be successfully conducted without compromising respect for human rights.

“In particular we see a need for reforms to address the failure to secure convictions in cases concerning alleged violations of human rights by the security forces. We recall the judgment of the Inter American Court of Human Rights that all such cases, without exception, should be investigated and tried within the civilian justice system.

“We also note the contradiction between the high rate of impunity and the high number of apparently innocent persons held in prison. Reforms to the criminal justice system must resolve this contradiction.

“We are proud that the European Union has already supported practical projects to assist Mexico in areas such as access to justice, the fight against torture and the enhancement of women’s rights. The European Parliament will support future efforts to promote respect for human rights alongside the EU–Mexico dialogue on justice and security to be launched shortly.

“I would like to conclude by saying that we have heard and we applaud the desire of the Mexican people for prosperity, security and social progress. We know that many of the people we have met recognize that these long term goals cannot be met without respect for, compliance with and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights for all.”

Mexico City, 20 May 2011