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## **MÉXICO: OPEN LETTER TO DR. HUGO LÓPEZ-GATELL**

### **SUBJECT: PROTECTION OF MIGRANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19**

Distinguished Dr. Lopez-Gatell:

On this occasion we are writing to you, in your capacity as Under-Secretary for Prevention and Health Promotion and as the authorized and official voice of the health sector to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico, to express Amnesty International's concern for the health of migrants and asylum seekers in need of international protection in the current context.

Amnesty International has observed the work you have done in promoting recommendations and actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Mexico; however, the organization notes with concern that, despite the fact that migrants have been considered by the Ministry of the Interior as one of the most vulnerable groups in the population, Mexican authorities are not releasing those who are deprived of their liberty solely because of their migration status. Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have expressed their recommendations on migration detention very clearly: "The situation of refugees and migrants detained in formal and informal detention centres, in unhealthy and overcrowded conditions, is particularly worrying. Considering the lethal consequences of an outbreak of COVID-19, they should be released without delay. Migrant children and their families, and those detained without sufficient legal basis, should be released immediately.

Amnesty International believes that during a global public health crisis such as COVID-19, detention based on migration status alone cannot be considered a necessary or proportionate restriction on the right to liberty.

Even though the National Migration Institute (INM) has announced actions arising from the precautionary measures issued by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), Amnesty International has observed that in practice these measures are not sufficient to protect the health of the migrant population and those in need of international protection.

In view of this and considering the leadership you are providing; we ask you to issue a public statement addressed to the INM asking that all persons in migration detention be released immediately and thus protect their lives from the pandemic. Such a measure should be accompanied by a humanitarian response that includes, among other things, access to housing and health services - regardless of the immigration status of the person concerned, in order to prevent the exposure and spread of COVID-19.

Similarly, we ask you to extend an invitation to the INM Commissioner to one of the press conferences you hold daily so that Mexico and the international community are aware of the INM's protection plans to address this crisis, protecting the health of all migrants and asylum seekers, who are now in national territory under the jurisdiction of the Mexican state.

Sincerely,

Erika Guevara Rosas  
Director for the Americas