

International Observatory Welcomes the Conviction of Two Soldiers for Sexual Torture against Valentina Rosendo in Mexico

The undersigned organizations that form part of the International Observatory on Human Rights in Mexico welcome the historic ruling that sentenced two members of the Mexican military to prison for violating the human rights of Valentina Rosendo Cantú in 2002.

Sixteen years after the crimes took place, and eight since the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Inter-American Court) issued a judgement against the Mexican government on the case, Valentina finally obtained justice in her country. On June 1, 2018, two members of the Mexican Army, Nemesio Sierra García and Armando Pérez Abarca, were sentenced to 19 years in prison for the crime of rape and torture against Valentina.

In this emblematic ruling, the Seventh District Judge of the Twenty-First Circuit of the State of Guerrero recognized that the sexual abuse Valentina suffered was a form of torture, which was aggravated by the fact that she is indigenous and was an adolescent at the time.

The undersigned organizations believe this sentence is a historic precedent because it establishes adequate sanctions for the severity of the crimes committed and key guidelines for how sexual torture should be criminally prosecuted in a context in which the practice of torture is common and nearly all cases end in impunity. By granting evidentiary value to Valentina's testimony, this ruling is a sign of progress in the recognition and protection of the rights of victims of this type of abuse. We also welcome the fact that the ruling recognizes the asymmetry of power held by the perpetrators due to their military positions.

Furthermore, this ruling is an important demonstration of judicial independence and is significant because it adequately guarantees the rights of Valentina Rosendo and addresses the consequences of human rights violations committed by state agents.

It is important to highlight that this judicial decision is the first time in Mexico where a criminal conviction is issued based on a previous judgement made by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Since 2008, the Inter-American Court has condemned the Mexican government on six occasions, more than half of which correspond to cases of human rights violations committed by members of the armed forces.

The ruling in the case of Valentina Rosendo Cantú represents an opportunity to reflect on the serious consequences of the armed forces' participation in public security tasks. It is particularly relevant given the current debate around the Internal Security Law (*Ley de Seguridad Interior*), which strengthens the role of the armed forces in internal security.

As the International Observatory, we reiterate our call to reject the Internal Security Law, as it contravenes Mexico's international human rights obligations and it exposes the civilian population to military abuses.

Lastly, we congratulate Valentina Rosendo Cantú for her courage and determination in her persistent fight for truth and justice, as well as the organizations—both national and international—that supported her in this fight throughout the years.

Signing organizations:

Amnesty International
Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)
German Network for Human Rights in Mexico
Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF)
Latin American Working Group (LAWG)
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
Peace Brigades International - USA (PBI-USA)
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

About the Observatory:

The International Observatory on Human Rights in Mexico was established in December 2017 by 10 international human rights groups to monitor the human rights situation in the country and to support Mexican civil society organizations in a context of increased violence and insecurity.

The members of the Observatory include Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT - France), Amnesty International, Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), the German Network for Human Rights in Mexico, the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), Human Rights Watch, the Latin American Working Group (LAWG), the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR), the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Peace Brigades International - USA (PBI-USA), Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, and the Wilson Center.