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Latin America: Regional Conference on Media Safety Concludes with a Call for Local Action

MEXICO – ARTICLE 19 and the International News Safety Institute (INSI) are taking the lead on creating a culture of safety for journalists in the Americas.

At a joint conference held in Mexico City on 6-7 October, 140 journalists, media workers, trade unions and NGOs from 14 Latin American countries came together to tackle the endemic violence against the press in this region. It was the first time that key stakeholders had an opportunity to exchange information and ideas and build a plan of action.

The conference included special focus sessions on priority countries such as Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Mexico, and also covered safety guidelines and journalists' rights, working in high risk zones, risk management, dealing with trauma, and media solidarity in the Americas.

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to practise journalism. In the last eight years, at least 24 journalists have been killed doing their jobs and a further eight have been forcibly disappeared. None of the perpetrators of these crimes have been brought to justice.

Several days after the conference ended, Miguel Angel Villagómez was kidnapped and later found shot to death in the west of the country. He was the editor of a local newspaper, *La Noticia*.

The prevailing culture of impunity in Mexico and other countries in the region has a chilling effect on the right to freedom of expression and access to information, as established by international law. It is therefore vitally important to highlight themes such as security and self-protection.

Dario Ramirez, ARTICLE 19's Mexico and Central America Director, pointed out that: *"It is time for journalists' organizations, media owners and directors to assume their role in demanding the level of safety needed to truly exercise press freedom. Human rights organizations will know how to support and accompany them in the process, but the core demands have to come from within."*

This event provided an opportunity to bring safety concerns into the spotlight for the first time. Not only in Mexico but all-across the continent, the organizations involved considered it essential to focus their efforts on security training for journalists.

Immediate outcomes of the event include the establishment of an agreement between all participants to create a media security working group in Mexico, facilitated by

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ARTICLE 19 and INSI. It aims to identify practical solutions to the daily dangers that journalists and media professionals face and will be composed of journalists, editors and newspaper owners. In addition to this, a work plan to train 400 journalists and media workers in safety and quality journalism around Mexico was also developed.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Ricardo González, ricardo@article19.org or +55 1054 6500, extension 104
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.