

In This Issue

page

Blocking accountability and eroding the rule of law: Mexico's illegal use of military courts in cases of human rights violations

Mexico's militarized public security operations have brought large-scale violations of fundamental rights, such as the right to life and to physical integrity. Despite the urgent need for accountability for these human rights violations, cases of military human rights abuses are investigated and tried under so-called military jurisdiction rather than in independent civilian courts, violating international law and denying victims' rights.

1

The Merida Initiative: Dangers for the protection of human rights

On June 30, 2008, US President George Bush signed into law an aid package known as the Merida Initiative, which will channel \$400 million USD of direct military assistance, police equipment, and other activities to combat organized crime to Mexico from now until September 2009. Although 15% of the funds are conditioned on advances in four areas related to human rights, overall the Merida Initiative reinforces a dysfunctional public security paradigm based on militarization and the use of force in a war against drug traffickers.

4

Perspectives from Oaxaca: Challenges facing human rights defenders advocating for the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples

Human rights defenders face many challenges when advocating for the collective rights of indigenous peoples. In the current context, examples from Oaxaca call attention to attacks on community radio stations and illustrate the need to strengthen and support the autonomy of indigenous groups.

6

Human rights education in Mexico today: Perspectives and insights

One can conceptualize human rights education along a spectrum, with one end of the spectrum drawing on the concrete, real life experiences of victims and communities, and the other end consisting of the legal framework of international human rights law and the body of jurisprudence that has developed around it. Center Prodh has found that a holistic approach and a close collaboration with victim communities can help to define strategic priorities in this field.

7

Newsbriefs

- Victory for soldier discharged from army for being HIV-positive
- Foreign contractors train Mexican police in torture techniques
- Prodh publishes new report on access to information
- The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders carries out mission to Mexico

10

Attack on human rights oversight: Government acts to undermine legitimate voices of concern

Two of the most important bases for building a strong democracy are public institutions that seek to uphold citizens' basic rights and a civil society that is consulted and respected by its government. Center Prodh notes with concern that recent actions of the Mexican government have threatened these fundamental democratic safeguards and, far from promoting the observance of Mexico's freely assumed international human rights obligations, have undermined attempts to monitor the government's ongoing human rights violations. These actions are especially severe in the context of the worsening human rights climate in Mexico, where the militarization of public security and the criminalization of social protest have brought grave violations of fundamental rights.

As part of his increasingly war-like rhetoric in relation to the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking, President Felipe Calderón has made public attacks on different non-governmental sectors in recent months, including the national media. For reporting on the rise of violence in the country, Calderón has accused the press of being "complicit" in weakening the government's public security strategy. In reality, however, it is difficult for any citizen not to want to be informed about

rising insecurity, which has included surges of violence in states such as Sinaloa and Chihuahua in recent months. Perhaps as a response to the reporting of these facts in the media, recently the number of soldiers deployed in a military operation in Michoacán was withheld from public disclosure. However, attacking the press for reporting basic facts on citizen security in Mexico will not improve security; it will only delay any possibility of a participatory democracy in which an informed population can monitor the success of the government's policies.

The government's attack on the independent role of the press comes in the midst of other alarming actions aimed at undermining transparency and accountability for Mexico's human rights abuses. In recent months the President of Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (frequently criticized by civil society for failure to act as an independent and objective body) successfully pressured for the removal from Mexico of Amerigo Incalcatera, the country's on-site representative from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and a long-time critic of the Mexican government's failure to respect and guarantee human rights. In March of this year, after Incalcatera publicly voiced

Continued on page 10

Blocking accountability and eroding the rule of law: Mexico's illegal use of military courts in cases of human rights

Since taking office as Mexico's president in December 2006, Felipe Calderón has deployed tens of thousands of soldiers to carry out policing tasks and wage the government's "war on organized crime." Far from increasing the security of Mexico's residents, however, the government's militarized public security operations have brought large-scale violations of fundamental human rights, such as the right to life and to physical integrity. A preliminary investigation by Center Prodh highlights several aspects of this pattern of abuse.

