

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 6, 2022

Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken, Attorney General Garland, and Administrator Power,

As Members of Congress concerned with human rights in Mexico, we welcome the administration's inclusion of human rights in the U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework and encourage an ongoing emphasis on human rights in our cooperation on migration and protection. However, we are increasingly concerned over the rising number of disappearances in Mexico, with the country reaching the grim milestone of 100,000 disappearances earlier this month.¹ Given the urgency of this matter, we write to ask for information on U.S. cooperation and efforts to address Mexico's disappearance crisis. It is crucially important for the United States to deepen our work with Mexico to support both the search for the disappeared and access to justice for these crimes.

On April 12, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) published its report on Mexico, following a country visit, during which it visited 13 Mexican states and met with over 85 government bodies and hundreds of victims and civil society representatives from 31 of Mexico's 32 states.² The Committee concluded that "a generalized situation of disappearances persists in a large part of Mexico's territory, accompanied by near-total impunity and revictimization." The Committee found that, in addition to enforced disappearances perpetrated by state agents, "organized crime has become a central perpetrator of disappearance in Mexico,

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/05/mexico-dark-landmark-100000-disappearances-reflects-pattern-impunity-un-experts>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/04/mexico-prevention-must-be-central-national-policy-stop-enforced>

with varying degrees of participation, acquiescence or omission by public servants.” The Committee expressed concern over a notable increase in disappearances of women, children, and adolescents. Noting that only 2 to 6 percent of cases have been brought to court, the Committee called for robust actions to address impunity and prevent disappearances.³

In light of these findings, and as expressed in a March 4, 2021, letter to Secretary Blinken signed by 19 Members of Congress⁴, we urge strong bilateral cooperation guided by consultation with the collectives of the families of the disappeared and civil society organizations working to address human rights violations and impunity in the country. Our specific asks are listed below:

1. **Searching for the disappeared:** Promote full and correct implementation of Mexico’s Uniform Search Protocol for disappearance cases. This includes ensuring that relevant offices have the human and technological capacity to search immediately with a view to quickly determining victims’ locations, maximizing the chances of finding them alive.
2. **Forensic Support:** Increase support for the Extraordinary Mechanism for Forensic Identification (MEIF), proposed by families of the disappeared, to tackle Mexico’s backlog of unidentified bodies and remains. Beyond the need to process the backlog, ongoing national capacity will be crucial to permit identification of those remains that continue to be exhumed.
3. **Reducing Impunity:** Strengthen Mexico’s landmark General Law against Disappearances by ensuring authorities have the proper resources to investigate these cases and obtain justice. Families of the disappeared report that authorities often fail to investigate with basic due diligence or even resist requests for investigations, with successful investigation of cases often depending on families’ search and activities rather than on authorities.

While we applaud the administration’s commitment to supporting forensic data gathering to provide families with closure and reducing impunity for disappearances, the rising number of cases indicates that more needs to be done. Therefore, we submit the following questions and requests for information regarding U.S.-Mexico cooperation on this issue, including the implementation of the U.S.-Mexico Partnership to Resolve Disappearances Cases that was announced in June 2021.

1. What activities are underway and what plans do your respective agencies have for expanded cooperation with Mexico’s national and local search commissions, prosecutors’ offices, civil society, victims’ groups, and/or other relevant stakeholders, to support the search for the disappeared?

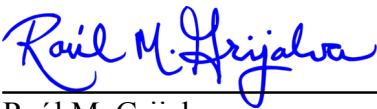
³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/04/mexico-prevention-must-be-central-national-policy-stop-enforced>

⁴ <https://lowenthal.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-lowenthal-leads-letter-promoting-human-rights-us-mexico-partnership>

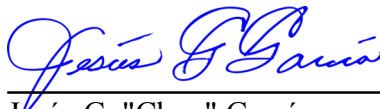
2. What activities are underway and what plans exist to increase forensic identification support, especially to expand support to larger numbers of Mexican states' prosecutors' offices, search commissions, and the Extraordinary Mechanism for Forensic Identification (MEIF)?
3. How is U.S. cooperation supporting the implementation of Mexico's General Law against Disappearances? Specifically, how does it support increased alignment between investigative practices on the ground and the obligations, tools, and standards enshrined in law, including the need not just to investigate individual cases, but also to map and analyze patterns of disappearances?
4. Does U.S. cooperation include specific actions to strengthen protection of the rights and safety of the families of the disappeared? What initiatives have been or will be undertaken in this area?
5. Does U.S. cooperation include actions to streamline and strengthen information-sharing between the United States and Mexico including harnessing data uncovered in U.S. investigations as a tool for solving human rights crimes committed in Mexico?
6. How is the United States working with authorities in Mexico to address disappearances of migrants, who often travel on perilous routes?

We ask that the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Justice publicly respond to these inquiries and work with our offices to schedule a briefing on the government's efforts. We look forward to continuing dialogue on this subject and we stand ready to support the administration's work with Mexican stakeholders to help bring truth and justice to the families of the disappeared.

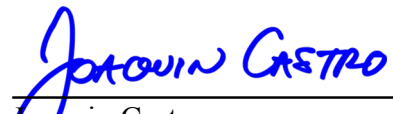
Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



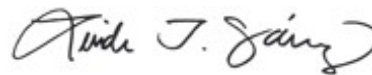
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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Joaquin Castro
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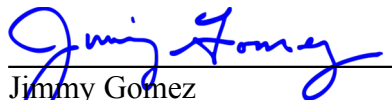
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

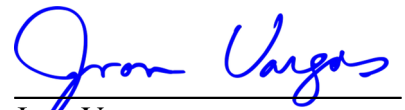


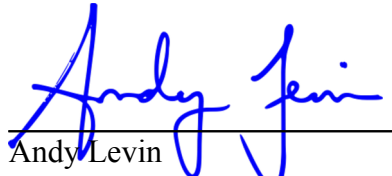
Mark Pocan
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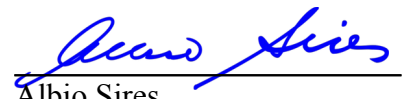


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