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About the Project: The Justice in Mexico Project is a research initiative hosted at the University of San Diego. The Justice in Mexico Project conducts and disseminates research on four broad areas: crime and violence; transparency and accountability; justice system reform; and human rights and civil society. The project receives generous financial support from the MacArthur Foundation. To make a financial contribution to our organization, please contact us at: justiceinmexico@sandiego.edu.

About the Report: The Justice in Mexico Project produces monthly news reports based on regular monitoring of international, national, and sub-national developments affecting the rule of law in Mexico. The project also provides periodic updates to its news blog and stores archives of past reports at http://www.justiceinmexico.org. This report was compiled by Cory Molzahn, Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodriguez, and David Shirk, with research and direct contributions from Gloria Gaona-Hernandez, Christopher Issel, Ruben Orosco, Harper Otawka, Sofia Ramirez, Marissa Rangel, and Alisson Shoffner. Any opinions expressed in attributions for this summary are those manifested in the media reports and op-ed pieces compiled herein, and not those of the University of San Diego, the Justice in Mexico Project, or its sponsors. Please report any questions, corrections, or concerns to justiceinmexico@sandiego.edu.

About the Cover: Protests break out across Mexico demanding justice and answers for the 43 disappeared normalista students from Iguala, Guerrero. Photo: Associated Press.

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Investigation continues into kidnapping of 43 education students by municipal police in Iguala, Guerrero

The state of Guerrero finds itself in a security crisis following the kidnapping of 43 education students in Iguala near the border with Morelos and Puebla in late September. According to initial reports from survivors of the incident, the students came under fire from police officers on September 26 as they were soliciting public contributions to help them purchase materials necessary for their studies. These hybrid demonstration-fundraisers are said to be relatively common in Guerrero, where students say the state’s education ministry does not sufficiently budget for supplies. Protestors often take possession of busses and trucks in these demonstrations, as was the case in Iguala on September 26, as demonstrators planned to take the march to Mexico City for an October 2 day of protest.

People present took to social media to report the incident, and two and a half hours later a second, unidentified group of gunmen surprised the collection of students, teachers, and reporters following a press conference about the initial incident. A third attack occurred after midnight involving a bus carrying the Los Avispones de Chilpancingo soccer team, leaving the driver and a 15-year old dead, along with a woman traveling in a taxi. In all, six are known to have died in the confrontations including three normalistas, identified as Daniel Solís Gallardo, Yosivani Guerrero, and Julio César Mondragón. It was initially reported that 57 students had been taken by municipal police, apparently financed by a local drug cartel, though 14 were quickly located. The teaching community was reminded of another incident in 2012 when two normalistas from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero died of wounds suffered in an attack from state and federal police as they were demonstrating to demand automatic employment in state schools, among other items.

About a week following the students’ disappearance, six graves were uncovered near where the students were taken containing the remains of 28 bodies, but authorities quickly released a statement that forensic exams demonstrated that they did not belong to the students. Nevertheless, it was this discovery that compelled the federal Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) to take over the investigation from its state-level counterpart in Guerrero.

There have been numerous arrests in connection with the September 26 attacks and disappearance of the 43 normalistas. On October 17 federal police arrested a man they say is the leader of the drug trafficking organization linked to the incident. Sidronio Casarrubias Salgado, accused of being the leader of the Guerreros Unidos criminal organization, was detained along with an alleged close associate on the highway leaving Mexico City. Guerreros Unidos is one of several groups that splintered from the now-defunct Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO). Their rival group in the area is Los Rojos, who Casarrubias was told by one of his principal operators was responsible for the September 26 protests. Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam said that Casarrubias’ arrest would help the investigations into what happened in Iguala to move forward. “I think that the detention [of Casarrubias] that we have today is the first of a new route of investigation that can get us closer to the truth more quickly and easily,” he said the day of the arrest. For his part, Casarrubias has denied giving any order to abduct or kill the students, but rather referred to them as “casualties,” according to Murillo Karam. Moreover, Karam said that Casarrubias admitted to paying municipal police salaries in Iguala, as well as in neighboring Cocula. In all, 36 police officers from Iguala and Cocula have been arrested in connection with the students’ disappearance. Murillo Karam added that 17 members of the Guerreros Unidos organization have also been arrested.

More recently, Former Iguala Mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez, who was removed from office by order of the Guerrero Senate, was identified along with his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, as the ones who ordered the municipal police to first attack the student demonstrators.
and then detain those remaining and transport them to the municipal police station, where they were allegedly handed over to members of organized crime. These claims, reported by Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office (PGR), originated from Casarrubias Salgado. He indicated that his gang acted against the students on the orders of María de los Ángeles, who was concerned that the protests would “sabotage” a presentation she was to give the same day on women in the workforce. Casarrubias indicated that María de los Ángeles was a “principle operator” of Guerreros Unidos from the municipal offices, alongside her husband and Public Security Secretary Felipe Flores Velázquez. In addition, Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam alleges that Abarca had paid Guerreros Unidos between $2 and $3 million pesos ($148,000 to $222,000 USD) for their services in the municipality, with $600,000 pesos ($44,489 USD) earmarked for the local police, for which the criminal organization was responsible for staffing. The whereabouts of Abarca and his wife, who has two brothers said to have been accountants for the Beltrán Leyva Organization, are unknown, and they have been deemed fugitives by the Mexican government. Abarca is also wanted in connection with the murder of social activist Arturo Hernández Cardona in May 2013—a crime Abarca has been widely accused of, and which he has denied.