Despite the urgent need for accountability for these human rights violations, cases of military abuses are investigated and tried under so-called military jurisdiction rather than in independent civilian courts. As international scrutiny focuses on this issue, it becomes ever more

crucial that the Mexican government act in accordance with its international obligations by ensuring that victims of human rights violations are given access to justice in civilian courts. Failure to do so allows increasing numbers of military abuses to escape impartial investigation and judgment, eroding the rule of law and preventing true public security from taking root in Mexico.

The human cost of the militarization of public security

In a series of military operations occurring in numerous states, soldiers set up military checkpoints; patrol the streets; enter and search houses; and carry out tasks that legally are reserved to the civilian police. Indeed, in diverse municipalities the military has disarmed entire police forces or taken over command of state and municipal police departments.

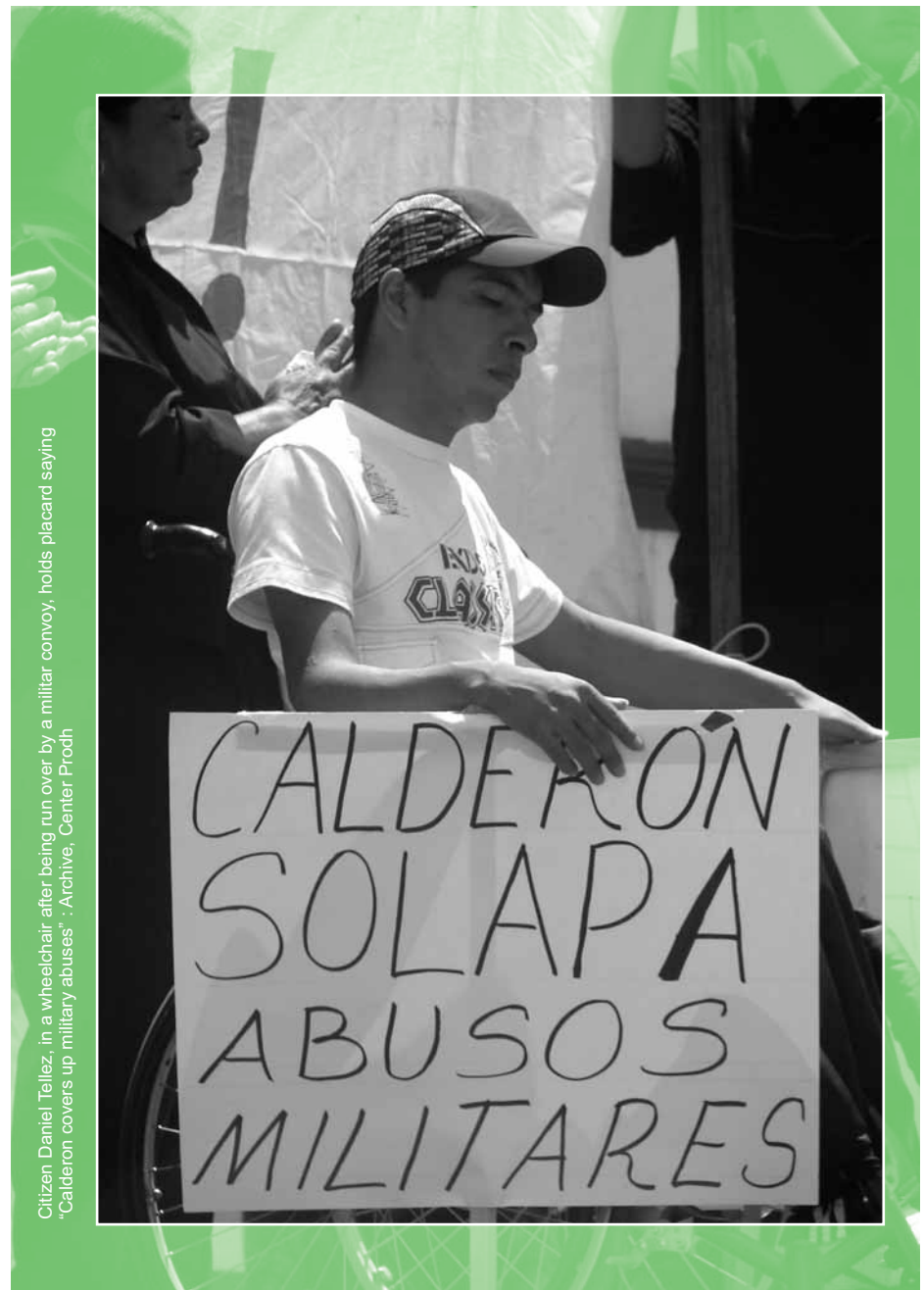
Since the launch of these operations, human rights organizations and community groups have denounced an increase in human rights violations by the military. A recent investigation by Center Prodh surveys these growing violations, which include shootings, allegations of torture, and aggression against vulnerable populations such as indigenous communities and migrants. Center Prodh reviewed media articles from January 2007 through June 10, 2008, drawing mostly from national newspapers to track military abuses reported in these sources. During the period under study, the media registered at least 50 cases or situations of human rights violations by the military. These abuses included 15 cases in which soldiers reportedly opened fire against civilians without justification (according to the sources surveyed, at least 11 people died in the first half of 2008 due to military abuses, an increase compared to 2007). Among just these 50 reported cases, there are 14 cases in which soldiers committed abuses in military checkpoints, usually by shooting civilians driving through the checkpoint. It is important to note that this survey captures only a small fraction of actual victims of military abuses. (Full

