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Bribes, Corruption Remain High in Mexico, Survey Finds

by LADB Staff

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Corruption and bribery remain major problems in Mexico despite President Vicente Fox's promise to address the problem during his administration. In its latest biannual report, Transparencia Mexicana (TM), an affiliate of the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI), said the average Mexican is obligated to pay more and more in small bribes to police and bureaucrats to survive.

The TM's latest Indice Nacional de Corrupcion y Buen Gobierno (INCBG), which measures the number of times that a bribe was paid for every 100 transactions, yielded a score of 10.1 points for 2005, up from 8.5 in 2003. The organization obtained its data by conducting a survey among 15,123 households around the country. The margin of error for the survey was about 1 percentage point.

A high cost

Bribes were estimated to cost Mexicans about 19 billion pesos (US\$1.69 billion) in 2005. "This is the worst kind of tax you can impose on citizens," said Roy Campos, a member of the TM advisory committee. Campos is also president of the respected polling organization Consulta Mitofsky.

Federico Reyes Heroles, president of the TM governing council, said the cost of bribes represents 24% of the income in lower-income households. He noted, however, that homes with the highest educational level "continue to be the most likely to participate in acts of corruption." The transactions with the "highest corruption level" are generally traffic infractions, among them being arrested or avoiding having one's car towed by the police, the TM poll found.

Reyes Heroles said the increase between 2003 and 2005 could be linked to a variety of factors, including the reactivation of economic activity in Mexico, a change in demographics, and the lack of oversight by authorities who "let their guard down" in the effort to fight corruption. The worst problems with corruption were found in the states of Guerrero, Hidalgo, Tabasco, and Mexico and in the Federal District, which comprises Mexico City.

The INCBG score for Mexico City jumped from 13.2 in 2003 to 19.8 in 2005, meaning that residents are forced to pay a bribe in two of every 10 transactions, TM said. The procedures with the least associated corruption were property-tax payments, soliciting a scholarship for school, or having correspondence delivered. TM director Eduardo Bohorquez said the organization is planning to set up a Web site to provide examples of "good government."

The site will also highlight companies that have embarked on exemplary projects to help promote development in Mexico. Bohorquez gave the Fox government good marks for effort in the fight to end corruptive practices such as bribery, but said much remains to be done. "This administration just started an open and clean fight against corruption...but the challenge is still there and needs to be addressed with more tools and knowledge," he said. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on May 17, reported at 11.19 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources:

www.transparenciamexicana.org.mx; Excelsior, El Financiero, Reforma, El Universal, Associated Press, 05/10/06; The Herald-Mexico City, Milenio Diario, 05/11/06)

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