



VERACRUZ: JOURNALISTS AND THE STATE OF FEAR

**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

→ 31 August 2015, outside the Veracruz state office in Mexico City: Activists condemn Rubén Espinosa's murder

© AFP PHOTO / Yuri CORTEZ



**REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS'S SURVEY
EMMANUEL COLOMBIÉ, DIRECTOR OF LATIN AMERICA BUREAU**

VISIT TO MEXICO

Like other NGOs that defend media freedom throughout Latin America's vast territory, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is unable to ignore all that is happening in the Mexican state of Veracruz. Not a week goes by without our Rio de Janeiro-based bureau hearing echoes of the threats and attacks against journalists in Veracruz. The past five years' statistics confirm this: located in a country that, although not formally at war, has endured two decades of drug cartel violence, Veracruz is the western hemisphere's most dangerous place for the media.

For the third time in 10 years, RSF went to Mexico in June 2016 to get a better understanding of the working environment for local journalists. In Mexico City, RSF met representatives of the institutions involved in protecting media personnel, and met journalists from Veracruz who have fled there seeking refuge. In Xalapa, the capital of the state of Veracruz, RSF organized meetings with a journalists' collective, local reporters and correspondents who have been threatened, representatives of the local mechanism for protecting the media, and NGOs. The final leg of the journey was the port city of Veracruz, where RSF met with persecuted journalists and the families of victims.

RSF's conclusion from this visit and these interviews is that Veracruz's journalists are caught in a dangerous trap between corrupt politicians and ultra-violent criminal cartels. While wrestling with precarious employment conditions that often force them to hold down several jobs at the same time, these vital observers have to come to terms with fear and have to censor themselves in order to survive and to protect their families. But, although exposed to constant danger, these courageous journalists do not resign themselves to saying nothing at all.

A report on the environment for journalists in Veracruz is by extension also a tribute to the thousands of other journalists operating in the rest of Mexico and in nearby Central American countries such as Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, a region blighted by organized crime.

As well portraying, as faithfully as possible, the day-to-day reality of life for the journalists who resist in Veracruz, this report also offers a series of recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of the many mechanisms that already exist, at both local and national level, for protecting journalists.

This report is being released just weeks after the installation of Veracruz's newly-elected governor, Miguel Ángel Yunes, so RSF uses the occasion to remind the new state government and the international community of the dangers to which journalism is exposed in Veracruz. If nothing changes and is nothing is done to rein in corruption, the state's already beleaguered independent journalism will cease to exist.

Emmanuel Colombié
Director of Latin America bureau



→
Cover:
11 February 2016, Mexico City:
Demonstrators pay tribute to Veracruz's murdered journalists

© AFP PHOTO/RONALDO SCHEMIDT

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STATE OF FEAR



Javier Duarte

Located on the east coast, Veracruz is not just the most dangerous of Mexico's 32 states for journalists but also the most dangerous place in Latin America for media personnel. There was a dramatic rise in attacks on the media under the governorship of Javier Duarte, which began in December 2010 and ended two months ahead of schedule when he resigned in October 2016.

As this report was being written, the news from Veracruz was edifying. Governor Javier Duarte, who has done more than any other single person to destroy independent journalism in the state, resigned on 12 October amid accusations of illegal enrichment and running a money-laundering ring. Since then his whereabouts have been unknown. The Mexican federal authorities and Interpol issued an international warrant for his arrest on 21 October, with the result that he is now wanted in 190 countries. He has left behind a heavily indebted state and media outlets that have been traumatized by the systematic attacks they endured during his six years as governor.

Why is the situation so bad in Veracruz? Firstly, because of its geographical location, its long Gulf of Mexico coastline and its vast industrial port, Mexico's biggest. Veracruz is a hub of trade and the transportation of goods, including illegal material of every kind, above all drugs. The drug trafficking is dominated by two cartels, Los Zetas, one of the most powerful and violent in Mexico, and Jalisco Nueva Generación. The two gangs often clash violently in the fight for control of routes.

The correspondents, press photographers, court reporters and crime reporters that RSF met during its visit are the most exposed. If they take too close an interest in organized crime, they are routinely threatened and often end up being the victims of cold-blooded, execution-style killings. The widespread corruption within the Veracruz police and judicial systems, in which many officials are directly or indirectly linked to the cartels, makes prosecutions pointless. Impunity is such that nearly half of the threats and attacks against journalists are by police officers, who are never or almost never arrested or questioned. Governor Duarte himself helped establish a system for keeping journalists under surveillance by creating teams of semi-official spies called "informantes" or "orejas" (ears). According to some journalists in Xalapa, the state capital, these spies often pose as journalists in order to obtain information.

As a result of the violence, corruption and close surveillance, the law of silence has gradually taken hold among Veracruz's journalists. They are forced to censor themselves in order to save their lives and the lives of their loved-ones. When the threats become too insistent, they often have no choice but to flee to another part of the country or leave Mexico altogether.

The installation of Miguel Ángel Yunes, a member of the National Action Party (PAN), as governor on 1 December 2016 ended an 88-year reign in Veracruz by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had controlled the state since 1928. Mafia-style practices, distrust of the media and attacks on journalists all became deeply entrenched during this long period of uninterrupted PRI rule.

It is not clear whether the tension between journalists and the Veracruz authorities will ease under Governor Yunes who was elected for a special two-year term designed to make gubernatorial elections henceforth coincide with presidential ones. His election has raised the hopes of some journalists and free-speech defenders but Yunes is from the same political class as Duarte and was a PRI member for years before switching his allegiance to the PAN. Furthermore, corruption and links to the cartels are so prevalent within Veracruz's officialdom that the chances of fundamental change may be limited.

1

VERACRUZ, THE MOST VIOLENT STATE IN LATIN AMERICA'S DEADLIEST COUNTRY

1. SHOCKING FIGURES

- State: Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave
- 8 million inhabitants (Mexico's 3rd most populous state, home to 6.7% of the Mexican population)
- Capital: Xalapa (also written Jalapa)

VERACRUZ, MEXICO'S DEADLIEST STATE FOR JOURNALISTS

- From January 2000 to September 2016, RSF counted **19 murders** of journalists in Veracruz. They represented **20% of the murders of journalists in Mexico** (source: RSF).
- During Javier Duarte's governorship (Dec 2010 - Dec 2016), RSF counted **17 murders of journalists** in Veracruz (source: RSF).
- **While Javier Duarte was governor, nearly 40% of the murders or disappearances of journalists in Mexico occurred in Veracruz, where 6.7% of the country's population lives** (source: RSF).

