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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN MEXICO

THE SITUATION IN CHIAPAS STATE WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE BRIEF AT THE TIME OF THE CONSULTATIONS.

ISSUE

President Salinas has created basic institutions and implemented reforms to address major human rights abuses with the ultimate goal of promoting a more democratic political system.

BACKGROUND

According to official statistics, recent reforms have reduced the most serious abuses, especially torture, and encouraged Mexicans to report abuses and insist on their rights. While official statistics are not completely reliable, overall it is still possible to conclude that Mexico is a more open society, that abuses are more likely to be publicized and corrected, and that offenders can no longer commit abuses with complete impunity. The Mexican government itself accepts that problems remain. Domestic political reforms, particularly freedom of the press and vastly expanded international contacts due to NAFTA-related interest in the country, have brought Mexico's internal affairs under greater scrutiny.

There exist three major sources of human rights violations. The Mexican police receive inadequate training and pay, and as a result, they resort to corruption to supplement their salaries, and to torture as a quick alternative to proper investigation. Indigenous people face particular obstacles in the Mexican judicial system because they often do not speak Spanish and interpretation facilities are inadequate. Centuries-old conflict over land claims continues, despite government efforts to help peasants obtain clear title to their land. Violence has frequently erupted as local barons, often backed by the police, attempt to impose their land claims. The war on drugs conducted by Mexican drug enforcement agencies, often under heavy international pressure, produces violations. Narcotrafic-related corruption and forced production of illicit crops, are growing. Recent organized crime legislation increased police powers to extend detention of accused narcotraffickers without trial.

President Salinas created the National Human Rights Commission (Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos - CNDH) to investigate abuses and promote human rights awareness. He entrenched its legal autonomy in the Constitution, and has created a network of state-level offices. His government enacted a federal law for the prevention of torture, and has prosecuted and punished offenders. The first act of the new Attorney General in 1993 was to fire 150 police officers for abuses. Mexico has established a Land Registry and legal machinery for adjudicating land cases, and spent tens of millions of dollars to help campesinos obtain clear title. The President has eliminated programmes which permitted

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