

IPI and WAN-IFRA hail passage of Mexican legislation to combat impunity

MEXICO: On Tuesday, 7 May 2013, The International Press Institute and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) welcomed the passage of seminal legislation in Mexico designed to combat the almost complete impunity in cases of crimes committed against the country's journalists.



The changes to the Federal Code on Penal Procedure, among other statutes - all of which entered into force last Thursday, World Press Freedom Day - put into practice a constitutional reform from last year granting the federal government the power to prosecute crimes against freedom of expression. Previously, under Mexico's federal structure, this responsibility lay primarily with state and local authorities, who have dramatically failed to protect the Mexican press from violent attacks.

IPI and WAN-IFRA, travelled to Mexico this February to urge legislators to approve this so-called "secondary legislation" (i.e. complementary to the constitutional reform), as part of both organisations' focus on improving journalist safety in Mexico. Ultimately, both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies passed the measure by unanimous vote.

"The passage of this legislation marks a milestone in the collaborative effort to protect and promote press freedom and journalist safety in Mexico," IPI Deputy Director Anthony Mills said. "Mexico's Congress has sent a strong signal that those who seek to harm journalists and thereby silence an entire nation will be met with the full force of the law."

Real work only just begun

"Mexico's legislators have now done their job, but the real work has only just begun: The federal government and the Office of the General Prosecutor must now ensure that the Federal Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression has the resources and funds to do her job. IPI will be carefully monitoring the prosecutor's work and we will not be satisfied until the killers of journalists are behind bars."

Prior to these changes to federal law, the Office of the Special Prosecutor was caught in an absurd situation in that it essentially lacked the legal standing to do the job it was created to do. The current prosecutor, Laura Borbolla, told IPI and WAN-IFRA in Mexico City in February that in at least 40 cases her office had collected enough information to justify the arrest of a suspect, but that each time the evidence had been brought to a federal judge, the case was declined due to a lack of jurisdiction. Since its creation in 2006, the Office has achieved just one conviction.

"Now that the Special Prosecutor has been given the legal tools to act, we expect nothing less than immediate and thorough investigations on the killings of journalists", said Larry Kilman, WAN-IFRA's deputy CEO. "We must not forget that, since the creation of the first Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Journalists by the federal government in 2006, more than 50 media professionals have been murdered. Convictions for the killers of journalists are long overdue from this Office. It's time to put an end to such impunity."

The reform to Article 73 of the Mexican Constitution does not make crimes against the media a federal offence per se, but rather empowers the federal government to prosecute such crimes under conditions now established by the secondary legislation. Exact details on the legal changes under the secondary legislation can be found in IPI and WAN-IFRA's recent [mission report](#).

IPI, based in Vienna, Austria, is a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists dedicated to the furtherance and safeguarding of press freedom, the protection of freedom of opinion and expression, the promotion of the free flow of news and information, and the improvement of the practices of journalism.

WAN-IFRA, based in Paris, France, and Darmstadt, Germany, with subsidiaries in Singapore and India, is the global organisation of the world's newspapers and news publishers. It represents more than 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries. Its core mission is to defend and promote press freedom, quality journalism and editorial integrity and the development of prosperous businesses.

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