



Hon. John Baird
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

December 17, 2014

Dear Minister Baird,

We are writing on behalf of the Americas Policy Group (APG), a working group of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), made up of 40 international development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, labour unions, research institutions, churches and solidarity groups. We have a long history of working with civil society partners in the Americas, monitoring the human rights situation and articulating joint policy positions on development, socio-economic issues and human rights in the region.

We are writing to express our distress and indignation about events unfolding in Mexico, and our concern around the Canadian government's silence and inaction to date. We are also recommending measures that we believe would contribute to a more constructive Canadian response to the situation.

The 43 missing students in Ayotzinapa

The September 26, 2014 police operation in Iguala that resulted in the murder of 6 people, injury of many others, and forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa is an egregious illustration of Mexico's lack of political will to stop the exponential increase in human rights violations, and its refusal to address the shocking levels of collusion between elected officials, public security forces, and organized crime.

In this case, the students were attacked and detained by local police, yet when family members went to the local prosecutor's office, officials claimed no knowledge of the event. Evidence has emerged that the police acted on orders from Iguala's mayor and in collusion with organized crime. Federal authorities had received evidence of collusion between municipal officials and criminal groups months before these events occurred, but had failed to take any action.

Violence, corruption and impunity are not new to this region. In December 2011, Ayotzinapa students who were protesting on the main highway outside Chilpancingo, the state capital, were attacked by state and federal police resulting in several deaths. At least 24 people suffered torture and other ill-treatment. Those police and superiors responsible for the abuses have never been held to account, encouraging a climate of impunity.

In the aftermath of the September 26, 2014 events, state and federal authorities have once again done too little, too late to find the disappeared students and protect them from harm. It was not until November 7 that Mexico's Attorney General held a press conference about his investigation. In it, he revealed that his main line of investigation was based on alleged testimonies from gang members who claimed to have killed the students, burned their bodies, and dumped the ashes in a river. The fact that



the investigation was only based on the testimonies of the gang members puts into question its level of rigour. Meanwhile, the discovery of dozens of mass graves -- none of which contained the missing 43 students -- barely elicited a response from authorities.

State complicity and incompetence was further highlighted in a December 13th report by El Proceso newspaper (produced in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Investigative Journalism Program). The report cites leaked government documents that reveal that federal officials knew about the Ayotzinapa attack as it happened -- and did nothing to stop the disappearance and probable massacre of the 43 students.

The Mexican government's response to the protests

All of this, and public awareness that the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students is no isolated case, has led to unprecedented mobilizations. Hundreds of thousands of citizens from every walk of life have taken to the streets in peaceful protest across Mexico and around the world to express their disgust with the endemic violence, impunity and corruption in Mexico. The Governor of Guerrero has been forced to step down, while continuing mobilizations call for the resignation of President Peña Nieto.

The Mexican government's reaction to these protests has been deeply troubling. Police have used disproportionate force against demonstrators and resorted to arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment of those in custody, in an apparent attempt to punish demonstrators and dissuade others from taking part in future demonstrations.

Moreover, several Mexican states have recently adopted or sought to adopt laws expanding the use of force by law enforcement officials during demonstrations. Many of these changes are inconsistent with international human rights standards and pose a threat to freedom of association and speech. On December 2, federal lawmakers voted in favour of a constitutional reform that would guarantee the right of "universal mobility". If successfully passed through the Senate, this measure will give the government grounds to repress or prohibit mass demonstrations like the ones Mexico has seen in recent months.

There are also disturbing reports that Mexico's intelligence agency is investigating and filing reports that criminalize human rights defenders and lawyers who counsel the families of the disappeared Ayotzinapa students, calling them "subversive" and "dangerous to governance."

Recent statements by President Peña Nieto and other high-ranking officials equate protest with destabilization and fail to acknowledge the reasons that triggered these demonstrations. Such statements suggest that the government has no intention of addressing protesters' demands for justice and change, and send a worrying message to law-enforcement officials that disproportionate use of force and other human rights violations are an acceptable way to deal with demonstrators.

