



Ciudadanos por una Causa en Común A. C

MA ELENA MORERA DE GALINDO  
May 18, 2010

Honorable Members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law,

Let me express my gratitude for the invitation and the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, and to speak to the highest council of representatives of the American People.

I am a Mexican citizen who like many other hardworking Mexican men and women loves her country and all the beautiful things it has to offer, but has been a witness to how the peace and freedom we used to enjoy has come to an end in recent years. We are now facing one of the most violent eras of our history as a nation.

My life as an activist against crime in Mexico can be traced back to September 2001 when my husband Pedro was abducted.

In those days, I experienced the difficulty of finding reliable people to make the best decisions about how to rescue my husband. A key positive decision was to let the police know about the abduction. I was not sure at first about the degree of professionalism (or lack of it) of the policemen that were supposed to help us. I was loaded with the prejudices - all well based - in our society dictating that if you see a Mexican policeman in the street you are better off crossing to the opposite sidewalk.

Provided with information that allowed us to calm down those initial prejudices and fears, we decided to maintain the police team and have them lead and carry out the negotiations, although this and each subsequent action resulted in difficulties in the interaction inside our family.

Months after my husband's return, while chatting with my father-in-law, I understood that the greatest difficulty in taking decisions came from something that we never told ourselves: my father-in-law felt that he was negotiating for a dead son, while I was striving to recover a living husband.

In the 29 long days of captivity my children and I were always accompanied and supported by our families, but we lived under great solitude, sorrow and pain.

Each one tried to do their best and maintain courage, but we knew, even without talking about it, of the profound pain and uncertainty we experienced.

In the process, a great friend of the family who had endured a similar event came and handed me two blank notebooks. He suggested using one to make a punctual registration of the daily decisions because he said that it was the best way to leave the blame behind when the process was over. The second handbook was to write Pedro my thoughts and feelings during his absence. I am happy to have taken the advice; while the ordeal lasted I wrote in these two notebooks.

It was October 19, 2001 when Pedro was rescued from his raptors. I could hardly recognize him: he had lost so much weight and his beard had grown all white.

After some weeks I believed that the nightmare had finished, but soon a new challenge began: taking the criminals out of our lives. While we weren't under the pressure of making correct decisions by the minute, this was yet another new situation for which we were not prepared. The sorrow and pain translated into anger and frustration.

Months went by, and I began to receive calls from families requesting our help as they were facing similar kidnapping experiences. By then, the nongovernmental organization Mexico United Against Crime was already a solid organization and presided over by Josefina Ricaño, who contacted me and invited me to participate in supporting the victims of kidnappings.

The judicial process in connection with Pedro's kidnapping taught me about the tortuous ways of justice in Mexico. I ignored its complexity, its "injustice" and the terrifying indifference towards the pain of the victims and of their families. While the letter and spirit of the law could be "perfect," its application was made imperfect and worthless by those responsible for administering justice.

However, again I was lucky to find knowledgeable people who wanted to teach me about security and justice, and law and practice, themes that now have become the passion in my life.

Two years after Pedro's return, in December 2003, the assembly of United Mexico Against Crime elected me as President. I invited valuable people with new ideas for this unusual challenge to join the organization's board. But I never imagined that we would be mobilizing so extensively the heartfelt demands for Security and Justice of so many Mexicans.

It is important for nongovernmental organizations to renew themselves, so I left Mexico United against Crime two years ago. Yet I was touched forever to keep on working to have a

better Mexico. This is why, with other committed Mexicans, I started a new nongovernmental organization a few months ago called: Citizens for a Common Cause.

Civil society in Mexico is taking root and many Mexicans, normal citizens without police uniforms or government positions, work every day for a better judicial system, for social justice, to develop Mexico socially and economically, and to strengthen and improve our political systems, our democracy and the education of our children and the younger generations.

Our challenge is daunting because law enforcement in Mexico needs to improve significantly. Yet, the biggest challenge of all is to stop the damage caused by criminal organizations and drug cartels that are threatening to destroy the social fabric of our communities.

Make no mistake: in Mexico, we are fighting a real battle against drug cartels that have enormous wealth and powerful weapons to corrupt or kill whoever stands in their way.

Mexican drug cartels generate their enormous wealth by smuggling illegal drugs into the United States. Obviously, they don't work alone and have many associates in the United States. In addition, over 90% of the weapons confiscated from drug cartel members in Mexico came from the United States.

I praise the steadfast determination of Mexican President Calderon in fighting drug cartels in Mexico. He raised the bar and is setting a new standard for future Mexican Presidents to follow.

But the U.S. and Mexican Governments must do much more than has been done so far.

In Mexico, a complete reform of the Public Security, Border Administration and Legal and Judicial institutions is needed.

This requires the support, resources and appropriate laws from the Mexican Congress. This also requires commitment from civil society organizations, like the one I am honored to preside over and represent, "Ciudadanos por una Causa en Común" ("Citizens for a Common Cause").

My main objective in being here with you is to invite you to recognize that this is as much a Mexican as well as a U.S. battle and that Mexico cannot just fight alone.

The Merida Initiative is good but insufficient. While there is no doubt that the resources the United States sends to Mexico are highly valuable, Mexico cannot succeed in this effort if the U.S. domestic institutions do not participate by assuming their share of the responsibility by focusing on drastically reducing illegal drug consumption and fighting cross-border arm trafficking.

We do not intend to question, by any means, the Bill of Rights and, in particular, the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. But we want to make sure that the rule of Law prevails and to stop once and for all lethal weapons from getting into the hands of drug cartels, where they are used to abduct, extort, threaten and kill Mexican citizens.

Both the United States and Mexico should work together as never before to address the root causes of this problem. The Merida Initiative is not yet fully implemented but is already coming up short due to the escalation of violence seen in Mexico.

Reducing illegal drug consumption and stopping arms from getting into the hands of drug cartels must be the highest priority in the U.S. – Mexico relations.

Failure to do so will translate into chaos in Mexico, which would lead to an unmanageable border problem where thousands of jobless Mexicans would attempt to flee to the United States to save their lives.

But if the U.S. Government embraces this effort wholeheartedly with Mexico, violence will be significantly reduced and Mexico will enjoy prosperity and peace, which will bring back investments and job creation and ultimately contain illegal immigration as well.

Today, I can say with confidence that if we work hard, with courage and strength, we will live again with peace and freedom.

So let me conclude by respectfully saying that I would like to leave this House with a commitment, yours and mine, to engage more strongly in the rightful common cause of eradicating violence in Mexico. We need your help to reduce illegal drug consumption in the United States and to put legislation and public policies in place to stop weapons from getting into the hands of Mexican drug cartels.

With all due respect, these policies will serve the national security interests of both the United States and Mexico.

Thank you very much.