VERACRUZ, STATE WITH THE MOST DISAPPEARANCES OF JOURNALISTS

- From 2000 to January 2016, **four journalists disappeared Veracruz** – while a total of **20 disappeared in the entire country** (source: CNDH).
- Three of the disappearances occurred during Javier Duarte's governorship (2010-2016).

VERACRUZ, RUNNER-UP IN ABUSES AGAINST THE MEDIA

- The Attorney-General's Office (PGR) opened **744 preliminary investigations** into crimes against journalists in Veracruz from January 2011 to September 2015 – 10% of the national total.
- There were **269 attacks against the media** in Veracruz from 2007 to 2015 – **13% of the national total** (source: Article 19).



VERACRUZ, STATE WITH THE MOST PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR JOURNALISTS

- From October 2012 to September 2015, the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists granted **protective measures for 34 journalists in Veracruz, 18.6% of all the journalists assigned protection in Mexico**. Under this mechanism, created in June 2012 as an interior ministry offshoot, measures are taken both to prevent threats to journalists and provide emergency protection to those in danger.
- Created in late 2012, the Veracruz State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (CEAPP) granted **protective measures to 59 journalists** in Veracruz from December 2012 to 30 June 2015.

MEXICO

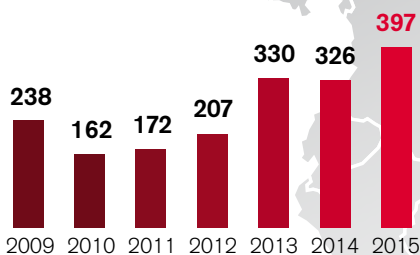
- Mexico: 120 million inhabitants
- Mexico has been Latin America's deadliest country for journalists since 2004, except in 2013, when it was briefly overtaken by Brazil and Honduras (source: RSF).
- In Mexico, from January 2000 to mid-December 2016, a total of **99 journalists** were the victims of murders that were **clearly or probably linked** to their work (source: RSF).
- According to the tally kept by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, **150 journalists were murdered** in the western hemisphere from January 2010 to November 2015, of whom a third were Mexican (source: Inter-American Court of Human Rights).

MEXICO,

STEADILY GROWING VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Number of complaints received by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) about violence against the media and journalists:

- From 2011 to 2015: **439**
- From 2006 to 2010: **390**
- From 2001 to 2005: **208**



Number of acts of aggression against the media in Mexico, including murders, attacks against media outlets, physical violence, enforced disappearance, enforced displacement, threats, harassment, intimidation, unauthorized intrusion, privation of freedom and institutional violence (source: Article 19 Mexico)

Number of murders of journalists in Mexico (source: RSF)



2. JAVIER DUARTE'S BLOODY GOVERNORSHIP

KEY DATES

- 1 December 2010** Installation of the new governor, Javier Duarte de Ochoa (PRI)
- 8 March 2011** Murder of Noel López Olguín, a reporter for *Horizonte*, *Noticias de Acayucán* and *La Verdad*
- 20 June 2011** Murders of *Notiver* journalists Miguel Ángel López Velasco and Misael López Solana
- 24 July 2011** Murder of Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz, *Notiver*
- 19 September 2011** Disappearance of Gabriel Fonseca, *El Mañanero*
- 6 November 2011** An arson attack destroys much of the headquarters of the Córdoba-based daily *El Buen Tono* just one month after its launch
- 28 April 2012** Murder of Regina Martínez, *Revista Proceso*
- 3 May 2012** Murders of Gabriel Hugué Córdova and Guillermo Luna Varela, *Veracruznews*, and of Esteban Rodríguez, *Diario AZ de Veracruz*
- 13 June 2012** Murder of Victor Manuel Báez Chino, *Milenio* and *Reporterospoliciacos.mx*
- 24 July 2012** Disappearance of Miguel Morales, *Diario de Poza Rica*
- 26 July 2012** Murder of Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz, *Notiver*
- 2 November 2012** Murder of Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, *Notisur* and *Liberal del Sur*
- 3 December 2012** Creation of the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (CEAPP) in Veracruz
- 22 January 2013** Murder of Sergio Landa, *Diario Cardel*
- 5 February 2014** Abduction and murder of Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, *Notisur* and *Liberal del Sur*
- 2 January 2015** Murder of Moisés Sánchez, *La Union*
- 3 May 2015** Murder of Armando Saldaña Morales, Radio *La Ke Buena*
- 30 June 2015** Murder of Juan Mendoza Delgado, *Escribiendo La Verdad*
- 1 July 2015** Governor Duarte tells Veracruz's journalists: "*Behave yourselves. We know some of you are going bad, we know which of you have links with the mafia. (...) Stay away from all of that. We are going to shake the tree and the rotten apples will fall.*"
- 31 July 2015** Murder of Rubén Espinosa Becerril, *Revista Proceso*, in Mexico City
- 8 February 2016** Murder of Anabel Flores Salazar, *El Sol de Orizaba*
- 2 March 2016** The IACHR issues an alarming report on the state of human rights and free speech in Mexico
- 14 May 2016** Murder of Manuel Torres, *Radioover.com*, TV *Azteca* and *Noticias MT*
- 5 June 2016** Local elections in Veracruz
- 20 July 2016** Murder of Pedro Tamayo Rosas, *Al Calor Político* and *Piñero de la Cuenca*
- 12 October 2016** Amid mounting allegations of corruption, the Veracruz state legislature gives Javier Duarte permission to stand down as governor in order to face imminent federal charges; he disappears a few days later and is still a fugitive from justice when this report is being written.
- 1 December 2016** Installation of the new governor, Miguel Ángel Yunes (PAN-PRD)



• VERACRUZ'S SLOW DESCENT INTO HELL

Various described as “*despicable*,” “*corrupt*” and “*Machiavellian*,” Fidel Herrera ruled Veracruz as governor from 2004 to 2010, leaving an unforgettable impression on all those who had anything to do with him. Observers say he made the criminal cartel known as Los Zetas welcome in Veracruz in the late 2000s (see box) and allowed an unprecedented climate of violence and persecution to develop, one in which journalists were specifically – but not exclusively – targeted.



Fidel Herrera Beltrán

One of the biggest turning points in Veracruz's recent history came in 2008. It was the year that Los Zetas broke away from another cartel, El Golfo, of which it had until then just been the armed wing. Their goal was to conquer new territories and one of their main targets was Veracruz, a key state for controlling the drug trafficking routes.

Far from worrying about the cartel's growing influence in his state, Herrera associated openly with “*capos*” and local drug bosses. Speaking on condition of anonymity years later, many people including former aides have referred to the lavish parties that he organized with some of its leaders. They show that, at the very least, he maintained close relations with the cartel, to the point that he was suggestively nicknamed “Z1” (Zeta No. 1).

