

8 September 2008

Reporters Without Borders
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Language: **English**

**Human Rights Council – Universal Periodic Review
Fourth session – February 2009**

**Contribution of Reporters Without Borders (a non-governmental
organisation in special consultative status) about press freedom in Mexico**

Introduction: Overview of press freedom situation

Mainly because of the influence of drug cartels, the country is still the most deadly in the Americas for journalists and impunity surrounds the murders of 32 of them and the disappearance of seven others between 2000 and 2007. Six others were killed for unknown motives since the beginning of 2008 and no case was resolved either. Prospects are not good with some local authorities working with organised crime. Felipe Calderón, of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) who was narrowly elected president on 2 July 2006, faces a parliament divided between the country's three main political forces and has to rely on the support of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000. A similar situation between the federal government and the states (most of them still controlled by the PRI) has slowed efforts by the judiciary and federal authorities to fight impunity and local obstacles to free expression. Some regional officials showed contempt for the right to inform the public. The Chihuahua state government, on November 2007, dismissed a CNDH recommendation about physical attacks by state police on three journalists. The height of political cynicism was displayed when the federal supreme court cleared Puebla state governor Mario Marín on 29 November 2007 of any involvement in the arbitrary arrest of journalist Lydia Cacho in December 2005. Strong suspicion fell on Marín after *W Radio*, part of *Televisa Radio*, and the daily paper *La Jornada*, disclosed conversations between him and a businessman friend, José Camel Nacif, who was accused by Cacho of belonging to a paedophile network in a 2004 book called "The Demons of Eden."

The investigation into the murder of Brad Will, a young cameraman on the alternative news agency Indymedia, gunned down on 27 October 2006 during major political and social unrest in Oaxaca, revealed dysfunction at various levels of government. The journalist's family told Reporters Without Borders that the federal justice system had simply endorsed the

conclusions of the local investigation in Oaxaca, that he had been killed at point blank range by militants of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), although the hypothesis is not seriously backed up by any evidence or any witness. A number of accounts rather point the finger at police and local officials.

Mauricio Estrada Zamora, of the regional daily La Opinión de Apatzingán, went missing in Michoacán state in the south-west on 12 February 2008, in circumstances suggesting he may well have been kidnapped. Since the beginning of the year, around 50 journalists were attacked or beaten and one is detained. Police arrested Jesús Lemus Barajas, editor of the daily El Tiempo, in La Piedad, (Michoacán) in Cuerámaro, in the state of Guanajuato, on 7 May where he was reporting on drug trafficking and now accuse him of involvement in the trade for “The Family”, an offshoot of the powerful Gulf cartel. After being held for 19 days in Puentevilla prison (Guanajuato), he was transferred to a high-security federal prison in Puente Grande, in the neighbouring state of Jalisco and no trial was scheduled yet.

1. Online freedom

Reporters Without Borders has not observed any special problems with the free flow of news online in Mexico.

2. Government steps to improve the situation

Freedom of expression moved forward on paper with the decriminalisation of press offences at federal level, on 12 April 2007. President Felipe Calderon’s promised in following October to “federalise” the handling of attacks against the media.

3. Working with non-governmental organisations (NGO)

Reporters Without Borders deplors the lack of transparency in enquiries made by the Mexican authorities and the lack of information to NGOs.

4. Recommendations

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) meeting in Washington on 18 July 2007, at the initiative of nine human rights and press freedom organisations - including Reporters Without Borders - ended in a strong commitment being given by attending representatives of the Mexican federal government:

- strengthening the rights of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Committed against Journalists (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos cometidos contra periodista - FEADP), settled in February 2006
- federal level handling of these types of cases
- regular reports to the IACHR on progress in ongoing investigations
- an association of organisations specialised in follow-up of investigations
- other commitments were made in relation to community and electronic media.

The data in this report has been gathered and verified by Reporters Without Borders, which has a network of correspondents in 130 countries and partner organisations in a score of countries.

In some countries, a journalist can be imprisoned for several years just for a word or a photo someone does not like. Reporters Without Borders, founded in 1985, works daily to support press freedom because imprisoning or killing a journalist removes a key witness and threatens the right of all of us to be kept informed of the news.

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