results are available in our prodh briefing of July 14, 2008, available at www.centroprodh.org.mx/english).

As another indicator, the number of complaints against the army received by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) has more than doubled during the Calderón administration, going from 182 in 2006 to 367 in 2007 (that is, more than one every day). Available statistics suggest that the number for 2008 will far surpass the total

for 2007. In July 2008, the Commission issued 8 recommendations (reports) regarding military abuses committed against civilians, including grave human rights violations such as torture, arbitrary detention, excessive use of force and firearms, and arbitrary deprivation of life.

Several of these recommendations originated from complaints filed more than a year earlier, demonstrating delays and a lack of due oversight on the part of the Commission in addressing these serious cases.



Citizen Daniel Tellez, in a wheelchair after being run over by a militar convoy, holds placard saying "Calderon covers up military abuses" : Archive, Center Prodh

Illegal extension of military jurisdiction

The pattern of abuses described above continues largely due to lack of accountability for officers who commit human rights violations. A central obstacle to such accountability is that civilian

subsists for crimes and offenses against military discipline.” This provision clearly limits the use of this special type of jurisdiction to offenses of a uniquely military nature, as opposed to common crimes or human rights violations. However, the Mexican army’s Code of

on Extrajudicial Executions, the Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges, and the Working Group on Extrajudicial Executions, as well as regional bodies including the Inter-American Commission and Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Inter-American Court, the binding judicial organ of the Organization of American States, has explained in numerous cases that military courts “should only judge members of the armed forces when they commit crimes or misdemeanors that, owing to their nature, affect rights and duties inherent to the military system... the military criminal jurisdiction is not the competent jurisdiction to investigate and, if applicable, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of human rights violations.” (See, e.g., *Rochela Massacre v. Colombia*, Ser. C. No. 163 (2007), para. 200).

Unfortunately, thus far Mexican judges and legislators have not acted to bring the use of military jurisdiction into line with international standards. Further, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission, despite documenting numerous abuses by the military, has failed to challenge the application of military jurisdiction in cases of grave human rights abuses. Instead, when the Commission recommends to the army that it investigate and punish an abuse, it does so within the framework of military jurisdiction, rather than recommending that the case be tried by independent, civilian courts.

Conclusion

In a democratic state, the rule of law is predicated on civilian control of government institutions, and on the equal application of the law to all members of society, including members of the military.

It is for these reasons that Mexican civil society, international NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations have long called for cases of human rights violations by military forces to be investigated and tried by civilian authorities. Most recently, the United States government has even conditioned part of its security aid funding

authorities are generally unable to investigate and prosecute military human rights violations due to the unconstitutional extension of the concept of “military jurisdiction” in Mexico. Under this system, crimes committed by the military are investigated by military prosecutors and tried in military courts that answer to the Secretary of Defense (Sedena). Among other aspects of military jurisdiction that serve to perpetuate impunity, military court judges lack the structural independence needed to render impartial judgments, as they report to the Executive, not the Judiciary branch of government. In addition, the structure of military jurisdiction is such that victims lack information about the status of their cases.

