

President Enrique Peña Nieto
Residencia Oficial de Los Pinos
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Mexico

Paris, 10 July 2015

Dear President Peña Nieto,

As your four-day visit to France gets under way today, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), an international NGO that defends freedom of information, would like to refer you to the disturbing situation of the media in your country and, in particular, the violence that journalists constantly face.

On 5 May, you publicly reaffirmed your *“complete commitment to Mexicans’ freedom of expression and right to information”* and you added that *“the free expression of ideas and the right to be correctly informed are fundamental for consolidating our democracy and accelerating our progress.”*

We think it is important to contrast these commendable comments with the reality on the ground for Mexican journalists. What with murders, kidnappings, physical attacks, a failure to punish these crimes of violence, widespread self-censorship and a concentration of media ownership in too few hands – much needs to be done. Solutions must urgently be found to the grave problems affecting freedom of information in Mexico.

Since 2000, RSF has registered a total of 86 murders of journalists and media workers in definite or probable connection with their work, of which 15 have taken place since you became president. These figures make Mexico the western hemisphere’s deadliest country for the media and have resulted in its being ranked 148th out of 180 countries in the 2015 RSF press freedom index.

Since the start of the year, RSF has had to alert public opinion to several grave acts of violence against journalists in Mexico:

- Six journalists and media workers have been murdered in the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca and Guanajuato. **Filadelfo Sánchez Sarmiento** was the latest victim. After receiving death threats during elections in early June, he was gunned down on 2 July as he left the radio station where he worked. The police have yet to identify the perpetrators of any of these murders.

- Radio presenter **Bernardo Javier Cano Torres** was kidnapped in the state of Guerrero in May and was held for 20 days. He was freed because his family paid a ransom. The police have not identified its kidnappers.
- There were many physical attacks against journalists during Mexico's election campaign in early June. RSF is aware of at least ten attacks against journalists whose only crime was to have been covering events.
- Journalist **Pedro Canché** spent nine months in prison in the state of Quintana Roo before a court finally recognized that his rights had been violated and ordered his immediate release on the night of 28 May. He had been accused of "sabotage" after posting photos of local protests and a video critical of Quintana Roo's administration. Several NGOs blamed his prolonged detention on interference by Quintana Roo's governor.

Impunity is unfortunately the rule in Mexico, partly because of collusion between organized crime and certain politicians and government officials. Some politicians do not hesitate to attack journalists in public statements, instead of supporting them, which just compounds the harassment to which they are exposed. A few days ago (on 1 July), the governor of Veracruz accused some journalists of being in constant contact with organized crime – the last straw in what is one of the deadliest states for journalists.

The Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos contra la Libertad de Expresión), created in 2006, and the federal mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, created in 2012, constitute positive judicial advances but they have not been equal to the needs, partly because of bureaucratic red tape.

RSF does not doubt that this disturbing state of affairs spurs you to do everything possible to improve the situation of journalists in Mexico. As you said in an address on 15 April when a new president of the Communication Council took office: *"The traditional media and new information technologies strengthen our democracy by creating dialogue, debate and understanding. Out of personal and democratic conviction as President of the Republic, I will continue to work to guarantee the full application of the freedoms recognized by our Constitution."*

We therefore ask you to consider our recommendations to:

- Carry out a complete overhaul of Mexico's justice system in order to combat impunity while providing journalists with real protection.
- Increase the resources of the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos contra la Libertad de Expresión).
- Strengthen the federal mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, establishing effective protective measures with a requirement that all local and federal authorities implement them. This mechanism must be given the capacity to act preventively and to intervene as soon as threats are received.
- Implement the recommendations on combatting impunity for crimes of violence against journalists, reinforcing the existing mechanisms and reinforcing the protection

of journalists that were accepted during the Universal Periodic Review in October 2013.

- Pay special attention to the most dangerous states for journalists and press their administrations to combat impunity effectively.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in grey ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line and a small dot.

Christophe Deloire
Secretary-General