Despite the arrests, demonstrations have broken out in Guerrero and far beyond to demand that authorities do more to locate the missing students. Protests in Guerrero spread to Mexico City on October 7 and then internationally to cities including London, Berlin, and Madrid. Estimates of the Mexico City demonstration ranged from an official number of 15,000 to reports from organizers of 30,000. Family members of the disappeared have been prominent in the aftermath of the disappearance, and parents, siblings, and other relatives of the disappeared joined in the march in Mexico City, which began at the Angel of Independence monument and ended at the Zócalo, the city’s central plaza, where they demonstrated in front of Mexico’s Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de Justicia) and the National Palace (Palacio Nacional). The march was led by members of the national educational workers organization Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE). Meanwhile, protests have continued in Guerrero, including one in the capital city of Chilpancingo where demonstrators lit fire to the state congressional building. Most recently a protest emerged in Acapulco on Friday, October 17, where thousands marched silently, including family members of the disappeared, who carried photographs of the missing students, breaking their silence only to call Governor Aguirre a murderer.

On the federal level, senators from the National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN) have proposed a federal government takeover of functions in Guerrero (desaparición de Poderes), a topic they hope the Senate will address on October 21. If that proposal receives enough votes to pass—Robertito Gil, president of the Justice Committee in the Senate, said that it has the support of 38 PAN senators—Governor Ángel Aguirre will be removed and replaced by a federal appointee. Business owners in the capital Chilpancingo have marched to demand that the Mexican Congress see the measure through.

Meanwhile, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, CIDH) has weighed in on the events in Iguala, as well as the apparent execution-style killings of suspected organized crime members by members of the Mexican Army in June in Tlatlaya, in the State of Mexico. CIDH Executive Secretary Emilio Álvarez Icaza said that the two events represent “a significant test for the Mexican state and its institutions.” Tlatlaya and Iguala bring into serious question the veracity of President Enrique Peña Nieto’s public policy, he added. The case of Tlatlaya emerged in the media in September, after a survivor of the incident came forward to claim that the 22 men who died were not killed in a shootout, as the National Defense Ministry (Secretaría de Defensa Nacional, Sedena) had originally reported. An investigation by the Associated Press later revealed evidence that at least eight of them had likely been killed execution-style while unarmed and at close range. Three members of the Army stand accused of homicide and one of covering up facts regarding the case. The secretary’s comments came shortly after the CIDH visited Mexico City regarding the incident in Iguala for a meeting with Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam, and President Peña Nieto’s legal advisor. Also present were parents of the disappeared and students. Álvarez Icaza said that it will soon be clear whether or not Mexico will be on the CIDH’s “black list” of troublesome countries appearing in its annual report.

Álvarez Icaza emphasized that Iguala is a case of forced disappearance in which state employees were involved, making the incident even more troubling. In August, the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Mexico office warned that Mexico faced a “critical situation in the area of disappearance of people.” It called on the Mexican government to recognize the authority of the UN’s
Committee on Enforced Disappearances as has been recommended by the UN’s Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, as well as its Human Rights Council have recommended. Human rights advocates also say that forced disappearances have been on the rise in Mexico during the Peña Nieto administration. Ximena Antillón, a researcher at Fundar Analysis Center, said that of the more than 22,000 documented cases over the past two administrations, around 12,500 came during the Calderón administration (2006-2012), while 9,700 have come since Peña Nieto took office in December 2012. If accurate, it would mean that in less than two years the Peña Nieto administration would have accumulated 78% of the forced disappearances that his predecessor accumulated over his six-year administration.

On October 30, a handwritten sign (narcomanta) appeared on the Iguala-Taxco highway affirming that the 43 disappeared students were still alive. Photo: El Siglo de Torreón.

In the meantime, the students remain missing, and investigators have focused the search for them in the area surrounding Iguala, including a garbage dump where human remains were reported to have been found. The investigation has also returned to mass graves that continue to surface nearby, which by October 25 had increased to ten such graves, containing a total of 38 bodies. The Mexican government has brought in Argentine forensic experts to help identify the remains. On October 30, an undisclosed number of graves containing an additional 14 human remains were then found in the Zitlala and Eduardo Neri municipalities. These had disintegrated to skeletons and showed gunshot wounds to the head, and likely belong to a number of people reported to have disappeared following armed conflicts between the Los Rojos and Los Ardillos gangs. On October 30, a large, handwritten sign (narcomanta) appeared on the Iguala-Taxco highway affirming that the 43 students were alive, and presumably signed by El Gil, one of Guerreros Unidos’ principle leaders. The narcomanta is directed to President Peña Nieto and promises that El Gil will turn himself over to authorities as soon as the 80% of Guerreros Unidos’ leadership structure—which it claims is made up of mayors from northern Guerrero and southern Morelos—is arrested.

Sources:


Solera, Claudia and Juan Pablo Reyes. “Claman por desaparecidos; marchan miles en México y otros países.” Milenio. October 9, 2014.


Homicides nationwide continue downward trend in 2014

According to Mexico’s National Public Security System (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, SNSP), there were 11,835 intentional homicide investigations opened between January and September of this year, a 14% decline from the previous nine-month period. Mexico is on track to reach 15,780 by the end of the year, which would represent the same decline from 2013. This year, the SNSP has begun tracking the number of victims involved in its investigations into homicides, extortions, and kidnappings. The SNSP registered 13,128 victims of intentional homicide between January and September, with an average of 1,358 during the third quarter of 2014. This compares with 1,509 during the first six months of the year. The State of Mexico (Estado de México) has registered the most intentional homicides with 1,704, followed by Guerrero (1,150) and Chihuahua (977).

