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Mexico City Police Force Under Fire: On Extortion & Multiple Rapes

by John Neagle

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On Aug. 13, the Mexican media reported that 150 policemen in Mexico City are being investigated following a series of multiple rapes. The investigation was ordered by Attorney General Ignacio Morales after President Carlos Salinas de Gortari received a phone call from an unnamed politician whose daughter was reportedly among the rape victims. Press reports said 10 women have already identified numerous policemen accused of raping them. On Aug. 14, three Mexico City police officers commenced an indefinite hunger strike in the Zocalo (main square), protesting traditional extortion methods within the force, and calling on President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to eradicate corruption. The three are regular officer Jorge Garcia Ramirez, 24, officer second-grade Jose Angel Perez, 34, and officer third-grade Pablo Martinez, 39, from Sector 6, District Iztapalapa. The three men told reporters that although they had not been formally dismissed, their chiefs had prevented them from entering district headquarters last month after they spoke out against corruption. They have filed unprecedented criminal complaints against several senior officers. On Tuesday, they collected signatures for a petition, and money to help them survive without salaries. They showed reporters signatures of 90 other officers, still employed, who said they supported the protest. The three told reporters of standard extortion practices on the city's police force, including even bribes to receive their pay packets. Perez told Copley News Service on Aug. 15: "We had to pay up 500,000 pesos ($200) under threat of being moved to bank-guarding duties in other districts. We had to pay $10 or $20 a day just to get our patrol car, although the car, No. 06081, is assigned to us. "We had to hand over 2,000 pesos (80 cents) every day to the guy who took back our weapons at the end of a shift. We don't believe taxpayers' money should be used in this way...Since we spoke out, we and our families have been physically threatened. Jorge [Ramirez] was pistol-whipped. We have moved our families out of the city for safety. This corruption has always gone on. We ourselves had to accept 'tips' from the public just to survive, because of the bribes we had to pay to our bosses." Perez was referring to the equally traditional "mordida," a bribe paid to police officers in return for a parking place, and dropping a traffic ticket, among other things. Perez continued: "But we finally decided to take a stand when President Salinas publicly called on Mexicans to denounce corruption wherever and whenever they saw it. That's what we are doing. We have faith in President Salinas and are sure he will support us." The policemen said they would continue the hunger strike until Mexico City's attorney general has acted on the criminal complaints they filed, and President Salinas acts to eliminate corruption within the police force. (Basic data from DPA, 08/13/89; Copley New Service, 08/16/89)

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