Canadian policy towards Mexico

The bloodshed and violence in Mexico is intolerable and should elicit strong condemnation from the Canadian government. Until the pervasive corruption, collusion and impunity in Mexico has been addressed, Mexicans will continue to live in a climate of increasing fear and insecurity. Mexico's official sources (INEGI and SNSP) report over 150,000 homicides and over 22,000 disappeared since the "war on



drugs” began in 2006, though actual numbers are bound to be even higher since most violent crimes are never reported. Reported cases of torture by state authorities have increased by 600% over the same time period, something that cannot be deflected onto organized crime.

Given the importance of Canada’s economic relationship with Mexico and the existence of security agreements with Mexico, Canada is morally and ethically obliged to use its influence to put pressure on Mexican authorities.

Since Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and the US in 1994, Canadian investment in Mexico has grown exponentially. Canada is now the largest foreign investor in Mexico’s mining sector and has greater mining assets in Mexico than in any other country in the world outside of Canada. These include important investments in the state of Guerrero, very near to where the students from Ayotzinapa were disappeared. When the state introduced new royalties on mineral production in 2013, Canadian companies and the Mining Commission of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce threatened to withdraw their investment from Mexico. In contrast, now that it is evident that they are doing business with a state that is deeply corrupt, with links to organized crime, Canadian companies and authorities are silent. Canadian officials argue that commercial engagement is necessary in order to address human rights abroad. But what we observe is that when business is successful, Canada is not only failing to speak out about one of the worst human rights crises in the hemisphere but, as a September 2014 Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs study shows, actually discussing how to bolster Canadian investment in Mexico once again.

Canada also has security arrangements with Mexico. Since 2012, Canadian, Mexican and US defence ministers have been meeting annually, and all three countries participate in the US Northern Command. According to the Canadian Press, exports of Canadian weapons and ammunition to Mexico climbed by 93 per cent between 2011 and 2012. In addition, the Canadian government is sending millions of dollars in funding to the Mexican military and police forces through the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program (ACCBP) and the RCMP has been involved in helping to train Mexican police recruits. These represent direct relationships between our country and actors implicated in the state-backed violence that is terrorizing the people of Guerrero and Mexico. While German parliamentarians have called for a suspension of their security agreement with Mexico, we have heard no indication that the security arrangements between Canada and Mexico are even being reviewed.

Recommendations

We call on the Canadian government and the Canadian Embassy in Mexico to make public declarations of support for the students and families of Ayotzinapa and for the citizens who are taking to the streets by the hundreds of thousands in peaceful protest to call for human rights, justice and real democracy in Mexico.

We call on the government of Canada to urge the Mexican government to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the Ayotzinapa case and to prosecute all of those responsible, including any high level public officials that are implicated.



We ask the Canadian authorities to press the government of Mexico to respect its citizens' rights to freedom of assembly and protest, and to take concrete action to bring an end to widespread violence, torture and disappearances.

We urge Canada to suspend and review all security arrangements involving Mexico, and put all discussions about our bilateral and multi-lateral (NAFTA) economic relationship on hold, until the human rights situation has verifiably improved.

The international community - including members of the German and European Parliaments, US President Obama, Pope Francis, and the United Nations - have all condemned the situation in Mexico. Given that Canada is the chair of the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society (WGEPCS), Canada is well-positioned to show leadership on this, and add its voice to the growing number of countries that are calling on Mexico to get serious about stopping the escalating violence, human rights violations by state actors, impunity and entrenched corruption that have become commonplace in what is now being characterized as a 'narcostate'.

Yours sincerely,

Tara Ward
Co-Chair, Americas Policy Group

Bill Fairbairn
Steering Committee Member, Americas Policy Group

Cc:

Ambassador Sara Hradecky, Canada's Ambassador to Mexico
Ambassador Francisco Suárez, Mexico's Ambassador to Canada
Thomas Mulcair, leader of the New Democratic Party and the Official Opposition
Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Mario Beaulieu, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada