

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2011

INTERNET RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION

Focus on freedom of expression and association online



This edition of Global Information Society Watch is dedicated to the people of the Arab revolutions whose courage in the face of violence and repression reminded the world that people working together for change have the power to claim the rights they are entitled to.

Steering committee

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Project coordinator

Karen Banks

Editor

Alan Finlay

Assistant editor

Lori Nordstrom

Publication production

Karen Higgs, Analía Lavin and Flavia Fascendini

Graphic design

MONOCROMO
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2 400 1685

Cover illustration

Matías Bervejillo

Proofreading

Stephanie Biscomb, Valerie Dee and Lori Nordstrom

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Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

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MEXICO

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE “WAR ON DRUGS”



LaNeta
Olinca Marino
www.laneta.apc.org

Introduction

There have been at least 10,000 minors orphaned, 120,000 persons displaced, and 23,000 young people recruited by organised crime over the course of the current presidential administration in Mexico, in power since 2006.¹ More than 30 mayors have also been assassinated since President Felipe Calderón declared a war on drug trafficking in December 2006, with results that to date have been catastrophic. Although there are no official statistics regarding how many civilians have been murdered since 2006, the *Zeta*, a weekly paper in Tijuana, has documented 50,490 executions throughout the country between December 2006 and May 2011.²

As in any war, the general population is very vulnerable. Both assassins and members of the armed forces have been killed. The army has violated civil rights during its raids and roadblocks.³ Drug cartels use the bodies of their victims to frighten and intimidate their opponents and to send warnings. Reports say 1,226 of the people who have died in the cross-fire or in direct attacks between December 2006 and December 2010 are children and teenagers.⁴

The violence that is part of this war does not only affect Mexicans: 10,000 kidnappings of migrants have been registered. In April 2011, a common grave with the bodies of 72 migrants was found in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and similar cases have occurred regularly elsewhere. Recently, some Central Americans denounced the fact that they were “sold” by agents from the National Migration Institute to the

organised crime group Los Zetas.⁵ These crimes can be categorised as crimes against humanity.

Information and action against violence

According to the organisations Article 19 and CENCOS (National Centre for Social Communication), more information and better quality information is urgently needed:

Society needs to know the origin and nature of this violence, without delay. To this end, the people dedicated to disseminating information and opinions regarding the violence should have the minimum guarantees for their security afforded by the state. In the case of falling victim to intimidation, they should be provided with the necessary protection to safeguard their physical integrity and that of their families, so that they can exercise their right to justice.⁶

Despite statements like these, some university professors who carry out research on drug trafficking and organised crime have disappeared, been murdered or have emigrated to other countries where their security can be guaranteed.⁷ Journalists who work in Mexico work in one of the most dangerous places in the Americas.⁸ According to Article 19 and CENCOS, in 2010 alone, 129 journalists and people in the field of communications media were attacked. The attacks upon female journalists and communicators also include threats to their families.⁹ In the first quarter of the 2011, eleven journalists were murdered.¹⁰

For this reason, some newspapers have changed their idea of journalism in order to carry on reporting in the face of the violence, threats, kidnappings and murders. An example is *El Diario Vanguardia*, based in the northern state of Coahuila, which was able to create a community of 30,000

1 www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/37103.html

2 www.zetatijuana.com/2011/07/11/50-mil-ejecuciones

3 President Felipe Calderón refuses to withdraw the army from the streets even though this is a repeated demand from the country's citizens, and even though international bodies have called on Mexico to stop using the army for functions that should be carried out by the police forces (such as the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, in its Preliminary Report of March 2011).

4 contralinea.info/archivo-revista/index.php/2011/03/22/1-mil-226-ninos-asesinados-en-la-guerra-de-calderon

5 www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/10/politica/007n1pol

6 Article 19 and CENCOS (2011) *Violencia en México y el derecho a la información 2010*, Article 19 Oficina para México y Centroamérica and CENCOS, Mexico City, p. 7.