Despite a nationwide downward trend in homicides, at least three states— the State of Mexico, Michoacán, and Tamaulipas— appear on track to exceed their intentional homicide totals for 2013, although Michoacán has seen a decline over the past three months, averaging about 79 victims per month, as compared with 111 during the first six months of the year. All three of these states have seen military and federal police-led operations in recent months to respond to worsening public security situations.
Likewise, the SNSP reports a decline in both extortions and kidnappings as compared with 2013 of 15% and 10% respectively. 4,961 investigations were opened into complaints of extortion from January through September, as compared with 6,384 over the previous nine months. Meanwhile, 1,128 investigations were opened into kidnappings between January and September, as compared with 1,299 over the previous nine months. It must be noted, however, that despite these apparent advancements, extortion and kidnapping are notoriously underreported in Mexico (cifra negra). For its part, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de la Estadística y Geografía, INEGI) estimates that just 1.3% of kidnappings and 1.5% of extortions are investigated. SNSP’s victimization data showed 1,529 victims of kidnappings involved in public prosecutor’s offices’ investigations in the first three quarters of 2014, and 4,988 victims of extortion.

Recent events in Guerrero have underscored some deficiencies in the SNSP’s reporting on incidences of crime, which depends on each state’s public prosecutor’s office disclosing investigations opened as well as the number of victims involved. As reported in Animal Político, the government of Guerrero did not include the 43 students who disappeared on September 26 in its figures for that month, with only nine victims of kidnapping reported for September. It also must be noted that unidentified bodies found in clandestine graves—like the 52 discovered in a yet undisclosed number of graves in Guerrero in October—are also not included in SNSP crime data, a fact that troubles Francisco Rivas, director general of the National Citizen Observatory (Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano). “Graves continue appearing, and they don’t tell us whose they are, but it also isn’t new. We indicated this last year, this constant discovery of graves should concern us,” he said.

Sources:


Peña Nieto administration takes down four prominent cartel members from four different cartels

The month of October saw several more key strikes against a variety of organized crime groups (OCGs) in Mexico, with four high-ranking cartel members from four different groups arrested in four different states, including one in Texas.

The string of arrests started early on in the month when Mexico’s Secretary of National Defense (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, SEDENA) confirmed the arrest of the presumed leader of the Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO), Héctor Beltrán Leyva. Beltrán Leyva, also known as “El H,” was detained on October 1 at a restaurant in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, along with BLO financial operator Germán Goyeneche Ortega. Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) led the operation—an operation also known has Hotel—, which was an 11-month intelligence gathering effort supported by Mexico’s Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas), Federal Police (Policía Federal, PF), and the Center of Investigation and National Security (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, CISEN). No shots were fired during the arrest.

El H became the leader of the Beltrán Leyva Organization in 2009 when his brother Arturo Beltrán Leyva, “El Barbas,” then-leader of the BLO, was killed by the Mexican Navy (Secretaría de Marina, SEMAR) in Cuernavaca, Morelos. His position as leader was reaffirmed following the Federal Police’s arrest of BLO’s second-in-command, Arnoldo Villa Sánchez, also known as René Calderón Sánchez, in April 2014 in Mexico City. El H has largely kept a low profile in the years since taking control, while continuing to maintain a
The Gulf Cartel (Cártel del Golfo, CDG) is one of the most important drug cartels in Mexico. According to experts cited in the New York Times, it was unusual that Sáenz-Tamez assumed the leadership role at such a young age, considering cartel leaders often have years, if not decades, of experience before taking over an organization. Nevertheless, he rose up quickly through the ranks, moving from lookout to regional boss—in charge of the GDG’s operations in Starr County, Texas, just west of McAllen and Edinburg—to the outright leader of the organization.

As such, Sáenz-Tamez was one of the top priority suspects named in May 2014 in the ongoing Tamaulipas security strategy being implemented by Mexico’s federal authorities and Federal Police. To avoid arrest, he relocated several times in the months since, bouncing between Reynosa and surrounding areas along the Tamaulipas-Texas border, including in the United States. Mexican government officials, who were speaking on the condition of anonymity, stated that the arrest was the result of the exchange of information between U.S. and Mexican agencies, and with Interpol.

Meanwhile across the border, Mexican officials were also busy on October 9, as they arrested Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, “El Viceroy,” the leader of the Juárez Cartel. Federal Police detained El Viceroy and two of his bodyguards during an operation in Torreón, Coahuila, conducted by the National Security Commission (Comisión Nacional de Seguridad, CNS). No shots were fired during the arrest, and authorities also seized two vehicles, one large and one small firearm, and communication equipment, which were passed to the Public Prosecutor’s Office (Ministerio Público Federal, MPF).

El Viceroy, who used a fake identification when police initially detained him, was wanted in both Mexico and the United States, with a reward for information leading to his arrest set at $30 million pesos ($2.23 million USD) and $5 million (USD), respectively. He faces charges of homicide, money laundering, and drug trafficking. According to Univisión, El Viceroy had some control and power in almost one-third of Mexico’s 32 states and Federal District (Distrito Federal, DF), as well as maintained control of important drug trafficking routes connecting the United States and Mexico, routes used specifically to transport cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana.

