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After Latest Killing, Mexican Journalists Demand Action

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The killing of Ruben Espinosa in Mexico City has shocked journalists who long considered the capital a refuge from the dangers elsewhere in the country.

The government of Mexico City, which was once a safe haven for journalists, must provide a timely, quick and comprehensive resolution to the murder of photojournalist Ruben Espinosa, the Civil Society Organization of Journalists demanded Monday in an open letter on the Periodistas de a Pie website.

The letter has been translated and published in full below.

According to local press, Espinosa — whose body was identified by his relatives, authorities say — was killed along with his three female roommates and also the maid. The victims had been tied up and were shot in the head. The bodies showed signs of torture.

Espinosa had previously spoken out against the threats and harassment he received when working in the Mexican Gulf state of Veracruz, which is considered to be one of the most dangerous states for journalists.

Espinosa also worked with the weekly magazine Proceso, renowned in Mexico for its investigative reporting. The magazine has demanded authorities conduct a proper investigation into the crime to determine what happened and punish the perpetrators of the “heinous crime.”

In a recent interview with the free press website Sin Embargo, the late journalist said that, in Veracruz, he was not allowed to attend official events or even press conferences.

This hostile attitude by the local authorities, according to Espinosa, came after Proceso published a picture of the state’s current governor, Javier Duarte, wearing a police cap, with the headline, “Veracruz, a lawless state.”

Duarte is from the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party. He took office in 2010 and since then 11 journalists have been killed, and others missing. Last month, during a public event to commemorate the Free Speech Week, the governor sent a message to the state's journalists saying "Please behave, I beg you. It's for your own good."

Espinosa is one of over 100 journalists killed in Mexico in the last 15 years, according to official figures by the attorney general's office, which show 25 more are missing.

FULL LETTER (Unofficial translation)

It was the City of Hope. For its inhabitants and refugees, persecuted writers and poets. It was a refuge for exiled journalists, until Friday July 31, 2015.

That day, the tortured body of the photojournalist Ruben Espinosa Becerril, 31, appeared, who, since 2012 had been receiving - and reported - threats against his life for carrying out his journalistic work.

He went to Mexico City on June 9 to escape the risk that practicing journalism in Veracruz posed. He chose this city because its government has offered protection of journalists through various means, and because the civil society organizations working to protect him and other colleagues are based there.

This crime brands Mexico City. The shelter has been broken. The authorities, particularly the prime minister, Miguel Angel Mancera, must clarify the murder of our colleague. The government should distance itself from that of Veracruz, which provides the best example that impunity is synonymous with death.

He had complained of threats, harassment and persecution. He spoke about it to each colleague and employer he met along the way; he wrote to alternative media organizations and those promoting press freedom to report the impossibility of journalistic work in Veracruz, and the climate of violence that forced him into exile and to leave the life he had built there. (He also reported) the fear carried by the colleagues who stayed in Veracruz. But the violence of Veracruz caught up with him in Mexico City.

As journalist organizations, we demand that Mexico City authorities, and particularly the head of government, resolve this crime comprehensively.

We emphasize that it is essential that investigations prioritize and look into journalistic activity, particularly because the victim alleged repeatedly in recent days that he was being hounded, even in the capital.

The first line of investigation for Mexico City's Public Ministry should be Ruben Espinosa's activities. In this context, Mexico City's attorney general is obliged to account to the federal authorities on Ruben Espinosa's repeated claims, the conditions under which he fled from Veracruz, and fulfill the responsibility of prosecutors and citizen representatives to ensure justice for our partner.

Ruben Espinosa is the first journalist seeking refuge in Mexico City against whom these death threats were fulfilled.

Mexico City may become another place of impunity and violence if this is not carried out in a timely matter the death of the photojournalist is not clarified quickly.

Mexico is known as the Latin American country where most journalists are killed and Governor Javier Duarte of Veracruz, the state Ruben fled, is disdained and held in contempt by journalists internationally.

Does Miguel Mancera want to become another Javier Duarte? Does Mexico City want to head down this route to become another area of violence and impunity?

Now meets the prime minister, Miguel Angel Mancera.

Sincerely,

Friends, classmates and colleagues Ruben Becerril Espinosa

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