7 www.lajornadadeoriente.com.mx/2011/01/13/puebla/ofa14.php

8 www.criterioonline.com.ar/mas/internacionales/48568-otro-periodista-fue-asesinado-en-mexico

9 Article 19 and CENCOS (2011) op. cit.

10 knightcenter.utexas.edu/es/blog/reportera-policial-es-septima-periodista-asesinada-en-mexico-en-2011

Facebook users and 12,000 Twitter followers to call upon authorities to provide timely and real-time information about the situation. In response to the pressure, the police in the state capital opened a Twitter account (@policiasaltillo). According to the digital publication *El periodismo digital*, the Twitter account created “a way to receive information about what is happening in the city in real time, even though this information is not often included in the newspapers the next day due to the risks.”¹¹ In another example, also in the state of Coahuila, the attorney general has provided information about recent cases of violence using his Twitter and Facebook accounts.¹²

In this way, social networks have started to appear in different states of Mexico as sources of real-time information. In February 2010, for example, in Torreón, Coahuila, the first alerts about a shooting incident were sent out on Twitter. Similar cases have occurred in the states of Jalisco, Zacatecas and Durango. In Veracruz, Nayarit and San Luis Potosí, social networks were used to warn about kidnappings and extortion.¹³ In the states of Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, Guerrero, Morelos, Coahuila, Nuevo León and the Federal District, alerts about situations of violence circulated on social networks. In the Federal District, users also circulated the phone numbers of kidnappers and extortionists.¹⁴

Paradoxically, the internet has also become a tool used by drug cartels.¹⁵ Narco mails and narco videos targeting rival criminal organisations, as well as authorities and civil society, have proliferated.¹⁶ CNN reports that “videos supposedly sent by cartels show kidnap victims gagged and bound and being tortured at the time of being murdered.”¹⁷ According to a Mexican newspaper, “among all of the media that drug lords have at their reach to attract followers, social networks seem to have become one of their main vehicles for communication.”¹⁸ This has led some politicians to call for greater regulation on certain digital tools in the country.¹⁹

While the Mexican population is feeling vulnerable and afraid on a daily basis, it has also

participated in different initiatives to say “No more bloodshed”. Mexicans have used many different kinds of media to remain united against the war. The internet and mobile phones have been important allies to different sectors of the population, allowing them to exchange information about drug cartel violence and to protect local communities in dangerous situations. Digital media have also served as a channel for the collective expression of civic discontent, and to mobilise citizens.²⁰

As part of this general violence, the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and in other states of Mexico continue. At least 10,000 women and girls have been violently murdered over the last ten years. Most of these cases are not brought before the courts.²¹ Because of this, the families of victims and organisations working in solidarity with them mobilise on the internet. Many initiatives are very active online, such as *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (Bring Our Daughters Home)²² or *Justicia para Nuestras Hijas* (Justice for Our Daughters), which has a blog,²³ a Twitter account,²⁴ a Facebook site,²⁵ a channel on YouTube²⁶ and a channel on Picasa with a photo gallery of the victims.²⁷

A national map was created identifying the sites of crimes on the website *Ciudadanía por la Paz y Justicia en México*²⁸ (Citizens for Peace and Justice in Mexico), which also encourages civic action. This is a public space. Every event or message sent by SMS, Twitter (#mapaMX #nosoncifras) or with an online form is pre-approved and published by a group of volunteers. For security reasons, personal information related to the authors of the published information is removed. This initiative is based in Cuernavaca, Morelos.²⁹

Other social media sites include:

- *Por favor no más sangre* (Please, no more bloodshed): This is a campaign that seeks to end the bloodshed of innocent people caused by the war on drug trafficking.³⁰

11 www.elperiodismodigital.org/2011/04/periodistas-optan-por-redes-sociales-ante-violencia-en-mexico

12 www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/79948.html

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/36666.html

16 noticias.aollatino.com/2010/12/03/narco-redes-sociales

17 mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/03/08/residentes-de-la-frontera-usan-internet-para-combatir-al-crimen-organizado

