

## Reporters Without Borders

*Mexico: Federal parliament and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked to intercede in Oaxaca crisis*

The International Civilian Commission for Human Rights Observation (CCIODH) - consisting of 41 members of organizations from six countries (France, Spain, Italy, Denmark, United States and New Zealand) - carried out its fifth visit to Mexico from December 16, 2006 to January 20, 2007 to investigate human rights violations during the social and political crisis in the state of Oaxaca that began last May.

The chapter of the commission's fact-finding report that deals with the media was made public on March 5, 2007 by Reporters Without Borders, which was represented on the commission. It deals not only with attacks on the media during the conflict, but also the media's coverage of the conflict. The full report was already presented to the general public in Mexico City on March 3.

During its month-long visit, the CCIODH conducted more than 400 interviews with members of civil society and officials in Oaxaca and the federal capital about the uprising by the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) against the Oaxaca state government led by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and the very harsh crackdown on this movement by the state government and federal authorities.

The events in Oaxaca left a heavy toll on the press. As well as the occupations of news media by activists, around 20 local and national journalists were subjected to intimidation, physical attacks and torture. Two were killed at the height of the crisis last autumn. Freelance cameraman Bradley Will, 36, of the Indymedia agency was fatally shot on October 27 in the locality of Santa Lucia del Camino. His murder was initially attributed to five state employees, two of whom were arrested and then quickly released. The police subsequently tried to blame the APPO for Will's death.

The investigation into Will's death, which is now at a standstill, again highlights the inadequacies of the judicial system and the powerlessness of the office of the special federal prosecutor for crimes against journalists, created on February 15, 2006. Impunity also continues to prevail in the December 8 murder in Santiago Juchitahuaca of Raúl Marcial Pérez, a columnist for the daily *El Gráfico*, who was also known as a community leader. It seems that all the possible leads in this case have not been explored.

The crisis in Oaxaca was the climax of an especially grim year for the Mexican press, in which a total of nine journalists were murdered and two disappeared. In the light of the report published by the CCIODH, Reporters Without Borders recommends that:

- a commission of enquiry of the federal parliament should continue the efforts begun by the CCIODH to shed full light on the human rights and press freedom violations during the events in Oaxaca,

- this commission should also shed light on the serious abuses of authority by local officials as regards the media, not only in the state of Oaxaca but also in the states of Sonora, Guanajuato and Puebla,
- the commission, in order to do this, should be able to question the governors of the states concerned and the judicial and police officials under their supervision,
- the office of the special prosecutor for crimes against journalists should have the necessary resources and independence to be able to successfully carry out impartial investigations and guarantee the protection of victims,
- in the absence of significant progress in the investigations, the cases of journalists murdered in Mexico (Will being the only foreigner among the 30 killed since 2000) should be referred to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

**Read full chapter on media of the CCIODH's report...**

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