The use of military jurisdiction to try human rights violations is illegal under Mexico’s Constitution, which establishes in its Article 13 that “military jurisdiction

Military Justice, which has gone unamended for more than 70 years, defines “military discipline” in an expansive manner that includes human rights violations against civilians.

Numerous international human rights bodies have explained that this use of military jurisdiction is not permissible under international law and prevents accountability for human rights violations.

Then-UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Sir Nigel Rodley reported in 1998 after a visit to Mexico, “Military personnel appear to be immune from civilian justice and generally protected by military justice,” and specified, “Cases of serious crimes committed by military personnel against civilians [should] be subject to civilian justice.”

Similar calls have been issued by the UN Committee Against Torture, the Rapporteur



Forum on militarization held in Center Prodh: General Gallardo, formerly tortured by the Mexican army, Rosalva Aída Hernández (Ciesas), Luis Arriaga, Professor Miguel Sarre: Archive, Center Prodh

to Mexico on the Mexican government's duty to ensure that civilian authorities have jurisdiction over cases of military human rights abuses (see article entitled The Merida Initiative).

As rising abuses call ever more attention to the need for accountability for crimes committed by Mexico's armed forces, the scope of military jurisdiction has become a crucial test of the government's willingness to bring its laws and practices into line with its international human rights obligations, not to mention its Constitution. Immediate action to reverse the current, illegal extension of military jurisdiction over human rights violations is necessary if Mexico is to reduce these abuses and guarantee true security for its population.



The Merida Initiative: Dangers for the protection of human rights

In a climate of escalating violence throughout many Mexican states, on June 30, 2008, US President George Bush signed into law an aid package known as the Merida Initiative, which will channel \$400 million USD to Mexico from now until September 2009 in the form of direct military assistance, police equipment, and other funds aimed principally at combating organized crime and drug trafficking. By using US funds to fuel existing Mexican security policies, the Merida Initiative largely reinforces a dysfunctional public security paradigm based on militarization and the use of force in a war against drug traffickers, an approach that leads not to greater human security for Mexico's population, but rather to numerous human rights violations by Mexican military and police. Although 15% of the funds in the Merida Initiative are conditioned on advances in four areas related to human rights, and thus provide incentives for the Mexican government to stem abuses in these particular areas, Center Prodh is nevertheless alarmed by the design of the aid package, which encourages an escalated territorial war against criminals rather than a much-needed change of direction in current security policies.

Precedents in US military funding to Mexico

The Merida Initiative is not the first time that Mexico has received military funding from the United States. Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo allowed significant increases in military aid from the United States in 1995, which among other

outcomes gave rise to a low-intensity war against political dissidents waged in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas with the aid of US funds. This period saw the rise of paramilitary groups throughout the state and an alarming spike in human rights violations. According to the *Just the Facts* program of the Washington Office on Latin America, the Latin American Working Group and the Center for International Policy, in recent years military and police aid from the United States to Mexico has hovered around the \$50 million mark. presidential term of Vicente Fox was also characterized by the use of the military and special squadrons of security forces to combat organized crime. Yet these past examples of the "frontal combat" approach to public



security demonstrate that despite any short-term results, ultimately criminal gangs are able to continue their activities, perhaps shifting their trafficking route to a different area or replacing arrested leaders.

The Merida Initiative fails to prioritize addressing root causes of criminality, such as the marginalization of broad sectors of Mexican society and the lack of quality education and employment opportunities. Rampant corruption among security forces is another factor complicating, and in some cases undermining, any attempt to use force alone to repress criminality in Mexico. The past few years have seen not only increasing militarization of public security efforts in Mexico, but also soaring levels of criminal violence, coupled with increasing reports of human rights violations. These trends should be more than sufficient to demonstrate that a more holistic and long-term security strategy is needed.

