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# Mexico frees first group of Indian inmates held unfairly

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MEXICO CITY - Authorities released 49 inmates from penitentiaries in central Mexico on Tuesday, the first batch of hundreds expected to be freed as government officials check cases against Indian prisoners for judicial improprieties.

Mexico's Indians - some of whom do not speak Spanish - often remain in jail when they are eligible for early release or bail, because of a lack of legal representation or economic resources or because of confusion about the law and bureaucratic hurdles.

During a ceremony in which prisoners were freed in Puebla, capital of the state of the same name 65 miles southeast of Mexico City, Public Safety Secretary Ramon Martin Huerta said authorities hope to release between 700 and 800 Indian inmates by the end of the year, after reviewing federal case files as well as those of prisoners held at the state and local levels.

There are about 7,700 Indians behind bars nationwide, Public Safety Department officials estimate.

The move came two weeks after Martin Huerta's office signed an agreement with the National Commission for Development to rid Mexican prisons of Indians held unfairly.

Attending the ceremony was Puebla Gov. Mario Marin, who said many of those included in the first wave to be released were younger inmates.

As part of the program, authorities have pledged to provide legal advisers who are familiar with Indian languages and customs and to attempt to move Indians being held far from their families to jails closer to home.

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