As one of the heads of the Juárez Cartel, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes led one of the most important cartels in Mexico. He played an important role with three of his brothers—Amado, Rodolfo, Alberto—in expanding the Juárez Cartel in the 1990s, trafficking drugs from South America to the United States, explains Excélsior. He then assumed his leadership role following the 1997 death of Amado Carrillo Fuentes, “El Señor de los Cielos,” El Viceroy’s brother and founder of the Juárez Cartel. Although he stepped down at one point due to
health reasons, El Viceroy nevertheless maintained a leading position in the Juárez Cartel, so much so that he recently represented the cartel at a meeting with leaders from three other prominent Mexican cartels—Los Zetas, Beltrán Leyva Organization, and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG). That meeting, held in June 2014, was viewed as the start of a possible alliance that may be growing among several of Mexico’s top organized crime groups (OCG), as they form a potential “cartel of cartels,” according to Reforma.

Although too early to tell, several media sources claim that the fall of El Viceroy marks the end of an era for the Juárez Cartel. Regardless, his arrest has been applauded by both U.S. and Mexican politicians, including the president of Mexico’s Chamber of Deputies, Silvano Aureoles Conejo, who recognized that El Viceroy’s takedown “gives the population confidence” that the Mexican government is making strides in its effort to destabilize organized crime groups and disrupt illicit activity.

Finally, just over one week after Comandante 103’s and El Viceroy’s arrests, federal and state officials delivered a blow to the Knights Templar Organization (Caballeros Templarios, KTO) with the capture of alleged leader Mario Alberto “El Tucán” Romero Rodríguez. Federal Police arrested Romero early in the morning on Saturday, October 18 in the well-known neighborhood of La Condesa in Mexico City. He was then presented to Mexico’s Office of Special Investigations on Organized Crime (Subprocuraduría Especializada en Investigación de Delincuencia Organizada, SEIDO), and has since been placed in holding in a La Condesa prison.

Romero is considered one of the most important operators in the Knights Templar Organization, as he is not only the alleged KTO regional leader in the municipalities of Antunez and Apatzingán, Michoacán, but also a close associate of KTO’s head leader Servando “La Tuta” Gómez Martínez. Romero is accused of being responsible for attacks on Federal Police and military troops, and faces charges of homicide, drug trafficking, and ties to organized criminal activity. Mexican authorities had been following Romero for quite some time prior to his arrest.

Romero’s capture falls in line with the federal and state governments’ targeted efforts against the KTO, which is predominantly based in western state of Michoacán. In June, eight alleged cartel members, including a current KTO operator and two of the nephews of former KTO leaders, were arrested. Prior to that, three of the organized crime group’s four leaders were brought down in the first three months 2014, leaving La Tuta in charge since. Michoacán Security Commissioner Alfredo Castillo had previously proclaimed that La Tuta would be apprehended before May 10, 2014, the deadline for Michoacán’s self-defense groups (grupos de autodefensa) to disarm or officially join the state’s security apparatus. The federal government currently has a $10 million peso reward out for La Tuta’s capture, and has allegedly intensified its efforts to locate the leader, concentrating the joint efforts between federal forces and rural police forces in the Tierra Caliente region.

Sources:


“Mexico’s federal forces take down third Knights Templar leader in three-month span.” Justice in Mexico. April 1, 2014.


“Mexico’s federal government delivers significant blow to Los Zetas and Gulf Cartel leadership.” Justice in Mexico. May 29, 2014.


“Reports indicate that four OCGs are forming a ‘cartel of cartels’ alliance.” Justice in Mexico. September 7, 2014.

“‘El Americano’ reinstated to rural police as manhunt continues for Knights Templar leader.” Justice in Mexico. September 27, 2014.


Former Mayor Cándido Morales Andrade. Photo: Proceso.

Morales Andrade was Acultzingo mayor from 2010 to 2013, a small town with a large indigenous Náhuatl population. Excélsior reports that the former mayor was recognized for his work done in Acultzingo while operating with few resources and a small budget, having received the National Tlatoani Award for his political contributions by the Mexican Institute of Evaluation (Instituto Mexicano de Evaluación) and the Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca in Spain. He was also mayor, however, at a time when residents in his community began taking the law into their own hands, detaining, beating, and forcing several suspects in February 2013, for example, to confess to crimes before turning the detainees over to the Public Ministry (Ministerio Público, MP). As translated by Mexico Voices, when asked about the incident, Morales Andrade commented that “municipal authorities did not intervene in the matter because it was an [issue] of ‘uses and customs,’” referencing the indigenous practices and customs common in the Acultzingo area.

Funeral services have been held in Morales Andrade’s honor since authorities recovered his body from the Río Blanco.

Sources:


Former mayor found dead in Acultzingo, Veracruz

The body of former Mayor Cándido Morales Andrade of Acultzingo, Veracruz was recently found floating in the Río Blanco. Morales, of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD), was reported missing on October 4, and authorities discovered his body two weeks later on October 19, after which Morales’ family identified him on October 24. According to forensic experts, Morales had a bullet in the chest and another in the leg, which they identify as signs of torture.

