



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**

### **Enforced Disappearance in Mexico**

**Thursday, October 5, 2017**

**10:00 – 11:00 AM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good morning. I'm Jim McGovern, and I co-chair, along with Rep. Randy Hultgren, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I'd like to thank you for joining us today for our briefing on enforced disappearance in Mexico. I especially want to thank our panelists, all of whom have come a long ways – from Mexico, Texas and Minnesota. We very much appreciate your presence today, and your deep and long-standing commitment to human rights.

My son Patrick is 19 years old and in his first year of college at Northeastern University in Boston. He's the same age as some of the 43 students from a rural college in Ayotzinapa in the Mexican state of Guerrero who were forcibly disappeared in September 2014.

“Forcibly disappeared” – what does that mean?

According to the *International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance*, enforced disappearance is:

“the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.”

Let me translate that into my kind of English.

Forced disappearance is when someone working for or with a government that is supposed to protect your rights instead takes you away, hides you, pretends to the world not to know where you are – for all intents and purposes, you simply vanish at the hands of the state.

No one says whether you're dead or alive; your family and friends can't find you; and so they fear you have suffered a terrible fate; and this can go on for a short period of time, or forever.

All human rights violations are bad. But enforced disappearance is perhaps one of the worst. It affects the immediate victim, as well as everyone who knows and loves him or her, and it is remembered every minute of every day – until the person is found, if that happens.

And when someone is found, most of the time what comes home is a body. Most forcibly disappeared people end up dead – again, mainly at the hands of the state.

Every one of these 43 students who disappeared three years ago in Mexico had a family, and friends, and colleagues. Just this one case – which, in spite of the great work of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, has never been resolved to anyone's satisfaction – just this one case has affected hundreds of people.

But as we will hear today, more than 30,000 disappearances have occurred in Mexico since 2007. Think for a moment of the number of people whose lives were upended by those 30,000 disappearances – all the parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, lovers, spouses, children.

Yet, as of March 2014, there were records of only six convictions. Basically, we're talking about nearly 100 percent impunity in these cases.

So this is what we're here to talk about today.

As a member of Congress, and as a father, I would like to know what we can do to help end both the scourge of forced disappearance in Mexico, and the impunity that makes it possible.

Frankly, I've never been able to understand how 43 kids can go missing and no one can figure out what truly happened.

Mexico ratified the Convention on Enforced Disappearance in 2008. That's a good thing, but it's clearly not enough.

Last April the Mexican Senate passed a bill to address the consequences of disappearances for the victims, but the Chamber of Deputies has yet to act. Maybe this briefing today can help nudge things along.

And I look forward to hearing other recommendations from the panelists.

Thank you.