An undemocratic process

Although the aid package was a request from the Mexican government to the United States, the process of adoption of the Merida Initiative was not a participatory one. The Mexican legislature did not have the power to design the initiative, nor will Mexican authorities be the ones to decide precisely how the money is used. Instead, these details are within the power of the US government, which seeks to promote its own security interests by influencing security practices in Mexico.

Much less has the Mexican public been able to access information about the initiative or engage in debate or feedback on the process. The government did not publicize the details discussed during meetings between the executive branches of the two countries about the initiative, and when Center Prodh filed a request for information in 2007 about these meetings through Mexico's Federal Institute for Access to Information, we were informed

by the Department of Foreign Affairs that such information was confidential.

Human rights conditions in the Merida Initiative

The Merida Initiative, contained in the Iraq supplemental spending bill H.R. 2642, outlines the general purposes for the \$400 million approved for Mexico. \$116.5 million is earmarked as foreign military funding, to be administered by the President of the United States. The rest of the funds are to be used *"to combat drug trafficking and related violence and organized crime, and for judicial reform, institution building, anti-corruption, and rule of law activities."* Following pressure both from sectors of the US Congress and Mexican civil society for the inclusion of human rights conditions in any eventual aid package to Mexico, the final legislation specifies that 15% of the funds contemplated for international narcotics and law enforcement and foreign military financing in the Merida Initiative cannot be disbursed until the US State Department reports that the Mexican government is:

- *Improving the transparency and accountability of police forces*
- *Ensuring that civilian (as opposed to military) prosecutors and judicial authorities are investigating and prosecuting members of federal police and military forces credibly alleged to have committed human rights violations*
- *Enforcing the prohibition on using testimony obtained through torture as evidence in court*
- *Establishing a mechanism for regular consultation between the Mexican government and civil society to monitor implementation of the Merida Initiative*



Police operations in the city of Oaxaca are a demonstration of the excessive use of force by authorities: Archive, Center Prodh

These conditions, if fulfilled by the Mexican government, have the potential to improve accountability for human rights abuse. Independent of any funding attached to them, the themes addressed in these conditions are crucial ones if the Mexican government is to begin to shift its public security and criminal justice policies away from a framework of excessive use of force toward one of respect for human rights. It is important to note that the human rights conditions, particularly regarding torture and civilian jurisdiction over military human rights abuses, simply echo obligations already voluntarily assumed by the Mexican government in human rights treaties. Full implementation of these conditions would thus mean taking an approach that is in compliance with international human rights standards.

In addition to the conditions mentioned above, the US Congressional report that accompanies the Merida Initiative expresses concern about particular cases of human rights violations in which Mexican authorities have not made progress in their investigations. The US Congress specifically notes concern over human rights violations by police officers, including rape and violence against women

in San Salvador Atenco, May 2006, as well as violations committed in Oaxaca between June and December 2006. In particular, the killing of US citizen and journalist Bradley Will in Oaxaca is highlighted as warranting a report from the Secretary of State to Congress that details progress on conducting a thorough, credible, and transparent investigation into the crime with a view to providing justice in this case.

Conclusions

As human development aid from the US to Mexico has fallen in the last five years, it is alarming that the current aid package from the US to Mexico comes largely in the form of military aid. The Merida Initiative in no way prioritizes addressing root causes of crime, such as extreme poverty and inequality in the distribution of wealth in Mexico, the multi-billion dollar market for illicit drugs in the US, and educational opportunities that are either poor or financially inaccessible for most young Mexicans. The grave public security issues facing Mexico can be addressed only through policies that both produce effective results and prioritize the respect for human rights. Despite its inclusion of four human rights conditions, overall the Merida Initiative fulfills neither of these requirements. Rather than including human rights as a side feature to a massive aid package directed at military and police training and equipment, respect for fundamental human rights should be the core of any approach to citizen security.

Perspectives from Oaxaca: Challenges facing human rights defenders advocating for the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples

Introduction

Indigenous communities in Mexico continue to fight for recognition of their rights, both civil and political (understood as collective rights for the indigenous community as a whole) and economic, social, cultural, and environmental. These rights, however, are not guaranteed in national or state policies, with potentially severe consequences for indigenous peoples.