Mexico’s Federal Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) is currently investigating the case, working to uncover the motive behind the former mayor’s disappearance and killing. It is believed that the assailants were members of organized crime, particularly given the presence of Los Zetas in the Veracruz area, and specifically in Acultzingo. This case also coincides with the Mexican Army’s discovery of a “narco ranch” on September 1 in the hills of Acultzingo on the highway connecting the nearby towns of Orizaba and Tehuacán in the neighboring state of Puebla. The ranch is believed to have been a Zetas’ training facility for youth and police. Federal authorities dismantled the facility in an operation that killed three and led to the arrest of 30 more suspects, but did not go public with its discovery and dismantling until October 14.
Obama nominates Maria Echaveste as U.S. ambassador to Mexico

President Barack Obama recently announced his nomination for the new U.S. ambassador to Mexico, naming Maria Echaveste in mid-September as his top choice to fill the position. If approved, Echaveste (60) would not only be the first woman to be appointed as the U.S. envoy to Mexico, but also one of the few Mexican-Americans to hold this position. Her nomination will likely go before the Senate for approval at the end of 2014.

While many are applauding President Obama’s nomination, recognizing the potential Echaveste could have in fueling migration reform and given her Mexican-American background, the Washington Post reports that while “many of her supporters believe she will win Senate confirmation, ... some are still anxious that unpredictable mid-term elections, or potential presidential action on immigration, could become disruptive.” Journalist Leon Krauze from Mexican newspaper El Universal expressed his concerns on Obama’s nomination, specifically commenting on Echaveste’s limited diplomatic career. In a column titled “The Mystery of Echaveste,” Krauze questioned Echaveste’s credentials, arguing that “the principal asset of Ms. Echaveste is being a) the daughter of Mexican immigrants and b) a Hispanic woman. It’s a shame. The ambassador from Washington in Mexico is not there to fill quotas.”

While differing opinions arise on Obama’s nomination, the decision awaits the U.S. Senate vote, which is anticipated by the end of 2014. If approved, Echaveste will replace current U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Earl Anthony Wayne, who has served in this role since 2011.

Sources:


A daughter of immigrants, Maria Echaveste was raised in Texas and California to farm-working parents that had migrated from Mexico to the United States under the federal “Bracero” program, which attracted agricultural and manual laborers from abroad during World War II. According to the Washington Post, as a child, Echaveste helped her parents pick strawberries in the field, giving her a first-hand look at the daily life of migrants in the United States, and the value of the work force they contribute to. “What is it about this work—child and parental care, home maintenance, food production, cleaning—that allows society to treat the workers in these occupations as invisible, or at least less important than the software developer, insurance adjustor, or any of the countless other occupations that have greater status in our society?” questioned Echaveste in 2009, reflecting on her parents’ experiences. From Texas and California, Echaveste went on to study anthropology in Stanford and then on to receive a law degree from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, where she currently serves as Policy and Program Development Director at the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy. She practiced as a corporate litigation attorney from 1980 to 1992, and then co-founded the company NVG, LLC in 2001, where she also still serves as a Senior Advisor. Politically speaking, Echaveste was Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff in the White House under the Clinton administration from 1998 to 2001, and Special Representative to Bolivia in 2009.
Michoacán mayor and four associates arrested for ties to Knights Templar Organization

Another Michoacán mayor has been arrested and indicted for suspected ties to organized crime groups in that troubled state as fallout from the federal government’s intervention there continues. José Luis Madrigal Figueroa, former mayor of Numarán, Michoacán, joins five other former Michoacán mayors currently under indictment for alleged ties to organized crime.

Madrigal, a member of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD), was arrested on October 24 and appeared before the state Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría de Justicia de Michoacán). In addition to Madrigal, Michoacán’s Office of the Public Prosecutor (Ministerio Público, MP) announced that four additional municipal employees were also detained, including Madrigal’s brother, Edwin Madrigal. The five entered the prison in nearby Zamora on October 25, and their indictments were handed down two days later, on charges of "illicit acts against the public security system and having ties with organized crime."

Michoacán Attorney General José Martín Godoy Castro alleges that Madrigal took his public security director, Jaime Daniel Solís Villegas, to a meeting with a leader of the Knights Templar criminal organization (Caballeros Templarios, KTO) who requested that Solís collaborate with his organization and agree not to interfere with its operations in the area, as well as to advise him of state and federal law enforcement activity. Edwin Madrigal, then director of Social Development (Desarrollo Social), is also suspected to have been present at the meeting. According to Attorney General Godoy, Solís received $15,000 pesos ($1,115 USD), $10,000 of which he shared amongst two supervisors beneath him. Godoy added that there is evidence that Madrigal gave his approval for the proposal.

Other former Michoacán mayors facing charges of organized crime involvement are Uriel Chávez (Apatzingán), Jesús Cruz Valencia (Aguililla), Dalia Santana Pineda (Huetamo), Salma Karru, (Pátzcuaro), all from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI); and Arqimides Oseguera from the PRD.

Sources:


"Dan formal prisión a alcalde de Numarán, Michoacán.” Milenio. October 27, 2014.

12 states failing in budget transparency: IMCO

Mexico’s Institute for Competitiveness (Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad, IMCO) found in its annual State Budget Report (Informe Presupuestal Estatal 2014) that 12 Mexican states are failing to provide transparency in their budgetary processes. Nevertheless, IMCO General Director Juan Pardinas said that overall, Mexican states and the Federal District (Distrito Federal, DF) have made advancements in the area. The most problematic areas are reporting on the number of public employees and public debt.

