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Americas - Mexico

State of the media

Year starts badly for Mexican journalists

18 February 2015

The western hemisphere's deadliest country, Mexico sinks deeper into violence by the day. Journalists are threatened, kidnapped and murdered with alarming impunity in the eastern state of Veracruz. News media are the targets of armed attacks in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas.

Reporters Without Borders offers an overview of the current situation of news and information providers in Mexico at the start of 2015

Although not in the throes of any armed conflict, Mexico is one of the world's most dangerous countries for media personnel. In 2014, it was the deadliest in the Americas, with three journalists killed in a clear connection with their work. A women blogger was also killed.

Collusion between organized crime and government officials or politicians poses a grave threat to news and information providers and obstructs the work of the police and judicial system at all levels. Two of the three journalists killed in 2014, [Octavio Rojas Hernández](#) in the southern state of Oaxaca and [Jorge Torres Palacio in Veracruz](#), were investigating links between officials and organized crime. So too was [María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio](#), a blogger killed in Tamaulipas.

News media are increasingly being targeted. A truck carrying copies of the newspaper *La Reforma* was riddled with bullets in the central state of Mexico on 15 February, injuring one person.

"Attacks on news and information providers are taking place at an alarming rate as 2015 gets under way," said Claire San Filippo, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"What are the Mexican authorities doing? Will they continue to look the other way as news outlets are forced to give up covering violence, drug trafficking and corruption, and as journalists flee the country? The authorities must end the almost total impunity that breeds fear and self-censorship. The inaction and complicity must stop."

Dangers in Veracruz state

The state of Veracruz is one of Mexico's most dangerous regions for journalists. They are often watched, threatened, harassed, physically attacked or killed if they dare to cover crime, drug cartels or corruption.

The figures speak for themselves. Since the start of 2010, four journalists have gone missing and 11 others have been killed, including [Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz](#) in February 2014 and [Moisés Sánchez Cerezo](#), whose death was confirmed by a DNA test on 5 February 2015.

The authorities try to deny the reality. Although the figures are indisputable, Veracruz officials have repeatedly misrepresented what is taking place. After Jiménez's death in 2014, Veracruz state interior minister Erick Lagos said it was probably a personal act of revenge or retaliation, and that it was "unacceptable" to link it to his journalistic work.

When Sánchez was kidnapped, the local authorities initially tried to deny that he was a journalist, saying he was a taxi driver who "just posted on social networks."

Ineffective justice. In both cases, the lack of cooperation between Veracruz officials (the state prosecutor's office) and federal officials (the Federal Prosecutor's office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression) has badly hurt the investigation and chances of the crimes ever being solved.

"We are worried because I have seen a series of irregularities in the investigation being conducted by the Veracruz state prosecutor's office," said Sánchez's son, Jorge Sánchez Ordóñez. "We don't trust the investigation."

Jiménez's widow, Carmela Hernández Osorio, also criticizes the local authorities. Her husband's murder is still unpunished a year later. Despite the protection provided by the Veracruz authorities, she has been threatened and intimidated three times and has requested protection under the federal mechanism for protecting human rights defenders and journalists.

Frequent threats. There is much tension and other journalists have been threatened. When Molotov cocktails were thrown at the *Heraldo de Córdoba* newspaper from a distance of less than a metre on 29 January, editor **Daniela Jácome** clearly feared another attempt to deny reality because she wrote in a Facebook post: "We demand that the authorities solve this case and not minimize what we have just undergone."

Threats have also been made against **Patricia Iveth Morales Ortiz**, a photographer with the *Imagen del Golfo* news agency and **Verónica Huerta**, who works for *AVC Noticias de Veracruz*. Huerta received a threatening message on 1 February. Alluding to Moisés Sánchez, it said: "Cow, it will be your turn after Moisés. We are watching you, bitch."

Inaction encouraging journalists to flee

Threats and violence against news providers and a failure to punish those responsible are not limited to Veracruz. According to the National Human Rights Commission, 89 percent of crimes against journalists go unpunished. Neither the Federal Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression nor the federal mechanism for protecting human rights defenders and journalists have managed to improve the situation. Police and judicial investigations are often closed quickly or are paralyzed by cumbersome bureaucratic procedures.

Because of the lack of an effective police and judicial system and the lack of effective protection, some journalists feel obliged to flee the country after receiving threats to themselves and their families.

This was the case with **Enrique Juárez**, the editor of *El Mañana*, a newspaper based in Matamoros, a city adjoining the US border in Tamaulipas state, after he was kidnapped and roughed up by gunmen for four hours on 4 February because of his coverage of the endemic violence in Matamoros and the frequent clashes between police and armed gangs.

The newspaper's management said he fled with his family to the United States in order to protect them. Regretting the deterrent effect of his abduction, the newspaper also announced that, as a safety measure, it would no longer provide any coverage of violence.

Two days later, a grenade attack on Matamoros-based *Televisa del Noreste* injured two of the TV station's security guards.

Moisés Villeda Rodríguez, a journalist based in Ciudad Juárez (in the northern state of Chihuahua) fled across the border seeking asylum in January after receiving threats in connection with articles about corruption that he wrote for the newspaper *El Mexicano*. One of the threats took the form of a dismembered cat that was left with a sign saying "Shut up!" outside a radio station where he worked.

The threats increased after the Chihuahua Journalists Forum nominated him for the José Vasconcelos Prize for a report entitled "*Shocking poverty versus offensive opulence*" about corruption and alleged collusion between government officials and drug traffickers. According to a Reporters Without Borders tally, he is the sixth Mexican journalist to have sought asylum in the United States since 2007.

By taking no action in response to acts of intimidation and violence against journalists (when not actually colluding or participating in them), the Mexican authorities give a blank check for violations of freedom of information.

The solution for Mexican journalists cannot be either to remain silent or to flee across the border to avoid violent reprisals. It is high time that the state assumed its responsibility for guaranteeing fundamental rights.

Mexico is ranked 148th out of 180 countries in [the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

