

PEN PROTESTA!

WRITERS TO DENOUNCE VIOLENCE AGAINST MEXICAN JOURNALISTS

On Sunday, January 9, 2012 journalists working in some of Mexico's most dangerous cities spoke of their experiences at PEN Protesta!, a remarkable event where frontline reporters stood side-by-side with the PEN delegation and many of Mexico's most prominent writers to demand an end to the killings. In all, more than 50 writers and journalists read short statements that alternated between harrowing first-hand accounts of deadly threats and declarations of outrage and horror.

In my statement on behalf of the IHRP, I emphasized Mexico's responsibilities under international law to protect communicators regardless of the source of threats and violence (see below).

The protesta was covered by both local and international media, including BBC, CBS and CNN. Click here to see [news coverage](#) of the event.

Renu Mandhane, Director of the IHRP stated as follows:

While paying lip-service to the need for substantive change, the Mexican government often responds to criticism with sophisticated spin as part of a strategy of minimization. When confronted with a serious and embarrassing human rights crisis, the government simulates a response by presenting a solution it knows to be ineffective. This placates public outcry but does nothing to alter the situation. One clear example of this disingenuousness is the creation of ...the Special Prosecutor's Office for the Attention to Crimes Committed against Freedom of Expression. Despite the broad prosecutorial powers its name implies, the Office has no formal ability to investigate crimes or make charges, nor is it empowered to tackle cases involving drug traffickers or organized crime. As a result, in its first four years, this Special Prosecutor has averaged just one prosecution per year.

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Mexican authorities are generally quick to explain that they are not responsible for the recent upsurge in drug-related violence. Victims are often disparaged by authorities and accused of collusion with drug-trafficking organizations, or labeled as unavoidable victims of the crossfire in the drug war. In another attempt to shift responsibility, authorities at all levels of the government frequently assert that they lack the jurisdiction to act. The responsibility, however, lies solely at the feet of the Mexican state, and no amount of political sophistry can place it elsewhere. Mexico is legally obligated to respect freedom of expression and opinion pursuant to its obligations under article 13 of the *American Convention on Human Rights* and article 19 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Regardless of how, why, or by whom journalists are attacked while exercising this right, the government of Mexico has a legal obligation to protect them.

Excerpt from PEN Canada and International Human Rights Program, University of Toronto Faculty of Law, Corruption, Impunity, Silence: The War on Mexico's Journalists (Toronto, 2011) at page 11