For example, the failure to respect cultural rights (such as the right to one's language, religion, philosophy, forms of social organization, traditional laws, and relationship to nature) can lead to the breakdown of a community's identity.

Mexico's Constitution and laws recognize collective rights in theory. In Oaxaca, for instance, the relevant law addressing indigenous peoples and communities fails to recognize indigenous peoples' right to self-determination (within the sovereign state of Mexico), as well as their right to territory and their identity as rights-holders.

The gaps in such legal frameworks generate problems such as the destruction of indigenous land, extreme poverty, and the imposition of lifestyles that do not fit with indigenous customs, threatening the physical, cultural, and spiritual survival of indigenous peoples.

Faced with deficient protection from the state, indigenous peoples' struggle in the twenty-first century is thus largely oriented toward the construction, strengthening, and recognition of their own autonomy. Such autonomy allows indigenous communities to design their own models of development according to their

the recent UN Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. On the domestic level, then, the shortcomings in the Mexican Constitution have simply led indigenous groups to strengthen de facto forms of self-government.

In the state of Oaxaca, the struggle of indigenous communities to exercise their human and collective rights presents particular complexities. On one hand, through organized campaigns, such groups are strengthening their autonomy and their ability to exercise and protect their economic, cultural, political, judicial, education, and health rights, allowing them to develop and transmit their traditional land and identity to future generations. However, these activities are criminalized by the government. As will be discussed below, the Oaxacan authorities do not respect even the peaceful transmission of indigenous culture within communities, although this right is a prerequisite for a dignified life for community members, serving as the basis of not just individual but also collective identity.



Oaxaca is one of the states with the greatest diversity of indigenous peoples in the country: Archive, Center Prodh

traditional or unique forms of social, economic, and cultural organization. It is worth noting that even though national laws have yet to recognize clearly indigenous communities' right to active participation in designing their modes of development, this right is already enshrined in international law, for instance in

Repression of the identity of indigenous communities

A recent example of such violations in Oaxaca occurred in Villa de Zaachila, a community located twenty minutes from the state capital.



On June 20, 2008, the Community Assembly of Villa de Zaachila held a meeting to evaluate a communication by the Municipal President, who was calling for the community to attend a reception ceremony for Governor Ulises Ruiz.

The Community Assembly decided not to participate in the reception, as they considered the governor unwelcome in their community due to his role in the social conflict of 2006. Instead, they decided to protest by installing barricades to prevent the governor's passage.

The reaction of the municipal authorities was to use violence to disperse the protesters.

These events marked the start of a campaign of intimidation, harassment, physical aggression, and threats against members of the Political Council of the Community Assembly of Villa de Zaachila, as well as against announcers on Zaachila Radio. These acts of intimidation restrict the activities carried out by this indigenous community radio station, seriously impairing the use of this station to spread awareness of human and collective rights and to strengthen and exercise indigenous culture.

These violations of the right to free expression and the acts of violence against announcers of Zaachila Radio form part of a pattern of such violations throughout 2006 and 2007 in Oaxaca against a number of community radio stations (including similar violations against Radio Nandia in Mazatlán Villa de Flores and Radio Calenda in San Antonino Castillo Velasco).

Strategies for protection of indigenous communities

How can human rights defenders support indigenous communities in Oaxaca facing such challenges to their individual and collective human rights? As a first consideration, given the lack of national and state legislation that protects indigenous rights, it falls to human rights defenders (understood broadly) to find new strategies for advocating for such rights.

The use of international instruments and institutions is one such strategy; in this regard, it is essential that we examine critically the role that these mechanisms can play in promoting human rights. Another area to explore is the strategic creation of precedents in the legal defense of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. Currently, the usual way of demanding these rights is through dialogue and negotiation with the relevant authorities.

At the same time, the climate of impunity and lack of rule of law in the state highlights the need for a holistic advocacy strategy for the human and collective rights of indigenous peoples, going beyond legal mechanisms. Supporting indigenous groups in strengthening their own internal legal and political systems can be one key component in such a strategy.

