



Amnesty International

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April 15, 2008

Dear President Bush, President Calderón and Prime Minister Harper:

In advance of your meeting next week in New Orleans to discuss issues pertaining to the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), the United States, Mexican and Canadian sections of Amnesty International call on you to be transparent about your agenda and to put human rights at its core.

We have written to you on behalf of the more than 400,000 North American members of Amnesty International in advance of every yearly Summit since 2005. We have repeatedly urged that you give human rights serious and concrete attention within the growing North American relationship, but have been profoundly disappointed with your failure to do so to date.

In previous years we outlined numerous recommendations regarding important North American human rights issues, including the rights of Indigenous peoples, the human rights impact of counter-terrorism laws and practices, the rights of migrants and refugees, and the failure to secure the primacy of human rights within NAFTA and other bilateral and trilateral trade and investment arrangements. All of those recommendations remain current.

Since your first meeting of heads of state in 2005, a number of very serious human rights challenges within our three countries have come into sharp focus. More than two and a half years after Hurricane Katrina hit the city you gather in today, tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents remain displaced in their own country, with a lack of affordable housing still an obstacle to survivors coming home. The international community has watched the United States try to justify the use of torture in the War on Terror. Native American and Alaska Native women are at least two and a half times more likely than other women in the United States to be raped. The perpetrators often enjoy impunity because of a complicated maze of legal jurisdiction and a failure to prioritize and adequately fund measures needed to ensure justice. And the U.S. Congress has failed to overhaul its immigration policy, allowing measures that have trampled the most fundamental rights of migrants.

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A closer look at the widespread use of torture within the Mexican public security and criminal justice systems and the almost total impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of torture has also caused great concern, as the U.S. Congress deliberates almost US\$1 billion in support for those very institutions. The Regional Security Cooperation Initiative for Mexico and Central America framing the assistance package lacks clear mechanisms to ensure that the United States is not assisting abusive Mexican security forces. While the United States and Mexico should work together to address shared drug and security problems, U.S. foreign policy and Mexican domestic policy to address those problems cannot be at the expense of human rights. Serious recent human rights concerns have included arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings in the state of Oaxaca, as well as sexual violence against women in San Salvador Atenco. Moving forward with the Regional Security Cooperation Initiative must be accompanied by a true commitment from Mexico to investigate incidents such as these and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

In the wake of Canada's aggressive stand against the recently adopted U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a series of high-profile incarcerations of Indigenous men and women peacefully protesting mining activity on disputed lands has heightened the sense of Indigenous rights being relegated to second class status, a serious problem plaguing all three North American governments. Various Canadian counter-terrorism laws and practices fall short of international fair trial standards and the prohibition on complicity in torture. And a flawed agreement between Canada and the United States dealing with refugee protection was struck down by the Federal Court of Canada because of serious human rights shortcomings, a decision now under appeal.

Our region will be secure and prosperous when the rights of all North Americans are guaranteed, protected and upheld. The secrecy and lack of accountability that has marked the development of the SPP, as well as initiatives that may fall under the scope of the SPP such as the Merida Initiative, leave insufficient room for informed involvement of civil society in shaping policies that we believe will best facilitate growth and security. Given that these are decisions and policies with the potential to substantially impact human rights, democracy and the very essence of our societies, we urge more transparency. We repeat our call for you to take steps to ensure that initiatives being shaped under the framework of the SPP are brought to the Canadian, Mexican and the United States legislatures so as to facilitate meaningful, public debate.

The glaring lack of North American human rights commitments and an effective institutional means to monitor and enforce those commitments is unacceptable. We repeat our recommendation that you develop a binding human rights framework to govern the SPP. A North American Human Rights Council should be established, made up of independent experts from all three countries. A North American Competitiveness Council offers advice and guidance to our three governments with respect to business interests. The lack of an analogous human rights body is an imbalance that must be corrected.

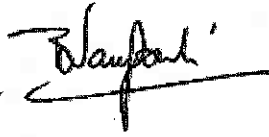
President Bush, President Calderón and Prime Minister Harper, when you meet in New Orleans you must:

- put in place real and effective measures that will end the secrecy about the Security and Prosperity Partnership; and
- take steps to ensure that in all aspects of the relationship among our three countries, human rights are given priority above all else.

Sincerely,



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