News



Mexico's President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum gestures at her swearing-in ceremony at the Congress in Mexico City Oct. 1. Sheinbaum, 62, an environmental scientist and former mayor of Mexico City, became Mexico's first female president in the nation's more than 200 years of independence. (OSV News/Reuters/Raquel Cunha)



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The Mexican bishops' conference has called on the country's freshly sworn-in president to pursue social peace as she inherits the complicated legacy of her popular and polarizing predecessor, who promoted social programs for the poor, but leaves her a country rife with violence and perceived to be backsliding on democracy.

Claudia Sheinbaum was sworn in Oct. 1 in the country's Congress as the first female Mexican president in history.

In a Sept. 30 statement, the bishops wished President Sheinbaum well, while encouraging her to govern for all Mexicans as she receives an increasingly powerful presidency and the ruling Morena party holds mega-majorities in both houses of Congress — effectively allowing her to rule by decree.

"We believe that when a woman becomes President of the Republic for the first time, she will be very sensitive and respectful, promoting everything that will contribute to the good and social development of all citizens," the bishops' statement said.

"Mexico faces great challenges, which are an opportunity to grow in participation and dialogue, overcoming polarization, seeking reconciliation (and) reaching the necessary agreements with all political forces — without annihilating minorities — to build, through dialogue and consensus, the project of the common good so that Mexican society can live in peace," the bishops wrote.

Sheinbaum, 62, is taking office as Mexico's first female president and first Jewish head of state, though she identifies as nonreligious. A climate scientist and former Mexico City mayor, she received more than 60% of the popular vote in the June 2

election, running on a platform of continuing the populist political project of her mentor, outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Mexican presidents cannot seek reelection.

López Obrador exits office with a 68% approval rating, according to the newspaper El Financiero. AMLO, as he's often called, hiked the minimum wage, built megaprojects ranging from railways to a refinery and implemented a series of cash stipends for seniors, single mothers and students.

Poverty fell 5% during his administration, according to a 2022 survey by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, though his scrapping of a health insurance scheme more than doubled the number of Mexicans lacking health care to 40% of the population.

Sister Juana Ángeles Zárate, a Carmelite of the Sacred Heart, said the president's discourse — though often polarizing — promised to put "the poor first" and resonated with the population.

"It seems that sometimes the president has a connection with the people," Juana, a former president of the Conference of Religious Superiors of Mexico, told OSV News. "Of course that touched a lot of hearts across society and the church, too."

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Father Filiberto Velázquez, director of social ministries in the Diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa told OSV News that the president's approval is due to "an innumerable number of social programs that have a positive effect on vulnerable people."

But he expressed skepticism with claims of change, saying, "At the end of the day, corruption, our institutions, and impunity continue being the same."

Difficulties such as rampant insecurity also continued throughout, though he often downplayed or dismissed it. At least 30 candidates were killed during the 2024 election cycle, raising concerns of drug cartels capturing local governments.

"We believe that reality speaks for itself and immediately demands public policies that guarantee citizen security, overcoming poverty and inequality, and promote

national unity and harmony among all," the bishops' statement said.

"These policies must be promoted and guaranteed by the government of the republic, in accordance with its constitutional mandate and the tools and resources it has at its disposal to achieve the goal of social peace. No more dominance by organized crime or crime in general."

Violence hit the church hard, when two elderly Jesuits were slain in their parish in 2022 by a known crime boss. The bishops' conference urged a rethinking of the president's security strategy, but López Obrador responded with a rebuke.

Mexico's Catholic leaders subsequently held peace forums and produced a blueprint for pacifying Mexico. The blueprint was signed by the three presidential candidates in March, though Sheinbaum called its analysis "pessimistic."

Jesuit Father Jorge Atilano said dialogue has been maintained with Sheinbaum's staff. "We trust that it will be a government with openness and we can move towards collaboration," he told OSV News.

López Obrador ended his term with a series of constitutional changes, including an overhaul of the judicial branch. The judicial reform mandates putting all judges — even supreme court justices — to popular vote, provoking concerns of the president gaining control over the courts.

The bishops said, alluding to the changes, "We are convinced … that Mexico is called to once again experience true democratic rule of law." They continued, "Without trust, there is no development nor a stable future."