Conclusions

In short, human rights defenders face many challenges when advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples, and have few legal tools available at the national level that truly protect indigenous rights. Continued acts of violence and disregard for the few rights that are fully recognized in legal norms generate an environment in which indigenous communities' identities are under threat and they are unable to develop according to their basic needs.

In this climate, the example of indigenous community radio stations is illustrative: the use of such radio stations to promote and strengthen the autonomy of indigenous groups may be criminalized by the Mexican government, but is considered legitimate not only by the communities themselves, but also by international law. Finding new ways to bridge the gap between community-level action and international human rights mechanisms may thus be one of the most important strategies we can deploy in the protection of indigenous rights.

Human rights education in Mexico today: Perspectives and insights

Human rights education as we know it today has evolved to serve both private individuals committed to working for others, as well as civil society and political actors. It is through such education that society has sought to counter the discourse of authoritarianism and the systematic

violation of human rights. Human rights education utilizes a methodology drawn jointly from concrete field experience and from the academic sphere, systematizing the tools available for the promotion and defense of human rights.

Editorial continued

approval of a February 2008 Human Rights Watch report that criticized the Mexican National Human Rights Commission, Commission President José Luis Soberanes wrote to then UN High Commissioner Louise Arbour asking that steps be taken to respond to the “situation”. Shortly afterwards, Incalcatera was removed from office. This maneuver by the National Commission appears aimed at reducing external oversight of Mexico’s human rights practices, and instead leaving the much-criticized National Commission itself as the principal body engaged in monitoring human rights. Center Prodh is highly concerned about these actions taken to undermine the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We hope for the swift appointment of a new in-country representative from the UN to help act as a counterweight to government actions that seriously threaten the respect for human rights and the ability of the population to be informed about the consequences of the government’s public security policies.

In yet another attempt to block oversight of its human rights practices, the Mexican government vehemently denounced the inclusion of human rights conditions in a recently approved foreign aid package from the United States known as the Merida Initiative (the provisions in question condition full disbursement of funding to Mexican security forces on Mexico’s observance of certain core human rights standards, discussed further in the article entitled *The Merida Initiative*).

Multiple branches of the government argued that such conditions would represent an improper intrusion on Mexican “sovereignty”. However, while other aspects of the Merida Initiative may indeed present sovereignty concerns, the human rights conditions themselves call for nothing more than that the government obey its own laws by upholding basic obligations that it freely assumed by ratifying international treaties. Further, the Merida Initiative is a unilateral donation of hundreds of millions of dollars and it is standard practice to include human rights conditions in such donations. The government’s appeal to “sovereignty” as a way to reject the human rights conditions – especially as the government raises no similar sovereignty concerns regarding other parts of the initiative or regarding the Mexican government’s privatization of formerly state-controlled industries, among other issues – thus appears implausible as anything other than a rejection of oversight of its human rights record.

Until the government halts maneuvers and attacks such as those discussed here and makes a serious commitment to valuing the role of civil society and the primordial importance of human rights, the prospects of a transparent, participatory democracy in Mexico remain dangerously distant.

News Briefs

Victory for soldier discharged from army for being HIV-positive



Press conference on HIV/AIDS and discrimination: Archive, Center Prodh

After long years of struggle, a soldier discharged from the military for being HIV-positive can return to his post as a mechanic after winning a legal challenge in federal court. A longtime member of the Mexican army, the victim (whose name is omitted for privacy) was discharged six years ago after testing positive for HIV. Center Prodh, together with the organizations VIHas de Vida and CEPAD, filed an administrative petition against the discharge of the victim, arguing that the dismissal constituted an impermissible act of health-based discrimination. The soldier’s dismissal from the army was then provisionally suspended as a result of the legal challenge. This enabled him to continue serving as a member of the army, yet not in his original position as a mechanic. He received his salary and medical attention while the judicial process moved forward. Finally, in July 2008, the Federal Court issued its final verdict, recognizing the victim’s dismissal an act of discrimination and therefore a violation of his fundamental rights.

Mexican AIDS policies currently feature high on the public agenda, as the 17th International AIDS Conference took place in Mexico City from 3-8 August 2008. The Conference aimed to influence leaders to take up their responsibility to address the wide range of problems associated with HIV/AIDS. We hope that current judicial recognitions of the equality of HIV-positive individuals support much-needed structural changes toward constructive policies on the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and broader respect for the rights of HIV-positive persons in Mexico.