In this respect, Veracruz is not unique in Mexico. Organized crime is well entrenched in many states and countless elected politicians and local government officials throughout the country maintain dubious relations with the cartels. But relations between Los Zetas and officialdom are particularly dense in Veracruz because of the welcome they received from Herrera. And thanks to this, Los Zetas have gradually established themselves as one of Mexico's most feared organized crime groups.

In 2013, the magazine Forbes included Fidel Herrera on its list of the “Ten most corrupt Mexicans.” Two years later, President Enrique Peña Nieto appointed Herrera as Mexico's consul in Barcelona, a decision that sparked an outcry in both Mexico and Spain.

In 2009 and 2010, journalists were often threatened but rarely murdered. Although a poor manager, Governor Herrera wielded unparalleled power and influence in Veracruz thanks to his links with the cartels and a “generous” distribution of public funds.

But by the time Herrera handed over the governorship to one of his aides, Javier Duarte, in 2010, Veracruz had become Mexico's third most indebted state. With fewer public funds at his disposal, Duarte found that his hands were tied vis-à-vis the cartels. In particular, he was unable to control Los Zetas, who infiltrated the entire state apparatus and became very active in Veracruz politics.

In this troubled environment, the most subtle criticism or apparently insignificant photo could annoy the hidden powers and elicit a harsh reaction. Journalists were now on the frontline. They had to live with constant threats, intimidation, tailing and arbitrary arrest, usually by the local (state) police and law enforcement agencies with no awareness or understanding of the concept of free speech and journalistic principles. A semi-official unit of “*informantes*” (paid informers) was even created to spy on journalists who had been blacklisted for being overly critical.

JOURNALISM, A DYING PROFESSION IN NEARBY STATES

Influential organized crime, widespread corruption and a high level of violence against the media are not unique to Veracruz. Tamaulipas, the Gulf of Mexico state between Veracruz and the US border, is particularly stricken by these problems. Journalism has almost ceased to exist in this state of 3 million inhabitants. For fear of being threatened, physically attacked or murdered, the few people still practicing this profession put out almost no domestic news reports that are not based on official statements from the authorities. The situation is only a little better in the states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Michoacán and Oaxaca.

The media had to cope with an additional danger: their use by the cartels. The gangs had acquired the habit of leaving messages to their rivals at the scenes of their crimes and counted on the media to report these messages. Media outlets that failed or refused to cooperate had to beware the consequences.

Execution-style killings of journalists began being reported within months of Duarte's installation and quickly increased in frequency. The initial targets were journalists who covered the links between organized crime and politicians, took too much interest in the disturbing increase in disappearances, or demanded justice too loudly. Other journalists condemned and protested against the killings of their colleagues in vain. Instead of carrying out proper investigations, the police just stepped up surveillance and intimidation of the journalists who protested the loudest and longest.

In response to a constant outcry, the Veracruz authorities finally created the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (CEAPP) in 2012 with the aim of "coming to the aid and guaranteeing the physical safety of journalists" and enabling them to work with greater confidence. These were fine promises but, four years after its creation, the commission is widely regarded as ineffective and lacking the necessary autonomy.

Mexico's politicians often loudly proclaim their commitment to free speech and media freedom. President Enrique Peña Nieto held forth at great length on the subject in May 2015, for example, declaring his "*complete commitment to Mexicans' freedom of expression and right to information*" and adding that "*the free expression of ideas and the right to be correctly informed are fundamental for consolidating our democracy and accelerating our progress.*" At the start of 2017, it is nonetheless as dangerous as ever to be a journalist in Mexico.

MEXICO SUBJECT TO OAS RULES

As a member the Organization of American States (OAS), Mexico is subject to its rules, and the OAS has issued a Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression that says: "*The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.*"

MIGUEL ÁNGEL YUNES, BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

After 88 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the Veracruz gubernatorial election of 4 June 2016 was won by Miguel Ángel Yunes, 63, a former PRI member now representing the National Action Party (PAN) in alliance with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Elected for a term that was reduced from the usual six years to two (so that the next gubernatorial election coincides with the 2018 presidential elections), he took office on 1 December.

Doubts have already been voiced about the new governor's probity. A teachers union, the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), accused him a few months ago of illegal enrichment and money laundering. In 2004, he was accused of being linked to a pedophile network, a claim made by the journalist Lydia Cacho in her book *Los Demonios del Edén* (Eden's Demons). Cacho had to flee the country temporarily because of the anonymous death threats that followed its publication.

Yunes nowadays seems to be trying at all costs to differentiate himself from his predecessor. Instead of threatening journalists and telling them to *"behave,"* as Duarte did in 2015, Yunes promised in one of his first post-election addresses that *"a new effort will be made ensure that freedom of expression and journalists have all the guarantees envisaged in the Constitution, without any kind of interference in editorial policies."* He added: *"Journalists will have our full support, they will be able to practice their profession freely, and Veracruz will no longer be the most dangerous place for this noble activity."* He also announced the creation of a "Truth Commission" to investigate the many disappearances of Veracruz residents in recent years. His promises are encouraging but seem ambitious, especially as he has only two years to get things done.



→ Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares,
Veracruz's governor since
1 December 2016
©D.R. / FORMATO SIETE

2

A JOURNALIST'S LOT

IN VERACRUZ

What with intimidation, harassment, death threats, abduction, disappearances and murder, journalists are sick with fear in Veracruz. The threats to them and their families come from all sides and may take many different forms including a masked gangster, a law enforcement officer and a plainclothes policeman.

1 - THE STATE, BIGGEST THREAT TO JOURNALISTS

In the course of the interviews that RSF conducted in Xalapa, the Veracruz state capital, it quickly became clear that it is the state, not the cartels, that pose the biggest threat to journalists. Javier Duarte established a reign of terror for journalists throughout his six years as governor, from 2010 to 2016, in a climate of such impunity that he was able to openly and publicly threaten the media without ever being held to account.



Hugo Cruz Ojeda

"We've never received threats from the narcos, we've not acquainted with them," said Hugo Cruz Ojeda, a journalist with the magazine *Rotativa*. *"They are not the ones who scare me. The persecution comes from the system: the politicians and the government. They are the ones who send policemen, in uniform or plain clothes, to follow me in the street."* Cruz, who saw a colleague murdered in 2012, often writes articles about the threats to the media in Xalapa and, as a result, is routinely subjected to harassment and intimidation. *"Journalism is the most vulnerable profession in Xalapa,"* he said.