Together, Mexican states and the DF received a score of 65%, representing the first positive score in seven years. According to Pardinas, the divide between states receiving positive grades and those receiving negative marks has grown, as a result of changes being made in successful states and others’ failure to make reforms. The worst performing states according to the IMCO study were Michoacán and Guanajuato each with a score of 47%, Baja California (48%), Quintana Roo (49%), and Chiapas (50%). Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Durango, Tamaulipas, Baja California Sur, Yucatán, and Veracruz also received failing grades below 60%. Despite being among the failing states once again, Tamaulipas made a substantial improvement over last year, when it was last
among Mexican states with a score of 16%. Meanwhile, the states performing the best were Jalisco and Puebla (96%), followed by Colima (92%). Among these, Puebla has made the greatest strides since 2008, with an improvement of 48%. Colima and Jalisco have improved by 37% and 27%, respectively.

Pardinas clarified that, while troubling, it is not the debt that states accumulate that is most concerning, but rather the opacity with which those funds are handled. He said that in a “great majority of the states” contracts are managed with little to no transparency. He added the concern regarding inconsistencies in the awarding of subsidies and other social supports, and that despite an ongoing narrative of austerity such payments continue to grow “without apparent reason.” Moreover, the report lists parts or all of some states’ budgets as being “illegible.”

IMCO recommends a five-point course of action to improve budgetary transparency among Mexican states and the DF. First, it proposes that the National Accounting Coordination Council (Consejo Nacional de Armonización Contable) mandate standardized accounting procedures across states; second, that states adopt best practices in budget procedures; third, that states commit to itemization procedures according to common criteria; fourth, that state congresses see to the existence of and adherence to budgetary laws; and fifth, that state debt be contracted through a public process where banks compete to offer the best financing terms possible.

Sources:


Around the States: Trainings and oral trials take priority

With just over a year and a half until the New Criminal Justice System (Nuevo Sistema de Justicia Penal, NSJP) is slated to be fully implemented and operational nationwide, Mexico’s states continue their push to fully implement and operate the new system by June 2016. October saw a variety of trainings held throughout the country, focusing on NSJP-related workshops for lawyers, students, police, and journalists, as well as the launching of oral trials. As such, these are some of the developments around the states as they move toward implementing and operating the NSJP:

**Baja California**
- By the end of October, Baja California had offered over 800 hours of NSJP workshops and trainings. Nevertheless, funding the transition has been “a challenge,” said State Secretary General Francisco Rueda Gómez, who is working collaboratively with SETEC to secure necessary funding to continue the system’s implementation and operation.

**Guanajuato**
- The president of the High Courts of Guanajuato, Miguel Valadez Reyes, oversaw a training on October 11 for journalists to learn more about the NSJP. Featuring presentations by state-level judges and magistrates, the workshop emphasized the media’s importance in the new system, specifically journalists’ publications, and their need for transparency and objectivity.

**Guerrero**
- On September 30, Guerrero held its first full public and oral trial, which was open to the media and anyone interested in attending. Held in Iguala, SETEC’s María de los Ángeles Fromow Rangel commented that this moves Guerrero into the next phase of NSJP implementation and operation.

**Oaxaca**
- Oaxaca’s Secretary of Public Security and Federal Police led almost 150 hours of training and workshops in Oaxaca this month, all hosted at the Institute of Police Professionalization. 53 police officers were trained in total, 26 on the NSJP’s implementation, and 27 more on the Criminal Justice System and National Penal Procedures Code.

**Tlaxcala**
- Tlaxcala’s first oral trial in business law (*juicio oral mercantil*) was held on October 24, a hearing that took nine minutes, exemplifying the NSJP’s speed and efficiency. The oral trial comes almost two years after Tlaxcala approved its Commercial Procedures Code in January 2013, which entered into force the following June.
Sources:


“Oaxaca cuenta con policías capacitados en el sistema de justicia penal.” *NSS Oaxaca.* October 18, 2014.


**CNDH addresses complaints of sexual abuse in schools throughout Mexico**

Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH) has issued a general recommendation to the Secretary of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), the 31 state governments, and the head of government of the Federal District (Distrito Federal, DF) regarding the rise in complaints of sexual abuse and harassment in schools throughout Mexico. The CNDH—Mexico’s ombudsman for review of human rights issues—launched an investigation into the matter, concluding thereafter that federal and state authorities nationwide must do more to prevent, investigate, and punish perpetrators of sexual abuse and harassment, and provide better treatment to victims of such act.

Published October 14, General Recommendation 21 (Recomendación General No. 21) is the CNDH’s 21st such recommendation published in 2014, and the fourth of which to be issued in part to the Secretary of Public Education.

The Commission took action on the issue of sexual abuse in schools as the number of complaints to the federal human rights commission (CNDH) and to the states’ respective human rights commissions continued to increase in recent years. From January 2000 to August 2014, 190 complaints of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violations, and inappropriate touching were registered with the CNDH against the Secretary of Public Education. As Milenio details, of the 190 complaints, 71 occurred in an elementary school setting (37%), 52 in middle school (27%), 37 in junior high or high school (19%), 24 in preschool (13%), and five in a special education setting (3%).

Meanwhile, the states’ human rights commissions received 657 complaints of sexual misconduct from 2000 to 2013, and 28 of the states’ secretaries of education—of the 32 federal entities that responded to the CNDH’s request for information—documented 1,997 more complaints during the same period in public schools. It is important to note, too, that this data only reflects the reported cases of sexual abuse and harassment. Investigators caution that thousands of more cases are likely unreported (also known as the cifra negra), bringing the number of such cases even higher still.

