

Statement from the International Mission on Attacks against Journalists and Media

Mexico City, April 25, 2008 — Mexico has become the most dangerous country for journalists in the Americas. Because of this concern, from April 20 to 25, 2008, an international mission of 11 organisations for freedom of expression and the press visited Mexico to assess the situation of freedom of expression in the following three areas: impunity, safety & protection, and self-censorship. In the last eight years, at least 24 journalists and media workers have been killed, eight have disappeared and dozens have been threatened or attacked in direct reprisal for their work. The majority of these cases continue to be met with impunity, a situation that has led to a general state of self-censorship.

The international mission travelled to Mexico City and the states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, Sonora and Guerrero. The international mission met with: journalists, editors and media owners; the families of reporters who have been murdered or are missing; human rights organisations; federal and local authorities; the Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives of the European Union.

The main obstacles for the work of journalist are organised crime, corruption, lack of political will and the failure of the Mexican authorities to provide protection and security to journalists.

This international mission called upon Mexican authorities to undertake immediate measures to halt attacks against freedom of expression. There is an urgent need for the creation and reinforcement of protection mechanisms. There is also a need for the development of a legal framework that will strengthen the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists (FEDAP), grant it independence to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Moreover, it is necessary to federalise crimes against freedom of expression. It is important to remember that since FEDAP was created in 2006, 15 journalists have been killed in Mexico.

The international mission met with local and federal authorities in order to express concern, hear their official position and open channels for dialogue. Although most authorities were open to discussion, this mission is alarmed by the contradiction between the official claim of political will and the lack of concrete actions and results.

The international mission paid special attention to the victims and their families. It evaluated the status of their cases and explored alternatives for support. Their isolation is of particular concern. Among them are community radio stations and their members, who because of a lack of legal recognition are vulnerable. Authorities obstruct their work and do not recognize them as journalists.

The international mission was also concerned by the deteriorating labour and press union conditions of journalists, particularly in the case of freelancers. Journalists recognised the need to work together and build solidarity as part of a strategy to change this situation.

The international mission noted the concentration of media ownership in México and the distribution of official advertising, used for political ends to reward or punish the media.

These problems hinder the plurality of information and citizens' right to information. It is the obligation of the state to promote appropriate regulatory frameworks for these issues.

The international mission will issue a detailed report with findings and recommendations. It will include a comprehensive action plan for all stakeholders. Among them are local and federal authorities, who expressed their willingness to engage and develop concrete actions to combat impunity and promote freedom of expression in México.

This international mission is composed of: Article19; International Media Support (IMS); International Press Institute (IPI); World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC); The Rory Peck Trust; Reporters Without Borders (RSF); the International Federation of Journalists (FIP-IFJ); UNESCO; International News Safety Institute (INSI); the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA); the Open Society Institute (OSI), The Foundation for Liberty and Freedom of the Press (FLIP).