

Mexican church leaders discuss death penalty after kidnapping case

MEXICO CITY - As Mexicans discussed reintroducing the death penalty as punishment for kidnapping, several Catholic leaders said capital punishment would not solve Mexico's crime problem.

Archbishop Jose Martin Rabago of Leon said there are "no easy solutions" in the fight to stop the kidnappings in the country.

During Mass in Leon Aug. 10, he denounced the recently revived discussion on the death penalty. Calls for reinstalling capital punishment - only two years after it was formally abolished - resurfaced in early August after the kidnapped 14-year-old son of a businessman was killed by his captors.

In reaction to the public outcry, Mexican President Felipe Calderon suggested the country restore his old initiative to make capital punishment applicable only to the most heinous crimes.

Mexicans, fed up with the high crime rate and abductions for ransom, are divided on the issue.

Archbishop Martin said he understands the public anger but rejects the death penalty. He only would agree to more severe punishments if the entire Mexican judiciary system is overhauled so that criminals truly are brought to justice, he said.

The Mexican criminal justice system is known for its inability to put lawbreakers behind bars. In many states, the sentence for kidnapping is up to 70 years, but only 2 percent of all kidnapping cases result in a conviction.

"This culture of impunity is the main reason for all these problems," he said.

Bishop Raul Vera Lopez of Saltillo made similar statements Aug. 10, saying, "The high crime rate won't be reduced through harsher sentences but rather by removing public officials from office who are the accomplices of the criminals."

Armando Martinez Gomez, president of the College of Catholic Lawyers in Mexico, also rejected the reintroduction of the death penalty and called it a step back in human rights. He said the notion that the death penalty is a deterrent from crime has been discredited universally.

But Bishop Lazaro Perez Jimenez of Celaya said he was in favor of capital punishment, while at the same time he called for more “preventative measures,” reported the daily newspaper *Correo* Aug. 11.

Statistics on abductions vary widely. According to news reports, Mexico had 400-500 kidnappings last year. However, human rights activists said the number could be much higher because many cases are not reported for fear of reprisals.