At Least Nine Journalists Killed in Mexico in 2013

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation

At Least Nine Journalists Killed in Mexico in 2013

by Carlos Navarro
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2014-02-05

Journalist rights organizations report that at least nine editors and reporters were killed in Mexico during 2013, although the number could actually be higher because the whereabouts of a handful of reporters who disappeared during the year are unknown. The organization Casa de Derechos de los Periodistas AC, based in Mexico City, reported the murders of six journalists during the first full year of President Enrique Peña Nieto’s presidency. Other sources reported at least three other murders, which adds up to nine confirmed killings last year, plus one journalist who disappeared and whose whereabouts are unknown. This compares with at least 17 murders of journalists in 2012, in addition to five others who disappeared. The 2012 murders include the controversial case of Regina Martínez, a reporter for the news magazine Proceso (SourceMex, April 24, 2013).

The victims reported by Casa de Derechos de Periodistas include Jaime Guadalupe González Domínguez, editor of the online news site OjinagaNoticias, based in Ojinaga, Chihuahua; Alonso de la Colina Noriega, a news anchor for TV Azteca in Guerrero state; Daniel Alejandro Martínez Bazaldúa, a photographer in Saltillo, Coahuila, for Vanguardia newspaper; Mario Ricardo Chávez Jorge, founder of the Tamaulipas-based online news site El Ciudadano; Alberto López Bello, a reporter in Oaxaca for the regional daily newspaper El Imparcial; and Alberto Angulo Gerardo, a broadcast journalist in Angostura, Sinaloa, for the national network Televisa.

Other sources reported the deaths of El Diario de Juárez correspondent Víctor Javier Campos in Agua Prieta, Sonora; Juan José García of Televisa in Jiménez, Chihuahua; and Rosa María Ríos Campos, a former Televisa anchor, in Morelia, Michoacán. The whereabouts of Gerardo José Padilla Blanquet of Radio Grande de Coahuila and Zoila Márquez of the Zacatecas-based online news site Línea Informativa are unknown.

Violence continues in 2014

Violence against journalists has continued into 2014, with a couple incidents already reported in January. Columnist Miguel Ángel Guzmán Garduño of the daily newspaper Vértice was murdered at his home in Chilpancingo, the capital city of Guerrero state. Additionally, Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz of the daily Liberal del Sur in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz state, was reported missing in January.

The French-based international journalist rights organization Reporters sans frontières (RSF) said disappearances of journalists are especially troubling because there are signs that corrupt public servants might be involved. "The impunity might be the result of collusion between organized crime and political and administrative officials," said RSF. "In some instances the cartels have infiltrated government agencies."

Not all the acts of aggression have resulted in injury or murder of journalists. In many instances, the acts are intended to intimidate the news media. There is a broad discrepancy in the estimated number of aggressive acts against writers, editors, photographers, and news institutions. The Casa de los Derechos de Periodistas report, released in mid-December 2013, said there were 124 attacks on journalists or news entities last year. The organization said the majority of the attacks occurred in Veracruz, Mexico City, and Oaxaca.
In contrast, a report from the independent human rights commission in Mexico City (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, CDHDF) released in early January said there were 424 acts of aggression against reporters, editors, and institutions. The discrepancy might be related to criteria used to determine what constitutes an attack, the data available to each organization, and the formula used to arrive at the numbers. The CDHDF said its records indicate that the attacks against journalists in 2013 were more than double those recorded in 2012.

The physical locations targeted in 2013 include the daily newspapers El Siglo de Torreón, El Diario de Juárez, Mural (Jalisco), E-Consulta (Puebla), and El Piñero de la Cuenca (Oaxaca), as well as the Canal 44 television station in Ciudad Juárez and Radio FM Maya in Quintana Roo state.

Where is government protection?

Regardless of the actual number of attacks, journalist organizations remain concerned that the government has been unable to protect journalists and news organizations despite the creation of a special agency (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión, FEADLE) in 2006 (SourceMex, Feb. 15, 2006) and the passage in the Senate of a constitutional reform in 2012 that strengthened protections for journalists (SourceMex, March 21, 2012). The initiative resulted in creating the Mecanismo de Protección a Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas, which replaced FEADLE.

Despite the new mechanisms to protect journalists, the nongovernmental organization Artículo 19 estimates that 90% of the attacks on journalists remain. The organization, an affiliate of the British-based organization, aims to protect freedom of expression.

Others concur with this assessment. "Mexico remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists," RSF said, pointing out that the situation has not improved despite the change in administration following Peña Nieto's election as president. Peña Nieto, who took office in December 2012, promised a different approach to combat organized crime than his predecessor President Felipe Calderón (SourceMex, Dec. 19, 2012).

Martha Olivia López, director of Casa de Derechos de los Periodistas, said the Peña Nieto administration has made little or no effort to prosecute crimes against journalists. "If there was a great campaign to solve this problem, then the number of complaints would rise," said López. "This means that the government would have to recognize openly that the problem is now out of control."

López said many journalists are reluctant to come forward because of concerns about their safety, particularly in areas where criminal organizations like the Zetas are in control. "In Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, 30 journalists have been threatened," the journalist rights advocate said in an interview with the online news site Voltairenet.org. "They don't file a complaint because is no reliable authority to address these cases."

Deputy interior secretary Silvia Vázquez Camacho said bureaucratic problems have become obstacles to protecting the human rights of workers and journalists. For example, she said the Mecanismo de Protección a Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas operated without funds for 10 months. Vázquez Camacho, who spoke at a gathering of journalists in Mexico City in November 2013 (Segundo Encuentro Nacional de Periodistas), said the agency received a budget of about US$13 million, but was unable to spend the money because rules of operation had not been put in place.
Additionally, Vázquez Camacho said, a handful of states—Quintana Roo, Sonora, Tlaxcala, Baja California, Baja California Sur, and Nuevo León—had not signed a cooperation agreement with the federal government, even though officials from these states had reiterated their desire for increased protections for journalists.

Other participants at the journalists’ gathering said the news about murders of reporters and editors in Mexico does not have the shock value for overseas audiences that it once had. Shannon Young, a correspondent in Mexico for Public Radio International (PRI), said the news about murders of journalists in Mexico has become such a common topic that a type of "information fatigue" might have set in overseas. She said it was important for international journalists in Mexico to continue reporting on this issue to keep it front and center with audiences in other countries. International pressure is needed to prompt the Mexican government to take a more proactive stance in stemming the violence against journalists, speakers said.

-- End --