18 noticias.aollatino.com/2010/12/03/narco-redes-sociales

19 www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/36666.html

20 Vega, A.F. and Merino, J. (2011) *Ciudadanos.mx: Twitter y el cambio político en México*, Debolsillo, Mexico City.

21 www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/530233.html

22 www.mujeresdejuarez.org

23 justiciaparanuestrashijas.blogspot.com

24 @JPNHo1

25 www.facebook.com/pages/Justicia-Para-Nuestras-Hijas

26 www.youtube.com/jpnho1

27 picasaweb.google.com/justiciaparanuestrashijas

28 pazyjusticia.crowdmap.com

29 www.facebook.com/pages/Red-por-la-Paz-y-la-Justicia/210655688946361; redporlapazyjusticia.org; witter.com/#!/redpazyjusticia

30 es-es.facebook.com/pages/Por-favor-no-más-sangre/184308684920918

- *Contingente Monterrey* (The Monterrey Contingent): These citizens promote creative actions for peace. Their Facebook site reads: “We will meet on the second Sunday of every month on the Esplanade of the Heroes of Monterrey until THERE ARE NO MORE MISSING PERSONS OR INNOCENT DEATHS!”³¹
- *Poesía para nuestros muertos* (Poetry for our dead): An initiative launched by a collective that invites action because “every Mexican has rights and we should fight for our DIGNITY, for PEACE and for JUSTICE to be a basic value in our country.”³²
- “*Menos Días Aquí*” (Fewer Days Here): A project run by volunteers with a blog that records a weekly count of the dead. “We count the number of deaths caused by violence in Mexico. In this way, we keep our dead alive.”³³
- *Balacera MTY* (Shooting in Monterrey): This offers timely and useful information shared by civilians to help avoid situations of risk. *Balacera MTY* is also active on Twitter.³⁴

On Twitter, we also find:

- *#ContingenteMX*: Digital action for peace supporting human rights.
- *#Sinviolencia*: Reports and warns of crime.
- *#Tienennombre*: Names victims of violence in Mexico. Emphasises that victims are not statistics – they have names.
- *#BalaceraGDL*: Keeps people informed of shootings and news about security issues in Guadalajara.
- *#noviolenciamx*: Encourages action against violence.
- *#tuitcallejero*: This initiative (which translates as “streettweet”) invites people to write a comment with 140 characters or less on a piece of paper and post it somewhere where passersby can read it. It invites people who find the notes to take pictures of them and to post them on their blogs as a way of disseminating the message.³⁵

31 es-es.facebook.com/ContingenteMty

32 www.facebook.com/posesiaparannuestrosmuertos

33 menosdiasaqui.blogspot.com

34 www.facebook.com/pages/BalaceraMTY; twitter.com/#!/BalaceraMTY

35 quelleguelapaz.blogspot.com/2011/07/tuitcallejero-invitation-oficial.html

Mexicans demand: “No more bloodshed!”

One of the first campaigns in Mexico using new media was the campaign launched by the famous cartoonist Eduardo del Río (who calls himself RIUS), together with other cartoonists, journalists and intellectuals, as a form of protest against the wave of violence. The idea was to create civic consciousness in spaces where each person can express his or her discontent using social networks. Twitter and Facebook users changed their profile photo to an image of the word “No”, which included a drop of blood, to support the movement. Within the first 48 hours of the campaign, 2,155 cybernauts showed their support on Facebook.³⁶ #NoMasSangre was among Twitter’s trending topics for several weeks.³⁷

The *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity) is an important initiative in Mexico. Poet and journalist Javier Sicilia has driven this movement in the wake of the murder of seven youths, including his son, in the state of Morelos in April 2011. To date the movement has organised a series of marches, amongst other activities. The Civic Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity, also known as the “Caravan of Consolation”, is of particular importance to the movement. It began its journey from Cuernavaca on 4 June from Cuernavaca, travelling through several of the cities hardest hit by violence in Mexico, and heading towards Ciudad Juárez. The caravan travelled over 3,000 kilometres. On Twitter, the hashtag #marchanacional became a trending topic for weeks.³⁸

