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Carlos Navarro

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Petition Asks U.S. Government to Stem Flow of High-Caliber Weapons to Mexico

by Carlos Navarro
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Just days before US President Barack Obama unveiled a package to reduce gun violence in the US, US Ambassador to Mexico Anthony Wayne received a petition from nearly 54,000 Mexican and US residents urging the US government to take more decisive steps to stem the flow of high-caliber weapons to Mexico. Most signatures on the petition addressed to Obama, US Vice President Joe Biden, and Wayne were gathered in Mexico by the victim’s right’s organization Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (MPJD) and other Mexican groups like Incide Social and Evolución Mexicana. Some signatures were obtained by US partners, including the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the Center for International Policy (CIP).

A letter accompanying the petition expressed condolences to the US government for the Dec. 14 massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, where a gunman killed 27 people, the majority of whom were schoolchildren. But organizers also expressed their concern that mass killings in Mexico have been ignored, particularly since the large majority of these murders have been carried out with weapons obtained in the US.

"We are disturbed and indignant by the indifference of the US government toward the massacres that cause mourning in Mexico every day," said organizers of the signature campaign, which was led by MPJD leader, poet Javier Sicilia, and political scientist and Colegio de México professor Sergio Aguayo.

"The United States is partly responsible for our humanitarian tragedy," Sicilia said at a rally in Mexico City shortly before the petition was delivered to Wayne. Sicilia became a strong advocate of nonviolence and the rights of victims of violence after his son was killed by drug traffickers in 2011 (SourceMex, May 9, 2012).

Drug violence claimed more than 12,000 lives in 2012

Drug-related violence has claimed the lives of some 70,000 people in Mexico since 2006, when former President Felipe Calderón launched a high-profile campaign against drug traffickers. The increased violence is also attributed to the rise of the Zetas cartel, a ruthless organization that has had no qualms about killing civilians (SourceMex, Feb. 1, 2012, and Oct. 17, 2012).

The number of drug-related murders has remained steady the past three years, with 12,394 deaths recorded in 2012, compared with 12,284 in 2011 and 12,656 in 2010, said the Mexico City daily newspaper Milenio.

The petition noted that more than 700 of the 2012 killings occurred during the first month of the new administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto, who took office on Dec. 1, 2012.

Petition asks for stricter enforcement, investigation

Mexico has consistently spoken out against the export of high-caliber weapons to Mexico that are manufactured in the US. While that remains an unspoken request, the petition focused on realistic
actions that the US can take immediately. For example, the first point of the petition notes that the US already has a law prohibiting the importation of high-caliber weapons manufactured abroad to the US, but the measure has not been strictly enforced. Too often, those weapons are brought into Mexico via the US. "We ask that you enforce this prohibition," said the petition. "These weapons have gained high popularity among drug traffickers because they combine high-speed firings with portability."

The petition also asks that the US expand to other states the directive that obligates the reporting of any assault weapons sold in states that border Mexico. "In addition to the border states, Florida, Colorado, and Oklahoma have become important sources of weapons shipped illegally to Mexico," said the petition.

A third request in the petition asks for law-enforcement agencies to consolidate data obtained from crime scenes and from seized weapons and match it to the US Suspect Gun Data Base, which could help the ATF identify some of the arms dealers that supply the drug traffickers.

Some Mexican legislators have suggested that the Peña Nieto government can do its part to combat gun smuggling by setting up tighter surveillance on the Mexican side of the US-Mexican border.

"It’s necessary to strengthen (customs) and to conduct more surveillance and review agreements with the US, but, most importantly, (we must) be more vigilant of the entry and exit of arms," said Deputy Francisco González Vargas, a member of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). But he noted that increased coordination between the US and Mexico would be vital to addressing the problem.

**Obama announces gun-control strategy**

On Jan. 16, Obama urged Congress to pass legislation that would enact universal background checks and impose bans on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, largely in response to the massacre in Connecticut. The president also announced a number of executive actions to address gun violence that could be enacted without congressional action.

Still, Obama’s plan does not contain any direct measures to address the flow of high-caliber weapons into Mexico, which have continued to enter the country with relative ease despite some controls implemented in 2008 and 2009 (SourceMex, March 5, 2008, April 1, 2009, and Feb. 2, 2011).

The Obama administration has not only failed to stem the flow of arms into Mexico but some administration officials were implicated in a high-risk plan that allowed the introduction of arms into Mexico as a way to track their destination. That plan, implemented by the Phoenix office of the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), backfired when the arms that were allowed free entry into Mexico were traced to several killings, including a couple of US officials (SourceMex, Oct. 19, 2011).

-- End --