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Mexican Government Denies Ecuador's Request For Extradition Of Mexican Citizen Lucia Morett

by LADB Staff

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Mexico's Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) has issued a final determination denying a request by the Ecuadoran government to extradite Mexican citizen Lucia Morett to the South American country to face charges of endangering Ecuadoran security. The SRE previously denied an extradition request in September 2009, citing a need to gather more information. Morett was the only one of five Mexican citizens who survived a surprise raid by the Colombian military on a Colombian rebel camp just inside the Ecuadoran border. Colombia has also requested Morett's extradition, but the SRE has not ruled on that request. The SRE offered few details on its decision to deny Ecuador's request, saying only that the case "does not satisfy the requirements established in the extradition treaty between Mexico and Ecuador or the International Extradition Law." The Ecuadoran request was based on charges filed by a regional prosecutor and later by the federal prosecutor (Fiscalia General del Estado) and was not endorsed by President Rafael Correa.

The Ecuadoran prosecutors accused Morett of endangering Ecuadoran security simply by her association with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), which had set up a camp just inside Ecuador. Morett was part of a delegation from the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM) visiting the FARC camp at the time that Colombian forces carried out the raid, which killed FARC leader Raul Reyes (NotiSur, March 07, 2008). The attack also killed four members of the UNAM delegation and severely injured Morett (SourceMex, April 02, 2008). Morett recovered in an Ecuadoran hospital and later spent some time in Nicaragua before returning to Mexico. Relatives of the UNAM students killed in the attack Veronica Velazquez Ramirez, Soren Aviles Angeles, Fernando Franco Delgado, and Juan Gonzalez del Castillo held several actions to protest the killings. In late February, they organized a protest in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo state, during a summit of Latin American and Caribbean leaders, which Colombian President Alvaro Uribe attended (SourceMex, March 03, 2010). One banner at the event said, "Wanted: Alvaro Uribe, Drug Trafficker, Paramilitary, Assassin." A week later the group held a protest in front of the Colombian Embassy in Mexico City to commemorate the death of the four students and the bombing of the FARC camp.

The messages were again directed at Uribe, with one sign calling the Colombian president "an accomplice of the massacre." Morett's relatives, who also traveled to the gathering in Playa del Carmen, took the opportunity to meet with Correa to ask him to halt the extradition process against Morett. At that time the SRE had not handed down its decision. The Ecuadoran president told Morett's parents that his hands were tied by the county's Constitution. "He expressed sensitivity [to our problem], but explained to us that the decision is entirely in the hands of the Fiscalia General del Estado, which is an autonomous body," said Lucia's father Jorge Morett. The father said Correa emphasized that he does not agree with the extradition request. Colombia still seeking Morett's extradition Morett's family and her attorney also visited with Luis Camilo Osorio Isaza, Colombia's ambassador to Mexico City, asking that Colombia drop its extradition request.

In what appears to be a case of guilt by association, Colombia has charged Lucia Morett with "participating in organized crime" and "engaging in activities with terrorist purposes" because of her contacts with the FARC. Morett's attorney Hugo Rosas de Leon said the meeting with the Colombian ambassador did not yield "the desired results," since Osorio did not offer any commitment to try to end the judicial process against Morett. Colombian authorities seem intent on bringing Morett to trial. In October 2009, Colombian prosecutor Guillermo Mendoza Diago rejected charges that the extradition request for Morett was politically motivated. "This is a judicial process just like any other," Mendoza told reporters. "There is no political motivation because everything will be subject to proof." But Jorge Morett called the charges against his daughter "absurd" and devoid of legal merit. "There is no proof whatsoever that Lucia committed any crime," he said. He also took the opportunity to take a potshot at Uribe, calling him an "assassin who wants to punish the victim."

For now, Lucia Morett is keeping a low profile because there are charges pending against her in Colombia, Ecuador, and even in her home country of Mexico. The ultraright organization Mejor Sociedad Mejor Gobierno has filed a legal complaint with the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) questioning the links that Lucia Morett's UNAM group had developed with leftist organizations in the Americas (SourceMex, October 08, 2008). "Lucia is not going out," Jorge Morett said in an interview with Milenio.com. "Since she is wanted, she has to remain underground."

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