

Statement
Of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression
Investigative Mission into Attacks and Killings of Journalists and
Media in Mexico

Mexico City, April 25, 2008 - From April 20 to 25, 2008, an international mission of 11 press freedom and freedom of expression organizations came to Mexico to carry out investigations into the increasingly violent situation for journalists and the media across the country. At least 24 journalists and media workers have been killed since the year 2000 along with 8 disappeared and dozens that have been threatened or attacked in direct reprisal for their professional activities. The majority of these cases remain in impunity creating a stifling environment of self-censorship and widespread silence.

The mission travelled to Mexico City and the states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, Sonora and Guerrero. Its members met with federal and local authorities; the Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives of the European Union; journalists and human rights organizations; editors, media owners and journalists; as well as journalists who have been victims of aggressions and the families of reporters who have been murdered or disappeared. As observed in the regions visited by the international mission, the main obstacles for the work of the media community are organized crime, corruption, lack of political will and the failure of the Mexican state to provide protection for journalists under fire.

The international delegation called upon Mexican authorities at all levels to undertake immediate measures that will prevent an increase in attacks against exponents of free expression. The delegation highlighted an urgent need for the creation of new protection mechanisms as well as the reinforcement of existing ones, noting in particular the need to develop a legal framework to strengthen the office of the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists (FEADP) and thereby grant it independence to investigate and bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. It is important to remember that since the FEADP was created in 2006, 15 journalists and media workers have been killed in Mexico. Moreover, as part of the initiative to federalise crimes against freedom of expression, it is necessary to have an ample and inclusive definition of a journalist that is in accordance with international principles of freedom of expression.

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

The international delegation paid special attention to the victims and their families, evaluating the status of their cases and exploring alternatives for support. The delegation noted with great concern the increasing feeling of isolation experienced by these families. Among them are community radio stations and their members, who because of a lack of legal recognition are extremely vulnerable, a situation, which has led to several cases of official obstruction to their work with an absolute failure by authorities to recognize them as journalists.

The delegation was also concerned by the deteriorating working conditions of journalists, particularly in the case of freelancers and supported the growing recognition by journalists themselves of the need to work together and foster solidarity as part of a strategy to change this situation.

The delegation noted the crippling concentration of the media leading to a total lack of plurality and diversity across the media community in Mexico along with the arbitrary distribution of official advertisement, which has been used for political ends to reward or punish media accordingly. These problems restrain the plurality of information and citizens' right to information. The delegation affirmed the obligation of the State to promote a regulatory framework.

Within the coming weeks, the international mission will issue a detailed report with findings and recommendations. It will include an inclusive action plan for all stakeholders, including local and federal authorities who expressed their willingness to engage and develop concrete actions to address key aspects of impunity, protection and self-censorship to promote freedom of expression in Mexico.

The international mission included the following groups: Article 19; International Media Support (IMS); International Press Institute (IPI); World Association of Community Radios (AMARC); Rory Peck Trust; Reporters Without Borders (RSF); International Federation of Journalists (IFJ); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); International News Safety Institute (INSI); Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); Inter-American Press Association (IAPA); Open Society Institute (OSI), and the Press Freedom Foundation in Colombia (FLIP).