This was confirmed by Melina Zurita, an AFP correspondent and reporter for *Grupo Radio Centro*. While covering the use of force to break up a demonstration by teachers on 14 September 2013, she and four colleagues, including Ruben Espinosa, a photographer murdered in July 2015, were beaten, arrested, jailed and interrogated by the local police, and their equipment was confiscated. But this unprecedented act of violence was just the start of long ordeal for Zurita.

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Local journalists lack the necessary organizational structures and the material and financial resources to practice their profession properly. To earn enough to live decently, journalists are forced to work for several media outlets at the same time. Some combine reporting with salaried jobs outside journalism in order to supplement their income.



→ 28 April 2013 in Xalapa, the capital of Veracruz: Event marking the first anniversary of journalist Regina Martínez's murder
©AFP PHOTO/SERGIO HERNANDEZ VEGA

Seventeen journalists were killed from 2010 to 2016. None of these murders has been solved.

"I was constantly followed and kept under surveillance," Zurita said. *"The government's aim is to put journalists in a state of permanent tension."* And thereby prevent them from working properly. Zurita ended up having to leave Veracruz in order to recover and resume writing. *"It was very hard for me to regain my emotional stability and motivate myself to go back to work,"* she added, still visibly affected by the years of anxiety. The intense harassment had been designed not only to silence her but also break her psychologically.



Melina Zurita

To judge from all the interviews with Veracruz journalists, such brutal and archaic practices are common. But they intensify and become even more widespread in the run-up to elections, when all of the state's representatives – mayors, federal parliamentarians, local parliamentarians and municipal councillors – become potential sources of aggression against the media.

María Elena Ferral, a political reporter for the *Sol de Tampico* and *Diario de Xalapa* newspapers, discovered this in April 2016. While having lunch with her family in a restaurant in Papantla, a city in the north of the state, she was threatened by a PRI candidate for the state parliament to whose murky past she had dedicated several articles. She filed complaints about his death threats but no action was ever taken. The passivity of the police does not surprise journalists and human rights groups, given the level of corruption within Veracruz's law enforcement and judicial systems (see "Justice system foundering on impunity"). Bereft of any protection, Ferral stopped covering anything remotely to do with the PRI. Thereafter, *"the threats stopped,"* she added.

There are countless similar stories of threats, harassment and physical attacks. *"In 15 years of experience, I've never seen such a complex situation as during Javier Duarte's mandate,"* said Noé Zavaleta, the national news magazine Proceso's correspondent in Veracruz. He replaced Regina Martínez, who was brutally murdered in 2012. Zavaleta has been subjected to countless threats, especially on social networks, intense online harassment and several intimidation attempts. In a book published in July 2016, *El Infierno de Javier Duarte*, (Javier Duarte's Hell), he sheds light on the many cases of embezzlement that occurred under Duarte.



Noé Zavaleta

“Veracruz reporters face three enemies, the government, organized crime and their own colleagues,” Zavaleta said. “There are (...) journalists who serve the government’s interests, [others] who call the mayor or governor ‘boss’ or ‘chief.’ And there are those who, although still a minority, are coopted or bought by the drug traffickers or have no choice but to enter into their service.” The situation has become so pernicious that journalists end up mistrusting each other.

2 - CARTEL REIGN OF TERROR

While the authorities play the dominant role in the hostile environment for the media in Veracruz, the cartels are not far behind. They are regarded in Veracruz as the armed wing of the politicians but they readily act on their own initiative when journalists get too interested in their affairs. *“If you impact organized crime’s interests, they will start by threatening you but if you don’t stop, they will come looking for you straight away,”* Zavaleta said.

Many journalists have been gunned down by drug traffickers. They include Victor Manuel Báez Chino, the editor of *ReporterosPoliciacos.mx*, a news website specializing in organized crime. His body was found in the very centre of Xalapa on 13 June 2012, shortly after he was kidnapped. He was clearly murdered by Los Zetas, according to one of his colleagues now living in Mexico City, who we will call María. In 2012, Los Zetas were waging a ruthless war against El Golfo, a rival cartel that had long been established in this region, and crime reporters were caught in the crossfire.

“Without any special protection and without knowing what we were exposing ourselves to, we began to cover these clashes and to report the messages that were being left

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Monterrey, 15 February 2012: Arrest of 14 members of the Los Zetas cartel

©AFP PHOTO / Julio Cesar Aguilar





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16 August 2015: Demonstration by journalists and activists in Mexico City, a few days after Rubén Espinosa's murder

© AFP PHOTO / YURI CORTEZ



→
9 January 2015: Journalists protest on the streets of Xalapa after the disappearance Moisés Sánchez Cerezo, whose body was found a few days later

© AFP PHOTO / SERGIO HERNANDEZ

beside the bodies,” María said. “The cartels communicated with each other by means of the messages they left at the scenes of their crimes. At first, we didn’t realize this might put us in danger.” The cartels soon began to insist that journalists publish their messages or risk being murdered or having members of their families murdered.

Since then, Los Zetas have acquired so much influence and have forged such close ties with the authorities that it is often hard to distinguish between them and to know who – the authorities or organized crime – is pulling the strings of the terror against the media. This was confirmed by Sandra Segura, a journalist based in the eastern port city of Veracruz. She writes a column called “La araña en el Palacio” (Spider in the Palace) for the newspaper *Notiver* in which she criticizes politicians, corruption, violent crime and disappearances.

Although a seasoned reporter who has worked for *Notiver* for more than 20 years, Segura does not dare pronounce the words “Los Zetas.” To refer to the cartel, she discreetly traces the letter Z with a finger on a table. Since 2013, she has lived in fear of being watched or, worse still, kidnapped, tortured and murdered. In 2013, she wrote a story for *Notiver* about a case of corruption involving former Veracruz governor Fidel Herrera and, more importantly, Los Zetas money launderer Francisco Colorado Cessa.

Two days later, she received three anonymous phone calls warning her to stop criticizing the government and the justice ministry. The callers all ended by making death threats against her and her husband. She wondered whether Los Zetas were behind the calls. And if they were, were they acting as the governor’s henchmen or on their account? Segura never found out. She filed a complaint but the investigation went nowhere. The police said it was impossible to trace the calls. After new threats in April 2016, she filed another complaint and discovered there was no record of the one she had made three years before. *“It saddens me to see that the justice system can act like this with complete impunity,”* she said. *“These officials think they own people’s lives.”*

3 - DEADLY ISOLATION OF VERACRUZ'S JOURNALISTS

Trapped between an oppressive state, extremely violent drug traffickers and an ineffective and corrupt justice system, Veracruz's journalists cannot count on anyone. Terrorized and powerless, they are only too often faced with the choice between exile and silence.

