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Fox Government Creates Office to Investigate, Prosecute Crimes Against Women

by LADB Staff

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The Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) has created a new office to investigate and prosecute crimes against women. The Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Relacionados con Actos de Violencia Contra las Mujeres will be headed by women's-rights attorney Alicia Elena Perez Duarte.

The new office will replace the special prosecutor's office created in 2004 to investigate the murders of women in Ciudad Juarez (see SourceMex, 2004-02-04). The duties of the new office will be expanded to include all 31 states and the Federal District. Mireille Roccatti, who headed the Juarez investigative office for just a few months, resigned the post in October 2005 to take a position in the administration of newly elected Mexico state Gov. Enrique Pena (see SourceMex, 2005-10-05). Roccatti had replaced Maria Lopez Urbina, who was removed from the post because of criticisms that she was ineffective (see SourceMex, 2005-06-01).

A vast majority of the more than 360 murders in Juarez remain unsolved, and the special prosecutor's office has remained vacant since Roccatti's resignation. New entity replaces office that probed Juarez murders The PGR pushed for the expansion of the office as part of a campaign to combat violence against women at a national level. "[The murders in Juarez] were just one example of a phenomenon that occurs across the country," said the PGR. Some legislators welcomed the decision. "It's a good sign, and we hope it works," said Deputy Beatriz Mojica, a member of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD).

Perez Duarte acknowledged that her office faces a daunting task but said she will receive support from all the state prosecutors' offices in Mexico. In addition, the Mexican Congress has appointed a special commission, comprising 12 legislators, to assist in the investigations. Without abandoning the commitment to Juarez, the new office will place a priority on areas where violence against women has resulted in numerous deaths, including the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Sonora, Baja California, Chiapas, Veracruz, Morelos, and Mexico City.

Perez Duarte promised to move ahead with the investigation and prosecution in the Juarez cases. She said she would attempt to prosecute 177 municipal and state officials, who allegedly failed to conduct proper investigations and may have even been complicit in some of the murders. None of these individuals has been prosecuted. She said she would seek the intervention of the high court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nacion, SCJN) and international tribunals. Several human rights advocates called the new prosecutor's office a farce. "This is just a smokescreen to cover up the inefficiency and negligence of the PGR," said Jose Luis Soberanes Fernandez, president of the Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH). Soberanes said the CNDH turned over a report on the Juarez murders to the federal government more than two-and-a-half years ago. "Nothing has been done since then." Other organizations said the administration has not only

failed to resolve past murders but has allowed killings in Juarez to continue. At a rally in Juarez in late February, a coalition led by Amnesty International (AI) and other groups pointed out that 31 women were murdered in the city during 2005. "The crimes are continuing, and the government with its indifference is an accomplice to the murders," said Liliana Velazquez, president of Amnistia Internacional-Mexico. (Sources: La Crisis, 02/03/06; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 02/16/06; La Cronica de Hoy, El Economista, The Herald-Mexico City, 02/17/06, La Jornada, 02/22/06, 02/27/06)

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