Hundreds of testimonies and demands for the federal government to end the war have been gathered at national marches. Dozens of harrowing testimonies and calls for the state’s strategy to change have been launched. One speaker at one of the first *Movimiento por la Paz* marches stated: “These 40,000 deaths³⁹ belong to us all, they are our dead. There can be no distinction between the deaths of drug dealers, assassins, soldiers and citizens.”⁴⁰

Local marches – often spontaneous – have been convened with the help of the internet. This was

36 www.pueblaonline.com.mx/en_boca_de/?tag=facebook&paged=2

37 dixo.com/2011/01/no-mas-sangre.php

38 www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/434f5cc48739b1e6f2b64e6cf230cc24

39 At the beginning of the mobilisation, in April 2011, the estimated number of deaths was 40,000; in July 2011, the weekly magazine *Zeta* reported an estimated total of 50,000.

40 homozapping.com.mx/2011/04

the case in Ciudad Juárez where a peace protest following a visit to the city by President Calderón was organised through social networking.⁴¹ A similar protest happened in Guadalajara within hours of several violent incidents by criminals. Approximately 700 people spontaneously responded to the call for action put out by young people on social networks.⁴²

Groups of Mexicans and sympathisers from the Americas, Asia and Europe have created the *Red Global por la Paz en México* (Global Network for Peace in Mexico).⁴³ They have organised many different initiatives across the world, some using information and communications technologies (ICTs), including the following: a virtual demonstration with pro-peace images organised in Seoul called “*Sí a la Paz*” (Yes to Peace); “1,000 Cranes for Peace in Mexico”, an initiative in Tokyo which dedicated 1,000 origami cranes to heal Mexico; “Ephemeral Ciudad Juárez”, set up at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, and consisting of a clothesline pegged with empty envelopes addressed to President Calderón with the names of victims of violence in Mexico as the senders; and “No More Bloodshed”, a conference organised in Corcovado de Rio in Brazil, which called for a review of international policies on drug use and drug trafficking.⁴⁴

Action steps

The importance of the internet can be felt in a society constantly threatened by violence. In the case of the “war on drugs” in Mexico, ICTs can be a valuable way to:

- Guarantee citizens’ right to monitor cases involving victims of the war.
- Facilitate the participation of citizen groups in providing coverage of the judicial processes brought by the victims of violence.
- Support meetings of those who have been victims in the war.
- Promote ways for citizen representation, such as referendums.
- Monitor and follow up on government security initiatives.
- Promote education and culture instead of violence.

In general, the internet can be used to support the participation of citizens and their mobilisation in efforts aimed at changing the state strategy in combating crime in the country.

More than ever the rights to access to information, free expression and the protection of personal data are critical in Mexico. The protection of journalists must also be guaranteed. Mexican society has much still to do.

41 mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/03/08/residentes-de-la-frontera-usan-internet-para-combatir-al-crimen-organizado

42 www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/79948.html

43 www.redglobalpazmexico.com

44 exteriorpaccionacional.blogspot.com

In the year of the Arab uprisings **GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2011** investigates how governments and internet and mobile phone companies are trying to restrict freedom online – and how citizens are responding to this using the very same technologies.

Everyone is familiar with the stories of Egypt and Tunisia. **GISWATCH** authors tell these and other lesser-known stories from more than 60 countries. Stories about:

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TORTURE IN INDONESIA The torture of two West Papuan farmers was recorded on a mobile phone and leaked to the internet. The video spread to well-known human rights sites sparking public outrage and a formal investigation by the authorities.

THE TSUNAMI IN JAPAN Citizens used social media to share actionable information during the devastating tsunami, and in the aftermath online discussions contradicted misleading reports coming from state authorities.

GISWATCH also includes thematic reports and an introduction from Frank La Rue, UN special rapporteur.

GISWATCH 2011 is the fifth in a series of yearly reports that critically cover the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

GISWATCH is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

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2011 Report

www.GISWatch.org