"I am often forced to censor myself for safety reasons, because I must protect my family," Revista Rotativa journalist Hugo Cruz Ojeda said. "But I've never considered leaving Veracruz. The violence continues but the fear gradually fades." And that is sometimes the moment when the danger is greatest.

This is why many journalists do leave Veracruz. Isolated and overwhelmed by guilt about making loved-ones pay for their commitment, they end up going somewhere far from their families, homes and lives. The *ReporterosPoliciacos.mx* reporter María fled in 2012 after her editor's murder because of growing threats not only to herself but also her mother. With the help of NGOs, she spent several months hiding in a refuge. Four years later, she has still not gone back to Veracruz. She is now based in Mexico City, where she is trying to rebuild her life. Despite the deep psychological scars, she wants to work as a journalist again. But it is not easy in a city where she knows no one aside from the support networks. *"But ceasing to do journalism would be to concede that the cartels were right, it would be a victory for them,"* she said.

Sandra Segura, the *Notiver* crime and court reporter in Veracruz, also felt very alone. When the cartels began targeting her, her editor temporarily removed her from covering anything related to local politics and he contacted state law enforcement on her behalf. She initially agreed to have a permanent escort of two police officers, who she had to feed and house. But she forsook the protection after a month for lack of money and space in her apartment. She felt completely helpless, but could only talk about it with a few close friends and colleagues. Far from lending a sympathetic ear, most of her fellow journalists in Veracruz were indifferent to the nightmare that her life had become. Worse still, several went so far as to insinuate that she had brought these problems upon herself. *"Unlike Xalapa, there are no journalist collectives in Veracruz to organize solidarity,"* she said. She is now working again but the anxiety has never left her. Self-censorship can save lives, she added, as if acknowledging that little else could be done.

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8 October 2012:
Arrest of members of
the Los Zetas cartel in
Mexico City
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ESTRELLA



In Xalapa, the state capital, many local media reporters, freelancers and national media correspondents have formed support groups and online solidarity platforms. Abandoned by the state, they try to organize mutual solidarity and alert systems via apps such as Whatsapp and Telegram and free speech collectives such as Voz Alterna, run by journalist and activist Norma Trujillo. Some social network pages also function as a forum for journalists in danger. These forums play a vital role in combatting censorship and above all self-censorship. *“Each time one of our colleagues is killed, we have to get organized to circulate information, because the government does everything possible to keep it opaque,”* said *Grupo Radio Centro* reporter and AFP correspondent Melina Zurita.

After yet another murder of a journalist, the Veracruz state authorities finally created the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (CEAPP) on 18 December 2012. But it has fallen far short of its promise. Lacking in funds, unable to respond to the flood of requests, and too closely tied to the authorities, it inspires little confidence in journalists four years after its creation. *“I didn’t want official protection because I realized that the CEAPP didn’t work and I didn’t want to give them the opportunity to keep me under surveillance,”* said Benito Juárez Ramírez, *Al Calor Político*’s correspondent and publisher of the *Proyecto13.com* website. He is being targeted by the so-called “chupaductos,” armed groups specializing in stealing oil from pipelines in rural areas. *“I don’t trust this kind of commission,”* he added. *“It’s like being at the government’s mercy. I prefer to hire a private security guard, an armed bodyguard who accompanies me, someone I trust.”*

4 - JUSTICE SYSTEM FOUNDERING ON IMPUNITY

These personal accounts speak volumes about the level of police corruption and impunity prevailing in Veracruz and Mexico as a whole regarding crimes of violence against journalists. According to the CNDH, 90%* of attacks against media outlets, murders of journalists and enforced disappearances of journalists in Mexico have gone unpunished. Only 10% of the investigations led to convictions.

*Rate of impunity for murders of journalists:	Rate of impunity for disappearances of journalists:	Rate of impunity for attacks against media outlets:
90%	100%	100%

These alarming figures are indicative of the mistrust and hostility that characterize the attitude of the authorities towards journalists. The figures are extremely eloquent in Veracruz, where the impunity rate is close to 100%. No one has so far been convicted of any the 17 murders of journalists reported during Javier Duarte’s governorship. After the murder of *Proceso*’s Veracruz correspondent, Regina Martínez, on 28 April 2012, a suspect known as El Silva was arrested and sentenced to 38 years in prison. But the sentence was quashed a few months later, on 8 August 2013, because the state prosecutor decided that the evidence against him was based solely on a confession obtained under torture.

The case of El Silva is just one example among many. When investigations are carried out, they are usually very flawed. This has been the case with the investigation into the July 2015 murder of Rubén Espinosa Becerril, a 31-year-old freelance photojournalist and free speech advocate, one that raises many questions about the impartiality and professionalism of the Mexican police and judicial systems. Espinosa’s body was found in a Mexico City apartment on 31 July 2015 together with the bodies of four women. He had been tortured, mutilated and shot in the head. The four women had been tortured and sexually abused.



Rubén Espinosa Becerril

Espinosa began his career as a photographer in 2009, working first for Javier Duarte's election campaign and then for the Xalapa city hall. But he soon gave up working for the Veracruz bureaucracy and established himself as a freelance photoreporter. The turning point in his commitment to media freedom came in 2012, the year of Regina Martínez's murder. He began specializing in covering social movements and protests. And soon found himself subjected to an avalanche of threats and intimidation attempts.

He ignored the growing dangers and continued to work with enthusiasm, often supplying material to the magazine *Proceso*, the photo agency *Cuartoscuro* and the news website *AVC Noticias*. He also became active in local groups that defend journalists, including *Voz Alterna*, and his activism quickly established him as one of the faces of the grassroots opposition in Veracruz. Instead of being silenced by the acts of intimidation, he continued to speak out, going so far as to publicly accuse the governor of being behind various attacks against the media and himself.

Amid growing threats and surveillance he fled Xalapa in 2015 hoping to find at least a degree of safety in Mexico City. One of his friends, the human rights activist Nadia Vera, also decided to flee. Hers was one of the four bodies found in the Mexico City apartment alongside Espinosa's.

The horrific nature of these murders send a shock wave through Mexico and, in response to a public outcry, an investigation was launched. In late September 2015, three individuals who had been caught on surveillance cameras were identified, arrested and held pending trial. But since then the investigation has ground to a near halt. More than a year later, much remains to be explained, said the Espinosa family's lawyer, Leopoldo Maldonado, who RSF

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Mexico City, 16 August 2015: Demonstrators demand justice after Rubén Espinosa's murder

© AFP PHOTO/ Yuri CORTEZ



met in Mexico City. The prosecutor's office regards the three suspects as responsible for the multiple homicide but shows no interest in taking the investigation any further. *"But everything indicates that this was (...) an execution-style killing, which means that there were people who instigated it,"* Maldonado said.

