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U.N.: Mexico needs work on equality

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MEXICO CITY - If Mexico wants to eradicate discrimination against women, it needs to follow up its promises with action, a U.N. report said Thursday.

The report applauded Mexico's 2006 passage of the General Act on Equality Between Women and Men but expressed concerns that additional steps have to be taken before it can be implemented effectively.

The authors of the report, members of the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, are worried the law lacks the necessary components to bring states and cities across the country on board, said Teresa Rodriguez, U.N. regional director of development for women.

In particular, the committee is concerned that the National Commission on Human Rights, which is charged with overseeing enforcement, does not have "the necessary financial resources and specially trained personnel to achieve this goal."

The report listed 42 recommendations Mexico should follow to eliminate violence against women, including ensuring access to safe abortions, as allowed under the law; providing more sex education; outlawing mandatory pregnancy tests at *maquiladora*, or assembly-for-export, factories; and finding a way to end the disappearances of women in the northern border city of Juarez.

"While noting with appreciation the commitment and efforts of the state to address the cases of violence against women in Ciudad Juarez, the committee ... is especially concerned that these efforts have so far failed to prevent further crimes from being committed," the report said.

The committee also requested that Mexico's special federal prosecutor for crimes against women be given jurisdiction over numerous allegations of sexual assault by police against protesters in San Salvador Atenco, 15 miles northeast of Mexico City.

The Mexico's National Human Rights Commission recently said police failed to comply with its recommendation to investigate officers who beat protesters and sexually abused women in the town last May.

The abuse took place during violent protests in which demonstrators kidnapped and beat six policemen after authorities tried to prevent street vendors from setting up stands in a nearby city. When police retook the town, 23 female detainees claimed they were sexually abused by officers, and others said they had been clubbed.

Also Thursday, several governmental and civil women's rights groups spoke out against a recent Supreme Court ruling that requires women who want to use domestic violence as a cause for divorce to provide the date, time, place and characteristics of the abuse.

Organizations including the Women's Institute of Mexico City told a news conference they would try to counteract the decision by promoting a law that would clearly define what domestic violence is and that would make it an automatically punishable crime.

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