

To: Congressional aides  
From: Laurie Freeman, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
Sean García, Latin America Working Group (LAWG)  
Date: October 18, 2004

**Re: Recent developments regarding the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico**

On October 13, bus driver Victor García Uribe was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison for the murders of eight women in Ciudad Juárez in November 2001. The judge ignored evidence that he had been tortured into confessing to the murders, and convicted him despite the lack of physical evidence linking him to the crime.

Judge Gustavo Muñoz Gamboa made it clear that allegations and even physical evidence of torture were irrelevant to his decision. He admitted that he did not nor would he consider the outcome of an ongoing federal inquiry to determine if García had been tortured. Weeks earlier, the president of the state Supreme Court was quoted in the local press saying that allegations of torture should not be given credence because no one, no matter how badly they are tortured, would ever confess to a crime they didn't commit.

**The judge's decision appears to indicate that allegations of torture are not being taken seriously by local officials and that criminal convictions can be based on little more than confessions obtained under torture. García's conviction does not bode well for three other persons detained in connection with the women's murders who have made similar claims of torture -- U.S. citizen Cynthia Kiecker, her husband Ulises Perzábal, and David Mesa.**

Victims' families and human rights defenders had hoped that the government's handling of the murder investigations would change under the administration of Governor José Reyes Baeza, who took office on October 3 this year. However, the disregard for García's torture allegations raises serious questions about the Chihuahua government's commitment to eradicating the practice of torture and sanctioning officials who committed acts of abuse and malfeasance in their handling of the women's murder investigations.

Attached are two recent articles for further information. The first, from *The Washington Post*, is about the case of detainee David Mesa, who was tortured into confessing to the murder of his cousin. The story is illustrative of how the police use torture to produce false confessions so that they can claim murder cases are solved. The second, from *The Dallas Morning News*, discusses the García conviction.

Background on Victor García Uribe case

On November 6 and 7, 2001, eight women's bodies -- showing signs of extreme brutality and sexual violence -- were found in an empty lot in Juarez. Two days later, state police had arrested two bus drivers, Victor Garcia Uribe and Gustavo Gonzalez Meza, and tortured them into confessing. According to forensics expert Oscar Maynez, who resigned after refusing to falsify evidence against Garcia and Gonzalez, no evidence other than their confessions links the men to the murders. Nevertheless, a judge ordered them to stand trial, ignoring evidence of torture, including a prison doctor's report confirming bruises and burns and suggesting the use of electric prods. In February 2002, state police shot and killed Gonzalez's lawyer, claiming he had been mistaken for a fugitive. A state judge ruled the police were acting in self-defense and would not be tried for the homicide. Gonzalez was found dead in his cell under mysterious circumstances on February 8, 2003. His death was not investigated.