The mounting public pressure has been ignored. And no action has been taken in response to the many requests filed by the lawyers of victims' families for the investigators to explore all avenues. There has so far been no sign that the police are considering the possibility that the murders were linked to Espinosa's journalistic work or to his and Vera's activism. On the contrary, various timely leaks to the media indicate that the police are working on the assumption that the motive was burglary. "Sources close to the investigation" have portrayed Espinosa as an addict under the influence of drugs at the time of his death. The aim, Maldonado said, is *"to stigmatize and criminalize the victims in order, in a way, to justify the crime."*

Nothing is being said about the contradictory testimony and inconsistencies, which justify a more thorough investigation. More than a year and a half after Espinosa's death, many questions remain unanswered.

Operating as an independent journalist in Veracruz is above all a permanent act of defiance and resistance to the multifaceted tyranny of the state and the cartels. The courage and abnegation displayed by many journalists cannot hide the worrying fact that, as a whole, they are in the process of disappearing in Veracruz. If no major, decisive political and judicial initiative is taken in the very near future, this state will join the list of news and information black holes, where no independent media outlet is able to operate.



3

HELL FOR THE

VICTIMS' FAMILIES

Every journalist gunned down in Veracruz is an immeasurable loss for journalism. But for the families, their deaths are always the start of a long and cruel ordeal.

They usually wait years in vain for the justice system to condemn the perpetrators and instigators of these murders. The silence of the judicial authorities and apathy of the police is often compounded by the imagination deployed by local officials in order to cover up a case or obfuscate its nature. Furthermore, demanding justice can be extremely dangerous in Veracruz. Aracely learned this too her cost after her brother, sister-in-law and nephew were all brutally murdered. During a meeting with RSF, she described her hellish ordeal for the first time.

1- SAYING NOTHING: MILO VELA'S MURDER

Aracely's brother, Miguel Ángel López Velasco, was murdered together his wife and son in the city of Veracruz on 20 June 2011. He was a *Notiver* crime reporter and outspoken columnist who used the pen-name of Milo Vela and who had written a book about drug trafficking entitled "*Todos están adentro*" (They're all in it).

Aracely, who was a law enforcement officer at the time, quickly noticed many irregularities in the investigation into this triple murder. For example, no security cordon was set up around the house where it took place. The statements of the neighbours were not very plausible. They all said they had heard nothing. "*How is this possible, when there were bursts of gunfire?*" she said. "*A few days after the massacre, I went back to clean the house and there were still bullet casings of various calibres – 39 and 9 mm – on the floor, and pieces of teeth.*" Aracely paused her horrifying account when her mother came into the room.

"The idea that members of the police were involved in this crime never left me," she said. She is also convinced that the Duarte government had a hand in the murders. But she never shared her suspicions with the investigators. "*You took the right decision because, if you'd spoken, they would definitely have killed you as well,*" a former senior police officer told her when she confided in him at an event held to pay tribute to her brother. "*We had no choice but to remain silent,*" she said. "*And believe me, that really hurt. But what could we do?*"

Plagued by many unanswered questions, Aracely found herself alone and helpless in this tragedy. She was summoned for questioning only once by the Attorney-General's Office (PGR). Nothing happened after that meeting. No progress was made in the investigation. In the ensuing five years, no one has been arrested and no wanted notice has been issued for any suspect.

Aracely nowadays alternates between fear and incomprehension. *"I knew that Milo was taking a risk with what he wrote. But why did they kill his wife and son as well?"* She is frustrated by her inability to do anything. Seeking reparations would be impossible. It would be too dangerous.

Although the Veracruz State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists was created shortly after this triple murder, it never contacted Aracely or anyone else in the family. However, with the help of RSF's Mexico correspondent, Balbina Flores, Aracely received assistance from the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, which arranged police patrol visits, surveillance cameras, reinforced locks on her home and a panic button. The police patrol visits have now ended.

Aracely had to remain silent in order to survive and protect her family. But her silence has been eating away at her for more than five years. Like the families of other victims, she is now pinning her hopes on the new Veracruz government. Above all, she is hoping for the appointment of a new state prosecutor in order to ask for the investigation to be reopened. And to finally gets some answers.

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3 August 2015: Journalists lay their cameras beside Rubén Espinosa's grave on the day of his funeral in Mexico City

© AFP PHOTO / ALFREDO ESTRELLA



2 - RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH GREGORIO JIMÉNEZ'S KILLERS

In Veracruz's poorest towns, families have to come to terms with not only the widespread corruption but also with the extreme brutality of the cartels, which terrorize the population. Lacking funds and support, they often abandon any attempt to obtain justice and continue to rub shoulders with the gangs that murdered their loved-ones.


This is the torture constantly endured by Carmen Hernández, the widow of Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, a crime reporter based in Coatzacoalcos, a town in the south of the state. Jiménez, who worked for *Notisur* and had previously worked for the newspapers *Liberal del Sur* and *En la Red*, was kidnapped by three masked gunmen near his home in the Coatzacoalcos suburb of Villa Allende on 5 February 2014. Six days later, his headless body was found with two other bodies in a clandestine grave near Las Choapas, a few kilometres outside Coatzacoalcos.

The investigation into his murder was conducted by both the Veracruz prosecutor's office and the Federal Attorney-General's Office (PGR). Five individuals were quickly arrested on suspicion of being the perpetrators. Teresa, a neighbour of Carmen thought to be linked to Los Zetas, was then arrested on suspicion of having masterminded the murder. The investigators concluded that the suspected perpetrators were linked to Los Zetas, the cartel believed to have been responsible for the crimes Jiménez had covered in his last articles for Notisur. Despite the clear link between his work and his death, more than two years have gone by without anyone being brought to trial and convicted.

During the weeks that followed the murder, Carmen and her children were given a safe refuge in Xalapa, the state capital, by the CEAPP (the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists). But now she is back in Coatzacoalcos, where she is permanently protected by two bodyguards.

For Carmen, her existence is now a torture. *"I live in fear," she said "One of my sons is receiving psychiatric treatment. He was 14 when it happened (...) All I ask is for justice to be done. When the sentence is pronounced, I will leave this place."*

According to the Federal Attorney-General's Office, three other individuals who were linked to Jiménez's murder and who are wanted by the authorities pose a potential threat to Carmen and her family. The FEADLE (Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression) has meanwhile not been in contact with Carmen for more than a year. Carmen is trying to rebuild her life with difficulty. One of Jiménez's sons from a previous relationship has fallen under the influence of Los Zetas and lives in the same neighbourhood. He often threatens Carmen, her children and his own brother with the same fate as Jiménez.