Within General Recommendation No. 21, CNDH addressed why the abuse is so prevalent. “Sexual violence in schools is caused by the lack of preventative measures, investigations, punishment, and treatment of this phenomenon through the omissions by school authorities, among which include the lack of policy prevention and identification; in other cases the lack of administrative regulations on how to govern and proceed when faced with these types of abuses in some federal entities; and in the lack of attention mechanisms to deal with these cases in school facilities,” explains CNDH. It goes on to name that the reasons largely behind these cases stems from “the ignorance or, better said, the negligence on the school authorities’ behalf regarding the procedure that needs to be followed when a case of sexual violence in a school has been identified, and inadequate attention is given to the victims.”

To remedy this situation, continues the recommendation, CNDH mandated that regulations and guidelines be made for the schools on how to deal with such cases of sexual human rights violations, which must state how officials should handle prevention, investigations, punishment, and reparation to the victims, as well as identify procedures for how handling cases if they arise. CNDH adds that such regulations should remain consistent throughout schools, so as to remedy the situation in similar ways across the board.

This is not the first time that the CNDH has investigated abuse in Mexican schools. The issues of bullying and school violence in Mexico gained attention in recent months, most notably after a student with learning disabilities was locked in a cage by fellow classmates in Tabasco in June 2014. One month prior to that incident, a middle school student in Tamaulipas was killed during a violent “game” played with his peers that resulted in severe head injuries. The CNDH’s recent recommendation thus reiterates its demand that school violence, including both sexual abuse and bullying, must be addressed immediately.

**Sources:**

Violence against journalists continues in October with two unrelated homicides in Sinaloa

Two Mexican activists and journalists have been the target of violence, this time in the state of Sinaloa with their deaths occurring less than a week apart.

Jesús Antonio Gamboa Uriás (39), the head of the politically-charged magazine Nueva Prensa, disappeared the night of October 10, according to a complaint filed by his family with the State Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado, PGJE). Speaking from Culiacán, Sinaloa, Iván Gamboa, the brother of Jesús Antonio, stated that the last time his brother was seen was around 11:00pm on October 10 in Ahone, Sinaloa, when he was leaving his brother’s bar, El Paradero, following an argument with other bar patrons inside. 13 days later, Gamboa’s body was found in Ahone, covered in bullets and partially buried.

Some speculation rose early on that Gamboa’s disappearance and killing might have been politically charged. Not only does Nueva Prensa report on stories of politics and corruption, but Gamboa, who has had over 18 years of experience in media, was also one of the leaders of a movement in August to repeal a law enacted by the Sinaloan Congress. Also known as the “Ley Mordaza,” or “Gag Law,” the law limited access journalists, and the public at large, have to information related to investigations and judicial cases. Gamboa played an active role in gathering hundreds of protestors to a march on August 7, demanding Congress repeal the law, which it unanimously did several weeks later. However, Sinaloa’s State Attorney General “seemed to rule out any connection between Gamboa’s work and his murder,” having gathered information from two suspects detained in the case thus far. Nevertheless, the PGJE’s investigations continue.

One day after Gamboa’s disappearance, a rather brazen and public attack left another Mexican journalist and activist dead. The attack occurred on October 11 when two armed men entered a radio station in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, and killed Atilano Román Tirado at point blank range. Román was in the middle of a live weekly radio program he held, “Así es mi tierra” (“Such is my land”), hosted on Radio Fiesta Mexicana when the gunmen entered. Although the radio recording was seized by authorities as part of the investigation, reports indicate that the other broadcasters and media members in the room yelled “They killed him! They killed him!,” which was broadcast live across the radio stream before the live broadcast was turned off. Román, who was shot in the face, was rushed to the nearby hospital where he passed away soon thereafter.

Because the gunmen did not turn their weapons on the witnesses in the broadcasting booth, authorities believe this was an attack strictly targeted towards Román because of his role as an activist in Sinaloa, and not because of his work as a journalist. For one, although attacks against journalists are not uncommon in Mexico, attacks against radio journalists are largely outside of the norm. Meanwhile, surveillance videos also show the gunmen following Román by car from his house through Mazatlán to the radio station. Román’s work as an activist included leading the Displaced Persons of Picachos group, which emerged when more than 800 families’ farm lands were flooded by the government following the criticized creation of the Picachos dam in Sinaloa in 2007. Román was an advocate for better treatment and compensation for the families and farmers who lost their land and houses. As Reporters Without Borders writes, “A frequent critic of the local authorities in his programmes, Román... had received threats in the past in connection with his role in organizing marches and protests to demand compensation for the lost land.”

In response to Román’s murder on the heels of Gamboa’s then-disappearance, Reporters Without Borders Deputy Programme Director Virginie Dangles spoke out, saying, “We urge the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into Atilano Román’s shocking murder and to bring those responsible to justice.” She continued, “Murdering a presenter in a radio studio while he is on the air shows that violence against journalists knows no limits in Mexico.” Sinaloa Governor Mario López Velázquez also chimed in on the matter, proclaiming that justice would be served against those responsible for Román’s murder.
Both Gamboa’s and Román’s murders come just one month after a story caught national news of the assault of a young female reporter in Guanajuato—an attack allegedly ordered by the town’s mayor and municipal police force. Such events add to Mexico’s already notorious standing as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists to work. In April 2014, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Mexico in the bottom seven countries worldwide in its effort to punish and investigate crimes against journalist, while organization Artículo 19 reported that of the 330 acts of aggression against journalists reported in 2013, government officials committed 60%. Meanwhile, Reporters Without Borders writes that Gamboa’s murder is the seventh journalist killed in Mexico in 2014, making Román’s the eighth of the year.

