

MEXICO: 21 attacks against print journalists in the first four months of 2008: 3 killed, 1 disappeared, 4 threatened with death, 1 bomb threat against newspaper staff, 1 journalist threatened, 2 briefly detained, 6 attacked physically and 3 harassed.

BACKGROUND: Mexico continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world to work as a journalist. Print journalists are particularly at risk of violence; during the last six months of 2007 there were 25 attacks, ranging from killings and disappearances, to death threats and violence. Sadly, there have been almost as many attacks in the first four months of 2008 alone suggesting that the violence is escalating.

Government officials and the police are the major perpetrators. However, an estimated three out of every 10 attacks are linked to organised crime or so-called "parallel powers", particularly drug cartels in the north of the country. Consequently, journalists reporting on organised crime, drug trafficking and corruption are especially at risk.

Impunity reigns. Although the Mexican government created the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra Periodistas, FEADP) in early 2006, to date there have been no successful prosecutions. This is due in part to jurisdictional limitations: murder and assault are state rather than federal crimes, and the federal government has no automatic right to intervene.

POSITIVE NEWS: Arrest warrants against 5 public employees allegedly involved in the 2005 abduction and detention of author and social activist **Lydia Cacho Ribeiro** were issued by the Attorney General's Office in April 2008. The names of the suspects were not made public to prevent them from fleeing. This despite the Supreme Court of Justice's November 2007 ruling that the incident had not constituted a serious violation of Cacho's constitutional rights. On May 3 Press Freedom Day, Cacho was awarded the 2008 UNESCO/ Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

In March, a member of the Arellano Félix drug cartel was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the murder of editor **Jesús J. Blancornelas**, killed in 1997 after reporting on the cartel in the Tijuana-based magazine *Zeta*. In April, it was reported that four men, including a former police chief, had been sentenced to 11 years in prison for their part in the November 2004 murder of **Gregorio Rodríguez Hernández**, photographer for the newspaper *El Debate*.

Special instructions: In the case of Mexico, please be sure to send a copy of your letter to the Mexican Ambassador in Ottawa.

For RAN FAQs: www.pencanada.ca/programs/prison

Appeal letter:

His Excellency Felipe De Jesús Calderón Hinojosa
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Your Excellency:

I am a member of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, the writers' organization with 145 centres in 110 countries around the world.

PEN Canada welcomes the recent steps taken by the authorities to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against journalists, such as the arrest of a drug cartel member on suspicion of involvement in the 1997 murder of editor Jesús J. Blancornelas and the issue of arrest warrants against public employees allegedly involved in the 2005 abduction and detention of journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro.

However, I join my colleagues in expressing grave concern about the continuing impunity in the vast majority of crimes against print journalists and the escalation of such attacks in Mexico in 2008.

We urge you to instruct federal, state and municipal authorities to take concrete steps to protect the life and rights of print journalists in Mexico, end impunity and bring to justice those who murder, attack, threaten or intimidate journalists.

In particular, we urge you to strengthen the Special Prosecutors Office for Crimes against Journalists (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra Periodistas, FEADP) and grant it the required independence to investigate such crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice, and to make the murder and assault of journalists federal rather than state crimes.

Sincerely,

[your name and signature]

Please send copies to:

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Salutation: Señor Procurador General/Dear Attorney General

Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists
David Vega Vera
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Salutation: Señor Fiscal Especial/Dear Special Prosecutor

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