4

PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS

MANY BUT INEFFECTIVE

Mexico is paradoxically equipped with an impressive array of mechanisms and laws for protecting media personnel. The figures presented in this report unfortunately evince the glaring ineffectiveness of these mechanisms and the failure of the authorities to stem the violence against journalists.

1. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Four entities of different kinds have been charged with guaranteeing the safety of journalists:



- **THE FEADLE** : the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (in Spanish, Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos cometidos en contra de la Libertad de Expresión).

Created in 2006 and initially called the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists (FEDF), the FEADLE is an offshoot of the Federal Attorney-General's Office (PGR). It lacks the necessary personnel, funding and political will to deal quickly and effectively with the complaints it receives. When it finally prepares cases and takes them to court, they are only too often rejected by the judge on the grounds of being legally flawed.

There is also a permanent conflict between federal and local (state-level) entities (see below). Crimes against journalists can be handled at the federal level but most of them are handled directly at the local level and, as most of these crimes have been committed by state agents, cases of impunity are legion. The countless cases of corruption and collusion between police and judicial officials, which are especially visible at the local level, fuel the vicious cycle of impunity. Investigators are directly linked to the police officers – the principal agents of violence against journalists – and are close to local government officials, who are themselves close to judicial officials.

“In Mexico, the judiciary's independence with respect to the executive and the legislature exists only on paper,” said Victor Ruiz Arrazola, a journalist and member of the consultative committee of the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Since 8 October 2013 – even before the FEADLE's prerogatives were expanded and incorporated into Mexico's constitution – civil society organizations that defend journalists have been calling for crimes against the media to be investigated at the federal level and for the federal justice system to have sole decision-making authority over such cases, so that they are handled in a more neutral manner. This request has so far been ignored and has yet to be added to the agenda of the Mexican Congress for discussion.



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SEGOB (interior ministry) headquarters in Mexico City
© D.R./ GRANDES CASAS DE MÉXICO



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CNDH president Luis Raúl González Pérez
© D.R./ EL SOL DE MEXICO

- **THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (CNDH) VIA:**

- **The Programme for Offences against Journalists and Civil Defenders of Human Rights (*Programa de Agravios a Periodistas y Defensores Civiles de Derechos Humanos*)**

- **Alert Number 6**

Founded in 1992, the CNDH is a governmental body with legal, organizational and financial autonomy. It is headed and run by a president and a consultative council with ten members, who are all appointed by the federal senate.

The CNDH receives complaints from journalists in danger via its special programme for journalists and human rights defenders. When state agents are responsible for the acts of aggression against journalists, the Commission can issue recommendations but they are not binding.

The decision on whether to take action in response to a complaint depends on a range of somewhat vague criteria that include the plaintiff's adaptability and receptiveness, and whether or not the Commission determines that an actual human rights violation has taken place.

Alert Number 6 is an emergency programme within the CNDH that issues public notices when a journalist is in danger or has been the victim of an act of aggression. It has 16 branches around the country and communicates with the local human rights commissions. Its members get in contact with the victim or the victim's family or loved-ones, and with local, municipal or federal officials who are likely to know the context or be in a position to offer assistance to the journalist.

It should be pointed out that individual states in Mexico can set up their own local human rights commissions that are independent of the CNDH. These local commissions have managerial, budgetary and legal autonomy and control their own assets. And they may also decide to address the issues of journalists' safety.

- **THE FEDERAL MECHANISM FOR PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS**

(Mecanismo Federal de Protección a Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas), an offshoot of the interior ministry.

In response to the growing number of attacks on journalists throughout the country, the Federal Mechanism was launched in 2012 with the aim of having a flexible, rapid and reliable entity that can provide preventive protection to journalists in danger without their being obliged to submit a formal request to the authorities.

It consists of three units: one for receiving complaints and for "rapid reaction," one for risk evaluation, and one for surveillance and analysis. These units can receive protection requests, conduct risk analysis and, when deemed appropriate, decide to implement protective measures (such as police patrol visits, panic buttons and the installation of surveillance cameras).

The Mechanism is overseen by a special committee, called the *Junta del Gobierno* (governing board), that consists of a four-member consultative council (two journalists and two human rights defenders) and a representative from each of the following entities: the FEADLE, the SEGOB (interior ministry), the National Security Commission and the foreign ministry.

Despite having such a wide range of representatives on its board, the four-year-old Mechanism has yet to prove itself and is trusted little by journalists. The assistance it provides to victims is either too late or inappropriate. The frequent staff turnover at all levels also hampers the provision of effective assistance.

Although every member of the *Junta del Gobierno* has a say, it does not function in a collegial manner and the level of dialogue between the various institutions is poor, with the result that decisions are often taken without full knowledge of the context, to the detriment of the plaintiffs.

Under an agreement signed with SEGOB in 2014, *Freedom House* has been training the Mechanism's personnel in risk analysis. This has led to changes in methodology and work systems, and to improvements in use of time and human resources. Nonetheless, journalists and human rights defenders still do not trust the Mechanism.

Finally, although a legally established entity, the Mechanism still lacks the necessary speed and flexibility to be able to respond effectively to the complaints it receives.

• **THE CEAV: THE EXECUTIVE COMMISSION FOR ATTENDING TO VICTIMS**
(in Spanish, Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas)

Created at the initiative of civil society organizations, the CEAV is an autonomous body tasked with assisting individuals (of all professions) whose basic rights have been violated in connection with their work. It concentrates on providing victims with assistance and financial compensation. It has so far helped few journalists.

A decree under which the CEAV is to be overhauled in order to make it more effective was published in the Federal Official Gazette (DOF) on 3 January 2017.

In general, these federal entities do not communicate sufficiently among themselves and are governed by their own laws and internal regulations. There are no provisions in the public administration under which they can be made to dialogue with each other. The Federal Mechanism, the FEADLE and the CNDH are linked only through the Junta del Gobierno, which only address specific cases.

IMPOSSIBLE TO RECEIVE LOCAL AND NATIONAL PROTECTION AT THE SAME TIME

Journalists needing protection should be aware that the law creating the Federal Mechanism stipulates that a beneficiary cannot at the same time be the beneficiary of a local assistance mechanism. If necessary, journalists must forgo local protection to receive federal protection. The aim is to avoid duplication and not use public resources unnecessarily, and to avoid conflicts between different jurisdictions. Mexico's states maintain a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the federal authorities.

2. AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Several Mexican states – Baja California, Campeche, Colima, Chihuahua, Hidalgo, Morelos, Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Quintana Roo and Mexico City – now have legislation that provides for a local mechanism for protecting journalists. Nonetheless, in practice, these mechanisms are currently functioning only in Veracruz, Morelos and Mexico City, and in a still very limited manner in these three states.

• IN VERACRUZ STATE

The law establishing the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (in Spanish, Comisión Estatal para la Atención y Protección de los Periodistas or CEAPP) was promulgated by the state of Veracruz on 3 December 2012.

Endowed with operational, budgetary and managerial autonomy, the CEAPP is tasked with *“coming to the aid of journalists, ensuring their physical safety and promoting the conditions that allow journalism to be practiced freely, with full respect for the right to information and freedom of expression.”*

The CEAPP undertakes to:

- **grant appropriate attention and protection** measures for dealing with threats or imminent dangers to journalists in the course of their work
- **ask the competent authorities** to implement these measures
- **denounce state officials** who do not respect the laws that are in force.

It is run by an executive secretary and eight commissioners, who are proposed by the governor and are elected by the state legislature.

After four years of existence, the CEAPP has also yet to win the trust of journalists, who for the most part think it is too closely linked to the local political class and lacks the necessary autonomy from the governor and his staff.

The CEAPP was given a new leadership on 22 December 2016. The new president, Ana Laura Pérez Mendoza, and the new executive secretary, Jorge Morales, are both journalists who are committed to defending freedom of expression in Veracruz. They have expressed their determination to overhaul the CEAPP so that it really helps journalists and gains their trust.



→ CEAPP headquarters in Xalapa, Veracruz

- **IN MORELOS STATE**

The Morelos state mechanism for protecting journalists was set up in 2012 as a result of an accord between journalists' associations and members of the state administration. It is run by a consultative council consisting of representatives of state law enforcement and the judicial system.

Several journalists' associations participated in the mechanism's creation but pulled out at the end of 2015 because it lacked resources and because local politicians showed no interest in supporting it. The programme is regarded as very ineffective and has received very few requests from journalists

- **IN MEXICO CITY**

Mexico's Federal District (Mexico City) promulgated a law for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists on 10 August 2015. Recognizing the promotion and defence of journalism and human rights as activities in the public interest, the law declares its goals to be guaranteeing the physical, psychological, moral and economic integrity of journalists who are in danger, and guaranteeing the same rights and protection for their families and co-workers. Eighteen months later, the law is still far from achieving these goals because its mechanism is not yet operational. Its budget, internal regulations, a description of the scope of its activities and the composition of its consultative council have still not been published. Furthermore, the CNDH has appealed to the federal supreme court asking for the law to be declared unconstitutional on discriminatory grounds, because it would only protect journalists who are experienced and have a press card.



5

RSF'S

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with Mexico's constitution and international obligations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

1. REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

for Mexico's federal authorities and entities

- Enforce respect for the rule of law throughout the country and step up efforts to combat corruption and organized crime.
- Guarantee respect for fundamental freedoms including respect for media freedom and the public's right of access to information.
- Ensure better implementation and coordination of the mechanisms for protecting journalists and step up the fight against impunity and abuses against journalists, including abuses by cartels and by federal and local government representatives.
- Systematically establish protective measures for threatened journalists and their families.
- Provide more financial and human resources to the FEADLE, the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, and the CEAV.

the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE)

- Provide the public with information about the cases it handles, including as much detail as possible about the types of attacks and violations, profiles of the victims and so on.
- Provide accurate information about the number of investigations carried out and, above all, about the number of investigations leading to the arrest and prosecution of those responsible by the relevant federal and local courts.
- Recruit qualified personnel who have been given training in free speech issues, and psychologists whose duties would include handling direct contact with victims.
- Set up local branches of the FEADLE in the most dangerous states for journalists. These local branches should work in coordination with the units of the local public prosecutor's offices that specialize in free speech issues.
- When there are grounds for suspecting that local public officials have participated in abuses and attacks against journalists, systematically take over and conduct investigations instead of just cooperating with local investigations.
- Ensure proper reparation of the damage inflicted on victims.
- In cases of enforced disappearance, ensure that the investigation and the legal situation of the family fully comply with international rules.

the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

- Quickly and systematically establish protective measures for journalists who have been threatened and who are in danger.
- Give the Mechanism's beneficiaries more advanced warning about envisaged measures in order to allow them time to make observations and to provide the information necessary for case analysis; take preventive action specifically for journalists.
- Refrain from rotating personnel in and out of the Mechanism at both the management and executive levels, and especially the personnel responsible for risk analysis.
- Improve and speed up communication between federal government representatives, the consultative council's members and the Mechanism's beneficiaries, encouraging collegial decision-making without ever losing sight of the victims' overriding interests.

the Executive Commission for Attending to Victims (CEAV)

- Create, within the Commission, a department that is dedicated solely to journalists who are the victims of attacks and aggression in connection with their work.
- Respond effectively to the needs of the families of missing or murdered journalists, as envisaged in the law under which the commission was created.

the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH)

- Be more transparent and publish more data about its activities.
- Handle the gravest cases more quickly and take charge of the cases that the local commissions have not addressed.
- Improve implementation of preventive protection measures for the families of victims and for demonstrations in support of threatened or murdered journalists.
- Devise a reparation plan jointly with victims and their representatives, follow up on recommendations, and inform the public whenever local authorities prevent their implementation.

2. RSF'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STATE OF VERACRUZ:

the new governor and his staff

- Establish a clear, effective and transparent policy for ensuring that journalists are safe and free to practice their profession in the state of Veracruz; do this by setting specific goals and by reinforcing the entities responsible for guaranteeing freedom of expression.
- Take swift action to urgently end impunity for crimes against journalists by ensuring enforcement of the sanctions laid down by the law and by undertaking to relaunch the investigations into the three disappearances of journalists and the 17 murders of journalists in Veracruz during Javier Duarte's governorship.
- Reinforce the CEAPP's financial and human resources, while guaranteeing its autonomy and independence.

the state legislature

- Regulate the use and allocation of state advertising in the media, with clear, precise, transparent and non-discriminatory goals.
- Overhaul legislation so that both judicial institutions and the CEAPP can carry out their duties properly.

the State Commission for the Attention and Protection of Journalists (CEAPP)

- Continue its efforts while being more transparent and providing the public with more information about its activities.
- Set up local branches in the remoter parts of the state in order to be able to react more quickly to emergencies.
- Recruit specialized personnel or train its staff in issues related to freedom of expression.
- Provide NGOs with regular reports about the results it has obtained.





→ 11 February, Mexico City:
Demonstrators pay tribute to
Veracruz's murdered journalists
© AFP PHOTO/RONALDO SCHEMIDT

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