Foreign contractors train Mexican police in torture techniques

In a high-profile case in July, it came to light that private contractors from the Miami- and London-based company Risks Incorporated were training police in the Mexican city of León, Guanajuato state, in various torture techniques. The training received by the Special Tactical Group of the León police included techniques such as the *tehuacanazo* (in which carbonated water is forced into a person's nasal cavities) and other tactics of physical and psychological torture, which the police practiced on each other, as shown in videos later made public. City authorities stated that such training was necessary to prepare the police to fight organized crime and withstand extreme stress, but civil society has denounced that the purpose of the techniques is to torture detainees in police custody, noting that numerous cases of such torture have already been documented in Guanajuato this year. The mayor of León initially defended the torture training and declared that it would continue, although he later agreed to suspend the courses following pressure from both governmental and civil society bodies.

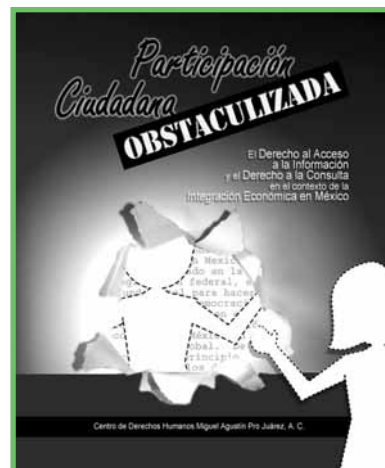
Prodh publishes new report on access to information

Center Prodh is pleased to announce the publication of its latest report, "Barriers to Civic Participation: The Rights to Information and Consultation in the Context of Economic Integration in Mexico" ("Participación Ciudadana Obstaculizada: El Derecho al Acceso a la Información y el Derecho a la Consulta en el contexto de la Integración Económica en México").

information and to consultation during Mexico's negotiation of bi-national and multinational agreements on free trade and economic integration. Individual chapters discuss the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTTA) and the European Union-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (EU-Mexico FTA), among others. The last chapter analyzes the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SSP), a tri-national initiative that links economic integration to security issues and that excluded the legislative branch from the negotiating process.

The report explains that, despite the adoption of the Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Public Information in 2002, the Mexican government still fails to respect the rights to information and consultation in the context of crucial economic agreements such as those related to free trade. While the 2002 law established a Federal Institute tasked with answering citizens' requests for information, the law also sets forth a wide range of exceptions under which requests for information may be denied. In the cases investigated by Center Prodh, these loopholes turned out to be the rule rather than the exception.

By negotiating international economic agreements in secrecy and denying citizens' requests for information, the report concludes, the Mexican government has prevented any meaningful and participatory process of public debate on topics that have enormous consequences for the lives and well-being of the Mexican population.



The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders carries out mission to Mexico

During the month of June 2008, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint program of the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), carried out a research mission to Mexico. The mission was focused on the vulnerability of human rights defenders in Mexico, who are experiencing a particularly difficult period in their work, with the criminalization of social protest, attempts at delegitimation from the Mexican government, threats, and harassment causing a delicate climate for human rights defenders. Center Prodh accompanied the mission in the organization of its visit to Mexico, which in 12 days encompassed Mexico City, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, where mission members met with over 30 different NGOs and human rights defenders, as well as representatives of the Mexican executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government at both state and federal levels. The report of the mission's findings will be published later this year.

Please visit Center Prodh's
english/spanish website for more recent
updates on the situation of Human Rights
in Mexico.

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Center Prodh was created in 1988 as an institution dedicated to the promotion and defence of human rights. It uses a method of integral defense incorporating four areas of work: integral legal defense, education, communication and analysis and international relations. Center Prodh has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and it also has the status of Accredited Organisation with the Organisation of American States.

Center Prodh works with groups throughout Mexico to consolidate human rights protection. Since its founding, it has given effective support and solidarity to groups and persons who have suffered injustice, poverty, and marginalisation. For further information or to join Center Prodh's membership, please contact:

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