Mexican Senate Approves Legislation to Ban Dogfights Nationwide

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Mexican Senate Approves Legislation to Ban Dogfights Nationwide

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In late November, the Mexican Senate approved bill that would outlaw the staging and organization of dogfighting events throughout the country, potentially ending a practice that some consider an iconic cultural activity. The ban was approved by a vote of 71 to 3, with three other legislators abstaining.

The initiative is the latest legislative measure to address animal cruelty in Mexico. Several states and municipalities have enacted legislation that bans bullfights and cockfights (SourceMex, Nov. 9, 2011, July 3, 2013, Sept. 9, 2015) and prohibits the use of animals in circus acts (SourceMex, July 23, 2014). As in those state and local initiatives, the main sponsor of the dogfight ban is the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), specifically Sen. Jorge Emilio González.

Animal rights activists have pushed for a nationwide ban on bullfights, but have not yet succeed in gaining approval for a nationwide prohibition on this practice. The initiative approved by the Senate on dogfights would apply throughout Mexico. The initiative, introduced in the form of an amendment to the Ley General del Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente (General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection), stipulates basic principles regarding the care of dogs, such as the provision of adequate food and water, and medical attention when needed.

Vote pending in lower house

The Chamber of Deputies has not yet taken up the initiative, and it is not certain how soon it will vote on the issue. However, the PVEM delegation in the lower house is leading the effort to persuade the leadership (Junta de Coordinación Política) to pass nationwide bans on both dogfights and cockfights. “We believe that humans must understand that [dogs and roosters] are living beings whose rights must be respected,” said Deputy Jesús Sesma Suárez, floor leader of the PVEM in the lower house.

The PVEM initiative in the Chamber of Deputies is similar to the one in the Senate, imposing prison sentences on organizers of dogfights and cockfights. Tougher penalties would be imposed on individuals caught trafficking dogs and roosters for the express purpose of using them in fights.

A vote to ban dogfights is likely in the lower house, given the near-unanimous Senate vote in favor of prohibiting the practice and recent public opinion polls indicating that Mexicans overwhelmingly oppose dogfights. In one survey conducted recently by the polling company Parametría, 99% of respondents expressed opposition to dogfights, and 80% said they would favor a ban on the activity.

Ending cruelty against dogs

Animal rights organizations applauded the Senate initiative. “It’s good news in terms of getting rid of this practice,” said Antón Aguilar, executive director of the Humane Society International of Mexico. “Organizers usually brutally kill dogs who lose. And the animals who emerge out as ‘winners’ often die because of hemorrhages, injuries, or infections caused by the fight.”
According to Aguilar, the dogs can be worth thousands of dollars, and betting at such events can be high. The breed of choice for dogfights throughout Mexico is the pit bull.

“These events also cause emotional damage and affect dogs’ mental states, because no animal is aggressive by nature,” added Aguilar, who noted a spike in dog fights in Mexico and Central America after a ban was put in place in the US. “This activity has more wide-ranging consequences than animal abuse. The dogs are worth thousands of dollars, and bets are very high.”

Three members of the upper house voted against the legislation, including Sen. Víctor Hermosillo of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), who cast a nay vote on the premise that the Senate has more important matters to consider than a ban on dogfights. “Soon they’ll be calling for a stop to killing lobsters because they’re boiled alive. Oh, the poor things!” quipped Hermosillo, who said legislators needed to focus on such issues as the plight of migrants in the US in the aftermath of the US presidential election.

Hermosillo’s opinion was countered by senators from other parties, who cited an urgent need for legislation that would address the legal void that allows states to permit dogfights. Among those who took to the podium to support the measure were Senators Silvia Garza of the PAN, Jorge Aréchiga of the PVEM, and Jesus Casillas of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

A nationwide ban on dogfighting would give leverage to groups like Amigos Pro Animal, which are trying to force the state of Aguascalientes to ban the international dogfights that are held in conjunction with the Feria de San Marcos every spring. The festival features bullfights and cockfights, along with activities such as concerts, sporting events, and a livestock expo. The dogfights are not listed as an official part of the fair, but are tolerated. Dogs are brought to the event from Spain, Brazil, the US, and other countries.

Amigos Pro Animal has launched a petition on the Change.org site to persuade authorities to prohibit dogfights in the Aguascalientes fair. “This despicable event is well organized,” the petition notes. “Posters with pictures of dogs fighting begin to circulate in the days prior to the Feria de San Marcos. The posters have a series of numbers and symbols that are incomprehensible to the general public, but that the people involved in the dogfights understand.”

The posters identify the areas where the dogfights take place. The information is also disseminated via social networks. “How is it possible that authorities have not done anything about this?” the petition asks.

-- End --