

U.S. Lawmakers Asked Mexico to Free an Illinois Man

By Lorraine Orlandi - Reuters News

22 December 2003

MEXICO CITY, Dec 22 (Reuters) - Five U.S. lawmakers asked Mexico to free an Illinois man they say was tortured and wrongly imprisoned for murder 10 years ago, saying his case contradicts Mexico's crusade against what it sees as U.S. injustices.

In a letter distributed on Monday, five members of the U.S. Congress urged Mexican President Vicente Fox to free Alfonso Martin del Campo, who was convicted of murdering his sister and her husband in Mexico in 1992 and sentenced to 50 years in prison.

"While in police custody, he was stripped, beaten and suffocated with a plastic bag," said the letter sponsored by U.S. Rep. Jan **Schakowsky**, an Illinois Democrat. "To stop the torture, Mr. Martin del Campo signed a confession he did not write and had never read."

Rights groups have concluded that Martin del Campo, an Illinois native with U.S. and Mexican citizenship, was tortured, based on evidence including medical reports and testimony by a policeman involved.

No physical evidence connected him to the crime, they say.

Last year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recommended the Mexican government release Martin del Campo and compensate him for time spent in prison.

Schakowsky and U.S. Reps. Luis Gutierrez and Lane Evans of Illinois, Maurice Hinchey of New York and George Miller of California, all Democrats, echoed that recommendation, calling Fox a "champion for the rights of Mexican prisoners in the United States."

"We encourage you to set an example for the United States by freeing Alfonso Martin del Campo Dodd, and in doing so demonstrate your commitment to rectifying the legal injustices suffered by U.S. and Mexican citizens imprisoned on both sides of our shared border," they said.

Fox's office declined to comment on the case on Monday.

Fox has campaigned against the death penalty in the United States, taking the U.S. government before the International Court of Justice at the Hague in an effort to win retrials for Mexicans on death row in the United States.

Mexico is asking the court to order the United States to retry 52 nationals because they were not informed of their right to consult consular officials after being arrested. The Hague court heard arguments in the case last week.