Sources:


“Director of Sinaloa newspaper reported missing.” Justice in Mexico. October 18, 2014.


Valor por Tamaulipas contributor tortured and killed

The death of María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio—an activist, journalist, and doctor that was kidnapped on Wednesday, October 15, 2014—has made national and international news. Fuentes Rubio was a contributor for the group Valor por Tamaulipas (Courage for Tamaulipas), which disseminates information and news to the public through its 160,000 followers on social media about narco-violence and instability in the region. Her body was found in Reynosa, Tamaulipas showing signs of torture.

Fuentes Rubio’s killing went viral when her kidnappers hacked her Twitter account @Miut3 and posted a gruesome picture of her with a bullet hole in the face. Other tweets from her kidnappers posted through her account stated, “Today my life has reached its end” and “I can only tell you to not make the same mistake I did.” About a week before her death Fuentes Rubio began receiving threats through Twitter from user @garzalaura142, suggesting that Fuentes Rubio’s impending kidnapping and death were due to her work as a doctor and for her failure to successfully treat the son of an organized crime group member, who her killers allege died in her care. Still, her death “has sent a chill through the border state of Tamaulipas,” says the San Diego Union Tribune, given that every day citizens have turned to social media, like Fuentes Rubio had, to help warn and alert fellow citizens to incidences of crime and violence occurring in their communities.

According to the Associated Press, Fuentes Rubio was a contributor for Valor por Tamaulipas “until 2013 when she was asked to stop contributing for her own safety.” In February 2013, an anonymous group believed to be a part of a drug trafficking organization in Tamaulipas offered a reward for information related to the whereabouts of the administrator of Valor por Tamaulipas. Since then Valor por Tamaulipas and tweeters associated with group have continued to receive threats. Organized crime-related Twitter users have also used accounts cloning Valor por Tamaulipas to confuse the public regarding information normally used to help and warn about safety issues.
Still, the administrator of Valor por Tamaulipas, who remains anonymous for safety reasons, stated that the organization would not stop their work and would honor Fuentes Rubio. "She was so daring she was putting herself at greater risk by collaborating with me," the administrator wrote. "[She] gave her life for the community ... she is a hero."

Sources:


Webpage. ”Mexico: Road to Justice – Breaking the Cycle of Impunity.” Committee to Protect Journalists. Last accessed October 17, 2014.

**Artículo 19 to present case against police repression in front of IACHR**

Artículo 19, a human rights organization that defends freedom of expression and information, recently announced that it will take a case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, IACHR) to bring justice to several acts of alleged police repression that have occurred in Mexico since 2012. Attorney Leopoldo Maldonado Gutiérrez will present Artículo 19’s case before the IACHR, specifically pointing to three different incidences of police aggression against the public, and in particular to a case earlier this year in July in Puebla under the administration of Puebla Governor Rafael Moreno Valle. Governor Moreno Valle has been in office since his election in 2010.

The Artículo 19 announcement was made at the National Center for Social Communication (Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social (Cencos), located in Mexico City on October 28, during an event attended by Elia Montes Tamayo, the mother of José Luis Tehuatlie Tamayo. Tehuatlie Tamayo (13) was allegedly killed by an errant rubber bullet fired by police during a protest on July 9, 2014 in San Bernardino Chalchihuapan, Puebla as he walked home from school. The protest was against the state congress’ approval two months before of the “Bullet Law” (“Ley Bala”), a controversial law that ‘regulated’ the use of police force and use of weapons against public protestors and demonstrators. In addition to the July 9 incident, Attn. Maldonado also plans to include several events where the police were unnecessarily aggressive towards protestors, including during a march on December 1, 2012, as a group rallied against President Enrique Peña Nieto’s swearing in ceremony, and during a protest on October 2, 2013 as part of an annual march commemorating the massacre of Tlatelolco. During the Tlatelolco protest, for example, in which police violently clashed with protestors, Artículo 19 claimed that 76% of the aggressions it documented during the upheaval were committed by police.

According to Informador, Governor Moreno Valle announced in September that he fully accepted the findings and recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH) to hold the Puebla State Police (Polícia Estatal) responsible for the death of Tehuatlie Tamayo in July. Governor Moreno Valle also announced he was naming a special prosecutor to that case, José Antonio Pérez Bravo. In addition, he stated that the Head of the Executive Office (Oficina del Ejecutivo), Juan Pablo Piña, would be responsible for verifying compliance of the recommended reforms required by the responsible agencies. Despite these announcements, however, Attn. Maldonado is still bringing the Artículo 19 case forward to keep pressure on Governor Moreno Valle to bring justice to Tehuatlie Tamayo’s case, especially considering that case has been overshadowed as the national attention has largely shifted to the disappearance in late September of the 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero. Attn. Maldonado also acknowledged his concern that Governor Moreno Valle may take action against the Puebla citizens that protested against him for the police’s actions in July that led to Tehuatlie Tamayo’s death.

Sources:


