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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

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Honourable Rob Nicholson  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Nicholson,

We write to you today on behalf of the Official Opposition concerning the situation of the 43 students forcibly disappeared in Guerrero State, Mexico, in September of last year.

On September 26, Mexican police and gunmen attacked a group of students from a teachers' college in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero state, killing 6 people and forcibly disappearing 43 others. This crime has become emblematic of the acute human rights crisis in Mexico. The disappearances and the ensuing investigation have made headlines throughout the world, and drawn the attention of many Canadians.

Thus far the various investigations into the disappearances have uncovered more than 15 mass graves in Guerrero—one of which contained the bodies of 28 people—yet so far the body of only one missing student has been conclusively identified through DNA analysis.

Unhappy with the slow and partial progress of the Mexican government's investigation, representatives of the parents of the missing have enlisted the help of a team of Argentinian forensics experts to study the available evidence. This team recently issued a statement pointing out a number of discrepancies in the government's investigation, and claiming that the

government had presented biased analyses of the scientific evidence to support its (most recent) conclusion that the youths were killed, their bodies burned to ashes and their remains thrown into a river to hide the evidence.

Unfortunately, the Ayotzinapa disappearances are not an isolated case. According to Human Rights Watch, roughly 26,000 people have been reported missing or forcibly disappeared in Mexico during the period of 2007-2014. Prosecutions have been few and the overwhelming majority of the victims have not been located.

Here in Canada, the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights (SDIR) recently heard testimony from individuals representing the missing students and their parents.

According to this testimony, all levels of government in Mexico—municipal, state and federal—are implicated in the Ayotzinapa disappearances, as well as in many other human rights abuses in the country.

A representative of the students, Jorge Luis Balbuena, stated during the SDIR hearing that:

[We] were chased by the Mexican army....They took us out, beat us up, threatened us that we would disappear.... at the hospital a person who said he was a major, with a number of other military personnel, who followed us and threatened us there.... army patrols were patrolling the streets to find [students who managed to escape from the abductors].

Official statements from the Mexican government suggest that it has arrested over 100 individuals in connection with the case of the missing 43 students. However, according to the lawyer representing the families of the disappeared, Isidoro Vicario Aguilar, not a single person has been charged with anything relating directly to the disappearance of the students.

As you might imagine, this process has been extremely frustrating for the parents. Hilda Vargas, the mother of one of the missing 43, stated during the same SDIR hearing that:

As parents we do not accept what the government has said because the government has lied since the very beginning. At the outset they said that our children were in graves, and then they said that they were thrown into the San Juan River, and now as it turns out they say that our children were burned....since the beginning they lied to us. The government continues to do so.

During the SDIR hearings, the witnesses stated their belief that the Government of Canada has an important role to play in assisting them in their quest for justice.

Through their testimony, the witnesses made the following four specific requests to the Government of Canada:

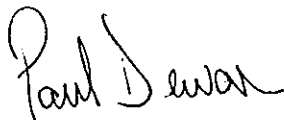
1. With respect to the Canadian refugee system, please remove Mexico from the list of "safe countries."
2. Urge the Government of Mexico to establish genuine transparency in the case involving investigations in Ayotzinapa.
3. Urge the Government of Mexico to guarantee the free, safe, and unrestrained work of experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the group of Argentine forensic anthropologists assisting the families of the disappeared.
4. Urge Mexican officials to offer guarantees of security and safety for the parents of the 43 students, as well as for the students of the normal school, their representatives, and other organizations that accompany this movement for justice.

Minister, Canada has a deep and extensive economic and diplomatic relationship with Mexico. We urge you to reach out to your Mexican counterparts and encourage them to proceed with the investigation into this case in as open and transparent a way as possible. We also ask that you use every available means to ensure that Mexican officials provide adequate security to the families of the disappeared as they seek justice for their missing sons.

Ultimately, all these families seek is justice. We are sure you will agree that they, and the people of Mexico, deserve nothing less.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Paul Dewar, M.P.  
NDP Foreign Affairs Critic



Wayne Marston, M.P.  
NDP Human Rights Critic